

FROM SQUIRE TO
SQUATTER
BY
WILLIAM GORDON
STABLES

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter One

“Ten to-morrow, Archie.”

“So you’ll be ten years old to-morrow, Archie?”

“Yes, father; ten to-morrow. Quite old, isn’t it? I’ll soon be a man, dad. Won’t it be fun, just?”

His father laughed, simply because Archie laughed. “I don’t know about the fun of it,” he said; “for, Archie lad, your growing a man will result in my getting old. Don’t you see?”

Archie turned his handsome brown face towards the fire, and gazed at it—or rather into it—for a few moments thoughtfully. Then he gave his head a little negative kind of a shake, and, still looking towards the fire as if addressing it, replied:

“No, no, no; I don’t see it. Other boys’ fathers may grow old; mine won’t, mine couldn’t, never, never.”

“Dad,” said a voice from the corner. It was a very weary, rather feeble, voice. The owner of it occupied a kind of invalid couch, on which he half sat and half reclined—a lad of only nine years, with a thin, pale, old-fashioned face, and big, dark, dreamy eyes that seemed to look you through and through as you talked to him.

“Dad.”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Wouldn’t you like to be old really?”

“Wel—,” the father was beginning.

“Oh,” the boy went on, “I should dearly love to be old, very old, and very wise, like one of these!” Here his glance reverted to a story-book he had been reading, and which now lay on his lap.

His father and mother were used to the boy's odd remarks. Both parents sat here to-night, and both looked at him with a sort of fond pity; but the child's eyes had half closed, and presently he dropped out of the conversation, and to all intents and purposes out of the company.

"Yes," said Archie, "ten is terribly old, I know; but is it quite a man though? Because mummie there said, that when Solomon became a man, he thought, and spoke, and did everything manly, and put away all his boy's things. I shouldn't like to put away my bow and arrow—what say, mum? I shan't be altogether quite a man to-morrow, shall I?"

"No, child. Who put that in your head?"

"Oh, Rupert, of course! Rupert tells me everything, and dreams such strange dreams for me."

"You're a strange boy yourself, Archie."

His mother had been leaning back in her chair. She now slowly resumed her knitting. The firelight fell on her face: it was still young, still beautiful—for the lady was but little over thirty—yet a shade of melancholy had overspread it to-night.

The firelight came from huge logs of wood, mingled with large pieces of blazing coals and masses of half-incandescent peat. A more cheerful fire surely never before burned on a hearth. It seemed to take a pride in being cheerful, and in making all sorts of pleasant noises and splutterings. There had been bark on those logs when first heaped on, and long white bunches of lichen, that looked like old men's beards; but tongues of fire from the bubbling, caking coals had soon licked those off, so that both sticks and peat were soon aglow, and the whole looked as glorious as an autumn sunset.

And firelight surely never before fell on cosier room, nor on cosier old-world furniture. Dark pictures, in great gilt frames, hung on the walls, almost hiding it; dark pictures, but with bright colours standing out in them, which Time himself had not been able to dim; albeit he had cracked the varnish. Pictures you could look into—look in through almost—and imagine figures that perhaps were not in them at all; pictures of old-fashioned places, with quaint, old-fashioned people and animals; pictures in which every creature or human being looked contented and happy. Pictures from masters' hands many of them, and worth far more than their weight in solid gold.

And the firelight fell on curious brackets, and on a tall corner-cabinet filled with old delf and china; fell on high, narrow-backed chairs, and on one huge carved-oak chest that

took your mind away back to centuries long gone by and made you half believe that there must have been “giants in those days.”

The firelight fell and was reflected from silver cups, and goblets, and candlesticks, and a glittering shield that stood on a sideboard, their presence giving relief to the eye. Heavy, cosy-looking curtains depended from the window cornices, and the door itself was darkly draped.

“Ten to-morrow. How time does fly!”

It was the father who now spoke, and as he did so his hand was stretched out as if instinctively, till it lay on the mother’s lap. Their eyes met, and there seemed something of sadness in the smile of each.

“How time does fly!”

“Dad!”

The voice came once more from the corner.

“Dad! For years and years I’ve noticed that you always take mummie’s hand and just look like that on the night before Archie’s birthday. Father, why—”

But at that very moment the firelight found something else to fall upon—something brighter and fairer by far than anything it had lit up to-night. For the door-curtain was drawn back, and a little, wee, girlish figure advanced on tiptoe and stood smiling in the middle of the room, looking from one to the other. This was Elsie, Rupert’s twin-sister. His “beautiful sister” the boy called her, and she was well worthy of the compliment. Only for a moment did she stand there, but as she did so, with her bonnie bright face, she seemed the one thing that had been needed to complete the picture, the centre figure against the sombre, almost solemn, background.

The fire blazed more merrily now; a jet of white smoke, that had been spinning forth from a little mound of melting coal, jumped suddenly into flame; while the biggest log cracked like a popgun, and threw off a great red spark, which flew half-way across the room.

Next instant a wealth of dark-brown hair fell on Archie’s shoulder, and soft lips were pressed to his sun-dyed cheek, then bright, laughing eyes looked into his.

“Ten to-morrow, Archie! Aren’t you proud?”

Elsie now took a footstool, and sat down close beside her invalid brother, stretching one arm across his chest protectingly; but she shook her head at Archie from her corner.

“Ten to-morrow, you great big, big brother Archie,” she said.

Archie laughed right merrily.

“What are you going to do all?”

“Oh, such a lot of things! First of all, if it snows—”

“It is snowing now, Archie, fast.”

“Well then I’m going to shoot the fox that stole poor Cock Jock. Oh, my poor Cock Jock! We’ll never see him again.”

“Shooting foxes isn’t sport, Archie.”

“No, dad; it’s revenge.”

The father shook his head.

“Well, I mean something else.”

“Justice?”

“Yes, that is it. Justice, dad. Oh, I did love that cock so! He was so gentlemanly and gallant, father. Oh, so kind! And the fox seized him just as poor Jock was carrying a crust of bread to the old hen Ann. He threw my bonnie bird over his shoulder and ran off, looking so sly and wicked. But I mean to kill him!

“Last time I fired off Branson’s gun was at a magpie, a nasty, chattering, unlucky magpie. Old Kate says they’re unlucky.”

“Did you kill the magpie, Archie?”

“No, I don’t think I hurt the magpie. The gun must have gone off when I wasn’t looking; but it knocked me down, and blackened all my shoulder, because it pushed so. Branson said I didn’t grasp it tight enough. But I will to-morrow, when I’m killing the fox.

Rupert, you'll stuff the head, and we'll hang it in the hall. Won't you, Roup?" Rupert smiled and nodded.

"And I'm sure," he continued, "the Ann hen was so sorry when she saw poor Cock Jock carried away."

"Did the Ann hen eat the crust?"

"What, father? Oh, yes, she did eat the crust! But I think that was only out of politeness. I'm sure it nearly choked her."

"Well, Archie, what will you do else to-morrow?"

"Oh, then, you know, Elsie, the fun will only just be beginning, because we're going to open the north tower of the castle. It's already furnished."

"And you're going to be installed as King of the North Tower?" said his father.

"Installed, father? Rupert, what does that mean?"

"Led in with honours, I suppose."

"Oh, father, I'll instal myself; or Sissie there will; or old Kate; or Branson, the keeper, will instal me. That's easy. The fun will all come after that."

Burley Old Farm, as it was called—and sometimes Burley Castle—was, at the time our story opens, in the heyday of its glory and beauty. Squire Broadbent, Archie's father, had been on it for a dozen years and over. It was all his own, and had belonged to a bachelor uncle before his time. This uncle had never made the slightest attempt to cause two blades of grass to grow where only one had grown before. Not he. He was well content to live on the little estate, as his father had done before him, so long as things paid their way; so long as plenty of sleek beasts were seen in the fields in summer, or wading knee-deep in the straw-yard in winter; so long as pigs, and poultry, and feather stock of every conceivable sort, made plenty of noise about the farm-stead, and there was plenty of human life about, the old Squire had been content. And why shouldn't he have been? What does a North-country farmer need, or what has he any right to long for, if his larder and coffer are both well filled, and he can have a day on the stubble or moor, and ride to the hounds when the crops are in?

But his nephew was more ambitious. The truth is he came from the South, and brought with him what the honest farmer folks of the Northumbrian borders call a deal of new-

fangled notions. He had come from the South himself, and he had not been a year in the place before he went back, and in due time returned to Burley Old Farm with a bonnie young bride. Of course there were people in the neighbourhood who did not hesitate to say, that the Squire might have married nearer home, and that there was no accounting for taste. For all this and all that, both the Squire and his wife were not long in making themselves universal favourites all round the countryside; for they went everywhere, and did everything; and the neighbours were all welcome to call at Burley when they liked, and had to call when Mrs Broadbent issued invitations.

Well, the Squire's dinners were truly excellent, and when afterwards the men folk joined the ladies in the big drawing-room, the evenings flew away so quickly that, as carriage time came, nobody could ever believe it was anything like so late.

The question of what the Squire had been previously to his coming to Burley was sometimes asked by comparative strangers, but as nobody could or cared to answer explicitly, it was let drop. Something in the South, in or about London, or Deal, or Dover, but what did it matter? he was "a jolly good fellow—ay, and a gentleman every inch." Such was the verdict.

A gentleman the Squire undoubtedly was, though not quite the type of build, either in body or mind, of the tall, bony, and burly men of the North—men descended from a race of ever-unconquered soldiers, and probably more akin to the Scotch than the English.

Sitting here in the green parlour to-night, with the firelight playing on his smiling face as he talked to or teased his eldest boy, Squire Broadbent was seen to advantage. Not big in body, and rather round than angular, inclining even to the portly, with a frank, rosy face and a bold blue eye, you could not have been in his company ten minutes without feeling sorry you had not known him all his life.

Amiability was the chief characteristic of Mrs Broadbent. She was a refined and genuine English lady. There is little more to say after that.

But what about the Squire's new-fangled notions? Well, they were really what they call "fads" now-a-days, or, taken collectively, they were one gigantic fad. Although he had never been in the agricultural interest before he became Squire, even while in city chambers theoretical farming had been his pet study, and he made no secret of it to his fellow-men.

"This uncle of mine," he would say, "whom I go to see every Christmas, is pretty old, and I'm his heir. Mind," he would add, "he is a genuine, good man, and I'll be genuinely sorry for him when he goes under. But that is the way of the world, and then I'll have my

fling. My uncle hasn't done the best for his land; he has been content to go—not run; there is little running about the dear old boy—in the same groove as his fathers, but I'm going to cut out a new one.”

The week that the then Mr Broadbent was in the habit of spending with his uncle, in the festive season, was not the only holiday he took in the year. No; for regularly as the month of April came round, he started for the States of America, and England saw no more of him till well on in June, by which time the hot weather had driven him home.

But he swore by the Yankees; that is, he would have sworn by them, had he sworn at all. The Yankees in Mr Broadbent's opinion were far ahead of the English in everything pertaining to the economy of life, and the best manner of living. He was too much of a John Bull to admit that the Americans possessed any superiority over this tight little isle, in the matter of either politics or knowledge of warfare. England always had been, and always would be, mistress of the seas, and master of and over every country with a foreshore on it. “But,” he would say, “look at the Yanks as inventors. Why, sir, they beat us in everything from button-hook. Look at them as farmers, especially as wheat growers and fruit raisers. They are as far above Englishmen, with their insular prejudices, and insular dread of taking a step forward for fear of going into a hole, as a Berkshire steam ploughman is ahead of a Skyeman with his wooden turf-turner. And look at them at home round their own firesides, or look at their houses outside and in, and you will have some faint notion of what comfort combined with luxury really means.”

It will be observed that Mr Broadbent had a bold, straightforward way of talking to his peers. He really had, and it will be seen presently that he had, “the courage of his own convictions,” to use a hackneyed phrase.

He brought those convictions with him to Burley, and the courage also.

Why, in a single year—and a busy, bustling one it had been—the new Squire had worked a revolution about the place. Lucky for him, he had a well-lined purse to begin with, or he could hardly have come to the root of things, or made such radical reforms as he did.

When he first took a look round the farm-steading, he felt puzzled where to begin first. But he went to work steadily, and kept it up, and it is truly wonderful what an amount of solid usefulness can be effected by either man or boy, if he has the courage to adopt such a plan.

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Chapter Two.

A Chip of the Old Block.

It was no part of Squire Broadbent's plan to turn away old and faithful servants. He had to weed them though, and this meant thinning out to such an extent that not over many were left.

The young and healthy creatures of inutility had to shift; but the very old, the decrepit—those who had become stiff and grey in his uncle's service—were pensioned off. They were to stay for the rest of their lives in the rural village adown the glen—bask in the sun in summer, sit by the fire of a winter, and talk of the times when "t'old Squire was aboot."

The servants settled with, and fresh ones with suitable "go" in them established in their place, the live stock came in for reformation.

"Saint Mary! what a medley!" exclaimed the Squire, as he walked through the byres and stables, and past the styes. "Everything bred anyhow. No method in my uncle's madness. No rules followed, no type. Why the quickest plan will be to put them all to the hammer."

This was cutting the Gordian-knot with a vengeance, but it was perhaps best in the long run.

Next came renovation of the farm-steading itself; pulling down and building, enlarging, and what not, and while this was going on, the land itself was not being forgotten. Fences were levelled and carted away, and newer and airier ones put up, and for the most part three and sometimes even five fields were opened into one. There were woods also to be seen to. The new Squire liked woods, but the trees in some of these were positively poisoning each other. Here was a larch-wood, for instance—those logs with the long, grey lichens on them are part of some of the trees. So closely do the larches grow together, so white with moss, so stunted and old-looking, that it would have made a merry-andrew melancholy to walk among them. What good were they? Down they must come, and down they had come; and after the ground had been stirred up a bit, and left for a summer to let the sunshine and air into it, all the hill was replanted with young, green, smiling pines, larches, and spruces, and that was assuredly an

improvement. In a few years the trees were well advanced; grass and primroses grew where the moss had crept about, and the wood in spring was alive with the song of birds.

The mansion-house had been left intact. Nothing could have added much to the beauty of that. It stood high up on a knoll, with rising park-like fields behind, and at some considerable distance the blue slate roofs of the farm-steading peeping up through the greenery of the trees. A solid yellow-grey house, with sturdy porch before the hall door, and sturdy mullioned windows, one wing ivy-clad, a broad sweep of gravel in front, and beyond that, lawns and terraces, and flower and rose gardens. And the whole overlooked a river or stream, that went winding away clear and silvery till it lost itself in wooded glens.

The scenery was really beautiful all round, and in some parts even wild; while the distant views of the Cheviot Hills lent a charm to everything.

There was something else held sacred by the Squire as well as the habitable mansion, and that was Burley Old Castle. Undoubtedly a fortress of considerable strength it had been in bygone days, when the wild Scots used to come raiding here, but there was no name for it now save that of a "ruin." The great north tower still stood firm and bold, and three walls of the lordly hall, its floor green with long, rank grass; the walls themselves partly covered with ivy, with broom growing on the top, which was broad enough for the half-wild goats to scamper along.

There was also the donjon keep, and the remains of a fosse; but all the rest of this feudal castle had been unceremoniously carted away, to erect cowsheds and pig-styes with it.

"So sinks the pride of former days,
When glory's thrill is o'er."

No, Squire Broadbent did not interfere with the castle; he left it to the goats and to Archie, who took to it as a favourite resort from the time he could crawl.

But these—all these—new-fangled notions the neighbouring squires and farmers bold could easily have forgiven, had Broadbent not carried his craze for machinery to the very verge of folly. So they thought. Such things might be all very well in America, but they were not called for here. Extraordinary mills driven by steam, no less wonderful-looking harrows, uncanny-like drags and drilling machines, sowing and reaping machines that were fearfully and wonderfully made, and ploughs that, like the mills, were worked by steam.

Terrible inventions these; and even the men that were connected with them had to be brought from the far South, and did not talk a homely, wholesome lingua, nor live in a homely, wholesome way.

His neighbours confessed that his crops were heavier, and the cereals and roots finer; but they said to each other knowingly, "What about the expense of down-put?" And as far as their own fields went, the plough-boy still whistled to and from his work.

Then the new live stock, why, type was followed; type was everything in the Squire's eye and opinion. No matter what they were, horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, and feather stock, even the dogs and birds were the best and purest of the sort to be had.

But for all the head-shaking there had been at first, things really appeared to prosper with the Squire; his big, yellow-painted wagons, with their fine Clydesdale horses, were as well known in the district and town of B— as the brewer's dray itself. The "nags" were capitally harnessed. What with jet-black, shining leather, brass-work that shone like burnished gold, and crimson-flashing fringes, it was no wonder that the men who drove them were proud, and that they were favourites at every house of call. Even the bailiff himself, on his spirited hunter, looked imposing with his whip in his hand, and in his spotless cords.

Breakfast at Burley was a favourite meal, and a pretty early one, and the capital habit of inviting friends thereto was kept up. Mrs Broadbent's tea was something to taste and remember; while the cold beef, or that early spring lamb on the sideboard, would have converted the veriest vegetarian as soon as he clapped eyes on it.

On his spring lamb the Squire rather prided himself, and he liked his due meed of praise for having reared it. To be sure he got it; though some of the straightforward Northumbrians would occasionally quizzingly enquire what it cost him to put on the table.

Squire Broadbent would not get out of temper whatever was said, and really, to do the man justice, it must be allowed that there was a glorious halo of self-reliance around his head; and altogether such spirit, dash, and independence with all he said and did, that those who breakfasted with him seemed to catch the infection. Their farms and they themselves appeared quite behind the times, when viewed in comparison with Broadbent's and with Broadbent himself.

If ever a father was loved and admired by a son, the Squire was that man, and Archie was that particular son. His father was Archie's beau ideal indeed of all that was worth being, or saying, or knowing, in this world; and Rupert's as well.

He really was his boys' hero, but behaved more to them as if he had been just a big brother. It was a great grief to both of them that Rupert could not join in their games out on the lawn in summer—the little cricket matches, the tennis tournaments, the jumping, and romping, and racing. The tutor was younger than the Squire by many years, but he could not beat him in any manly game you could mention.

Yes, it was sad about Rupert; but with all the little lad's suffering and weariness, he was such a sunny-faced chap. He never complained, and when sturdy, great, brown-faced Archie carried him out as if he had been a baby, and laid him on the couch where he could witness the games, he was delighted beyond description.

I'm quite sure that the Squire often and often kept on playing longer than he would otherwise have done just to please the child, as he was generally called. As for Elsie, she did all her brother did, and a good deal more besides, and yet no one could have called her a tom girl.

As the Squire was Archie's hero, I suppose the boy could not help taking after his hero to some extent; but it was not only surprising but even amusing to notice how like to his "dad" in all his ways Archie had at the age of ten become. The same in walk, the same in talk, the same in giving his opinion, and the same in bright, determined looks. Archie really was what his father's friends called him, "a chip of the old block."

He was a kind of a lad, too, that grown-up men folks could not help having a good, romping lark with. Not a young farmer that ever came to the place could have beaten Archie at a race; but when some of them did get hold of him out on the lawn of an evening, then there would be a bit of fun, and Archie was in it.

These burly Northumbrians would positively play a kind of pitch and toss with him, standing in a square or triangle and throwing him back and fore as if he had been a cricket ball. And there was one very tall, wiry young fellow who treated Archie as if he had been a sort of dumb-bell, and took any amount of exercise out of him; holding him high aloft with one hand, swaying him round and round and up and down, changing hands, and, in a word, going through as many motions with the laughing boy as if he had been inanimate.

I do not think that Archie ever dressed more quickly in his life, than he did on the morning of that auspicious day which saw him ten years old. To tell the truth, he had never been very much struck over the benefits of early rising, especially on mornings in winter. The parting between the boy and his warm bed was often of a most affecting

character. The servant would knock, and the gong would go, and sometimes he would even hear his father's voice in the hall before he made up his mind to tear himself away.

But on this particular morning, no sooner had he rubbed his eyes and began to remember things, than he sprang nimbly to the floor. The bath was never a terrible ordeal to Archie, as it is to some lads. He liked it because it made him feel light and buoyant, and made him sing like the happy birds in spring time; but to-day he did think it would be a saving of time to omit it. Yes, but it would be cowardly, and on this morning of all mornings; so in he plunged, and plied the sponge manfully. He did not draw up the blinds till well-nigh dressed. For all he could see when he did do so, he might as well have left them down. The windows—the month was January—were hard frozen; had it been any other day, he would have paused to admire the beautiful frost foliage and frost ferns that nature had etched on the panes. He blew his breath on the glass instead, and made a clean round hole thereon.

Glorious! It had been snowing pretty heavily, but now the sky was clear. The footprints of the wily fox could be tracked. Archie would follow him to his den in the wild woods, and his Skye terriers would unearth him. Then the boy knelt to pray, just reviewing the past for a short time before he did so, and thinking what a deal he had to be thankful for; how kind the good Father was to have given him such parents, such a beautiful home, and such health, and thinking too what a deal he had to be sorry for in the year that was gone; then he gave thanks, and prayer for strength to resist temptation in the time to come; and, it is needless to say, he prayed for poor invalid Rupert.

When he got up from his knees he heard the great gong sounded, and smiled to himself to think how early he was. Then he blew on the pane and looked out again. The sky was blue and clear, and there was not a breath of wind; the trees on the lawn, laden with their weight of powdery snow, their branches bending earthwards, especially the larches and spruces, were a sight to see. And the snow-covered lawn itself, oh, how beautiful! Archie wondered if the streets of heaven even could be more pure, more dazzlingly white.

Whick, whick, whick, whir-r-r-r-r!

It was a big yellow-billed blackbird, that flew out with startled cry from a small Austrian pine tree. As it did so, a cloud of powdery snow rose in the air, showing how hard the frost was.

Early though it was—only a little past eight—Archie found his father and mother in the breakfast-room, and greetings and blessings fell on his head; brief but tender.

By-and-bye the tutor came in, looking tired; and Archie exulted over him, as cocks crow over a fallen foe, because he was down first.

Mr Walton was a young man of five or six and twenty, and had been in the family for over three years, so he was quite an old friend. Moreover, he was a man after the Squire's own heart; he was manly, and taught Archie manliness, and had a quiet way of helping him out of every difficulty of thought or action. Besides, Archie and Rupert liked him.

After breakfast Archie went up to see his brother, then downstairs, and straight away out through the servants' hall to the barn-yards. He had showers of blessings, and not a few gifts from the servants; but old Scotch Kate was most sincere, for this somewhat aged spinster really loved the lad.

At the farm-steading he had many friends to see, both hairy and feathered. He found some oats, which he scattered among the last, and laughed to see them scramble, and to hear them talk. Well, Archie at all events believed firmly that fowls can converse. One very lovely red game bird, came boldly up and pecked his oats from Archie's palm. This was the new Cock Jock, a son of the old bird, which the fox had taken. The Ann hen was there too. She was bold, and bonnie, and saucy, and seemed quite to have given up mourning for her lost lord. Ann came at Archie's call, flew on to his wrist, and after steadying herself and grumbling a little because Archie moved his arm too much, she shoved her head and neck into the boy's pocket, and found oats in abundance. That was Ann's way of doing business, and she preferred it.

The ducks were insolent and noisy; the geese, instead of taking higher views of life, as they are wont to do, bent down their stately necks, and went in for the scramble with the rest. The hen turkeys grumbled a great deal, but got their share nevertheless; while the great gobbler strutted around doing attitudes, and rustling himself, his neck and head blood-red and blue, and every feather as stiff as an oyster-shell. He looked like some Indian chief arrayed for the war-path.

Having hurriedly fed his feathered favourites, Archie went bounding off to let out a few dogs. He opened the door and went right into their house, and the consequence was that one of the Newfoundlands threw him over in the straw, and licked his face; and the Skye terriers came trooping round, and they also paid their addresses to him, some of the young ones jumping over his head, while Archie could do nothing for laughing. When he got up he sang out "Attention!" and lo! and behold the dogs, every one looking wiser than another, some with their considering-caps on apparently, and their heads held knowingly to one side.

“Attention!” cried the boy. “I am going to-day to shoot the fox that ran off with the hen Ann’s husband. I shall want some of you. You Bounder, and you little Fuss, and you Tackier, come.”

And come those three dogs did, while the rest, with lowered tails and pitiful looks, slunk away to their straw. Bounder was an enormous Newfoundland, and Fuss and Tackier were terriers, the former a Skye, the latter a very tiny but exceedingly game Yorkie.

Yonder, gun on shoulder, came tall, stately Branson, the keeper, clad in velveteen, with gaiters on. Branson was a Northumbrian, and a grand specimen too. He might have been somewhat slow of speech, but he was not slow to act whenever it came to a scuffle with poachers, and this last was not an unfrequent occurrence.

“My gun, Branson?”

“It’s in the kitchen, Master Archie, clean and ready; and old Kate has put a couple of corks in it, for fear it should go off.”

“Oh, it is loaded then—really loaded!”

“Ay, lad; and I’ve got to teach you how to carry it. This is your first day on the hill, mind, and a rough one it is.”

Archie soon got his leggings on, and his shot-belt and shooting-cap and everything else, in true sportsman fashion.

“What!” he said at the hall door, when he met Mr Walton, “am I to have my tutor with me to-day?”

He put strong emphasis on the last word.

“You know, Mr Walton, that I am ten to-day. I suppose I am conceited, but I almost feel a man.”

His tutor laughed, but by no means offensively.

“My dear Archie, I am going to the hill; but don’t imagine I’m going as your tutor, or to look after you. Oh, no! I want to go as your friend.”

This certainly put a different complexion on the matter.

Archie considered for a moment, then replied, with charming condescension:

“Oh, yes, of course, Mr Walton! You are welcome, I’m sure, to come as a friend.”

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Chapter Three.

A Day of Adventure.

If we have any tears all ready to flow, it is satisfactory to know that they will not be required at present. If we have poetic fire and genius, even these gifts may for the time being be held in reservation. No “Ode to a Dying Fox” or “Elegy on the Death and Burial of Reynard” will be necessary. For Reynard did not die; nor was he shot; at least, not sufficiently shot.

In one sense this was a pity. It resulted in mingled humiliation and bitterness for Archie and for the dogs. He had pictured to himself a brief moment of triumph when he should return from the chase, bearing in his hand the head of his enemy—the murderer of the Ann hen’s husband—and having the brush sticking out of his jacket pocket; return to be crowned, figuratively speaking, with festive laurel by Elsie, his sister, and looked upon by all the servants with a feeling of awe as a future Nimrod.

In another sense it was not a pity; that is, for the fox. This sable gentleman had enjoyed a good run, which made him hungry, and as happy as only a fox can be who knows the road through the woods and wilds to a distant burrow, where a bed of withered weeds awaits him, and where a nice fat hen is hidden. When Reynard had eaten his dinner and licked his chops, he laid down to sleep, no doubt laughing in his paw at the boy’s futile efforts to capture or kill him, and promising himself the pleasure of a future moonlight visit to Burley Old Farm, from which he should return with the Ann hen herself on his shoulder.

Yes, Archie’s hunt had been unsuccessful, though the day had not ended without adventure, and he had enjoyed the pleasures of the chase.

Bounder, the big Newfoundland, first took up the scent, and away he went with Fuss and Tackier at his heels, the others following as well as they could, restraining the dogs by voice and gesture. Through the spruce woods, through a patch of pine forest, through a wild tangle of tall, snow-laden furze, out into the open, over a stream, and across a wide stretch of heathery moorland, round quarries and rocks, and once more into a wood. This time it was stunted larch, and in the very centre of it, close by a cairn of stones, Bounder said—and both Fuss and Tackier acquiesced—that Reynard had his den. But how to get him out?

“You two little chaps get inside,” Bounder seemed to say. “I’ll stand here; and as soon as he bolts, I shall make the sawdust fly out of him, you see!”

Escape for the fox seemed an impossibility. He had more than one entrance to his den, but all were carefully blocked up by the keeper except his back and front door. Bounder guarded the latter, Archie went to watch by the former.

“Keep quiet and cool now, and aim right behind the shoulder.”

Quiet and cool indeed! how could he? Under such exciting circumstances, his heart was thumping like a frightened pigeon’s, and his cheeks burning with the rush of blood to them.

He knelt down with his gun ready, and kept his eyes on the hole. He prayed that Reynard might not bolt by the front door, for that would spoil his sport.

The terrier made it very warm for the fox in his den. Small though the little Yorkie was, his valour was wonderful. Out in the open Reynard could have killed them one by one, but here the battle was unfair, so after a few minutes of a terrible scrimmage the fox concluded to bolt.

Archie saw his head at the hole, half protruded then drawn back, and his heart thumped now almost audibly.

Would he come? Would he dare it?

Yes, the fox dared it, and came. He dashed out with a wild rush, like a little hairy hurricane. “Aim behind the shoulder!” Where was the shoulder? Where was anything but a long sable stream of something feathering through the snow?

Bang! bang! both barrels. And down rolled the fox. Yes, no. Oh dear, it was poor Fuss! The fox was half a mile away in a minute.

Fuss lost blood that stained the snow brown as it fell on it. And Archie shed bitter tears of sorrow and humiliation.

“Oh, Fuss, my dear, dear doggie!” he cried, “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

The Skye terrier was lying on the keeper’s knees and having a snow styptic.

Soon the blood ceased to flow, and Fuss licked his young master's hands, and presently got down and ran around and wanted to go to earth again; and though Archie felt he could never forgive himself for his awkwardness, he was so happy to see that Fuss was not much the worse after all.

But there would be no triumphant home-returning; he even began to doubt if ever he would be a sportsman. Then Branson consoled him, and told him he himself didn't do any better when he first took to the hill.

"It is well," said Mr Walton, laughing, "that you didn't shoot me instead."

"Ye-es," said Archie slowly, looking at Fuss. It was evident he was not quite convinced that Mr Walton was right.

"Fuss is none the worse," cried Branson. "Oh, I can tell you it does these Scotch dogs good to have a drop or two of lead in them! It makes them all the steadier, you know."

About an hour after, to his exceeding delight, Archie shot a hare. Oh joy! Oh day of days! His first hare! He felt a man now, from the top of his Astrachan cap to the toe caps of his shooting-boots.

Bounder picked it up, and brought it and laid it at Archie's feet.

"Good dog! you shall carry it."

Bounder did so most delightedly.

They stopped at an outlying cottage on their way home. It was a long, low, thatched building, close by a wood, a very humble dwelling indeed.

A gentle-faced widow woman opened to their knock. She looked scared when she saw them, and drew back.

"Oh!" she said, "I hope Robert hasn't got into trouble again?"

"No, no, Mrs Cooper, keep your mind easy, Bob's a' right at present. We just want to eat our bit o' bread and cheese in your sheiling."

"And right welcome ye are, sirs. Come in to the fire. Here's a broom to brush the snow fra your leggins."

Bounder marched in with the rest, with as much swagger and independence as if the cottage belonged to him. Mrs Cooper's cat determined to defend her hearth and home against such intrusion, and when Bounder approached the former, she stood on her dignity, back arched, tail erect, hair on end from stem to stern, with her ears back, and green fire lurking in her eyes. Bounder stood patiently looking at her. He would not put down the hare, and he could not defend himself with it in his mouth; so he was puzzled. Pussy, however, brought matters to a crisis. She slapped his face, then bolted right up the chimney. Bounder put down the hare now, and gave a big sigh as he lay down beside it.

"No, Mrs Cooper, Bob hasn't been at his wicked work for some time. He's been gi'en someone else a turn I s'pose, eh?"

"Oh, sirs," said the widow, "it's no wi' my will he goes poachin'! If his father's heid were above the sod he daren't do it. But, poor Bob, he's all I have in the world, and he works hard—sometimes."

Branson laughed. It was a somewhat sarcastic laugh; and young Archie felt sorry for Bob's mother, she looked so unhappy.

"Ay, Mrs Cooper, Bob works hard sometimes, especially when settin' girns for game. Ha! ha! Hullo!" he added, "speak of angels and they appear. Here comes Bob himself!"

Bob entered, looked defiantly at the keeper, but doffed his cap and bowed to Mr Walton and Archie. "Mother," he said, "I'm going out."

"Not far, Bob, lad; dinner's nearly ready."

Bob had turned to leave, but he wheeled round again almost fiercely. He was a splendid young specimen of a Borderer, six feet if an inch, and well-made to boot. No extra flesh, but hard and tough as copper bolts. "Denner!" he growled. "Ay, denner to be sure—taties and salt! Ha! and gentry live on the fat o' the land! If I snare a rabbit, if I dare to catch one o' God's own cattle on God's own hills, I'm a felon; I'm to be taken and put in gaol—shot even if I dare resist! Yas, mother, I'll be in to denner," and away he strode.

"Potatoes and salt!" Archie could not help thinking about that. And he was going away to his own bright home and to happiness. He glanced round him at the bare, clay walls, with their few bits of daubs of pictures, and up at the blackened rafters, where a cheese stood—one poor, hard cheese—and on which hung some bacon and onions. He could not repress a sigh, almost as heart-felt as that which Bounder gave when he lay down beside the hare.

When the keeper and tutor rose to go, Archie stopped behind with Bounder just a moment. When they came out, Bounder had no hare.

Yet that hare was the first Archie had shot, and—well, he had meant to astonish Elsie with this proof of his prowess; but the hare was better to be left where it was—he had earned a blessing.

The party were in the wood when Bob Cooper, the poacher, sprang up as if from the earth and confronted them.

“I came here a purpose,” he said to Branson. “This is not your wood; even if it was I wouldn’t mind. What did you want at my mother’s hoose?”

“Nothing; and I’ve nothing to say to ye.”

“Haven’t ye? But ye were in our cottage. It’s no for nought the glaud whistles.”

“I don’t want to quarrel,” said Branson, “especially after speakin’ to your mother; she’s a kindly soul, and I’m sorry for her and for you yoursel’, Bob.”

Bob was taken aback. He had expected defiance, exasperation, and he was prepared to fight.

Archie stood trembling as these two athletes looked each other in the eyes.

But gradually Bob’s face softened; he bit his lip and moved impatiently. The allusion to his mother had touched his heart.

“I didn’t want sich words, Branson. I—may be I don’t deserve ’em. I—hang it all, give me a grip o’ your hand!”

Then away went Bob as quickly as he had come.

Branson glanced at his retreating figure one moment.

“Well,” he said, “I never thought I’d shake hands wi’ Bob Cooper! No matter; better please a fool than fecht ’im.”

“Branson!”

“Yes, Master Archie.”

“I don’t think Bob’s a fool; and I’m sure that, bad as he is, he loves his mother.”

“Quite right, Archie,” said Mr Walton.

Archie met his father at the gate, and ran towards him to tell him all his adventures about the fox and the hare. But Bob Cooper and everybody else was forgotten when he noticed what and whom he had behind him. The “whom” was Branson’s little boy, Peter; the “what” was one of the wildest-looking—and, for that matter, one of the wickedest-looking—Shetland ponies it is possible to imagine. Long-haired, shaggy, droll, and daft; but these adjectives do not half describe him.

“Why, father, wherever—”

“He’s your birthday present, Archie.”

The boy actually flushed red with joy. His eyes sparkled as he glanced from his father to the pony and back at his father again.

“Dad,” he said at last, “I know now what old Kate means about ‘her cup being full.’ Father, my cup overflows!”

Well, Archie’s eyes were pretty nearly overflowing anyhow.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Four.

In the Old Castle Tower.

They were all together that evening in the green parlour as usual, and everybody was happy and merry. Even Rupert was sitting up and laughing as much as Elsie. The clatter of tongues prevented them hearing Mary's tapping at the door; and the carpet being so thick and soft, she was not seen until right in the centre of the room.

"Why, Mary," cried Elsie, "I got such a start, I thought you were a ghost!"

Mary looks uneasily around her.

"There be one ghost, Miss Elsie, comes out o' nights, and walks about the old castle."

"Was that what you came in to tell us, Mary?"

"Oh, no, sir! If ye please, Bob Cooper is in the yard, and he wants to speak to Master Archie. I wouldn't let him go if I were you, ma'am."

Archie's mother smiled. Mary was a privileged little parlour maiden, and ventured at times to make suggestions.

"Go and see what he wants, dear," said his mother to Archie.

It was a beautiful clear moonlight night, with just a few white snow-laden clouds lying over the woods, no wind and never a hush save the distant and occasional yelp of a dog.

"Bob Cooper!"

"That's me, Master Archie. I couldn't rest till I'd seen ye the night. The hare—"

"Oh! that's really nothing, Bob Cooper!"

"But allow me to differ. It's no' the hare altogether. I know where to find fifty. It was the way it was given. Look here, lad, and this is what I come to say, Branson and you have been too much for Bob Cooper. The day I went to that wood to thrash him, and I'd hae killed him, an I could. Ha! ha! I shook hands with him! Archie Broadbent, your father's a

gentleman, and they say you're a chip o' t'old block. I believe 'em, and look, see, lad, I'll never be seen in your preserves again. Tell Branson so. There's my hand on't. Nay, never be afear'd to touch it. Good-night. I feel better now."

And away strode the poacher, and Archie could hear the sound of his heavy tread crunching through the snow long after he was out of sight.

"You seem to have made a friend, Archie," said his father, when the boy reported the interview.

"A friend," added Mr Walton with a quiet smile, "that I wouldn't be too proud of."

"Well," said the Squire, "certainly Bob Cooper is a rough nut, but who knows what his heart may be like?"

Archie's room in the tower was opened in state next day. Old Kate herself had lit fires in it every night for a week before, though she never would go up the long dark stair without Peter. Peter was only a mite of a boy, but wherever he went, Fuss, the Skye terrier, accompanied him, and it was universally admitted that no ghost in its right senses would dare to face Fuss.

Elsie was there of course, and Rupert too, though he had to be almost carried up by stalwart Branson. But what a glorious little room it was when you were in it! A more complete boy's own room could scarcely be imagined. It was a beau ideal; at least Rupert and Archie and Elsie thought so, and even Mr Walton and Branson said the same.

Let me see now, I may as well try to describe it, but much must be left to imagination. It was not a very big room, only about twelve feet square; for although the tower appeared very large from outside, the abnormal thickness of its walls detracted from available space inside it. There was one long window on each side, and a chair and small table could be placed on the sill of either. But this was curtained off at night, when light came from a huge lamp that depended from the ceiling, and the rays from which fought for preference with those from the roaring fire on the stone hearth. The room was square. A door, also curtained, gave entrance from the stairway at one corner, and at each of two other corners were two other doors leading into turret chambers, and these tiny, wee rooms were very delightful, because you were out beyond the great tower when you sat in them, and their slits of windows granted you a grand view of the charming scenery everywhere about.

The furniture was rustic in the extreme—studiously so. There was a tall rocking-chair, a great dais or sofa, and a recline for Rupert—“poor Rupert” as he was always called—the big chair was the guest’s seat.

The ornaments on the walls had been principally supplied by Branson. Stuffed heads of foxes, badgers, and wild cats, with any number of birds’ and beasts’ skins, artistically mounted. There were also heads of horned deer, bows and arrows—these last were Archie’s own—and shields and spears that Uncle Ramsay had brought home from savage wars in Africa and Australia. The dais was covered with bear skins, and there was quite a quantity of skins on the floor instead of a carpet. So the whole place looked primeval and romantic.

The bookshelf was well supplied with readable tales, and a harp stood in a corner, and on this, young though she was, Elsie could already play.

The guest to-night was old Kate. She sat in the tall chair in a corner opposite the door, Branson occupied a seat near her, Rupert was on his recline, and Archie and Elsie on a skin, with little Peter nursing wounded Fuss in a corner.

That was the party. But Archie had made tea, and handed it round; and sitting there with her cup in her lap, old Kate really looked a strange, weird figure. Her face was lean and haggard, her eyes almost wild, and some half-grey hair peeped from under an uncanny-looking cap of black crape, with long depending strings of the same material.

Old Kate was housekeeper and general female factotum. She was really a distant relation of the Squire, and so had it very much her own way at Burley Old Farm.

She came originally from “just ayant the Border,” and had a wealth of old-world stories to tell, and could sing queer old bits of ballads too, when in the humour.

Old Kate, however, said she could not sing to-night, for she felt as yet unused to the place; and whether they (the boys) believed in ghosts or not she (Kate) did, and so, she said, had her father before her. But she told stories—stories of the bloody raids of long, long ago, when Northumbria and the Scottish Borders were constantly at war—stories that kept her hearers enthralled while they listened, and to which the weird looks and strange voice of the narrator lent a peculiar charm.

Old Kate was just in the very midst of one of these when, twang! one of the strings of Elsie’s harp broke. It was a very startling sound indeed; for as it went off it seemed to emit a groan that rang through the chamber, and died away in the vaulted roof. Elsie crept closer to Archie, and Peter with Fuss drew nearer the fire.

The ancient dame, after being convinced that the sound was nothing uncanny, proceeded with her narrative. It was a long one, with an old house in it by the banks of a winding river in the midst of woods and wilds—a house that, if its walls had been able to speak, could have told many a marrow-freezing story of bygone times.

There was a room in this house that was haunted. Old Kate was just coming to this, and to the part of her tale on which the ghosts on a certain night of the year always appeared in this room, and stood over a dark stain in the centre of the floor.

“And ne’er a ane,” she was saying, “could wash that stain awa’. Weel, bairns, one moonlicht nicht, and at the dearest hoor o’ the nicht, nothing would please the auld laird but he maun leave his chamber and go straight along the damp, dreary, long corridor to the door o’ the haunted room. It was half open, and the moon’s licht danced in on the floor. He was listening—he was looking—”

But at this very moment, when old Kate had lowered her voice to a whisper, and the tension at her listeners’ heart-strings was the greatest, a soft, heavy footstep was heard coming slowly, painfully as it might be, up the turret stairs.

To say that every one was alarmed would but poorly describe their feelings. Old Kate’s eyes seemed as big as watch-glasses. Elsie screamed, and clung to Archie.

“Who—oo—’s—Who’s there?” cried Branson, and his voice sounded fearful and far away.

No answer; but the steps drew nearer and nearer. Then the curtain was pushed aside, and in dashed—what? a ghost?—no, only honest great Bounder.

Bounder had found out there was something going on, and that Fuss was up there, and he didn’t see why he should be left out in the cold. That was all; but the feeling of relief when he did appear was unprecedented.

Old Kate required another cup of tea after that. Then Branson got out his fiddle from a green baize bag; and if he had not played those merry airs, I do not believe that old Kate would have had the courage to go downstairs that night at all.

Archie’s pony was great fun at first. The best of it was that he had never been broken in. The Squire, or rather his bailiff, had bought him out of a drove; so he was, literally speaking, as wild as the hills, and as mad as a March hare. But he soon knew Archie and Elsie, and, under Branson’s supervision, Scallowa was put into training on the lawn. He

was led, he was walked, he was galloped. But he reared, and kicked, and rolled whenever he thought of it, and yet there was not a bit of vice about him.

Spring had come, and early summer itself, before Scallowa permitted Archie to ride him, and a week or two after this the difficulty would have been to have told which of the two was the wilder and dafter, Archie or Scallowa. They certainly had managed to establish the most amicable relations. Whatever Scallowa thought, Archie agreed to, and vice versa, and the pair were never out of mischief. Of course Archie was pitched off now and then, but he told Elsie he did not mind it, and in fact preferred it to constant uprightness: it was a change. But the pony never ran away, because Archie always had a bit of carrot in his pocket to give him when he got up off the ground.

Mr Walton assured Archie that these carrots accounted for his many tumbles. And there really did seem to be a foundation of truth about this statement. For of course the pony had soon come to know that it was to his interest to throw his rider, and acted accordingly. So after a time Archie gave the carrot-payment up, and matters were mended.

It was only when school was over that Archie went for a canter, unless he happened to get up very early in the morning for the purpose of riding. And this he frequently did, so that, before the summer was done, Scallowa and Archie were as well known over all the countryside as the postman himself.

Archie's pony was certainly not very long in the legs, but nevertheless the leaps he could take were quite surprising.

On the second summer after Archie got this pony, both horse and rider were about perfect in their training, and in the following winter he appeared in the hunting-field with the greatest sang-froid, although many of the farmers, on their weight-carrying hunters, could have jumped over Archie, Scallowa, and all. The boy had a long way to ride to the hounds, and he used to start off the night before. He really did not care where he slept. Old Kate used to make up a packet of sandwiches for him, and this would be his dinner and breakfast. Scallowa he used to tie up in some byre, and as often as not Archie would turn in beside him among the straw. In the morning he would finish the remainder of Kate's sandwiches, make his toilet in some running stream or lake, and be as fresh as a daisy when the meet took place.

Both he and Scallowa were somewhat uncouth-looking. Elsie, his sister, had proposed that he should ride in scarlet, it would look so romantic and pretty; but Archie only laughed, and said he would not feel at home in such finery, and his "Eider Duck"—as he

sometimes called the pony—would not know him. “Besides, Elsie,” he said, “lying down among straw with scarlets on wouldn’t improve them.”

But old Kate had given him a birthday present of a little Scotch Glengarry cap with a real eagle’s feather, and he always wore this in the hunting-field. He did so for two reasons; first, it pleased old Kate; and, secondly, the cap stuck to his head; no breeze could blow it off.

It was not long before Archie was known in the field as the “Little Demon Huntsman.” And, really, had you seen Scallowa and he feathering across a moor, his bonnet on the back of his head, and the pony’s immense mane blowing straight back in the wind, you would have thought the title well earned. In a straight run the pony could not keep up with the long-legged horses; but Archie and he could dash through a wood, and even swim streams, and take all manner of short cuts, so that he was always in at the death.

The most remarkable trait in Archie’s riding was that he could take flying leaps from heights: only a Shetland pony could have done this. Archie knew every yard of country, and he rather liked heading his Lilliputian nag right away for a knoll or precipice, and bounding off it like a roebuck or Scottish deerhound. The first time he was observed going straight for a bank of this kind he created quite a sensation. “The boy will be killed!” was the cry, and every lady then drew rein and held her breath.

Away went Scallowa, and they were on the bank, in the air, and landed safely, and away again in less time than it takes me to tell of the exploit.

The secret of the lad’s splendid management of the pony was this: he loved Scallowa, and Scallowa knew it. He not only loved the little horse, but studied his ways, so he was able to train him to do quite a number of tricks, such as lying down “dead” to command, kneeling to ladies—for Archie was a gallant lad—trotting round and round circus-fashion, and ending every performance by coming and kissing his master. Between you and me, reader, a bit of carrot had a good deal to do with the last trick, if not with the others also.

It occurred to this bold boy once that he might be able to take Scallowa up the dark tower stairs to the boy’s own room. The staircase was unusually wide, and the broken stones in it had been repaired with logs of wood. He determined to try; but he practised riding him blindfolded first. Then one day he put him at the stairs; he himself went first with the bridle in his hand.

What should he do if he failed? That is a question he did not stop to answer. One thing was quite certain, Scallowa could not turn and go down again. On they went, the two of

them, all in the dark, except that now and then a slit in the wall gave them a little light and, far beneath, a pretty view of the country. On and on, and up and up, till within ten feet of the top.

Here Scallowa came to a dead stop, and the conversation between Archie and his steed, although the latter did not speak English, might have been as follows: "Come on, 'Eider Duck'!"

"Not a step farther, thank you."

"Come on, old horsie! You can't turn, you know."

"No; not another step if I stay here till doomsday in the afternoon. Going upstairs becomes monotonous after a time. No; I'll be shot if I budge!"

"You'll be shot if you don't. Gee up, I say; gee up!"

"Gee up yourself; I'm going to sleep."

"I say, Scallowa, look here."

"What's that, eh? a bit of carrot? Oh, here goes?" And in a few seconds more Scallowa was in the room, and had all he could eat of cakes and carrots. Archie was so delighted with his success that he must go to the castle turret, and halloo for Branson and old Kate to come and see what he had got in the tower.

Old Kate's astonishment knew no bounds, and Branson laughed till his sides were sore. Bounder, the Newfoundland, appeared also to appreciate the joke, and smiled from lug to lug.

"How will you get him down?"

"Carrots," said Archie; "carrots, Branson. The 'Duck' will do anything for carrots."

The "Duck," however, was somewhat nervous at first, and half-way downstairs even the carrots appeared to have lost their charm.

While Archie was wondering what he should do now, a loud explosion seemed to shake the old tower to its very foundation. It was only Bounder barking in the rear of the pony. But the sound had the desired effect, and down came the "Duck," and away went Archie, so that in a few minutes both were out on the grass.

And here Scallowa must needs relieve his feelings by lying down and rolling; while great Bounder, as if he had quite appreciated all the fun of the affair, and must do something to allay his excitement, went tearing round in a circle, as big dogs do, so fast that it was almost impossible to see anything of him distinctly. He was a dark shape *et preterea nihil*.

But after a time Scallowa got near to the stair, which only proves that there is nothing in reason you cannot teach a Shetland pony, if you love him and understand him.

The secret lies in the motto, "Fondly and firmly." But, as already hinted, a morsel of carrot comes in handy at times.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Five

“Boys will be Boys”

Bob Cooper was as good as his word, which he had pledged to Archie on that night at Burley Old Farm, and Branson never saw him again in the Squire’s preserves.

Nor had he ever been obliged to compeer before the Squire himself—who was now a magistrate—to account for any acts of trespass in pursuit of game on the lands of other lairds. But this does not prove that Bob had given up poaching. He was discreetly silent about this matter whenever he met Archie.

He had grown exceedingly fond of the lad, and used to be delighted when he called at his mother’s cottage on his “Eider Duck.” There was always a welcome waiting Archie here, and whey to drink, which, it must be admitted, is very refreshing on a warm summer’s day.

Well, Bob on these occasions used to show Archie how to make flies, or busk hooks, and gave him a vast deal of information about outdoor life and sport generally.

The subject of poaching was hardly ever broached; only once, when he and Archie were talking together in the little cottage, Bob himself volunteered the following information:

“The gentry folks, Master Archie, think me a terrible man; and they wonder I don’t go and plough, or something. La! they little know I’ve been brought up in the hills. Sport I must hae. I couldna live away from nature. But I’m never cruel. Heigho! I suppose I must leave the country, and seek for sport in wilder lands, where the man o’ money doesn’t trample on the poor. Only one thing keeps me here.”

He glanced out of the window as he spoke to where his old mother was cooking dinner al fresco—boiling a pot as the gipsy does, hung from a tripod.

“I know, I know,” said Archie.

“How old are you now, Master Archie?”

“Going on for fourteen.”

“Is that all? Why ye’re big eno’ for a lad o’ seventeen!”

This was true. Archie was wondrous tall, and wondrous brown and handsome. His hardy upbringing and constant outdoor exercise, in summer’s shine or winter’s snow, fully accounted for his stature and looks.

“I’m almost getting too big for my pony.”

“Ah! no, lad; Shetlands’ll carry most anything.”

“Well, I must be going, Bob Cooper. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Master Archie. Ah! lad, if there were more o’ your kind and your father’s in the country, there would be fewer bad men like—like me.”

“I don’t like to hear you saying that, Bob. Couldn’t you be a good man if you liked? You’re big enough.”

The poacher laughed.

“Yes,” he replied, “I’m big enough; but, somehow, goodness don’t strike right home to me like. It don’t come natural—that’s it.”

“My brother Rupert says it is so easy to be good, if you read and pray God to teach and help you.”

“Ah, Master Archie, your brother is good himself, but he doesn’t know all.”

“My brother Rupert bade me tell you that; but, oh, Bob, how nice he can speak. I can’t. I can fish and shoot, and ride ‘Eider Duck;’ but I can’t say things so pretty as he can. Well, good-bye again.”

“Good-bye again, and tell your brother that I can’t be good all at one jump like, but I’ll begin to try mebbe. So long.”

Archie Broadbent might have been said to have two kinds of home education; one was thoroughly scholastic, the other very practical indeed. The Squire was one in a hundred perhaps. He was devoted to his farm, and busied himself in the field, manually as well as orally. I mean to say that he was of such an active disposition that, while superintending and giving advice and orders, he put his hand to the wheel himself. So did Mr Walton,

and whether it was harvest-time or haymaking, you would have found Squire Broadbent, the tutor, and Archie hard at it, and even little Elsie doing a little.

I would not like to say that the Squire was a radical, but he certainly was no believer in the benefits of too much class distinction. He thought Burns was right when he said—

“A man’s a man for a’ that.”

Was he any the less liked or less respected by his servants, because he and his boy tossed hay in the same field with them? I do not think so, and I know that the work always went more merrily on when they were there; and that laughing and even singing could be heard all day long. Moreover, there was less beer drank, and more tea. The Squire supplied both liberally, and any man might have which he chose. Consequently there was less, far less, tired-headedness and languor in the evening. Why, it was nothing uncommon for the lads and lasses of Burley Old Farm to meet together on the lawn, after a hard day’s toil, and dance for hours to the merry notes of Branson’s fiddle.

We have heard of model farms; this Squire’s was one; but the servants, wonderful to say, were contented. There was never such a thing as grumbling heard from one year’s end to the other.

Christmas too was always kept in the good, grand old style. Even a yule log, drawn from the wood, was considered a property of the performances; and as for good cheer, why there was “lashins” of it, as an Irishman would say, and fun “galore,” to borrow a word from beyond the Border.

Mr Walton was a scholarly person, though you might not have thought so, had you seen him mowing turnips with his coat off. He, however, taught nothing to Archie or Rupert that might not have some practical bearing on his after life. Such studies as mathematics and algebra were dull, in a manner of speaking; Latin was taught because no one can understand English without it; French and German conversationally; geography not by rote, but thoroughly; and everything else was either very practical and useful, or very pleasant.

Music Archie loved, but did not care to play; his father did not force him; but poor Rupert played the zither. He loved it, and took to it naturally.

Rupert got stronger as he grew older, and when Archie was fourteen and he thirteen, the physician gave good hopes; and he was even able to walk by himself a little. But to some extent he would be “Poor Rupert” as long as he lived.

He read and thought far more than Archie, and—let me whisper it—he prayed more fervently.

“Oh, Roup,” Archie would say, “I should like to be as good as you! Somehow, I don’t feel to need to pray so much, and to have the Lord Jesus so close to me.”

It was a strange conceit this, but Rupert’s answer was a good one.

“Yes, Archie, I need comfort more; but mind you, brother, the day may come when you’ll want comfort of this kind too.”

Old Kate really was a queer old witch of a creature, superstitious to a degree. Here is an example: One day she came rushing—without taking time to knock even—into the breakfast parlour.

“Oh, Mistress Broadbent, what a ghaist I’ve gotten!”

“Dear me!” said the Squire’s wife; “sit down and tell us. What is it, poor Kate?”

“Oh! Oh!” she sighed. “Nae wonder my puir legs ached. Oh! sirs! sirs!”

“Ye ken my little pantry? Well, there’s been a board doon on the fleer for ages o’ man, and to-day it was taken out to be scrubbit, and what think ye was reveeled?”

“I couldn’t guess.”

“Words, ’oman; words, printed and painted on the timmer—‘Sacred to the Memory of Dinah Brown, Aged 99.’ A tombstone, ’oman—a wooden gravestone, and me standin’ on’t a’ these years.”

Here the Squire was forced to burst out into a hearty laugh, for which his wife reprimanded him by a look.

There was no mistake about the “wooden tombstone,” but that this was the cause of old Kate’s rheumatism one might take the liberty to doubt.

Kate was a staunch believer in ghosts, goblins, fairies, kelpies, brownies, spunkies, and all the rest of the supernatural family; and I have something to relate in connection with this, though it is not altogether to the credit of my hero, Archie.

Old Kate and young Peter were frequent visitors to the room in the tower, for the tea Archie made, and the fires he kept on, were both most excellent in their way.

“Boys will be boys,” and Archie was a little inclined to practical joking. It made him laugh, so he said, and laughing made one fat.

It happened that, one dark winter’s evening, old Kate was invited up into the tower, and Branson with Peter came also. Archie volunteered a song, and Branson played many a fine old air on his fiddle, so that the first part of the evening passed away pleasantly and even merrily enough. Old Kate drank cup after cup of tea as she sat in that weird old chair, and, by-and-by, Archie, the naughty boy that he was, led the conversation round to ghosts. The ancient dame was in her element now; she launched forth into story after story, and each was more hair-stirring than its predecessor.

Elsie and Archie occupied their favourite place on a bear’s skin in front of the low fire; and while Kate still droned on, and Branson listened with eyes and mouth wide open, the boy might have been noticed to stoop down, and whisper something in his sister’s ear.

Almost immediately after a rattling of chains could be heard in one of the turrets. Both Kate and Branson started, and the former could not be prevailed upon to resume her story till Archie lit a candle and walked all round the room, drawing back the turret curtains to show no one was there.

Once again old Kate began, and once again chains were heard to rattle, and a still more awesome sound followed—a long, low, deep-bass groan, while at the same time, strange to say, the candle in Archie’s hand burnt blue. To add to the fearsomeness of the situation, while the chain continued to rattle, and the groaning now and then, there was a very appreciable odour of sulphur in the apartment. This was the climax. Old Kate screamed, and the big keeper, Branson, fell on his knees in terror. Even Elsie, though she had an inkling of what was to happen, began to feel afraid.

“There now, granny,” cried Archie, having carried the joke far enough, “here is the groaning ghost.” As he spoke he produced a pair of kitchen bellows, with a musical reed in the pipe, which he proceeded to sound in old Kate’s very face, looking a very mischievous imp while he did so.

“Oh,” said old Kate, “what a scare the laddie has given me. But the chain?”

Archie pulled a string, and the chain rattled again. “And the candle? That was na canny.”

“A dust of sulphur in the wick, granny.” Big Branson looked ashamed of himself, and old Kate herself began to smile once more.

“But how could ye hae the heart to scare an old wife sae, Master Archie?”

“Oh, granny, we got up the fun just to show you there were no such things as ghosts. Rupert says—and he should know, because he’s always reading—that ghosts are always rats or something.”

“Ye maunna frichten me again, laddie. Will ye promise?”

“Yes, granny, there’s my hand on it. Now sit down and have another cup of tea, and Elsie will play and sing.”

Elsie could sing now, and sweet young voice she had, that seemed to carry you to happier lands. Branson always said it made him feel a boy again, wandering through the woods in summer, or chasing the butterflies over flowery beds.

And so, albeit Archie had carried his practical joke out to his own satisfaction, if not to that of every one else, this evening, like many others that had come before it, and came after it, passed away pleasantly enough.

It was in the spring of the same year, and during the Easter holidays, that a little London boy came down to reside with his aunt, who lived in one of Archie’s father’s cottages.

Young Harry Brown had been sent to the country for the express purpose of enjoying himself, and set about this business forthwith. He made up to Archie; in fact, he took so many liberties, and talked to him so glibly, and with so little respect, that, although Archie had imbued much of his father’s principles as regards liberalism, he did not half like it.

Perhaps, after all, it was only the boy’s manner, for he had never been to the country at all before, and looked upon every one—Archie included—who did not know London, as jolly green. But Archie did not appreciate it, and, like the traditional worm, he turned, and once again his love for practical joking got the better of his common-sense.

“Teach us somefink,” said Harry one day, turning his white face up. He was older, perhaps, than Archie, but decidedly smaller. “Teach us somefink, and when you comes to Vitechapel to wisit me, I’ll teach you summut. My eye, won’t yer stare!”

The idea of this white-chafted, unwholesome-looking cad, expecting that he, Squire Broadbent's son, would visit him in Whitechapel! But Archie managed to swallow his wrath and pocket his pride for the time being.

"What shall I teach you, eh? I suppose you know that potatoes don't grow on trees, nor geese upon gooseberry-bushes?"

"Yes; I know that taters is dug out of the hearth. I'm pretty fly for a young un."

"Can you ride?"

"No."

"Well, meet me here to-morrow at the same time, and I'll bring my 'Duck.'"

"Look 'ere, Johnnie Raw, ye said 'ride,' not 'swim.' A duck teaches swimmin', not ridin'. None o' yer larks now!"

Next day Archie swept down upon the Cockney in fine form, meaning to impress him.

The Cockney was not much impressed; I fear he was not very impressionable.

"My heye, Johnnie Raw," he roared, "vere did yer steal the moke?"

"Look you here, young Whitechapel, you'll have to guard that tongue of yours a little, else communications will be cut. Do you see?"

"It is a donkey, ain't it, Johnnie?"

"Come on to the field and have a ride."

Five minutes afterwards the young Cockney on the "Eider Duck's" back was tearing along the field at railway speed. John Gilpin's ride was nothing to it, nor Tam O'Shanter's on his grey mare, Meg! Both these worthies had stuck to the saddle, but this horseman rode upon the neck of the steed. Scallowa stopped short at the gate, but the boy flew over.

Archie found his friend rubbing himself, and looking very serious, and he felt happier now.

“Call that ’ere donkey a heider duck? H’m? I allers thought heider ducks was soft!

“One to you, Johnnie. I don’t want to ride hany more.”

“What else shall I teach you?”

“Hey?”

“Come, I’ll show you over the farm.”

“Honour bright? No larks!”

“Yes; no larks!”

“Say honour.”

“Honour.”

Young Whitechapel had not very much faith in his guide, however; but he saw more country wonders that day than ever he could have dreamt of; while his strange remarks kept Archie continually laughing.

Next day the two boys went bird-nesting, and really Archie was very mischievous. He showed him a hoody-crow’s nest, which he represented as a green plover’s or lapwing’s; and a blackbird’s nest in a furze-bush, which he told Harry was a magpie’s; and so on, and so forth, till at last he got tired of the cheeky Cockney, and sent him off on a mile walk to a cairn of stones, on which he told him crows sometimes sat and “might have a nest.”

Then Archie threw himself on the moss, took out a book, and began to read. He was just beginning to repent of his conduct to Harry Brown, and meant to go up to him like a man when he returned, and crave his forgiveness.

But somehow, when Harry came back he had so long a face, that wicked Archie burst out laughing, and forgot all about his good resolve.

“What shall I teach you next?” said Archie.

“Draw it mild, Johnnie; it’s ’Arry’s turn. It’s the boy’s turn to teach you summut. Shall we ’ave it hout now wi’ the raw uns? Bunches o’ fives I means. Hey?”

“I really don’t understand you.”

“Ha! ha! ha! I knowed yer was a green ’un, Johnnie. Can yer fight? Hey? ’Cause I’m spoilin’ for a row.”

And Harry Brown threw off his jacket, and began to dance about in terribly knowing attitudes.

“You had better put on your clothes again,” said Archie. “Fight you? Why I could fling you over the fishpond.”

“Ah! I dessay; but flingin’ ain’t fightin’, Johnnie. Come, there’s no getting hout of it. It ain’t the first young haristocrat I’ve frightened; an’ now you’re afraid.”

That was enough for Archie. And the next moment the lads were at it.

But Archie had met his match; he went down a dozen times. He remained down the last time.

“It is wonderful,” he said. “I quite admire you. But I’ve had enough; I’m beaten.”

“Spoken like a plucked ’un. Haven’t swallowed yer teeth, hey?”

“No; but I’ll have a horrid black-eye.”

“Raw beef, my boy; raw beef.”

“Well; I confess I’ve caught a tartar.”

“An’ I caught a crab yesterday. Wot about your eider duck? My heye! Johnnie, I ain’t been able to sit down conweniently since. I say, Johnnie?”

“Well.”

“Friends, hey?”

“All right.”

Then the two shook hands, and young Whitechapel said if Archie would buy two pairs of gloves he would show him how it was done. So Archie did, and became an apt pupil in the noble art of self-defence; which may be used at times, but never abused.

However, Archie Broadbent never forgot that lesson in the wood.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Six.

“Johnnie’s got the Grit in him.”

On the day of his fight with young Harry in the wood, Archie returned home to find both his father and Mr Walton in the drawing-room alone. His father caught the lad by the arm. “Been tumbling again off that pony of yours?”

“No, father, worse. I’m sure I’ve done wrong.” He then told them all about the practical joking, and the finale.

“Well,” said the Squire, “there is only one verdict. What do you say, Walton?”

“Serve him right!”

“Oh, I know that,” said Archie; “but isn’t it lowering our name to keep such company?”

“It isn’t raising our name, nor growing fresh laurels either, for you to play practical jokes on this poor London lad. But as to being in his company, Archie, you may have to be in worse yet. But listen! I want my son to behave as a gentleman, even in low company. Remember that boy, and despise no one, whatever be his rank in life. Now, go and beg your mother’s and sister’s forgiveness for having to appear before them with a black-eye.”

“Archie!” his father called after him, as he was leaving the room.

“Yes, dad?”

“How long do you think it will be before you get into another scrape?”

“I couldn’t say for certain, father. I’m sure I don’t want to get into any. They just seem to come.”

“There’s no doubt about one thing, Mr Broadbent,” said the tutor smiling, when Archie had left.

“And that is?”

“He’s what everybody says he is, a chip of the old block. Headstrong, and all that; doesn’t look before he leaps.”

“Don’t I, Walton?”

“Squire, I’m not going to flatter you. You know you don’t.”

“Well, my worthy secretary,” said the Squire, “I’m glad you speak so plainly. I can always come to you for advice when—”

“When you want to,” said Walton, laughing. “All right, mind you do. I’m proud to be your factor, as well as tutor to your boys. Now what about that Chillingham bull? You won’t turn him into the west field?”

“Why not? The field is well fenced. All our picturesque beasts are there. He is only a show animal, and he is really only a baby.”

“True, the bull is not much more than a baby, but—”

The baby in question was the gift of a noble friend to Squire Broadbent; and so beautiful and picturesque did he consider him, that he would have permitted him to roam about the lawns, if there did not exist the considerable probability that he would play battledore and shuttlecock with the visitors, and perhaps toss old Kate herself over the garden wall.

So he was relegated to the west field. This really was a park to all appearance. A few pet cattle grazed in it, a flock of sheep, and a little herd of deer. They all lived amicably together, and sought shelter under the same spreading trees from the summer’s sun. The cattle were often changed, so were the sheep, but the deer were as much fixtures as the trees themselves.

The changing of sheep or cattle meant fine fun for Archie. He would be there in all his glory, doing the work that was properly that of herdsmen and collie dogs. There really was not a great deal of need for collies when Archie was there, mounted on his wild Shetland pony, his darling “Eider Duck” Scallowa; and it was admittedly a fine sight to see the pair of them—they seemed made for each other—feathering away across the field, heading and turning the drove. At such times he would be armed with a long whip, and occasionally a beast more rampageous than the rest would separate itself from the herd, and, with tail erect and head down, dash madly over the grass. This would be just the test for Archie’s skill that he longed for. Away he would go at a glorious gallop; sometimes riding neck and neck with the runaway and plying the whip, at other times

getting round and well ahead across the beast's bows with shout and yell, but taking care to manoeuvre so as to steer clear of an ugly rush.

In this field always dwelt one particular sheep. It had, like the pony, been a birthday present, and, like the pony, it hailed from the Ultima Thule of the British North. If ever there was a demon sheep in existence, surely this was the identical quadruped. Tall and lank, and daft-looking, it possessed almost the speed of a red deer, and was as full of mischief as ever sheep could be. The worst of the beast was, that he led all the other woolly-backs into mischief; and whether it proposed a stampede round the park, ending with a charge through the ranks of the deer, or a well-planned attempt at escape from the field altogether, the other sheep were always willing to join, and sometimes the deer themselves.

Archie loved that sheep next to the pony, and there were times when he held a meet of his own. Mousa, as he called him, would be carted, after the fashion of the Queen's deer, to a part of the estate, miles from home; but it was always for home that Mousa headed, though not in a true line. No, this wonderful sheep would take to the woods as often as not, and scamper over the hills and far away, so that Archie had many a fine run; and the only wonder is that Scallowa and he did not break their necks.

The young Chillingham bull was as beautiful as a dream—a nightmare for instance. He was not very large, but sturdy, active, and strong. Milk-white, or nearly so, with black muzzle and crimson ears inside, and, you might say, eyes as well. Pure white black-tipped horns, erect almost, and a bit of a mane which added to his picturesqueness and wild beauty. His name was Lord Glendale, and his pedigree longer than the Laird o' Cockpen's.

Now, had his lordship behaved himself, he certainly would have been an ornament to the society of Westfield. But he wouldn't or couldn't. Baby though he was, he attempted several times to vivisect his companions; and one day, thinking perhaps that Mousa did not pay him sufficient respect, his lordship made a bold attempt to throw him over the moon. So it was determined that Lord Glendale should be removed from Westfield. At one end of the park was a large, strong fence, and Branson and others came to the conclusion that Glendale would be best penned, and have a ring put in his nose.

Yes, true; but penning a Chillingham wild baby-bull is not so simple as penning a letter. There is more present risk about the former operation, if not future.

"Well, it's got to be done," said Branson.

"Yes," said Archie, who was not far off, "it's got to be done."

“Oh, Master Archie, you can’t be in this business!”

“Can’t I, Branson? You’ll see.”

And Branson did see. He saw Archie ride into the west field on Scallowa, both of them looking in splendid form. Men with poles and ropes and dogs followed, some of the former appearing not to relish the business by any means.

However, it would probably be an easier job than they thought. The plan would be to get the baby-bull in the centre of the other cattle, manoeuvre so as to keep him there, and so pen all together.—This might have been done had Archie kept away, but it so happened that his lordship was on particularly good terms with himself this morning. Moreover, he had never seen a Shetland pony before. What more natural, therefore, than a longing on the part of Lord Glendale to examine the little horse inside as well as out?

“Go gently now, lads,” cried Branson. “Keep the dogs back, Peter, we must na’ alarm them.”

Lord Glendale did not condescend to look at Branson. He detached himself quietly from the herd, and began to eat up towards the spot where Archie and his “Duck” were standing like some pretty statue. Eating up towards him is the correct expression, as everyone who knows bulls will admit; for his lordship did not want to alarm Archie till he was near enough for the grand rush. Then the fun would commence, and Lord Glendale would see what the pony was made of. While he kept eating, or rather pretending to eat, his sly red eyes were fastened on Archie.

Now, had it been Harry Brown, the Whitechapel boy, this ruse on the part of the baby-bull might have been successful. But Archie Broadbent was too old for his lordship. He pretended, however, to take no notice; but just as the bull was preparing for the rush he laughed derisively, flicked Lord Glendale with the whip, and started.

Lord Glendale roared with anger and disappointment.

“Oh, Master Archie,” cried Branson, “you shouldn’t have done that!”

Now the play began in earnest. Away went Archie on Scallowa, and after him tore the bull. Archie’s notion was to tire the brute out, and there was some very pretty riding and manoeuvring between the two belligerents. Perhaps the bull was all too young to be easily tired, for the charges he made seemed to increase in fierceness each time, but Archie easily eluded him.

Branson drove the cattle towards the pen, and got them inside, then he and his men concentrated all their attention on the combatants.

“The boy’ll be killed as sure as a gun!” cried the keeper. Archie did not think so, evidently; and it is certain he had his wits about him, for presently he rode near enough to shout:

“Ease up a hurdle from the back of the pen, and stand by to open it as I ride through.”

The plan was a bold one, and Branson saw through it at once.

Down he ran with his men, and a back hurdle was loosened.

“All right!” he shouted.

And now down thundered Scallowa and Archie, the bull making a beautiful second.

In a minute or less he had entered the pen, but this very moment the style of the fight changed somewhat; for had not the attention of everyone been riveted on the race, they might have seen the great Newfoundland dashing over the field, and just as Lord Glendale was entering the pen, Bounder pinned him short by the tail.

The brute roared with pain and wheeled round. Meanwhile Archie had escaped on the pony, and the back hurdle was put up again. But how about the new phase the fight had taken?

Once more the boy’s quick-wittedness came to the front. He leapt off the pony and back into the pen, calling aloud, “Bounder! Bounder! Bounder!”

In rushed the obedient dog, and after him came the bull; up went the hurdle, and off went Archie! But, alas! for the unlucky Bounder. He was tossed right over into the field a moment afterwards, bleeding frightfully from a wound in his side.

To all appearance Bounder was dead. In an agony of mind the boy tried to staunch the blood with his handkerchief; and when at last the poor dog lifted his head, and licked his young master’s face, the relief to his feelings was so great that he burst into tears. Archie was only a boy after all, though a bold and somewhat mischievous one.

Bounder now drank water brought from a stream in a hat. He tried to get up, but was too weak to walk, so he was lifted on to Scallowa's broad back and held there, and thus they all returned to Burley Old Farm.

So ended the adventure with the baby-bull of Chillingham. The ring was put in his nose next day, and I hope it did not hurt much. But old Kate had Bounder as a patient in the kitchen corner for three whole weeks.

A day or two after the above adventure, and just as the Squire was putting on his coat in the hall, who should march up to the door and knock but Harry Brown himself.

Most boys would have gone to the backdoor, but shyness was not one of Harry's failings.

"Ullo!" he said; for the door opened almost on the instant he knocked, "Yer don't take long to hopen to a chap then."

"No," said Squire Broadbent, smiling down on the lad; "fact is, boy, I was just going out."

"Going for a little houting, hey? Is 'pose now you're Johnnie's guv'nor?"

"I think I know whom you refer to. Master Archie, isn't it? and you're the little London lad?"

"I don't know nuffink about no Harchies. P'r'aps it is Harchibald. But I allers calls my friends wot they looks like. He looks like Johnnie. Kinsevently, guv'nor, he is Johnnie to me. D'ye twig?"

"I think I do," said Squire Broadbent, laughing; "and you want to see my boy?"

"Vot I wants is this 'ere. Johnnie is a rare game un. 'Scuse me, guv'nor, but Johnnie's got the grit in him, and I vant to say good-bye; nuffink else, guv'nor."

Here Harry actually condescended to point a finger at his lip by way of salute, and just at the same moment Archie himself came round the corner. He looked a little put out, but his father only laughed, and he saw it was all right.

These were Harry's last words: "Good-bye, then. You've got the grit in ye, Johnnie. And if hever ye wants a friend, telegraph to 'Arry Brown, Esq., of Vitechapel, 'cos ye know, Johnnie, the king may come in the cadger's way. Adoo. So long. Blue-lights, and hoff we goes."

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Seven.

“They’re up to some Black Work To-night.”

Another summer flew all too fast away at Burley Old Farm and Castle Tower. The song of birds was hushed in the wild woods, even the corn-crake had ceased its ventriloquistic notes, and the plaintive wee lilt of the yellow-hammer was heard no more. The corn grew ripe on braeland and field, was cut down, gathered, stooked, and finally carted away. The swallows flew southwards, but the peewits remained in droves, and the starlings took up their abode with the sheep. Squires and sturdy farmers might now have been met tramping, gun in hand, over the stubble, through the dark green turnip-fields, and over the distant moorlands, where the crimson heather still bloomed so bonnie.

Anon, the crisp leaves, through which the wind now swept with harsher moan, began to change to yellows, crimsons, and all the hues of sunset, and by-and-by it was hunting-time again.

Archie was unusually thoughtful one night while the family sat, as of yore, round the low fire in the green parlour, Elsie and Rupert being busy in their corner over a game of chess.

“In a brown study, Archie?” said his mother.

“No, mummie; that is, Yes, I was thinking—”

“Wonders will never cease,” said Rupert, without looking up. Archie looked towards him, but his brother only smiled at the chessmen. The boy was well enough now to joke and laugh. Best of signs and most hopeful.

“I was thinking that my legs are almost too long now to go to the meet on poor Scallowa. Not that Scallowa would mind. But don’t you think, mummie dear, that a long boy on a short pony looks odd?”

“A little, Archie.”

“Well, why couldn’t father let me have Tell to-morrow? He is not going out himself.”

His father was reading the newspaper, but he looked at Archie over it. Though only his eyes were visible, the boy knew he was smiling.

“If you think you won’t break your neck,” he said, “you may take Tell.”

“Oh,” Archie replied, “I’m quite sure I won’t break my neck!”

The Squire laughed now outright.

“You mean you might break Tell’s, eh?”

“Well, dad, I didn’t say that.”

“No, Archie, but you thought it.”

“I’m afraid, dad, the emphasis fell on the wrong word.”

“Never mind, Archie, where the emphasis falls; but if you let Tell fall the emphasis will fall where you won’t like it.”

“All right, dad, I’ll chance the emphasis. Hurrah!”

The Squire and Mr Walton went off early next day to a distant town, and Branson had orders to bring Tell round to the hall door at nine sharp; which he did. The keeper was not groom, but he was the tallest man about, and Archie thought he would want a leg up.

Archie’s mother was there, and Elsie, and Rupert, and old Kate, and little Peter, to say nothing of Bounder and Fuss, all to see “t’ young Squire mount.” But no one expected the sight they did see when Archie appeared; for the lad’s sense of fun and the ridiculous was quite irrepressible. And the young rascal had dressed himself from top to toe in his father’s hunting-rig—boots, cords, red coat, hat, and all complete. Well, as the boots were a mile and a half too big for him—more or less, and the breeches and coat would have held at least three Archie Broadbents, while the hat nearly buried his head, you may guess what sort of a guy he looked. Bounder drew back and barked at him. Old Kate turned her old eyes cloudwards, and held up her palms. Branson for politeness’ sake tried not to laugh; but it was too much, he went off at last like a soda-water cork, and the merriment rippled round the ring like wildfire. Even poor Rupert laughed till the tears came. Then back into the house ran Archie, and presently re-appeared dressed in his own velvet suit.

But Archie had not altogether cooled down yet. He had come to the conclusion that having an actual leg up, was not an impressive way of getting on to his hunter; so after kissing his mother, and asking Rupert to kiss Elsie for him, he bounded at one spring to Branson's shoulder, and from this elevation bowed and said "good morning," then let himself neatly down to the saddle.

"Tally ho! Yoicks!" he shouted. Then clattered down the avenue, cleared the low, white gate, and speedily disappeared across the fields.

Archie had promised himself a rare day's run, and he was not disappointed. The fox was an old one and a wily one—and, I might add, a very gentlemanly old fox—and he led the field one of the prettiest dances that Dawson, the greyest-headed huntsman in the North, ever remembered; but there was no kill. No; Master Reynard knew precisely where he was going, and got home all right, and went quietly to sleep as soon as the pack drew off.

The consequence was that Archie found himself still ten miles from home as gloaming was deepening into night. Another hour he thought would find him at Burley Old Farm. But people never know what is before them, especially hunting people.

It had been observed by old Kate, that after Archie left in the morning, Bounder seemed unusually sad. He refused his breakfast, and behaved so strangely that the superstitious dame was quite alarmed.

"I'll say naething to the ladies," she told one of the servants, "but, woe is me! I fear that something awfu' is gain tae happen. I houp the young laddie winna brak his neck. He rode awa' sae daft-like. He is just his faither a' ower again."

Bounder really had something on his mind; for dogs do think far more than we give them credit for. Well, the Squire was off, and also Mr Walton, and now his young master had flown. What did it mean? Why he would find out before he was many hours older. So ran Bounder's cogitations.

To think was to act with Bounder; so up he jumped, and off he trotted. He followed the scent for miles; then he met an errant collie, and forgetting for a time all about his master, he went off with him. There were many things to be done, and Bounder was not in a hurry. They chased cows and sheep together merely for mischief's sake; they gave chase to some rabbits, and when the bunnies took to their holes, they spent hours in a vain attempt to dig them out. The rabbits knew they could never succeed, so they quietly washed their faces and laughed at them.

They tired at last, and with their heads and paws covered with mould, commenced to look for mice among the moss. They came upon a wild bees' home in a bank, and tore this up, killing the inmates bee by bee as they scrambled out wondering what the racket meant. They snapped at the bees who were returning home, and when both had their lips well stung they concluded to leave the hive alone. Honey wasn't very nice after all, they said. At sunset they bathed in a mill-dam and swam about till nearly dusk, because the miller's boy was obliging enough to throw in sticks for them. Then the miller's boy fell in himself, and Bounder took him out and laid him on the bank to drip, neither knowing nor caring that he had saved a precious life. But the miller's boy's mother appeared on the scene and took the weeping lad away, inviting the dogs to follow. She showered blessings on their heads, especially on "the big black one's," as the urchin called Bounder, and she put bread and milk before them and bade them eat. The dogs required no second bidding, and just as Bounder was finishing his meal the sound of hoofs was heard on the road, and out bounced Bounder, the horse swerved, the rider was thrown, and the dog began to wildly lick his face.

"So it's you, is it, Bounder?" said Archie. "A nice trick. And now I'll have to walk home a good five miles."

Bounder backed off and barked. Why did his master go off and leave him then? That is what the dog was saying.

"Come on, boy," said Archie. "There's no help for it; but I do feel stiff."

They could go straight over the hill, and through the fields and the wood, that was one consolation.

So off they set, and Archie soon forgot his stiffness and warmed to his work.

Bounder followed close to his heels, as if he were a very old and a very wise dog indeed; and harrying bees' hives, or playing with millers' boys, could find no place in his thoughts.

Archie lost his way once or twice, and it grew quite dark. He was wondering what he should do when he noticed a light spring up not far away, and commenced walking towards it. It came from the little window of a rustic cottage, and the boy knew at once now in which way to steer.

Curiosity, however, impelled him to draw near to the window. He gave just one glance in, but very quickly drew back. Sitting round a table was a gang of half a dozen poachers. He knew them as the worst and most notorious evil-doers in all the country round. They

were eating and drinking, and guns stood in the corners, while the men themselves seemed ready to be off somewhere.

Away went Archie. He wanted no nearer acquaintance with a gang like that.

In his way home he had to pass Bob Cooper's cottage, and thought he might just look in, because Bob had a whole book of new flies getting ready for him, and perhaps they were done.

Bob was out, and his mother was sitting reading the good Book by the light of a little black oil lamp. She looked very anxious, and said she felt so. Her laddie had "never said where he was going. Only just went away out, and hadn't come back."

It was Archie's turn now to be anxious, when he thought of the gang, and the dark work they might be after. Bob was not among them, but who could tell that he would not join afterwards?

He bade the widow "Good-night," and went slowly homewards thinking.

He found everyone in a state of extreme anxiety. Hours ago Tell had galloped to his stable door, and if there be anything more calculated to raise alarm than another, it is the arrival at his master's place of a riderless horse.

But Archie's appearance, alive and intact, dispelled the cloud, and dinner was soon announced.

"Oh, by the way," said Archie's tutor, as they were going towards the dining-room, "your old friend Bob Cooper has been here, and wants to see you! I think he is in the kitchen now."

Away rushed Archie, and sure enough there was Bob eating supper in old Kate's private room.

He got up as Archie's entered, and looked shy, as people of his class do at times.

Archie was delighted.

"I brought the flies, and some new sorts that I think will do for the Kelpie burn," he said.

"Well, I'm going to dine, Bob; you do the same. Don't go till I see you. How long have you been here?"

“Two hours, anyhow.”

When Archie returned he invited Bob to the room in the Castle Tower. Kate must come too, and Branson with his fiddle.

Away went Archie and his rough friend, and were just finishing a long debate about flies and fishing when Kate and Peter, and Branson and Bounder, came up the turret stairs and entered the room.

Archie then told them all of what he had seen that night at the cottage.

“Mark my words for it,” said Bob, shaking his head, “they’re up to some black work to-night.”

“You mustn’t go yet awhile, Bob,” Archie said. “We’ll have some fun, and you’re as well where you are.”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eight

The Widow's Lonely Hut.

Bob Cooper bade Archie and Branson good-bye that night at the bend of the road, some half mile from his own home, and trudged sturdily on in the starlight. There was sufficient light "to see men as trees walking."

"My mother'll think I'm out in th' woods," Bob said to himself. "Well, she'll be glad when she knows she's wrong this time."

Once or twice he started, and looked cautiously, half-fearfully, round him; for he felt certain he saw dark shadows in the field close by, and heard the stealthy tread of footsteps.

He grasped the stout stick he carried all the firmer, for the poacher had made enemies of late by separating himself from a well-known gang of his old associates—men who, like the robbers in the ancient ballad—

"Slept all day and waked all night,
And kept the country round in fright."

On he went; and the strange, uncomfortable feeling at his heart was dispelled as, on rounding a corner of the road, he saw the light glinting cheerfully from his mother's cottage.

"Poor old creature," he murmured half aloud, "many a sore heart I've given her. But I'll be a better boy now. I'll—"

"Now, lads," shouted a voice, "have at him!"

"Back!" cried Bob Cooper, brandishing his cudgel. "Back, or it'll be worse for you!"

The dark shadows made a rush. Bob struck out with all his force, and one after another fell beneath his arm. But a blow from behind disabled him at last, and down he went, just as his distracted mother came rushing, lantern in hand, from her hut. There was the sharp click of the handcuffs, and Bob Cooper was a prisoner. The lantern-light fell on the uniforms of policemen.

“What is it? Oh, what has my laddie been doin’?”

“Murder, missus, or something very like it! There has been dark doin’s in th’ hill to-night!”

Bob grasped the nearest policeman by the arm with his manacled hands. “When—when did ye say it had happened?”

“You know too well, lad. Not two hours ago. Don’t sham innocence; it sits but ill on a face like yours.”

“Mother,” cried Bob bewilderingly, “I know nothing of it! I’m innocent!”

But his mother heard not his words. She had fainted, and with rough kindness was carried into the hut and laid upon the bed. When she revived some what they left her.

It was a long, dismal ride the unhappy man had that night; and indeed it was well on in the morning before the party with their prisoner reached the town of B—.

Bob’s appearance before a magistrate was followed almost instantly by his dismissal to the cells again. The magistrate knew him. The police had caught him “red-handed,” so they said, and had only succeeded in making him prisoner “after a fierce resistance.”

“Remanded for a week,” without being allowed to say one word in his own defence.

The policeman’s hint to Bob’s mother about “dark doin’s in th’ hill” was founded on fearful facts. A keeper had been killed after a terrible *melée* with the gang of poachers, and several men had been severely wounded on both sides.

The snow-storm that came on early on the morning after poor Bob Cooper’s capture was one of the severest ever remembered in Northumbria. The frost was hard too all day long. The snow fell incessantly, and lay in drifts like cliffs, fully seven feet high, across the roads.

The wind blew high, sweeping the powdery snow hither and thither in gusts. It felt for all the world like going into a cold shower-bath to put one’s head even beyond the threshold of the door. Nor did the storm abate even at nightfall; but next day the wind died down, and the face of the sky became clear, only along the southern horizon the white clouds were still massed like hills and cliffs.

It was not until the afternoon that news reached Burley Old Farm of the fight in the woods and death of the keeper. It was a sturdy old postman who had brought the tidings. He had fought his way through the snow with the letters, and his account of the battle had well-nigh caused old Kate to swoon away. When Mary, the little parlour maid, carried the mail in to her master she did not hesitate to relate what she had heard.

Squire Broadbent himself with Archie repaired to the kitchen, and found the postman surrounded by the startled servants, who were drinking in every word he said.

“One man killed, you say, Allan?”

“Ay, sir, killed dead enough. And it’s a providence they caught the murderer. Took him up, sir, just as he was a-goin’ into his mother’s house, as cool as a frosted turnip, sir.”

“Well, Allan, that is satisfactory. And what is his name?”

“Bob Cooper, sir, known all over the—”

“Bob Cooper!” cried Archie aghast. “Why, father, he was in our room in the turret at the time.”

“So he was,” said the Squire. “Taken on suspicion I suppose. But this must be seen to at once. Bad as we know Bob to have been, there is evidence enough that he has reformed of late. At all events, he shall not remain an hour in gaol on such a charge longer than we can help.”

Night came on very soon that evening. The clouds banked up again, the snow began to fall, and the wind moaned round the old house and castle in a way that made one feel cold to the marrow even to listen to.

Morning broke slowly at last, and Archie was early astir. Tell, with the Shetland pony and a huge great hunter, were brought to the door, and shortly after breakfast the party started for B—.

Branson bestrode the big hunter—he took the lead—and after him came the Squire on Tell, and Archie on Scallowa. This daft little horse was in fine form this morning, having been in stall for several days. He kept up well with the hunters, though there were times that both he and his rider were all but buried in the gigantic wreaths that lay across the road. Luckily the wind was not high, else no living thing could long have faced that storm.

The cottage in which widow Cooper had lived ever since the death of her husband was a very primitive and a very poor one. It consisted only of two rooms, what are called in Scotland “a butt and a ben.” Bob had been only a little barefooted boy when his father died, and probably hardly missed him. He had been sent regularly to school before then, but not since, for his mother had been unable to give him further education. All their support was the morsel of garden, a pig or two, and the fowls, coupled with whatever the widow could make by knitting ribbed stockings for the farmer folks around. Bob grew up wild, just as the birds and beasts of the hills and woods do. While, however, he was still a little mite of a chap, the keepers even seldom molested him. It was only natural, they thought, for a boy to act the part of a squirrel or polecat, and to be acquainted with every bird’s nest and rabbit’s burrow within a radius of miles. When he grew a little older and a trifle bigger they began to warn him off, and when one day he was met marching away with a cap full of pheasant’s eggs, he received as severe a drubbing as ever a lad got at the hands of a gamekeeper.

Bob had grown worse instead of better after this. The keepers became his sworn enemies, and there was a spice of danger and adventure in vexing and outwitting them.

Unfortunately, in spite of all his mother said to the contrary, Bob was firmly impressed with the notion that game of every kind, whether fur or feather, belonged as much to him as to the gentry who tried to preserve them. The fresh air was free; nobody dared to claim the sunshine. Then why the wild birds, and the hares and rabbits?

Evil company corrupts good manners. That is what his copy-book used to tell him. But Bob soon learned to laugh at that, and it is no wonder that as he reached manhood his doings and daring as a poacher became noted far and near.

He was beyond the control of his mother. She could only advise him, read to him, pray for him; but in vain. Only be it known that Bob Cooper really loved this mother of his, anomalous though it may seem.

Well, the keepers had been very harsh with him, and the gentry were harsh with him, and eke the law itself. Law indeed! Why Bob was all but an outlaw, so intense was his hatred to, and so great his defiance of the powers that be.

It was strange that what force could not effect, a few soft words from Branson, and Archie’s gift of the hare he had shot on his birthday, brought about. Bob Cooper’s heart could not have been wholly adamant, therefore he began to believe that after all a gamekeeper might be a good fellow, and that there might even exist gentlefolks whose chief delight was not the oppression of the poor. He began after that to seek for honest

work; but, alas! people looked askance at him, and he found that the path of virtue was one not easily regained when once deviated from.

His quondam enemy, however, Branson, spoke many a good word for him, and Bob was getting on, much to his mother's delight and thankfulness, when the final and crashing blow fell.

Poor old widow Cooper! For years and years she had but two comforts in this world; one was her Bible, and the other—do not smile when I tell you—was her pipie.

Oh! you know, the poor have not much to make them happy and to cheer their loneliness, so why begrudge the widow her morsel of tobacco?

In the former she learned to look forward to another and a better world, far beyond that bit of blue sky she could see at the top of her chimney on a summer's night—a world where everything would be bright and joyful, where there would be no vexatious rheumatism, no age, and neither cold nor care. From the latter she drew sweet forgetfulness of present trouble, and happy recollections of bygone years.

Sitting there by the hearth all alone—her son perhaps away on the hill—her thoughts used oftentimes to run away with her. Once more she would be young, once again her hair was a bonnie brown, her form little and graceful, roses mantling in her cheeks, soft light in her eyes. And she is wandering through the tasselled broom with David by her side. "David! Heigho!" she would sigh as she shook the ashes from her pipie. "Poor David! it seems a long, long time since he left me for the better land," and the sunlight would stream down the big, open chimney and fall upon her skinny hands—fall upon the elfin-like locks that escaped from beneath her cap—fall, too, on the glittering pages of the Book on her lap like a promise of better things to come.

Before that sad night, when, while sitting up waiting for her son, she was startled by the sudden noise of the struggle that commenced at her door, she thought she had reason to be glad and thankful for the softening of her boy's heart.

Then all her joy collapsed, her hopes collapsed—fell around her like a house of cards. It was a cruel, a terrible blow.

The policeman had carried her in, laid her on the bed with a rough sort of kindness, made up the fire, then gone out and thought no more about her.

How she had spent the night need hardly be said; it is better imagined. She had dropped asleep at last, and when she awoke from fevered dreams it was daylight out of doors, but

darkness in the hut. The window and door were snowed up, and only a faint pale light shimmered in through the chimney, falling on the fireless hearth—a dismal sight.

Many times that day she had tried to rise, but all in vain. The cold grew more intense as night drew on, and it did its work on the poor widow's weakened frame. Her dreams grew more bright and happy though, as her body became numbed and insensible. It was as though the spirit were rejoicing in its coming freedom. But dreams left her at last. Then all was still in the house, save the ticking of the old clock that hung against the wall.

The Squire speedily effected Bob Cooper's freedom, and he felt he had really done a good thing.

"Now, Robert," he told him, "you have had a sad experience. Let it be a lesson to you. I'll give you a chance. Come to Burley, and Branson will find you honest work as long as you like to do it."

"Lord love you, sir!" cried Bob. "There are few gentry like you."

"I don't know so much about that, Robert. You are not acquainted with all the good qualities of gentlefolks yet. But now, Branson, how are we all to get home?"

"Oh, I know!" said Archie. "Scallowa can easily bear Branson's weight, and I will ride the big hunter along with Bob."

So this was arranged.

It was getting gloamed ere they neared the widow's lonesome hut. The Squire with Branson had left Archie and Bob, and cut across the frozen moor by themselves.

"How glad my mother will be!" said Bob.

And now they came in sight of the cottage, and Bob rubbed his eyes and looked again and again, for no smoke came from the chimney, no signs of life was about.

The icicles hung long and strong from the eaves; one side of the hut was entirely overblown with drift, and the door in the other looked more like the entrance to some cave in Greenland north. Bad enough this was; but ah, in the inside of the poor little house the driven snow met them as they pushed open the door! It had blown down the wide chimney, covered the hearth, formed a wreath like a sea-wave on the floor, and

even o'er-canopied the bed itself. And the widow, the mother, lay underneath. No, not dead; she breathed, at least.

When the room had been cleared and swept of snow; when a roaring fire had been built on the hearth, and a little warm tea poured gently down her throat, she came gradually back again to life, and in a short time was able to be lifted into a sitting position, and then she recognised her son and Archie.

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Bob, the tears streaming over his sun-browned face, "the Maker'll never forgive me for all the ill I've done ye."

"Hush! Bobbie, hush! What, lad, the Maker no' forgive ye! Eh, ye little know the grip o' His goodness! But you're here, you're innocent. Thank Him for that."

"Ye'll soon get better, mother, and I'll be so good. The Squire is to give me work too."

"It's o'er late for me," she said. "I'd like to live to see it, but His will be done."

Archie rode home the giant hunter, but in two hours he was once more mounted on Scallowa, and feathering back through the snow towards the little cottage. The moon had risen now, and the night was starry and fine.

He tied Scallowa up in the peat shed, and went in unannounced.

He found Bob Cooper sitting before the dying embers of the fire, with his face buried in his hands, and rocking himself to and fro.

"She—just blessed me and wore away."

That was all he said or could say. And what words of comfort could Archie speak? None. He sat silently beside him all that livelong night, only getting up now and then to replenish the fire. But the poacher scarcely ever changed his position, only now and then he stretched out one of his great hands and patted Archie's knee as one would pet a dog.

A week passed away, and the widow was laid to rest beneath the frozen ground in the little churchyard by the banks of the river. Archie went slowly back with Bob towards the cottage. On their way thither, the poacher—poacher now no more though—entered a plantation, and with his hunting-knife cut and fashioned a rough ash stick.

"We'll say good-bye here, Master Archie."

“What! You are not going back with me to Burley Old Farm?”

Bob took a small parcel from his pocket, and opening it exposed the contents.

“Do you know them, Master Archie?”

“Yes, your poor mother’s glasses.”

“Ay, lad, and as long as I live I’ll keep them. And till my dying day, Archie, I’ll think on you, and your kindness to poor poacher Bob. No, I’m not goin’ back to Burley, and I’m not going to the cottage again. I’m going away. Where? I couldn’t say. Here, quick, shake hands, friend. Let it be over. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

And away went Bob. He stopped when a little way off, and turned as if he had forgotten something.

“Archie!” he cried.

“Yes, Bob.”

“Take care of my mother’s cat.”

Next minute he leapt a fence, and disappeared in the pine wood.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Nine.

The Whole Yard was Ablaze and Burning Fiercely.

One year is but a brief span in the history of a family, yet it may bring many changes. It did to Burley Old Farm, and some of them were sad enough, though some were glad. A glad change took place for instance in the early spring, after Bob's departure; for Rupert appeared to wax stronger and stronger with the lengthening days; and when Uncle Ramsay, in a letter received one morning, announced his intention of coming from London, and making quite a long stay at Burley, Rupert declared his intention of mounting Scallowa, and riding over to the station to meet him. And the boy was as good as his word. In order that they might be both cavaliers together, Uncle Ramsay hired a horse at D—, and the two rode joyfully home side by side.

His mother did not like to see that carmine flush on Rupert's cheeks, however, nor the extra dark sparkle in his eyes when he entered the parlour to announce his uncle's arrival, but she said nothing.

Uncle Ramsay Broadbent was a brother of the Squire, and, though considerably older, a good deal like him in all his ways. There was the same dash and go in him, and the same smiling front, unlikely to be dismayed by any amount of misfortune.

"There are a deal of ups and downs in the ocean of life," Archie heard him say one day; "we're on the top of a big wave one hour, and in the trough of the sea next, so we must take things as they come."

Yes, this uncle was a seafarer; the skipper of a sturdy merchantman that he had sailed in for ten long years. He did not care to be called captain by anyone. He was a master mariner, and had an opinion, which he often expressed, that plain "Mr" was a gentleman's prefix.

"I shan't go back to sea again," he said next morning at breakfast.

"Fact is, brother, my owners think I'm getting too old. And maybe they're right. I've had a fair innings, and it is only fair to give the young ones a chance."

Uncle Ramsay seemed to give new life and soul to the old place. He settled completely down to the Burley style of life long before the summer was half over. He joined the

servants in the fields, and worked with them as did the Squire, Walton, and Archie. And though more merriment went on in consequence, there was nevertheless more work done. He took an interest in all the boys' "fads," spent hours with them in their workshop, and made one in every game that was played on the grass. He was dreadfully awkward at cricket and tennis however; for such games as these are but little practised by sailors. Only he was right willing to learn.

There was a youthfulness and breeziness about Uncle Ramsay's every action, that few save seafarers possess when hair is turning white. Of course, the skipper spent many a jolly hour up in the room of the Castle Tower, and he did not object either to the presence of old Kate in the chair. He listened like a boy when she told her weird stories; and he listened more like a baby than anything else when Branson played his fiddle.

Then he himself would spin them a yarn, and hold them all enthralled, especially big-eyed Elsie, with the sterling reality and graphicness of the narrative.

When Uncle Ramsay spoke you could see the waves in motion, hear the scream of the birds around the stern, or the wind roaring through the rigging. He spoke as he thought; he painted from life.

Well, the arrival of Uncle Ramsay and Rupert's getting strong were two of the pleasant changes that took place at Burley in this eventful year. Alas! I have to chronicle the sad ones also. Yet why sigh? To use Uncle Ramsay's own words, "You never know what a ship is made of until stormy seas are around you."

First then came a bad harvest—a terribly bad harvest. It was not that the crops themselves were so very light, but the weather was cold and wet; the grain took long to ripen. The task of cutting it down was unfortunately an easy one, but the getting it stored was almost an impossibility. At the very time when it was ripe, and after a single fiercely hot day, a thunder-storm came on, and with it such hail as the oldest inhabitant in the parish could not remember having seen equalled. This resulted in the total loss of far more of the precious seed, than would have sown all the land of Burley twice over.

The wet continued. It rained and rained every day, and when it rained it poured.

The Squire had heard of a Yankee invention for drying wheat under cover, and rashly set about a rude but most expensive imitation thereof. He first mentioned the matter to Uncle Ramsay at the breakfast-table. The Squire seemed in excellent spirits that morning. He was walking briskly up and down the room rubbing his hands, as if in deep but pleasant thought, when his brother came quietly in.

“Hullo! you lazy old sea-dog. Why you’d lie in your bed till the sun burned a hole in the blanket. Now just look at me.”

“I’m just looking at you.”

“Well, I’ve been up for hours. I’m as hungry as a Caithness Highlander. And I’ve got an idea.”

“I thought there was something in the wind.”

“Guess.”

“Guess, indeed! Goodness forbid I should try. But I say, brother,” continued Uncle Ramsay, laughing, “couldn’t you manage to fall asleep somewhere out of doors, like the man in the story, and wake up and find yourself a king? My stars, wouldn’t we have reforms as long as your reign lasted! The breakfast, Mary? Ah, that’s the style!”

“You won’t be serious and listen, I suppose, Ramsay.”

“Oh, yes; I will.”

“Well, the Americans—”

“The Americans again; but go on.”

“The Americans, in some parts where I’ve been, wouldn’t lose a straw in a bad season. It is all done by means of great fanners and heated air, you know. Now, I’m going to show these honest Northumbrian farmers a thing or two. I—”

“I say, brother, hadn’t you better trust to Providence, and wait for a fair wind?”

“Now, Ramsay, that’s where you and I differ. You’re a slow Moses. I want to move ahead a trifle in front of the times. I’ve been looking all over the dictionary of my daily life, and I can’t find such a word as ‘wait’ in it.”

“Let me give you some of this steak, brother.”

“My plan of operations, Ramsay, is—”

“Why,” said Mrs Broadbent, “you haven’t eaten anything yet!”

“I thought,” said Uncle Ramsay, “you were as hungry as a Tipperary Highlander, or some such animal.”

“My plan, Ramsay, is—” etc, etc.

The two “etc, etc’s” in the last line stand for all the rest of the honest Squire’s speech, which, as his sailor brother said, was as long as the logline. But for all his hunger he made but a poor breakfast, and immediately after he jumped up and hurried away to the barn-yards.

It was a busy time for the next two weeks at Burley Old Farm, but, to the Squire’s credit be it said, he was pretty successful with his strange operation of drying wheat independent of the sun. His ricks were built, and he was happy—happy as long as he thought nothing about the expense. But he did take an hour or two one evening to run through accounts, as he called it. Uncle Ramsay was with him.

“Why, brother,” said Ramsay, looking very serious now indeed, “you are terribly down to leeward—awfully out of pocket!”

“Ah! never mind, Ramsay. One can’t keep ahead of the times now-a-days, you know, without spending a little.”

“Spending a little! Where are your other books? Mr Walton and I will have a look through them to-night, if you don’t mind.”

“Not a bit, brother, not a bit. We’re going to give a dance to-morrow night to the servants, so if you like to bother with the book-work I’ll attend to the terpsichorean kick up.”

Mr Walton and Uncle Ramsay had a snack in the office that evening instead of coming up to supper, and when Mrs Broadbent looked in to say good-night she found them both quiet and hard at work.

“I say, Walton,” said Uncle Ramsay some time after, “this is serious. Draw near the fire and let us have a talk.”

“It is sad as well as serious,” said Walton.

“Had you any idea of it?”

“Not the slightest. In fact I’m to blame, I think, for not seeing to the books before. But the Squire—”

Walton hesitated.

“I know my brother well,” said Ramsay. “As good a fellow as ever lived, but as headstrong as a nor’-easter. And now he has been spending money on machinery to the tune of some ten thousand pounds. He has been growing crop after crop of wheat as if he lived on the prairies and the land was new; and he has really been putting as much down in seed, labour, and fashionable manures as he has taken off.”

“Yet,” said Walton, “he is no fool.”

“No, not he; he is clever, too much so. But heaven send his pride, honest though it be, does not result in a fall.”

The two sat till long past twelve talking and planning, then they opened the casement and walked out on to the lawn. It was a lovely autumn night. The broad, round moon was high in the heavens, fighting its way through a sky of curdling clouds which greatly detracted from its radiance.

“Look, Walton,” said the sailor, “to windward; yonder it is all blue sky, by-and-by it will be a bright and lovely night.”

“By-and-by. Yes,” sighed Walton.

“But see! What is that down yonder rising white over the trees? Smoke! Why, Walton, the barn-yards are all on fire!”

Almost at the same moment Branson rushed upon the scene.

“Glad you’re up, gentlemen,” he gasped. “Wake the Squire. The servants are all astir. We must save the beasts, come of everything else what will.”

The farm-steading of Burley was built in the usual square formation round a centre straw-yard, which even in winter was always kept so well filled that beasts might lie out all night. To the north were the stacks, and it was here the fire originated, and unluckily the wind blew from that direction. It was by no means high; but fire makes its own wind, and in less than half an hour the whole yard was ablaze and burning fiercely, while the byres, stables, and barns had all caught. From the very first these latter had been

enveloped in dense rolling clouds of smoke, and sparks as thick as falling snowflakes, so that to save any of the live stock seemed almost an impossibility.

With all his mania for machinery, and for improvements of every kind possible to apply to agriculture, it is indeed a wonder that the Squire had not established a fire brigade on his farm. But fire was an eventuality which he had entirely left out of his reckoning, and now there was really no means of checking the terrible conflagration.

As soon as the alarm was given every one did what he could to save the live stock; but the smoke was blinding, maddening, and little could be done save taking the doors off their hinges.

Who knows what prodigies of valour were performed that night by the humble cowmen even, in their attempts to drive the oxen and cows out, and away to a place of safety? In some instances, when they had nearly succeeded, the cattle blocked the doorways, or, having got out to the straw-yard, charged madly back again, and prevented the exit of their fellows. Thus several servants ran terrible risks to their lives.

They were more successful in saving the horses, and this was greatly owing to Archie's presence of mind. He had dashed madly into the stable for his pet Scallowa. The Shetland pony had never looked more wild before. He sniffed the danger, he snorted and reared. All at once it occurred to Archie to mount and ride him out. No sooner had he got on his back than he came forth like a lamb. He took him to a field and let him free, and as he was hurrying back he met little Peter.

"Come, Peter, come," he cried; "we can save the horses."

The two of them rushed to the stable, and horse after horse was bridled and mounted by little Peter and ridden out.

But a fearful hitch occurred. Tell, the Squire's hunter, backed against the stable door and closed it, thus imprisoning Archie, who found it impossible to open the door.

The roof had already caught. The horses were screaming in terror, and rearing wildly against the walls.

Peter rushed away to seek assistance. He met Branson, and in a word or two told him what had happened.

Luckily axes were at hand, and sturdy volunteers speedily smashed the door in, and poor Archie, more dead than alive, with torn clothes and bleeding face, was dragged through.

The scene after this must be left to imagination. But the Squire reverently and fervently thanked God when the shrieks of those fire-imprisoned cattle were hushed in death, and nothing was to be heard save the crackle and roar of the flames.

The fire had lit up the countryside for miles around. The moonlight itself was bright, but within a certain radius the blazing farm cast shadows against it.

Next morning stackyards, barn-yards, farm-steading, machinery-house, and everything pertaining to Burley Old Farm, presented but a smouldering, blackened heap of ruins.

Squire Broadbent entertained his poor, frightened people to an early breakfast in the servants' hall, and the most cheerful face there was that of the Squire. Here is his little speech:

“My good folks, sit down and eat; and let us be thankful we're all here, and that no human lives are lost. My good kinswoman Kate here will tell you that there never yet was an ill but there might be a worse. Let us pray the worse may never come.”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Ten.

“After all, it doesn’t take much to make a Man Happy.”

For weeks to come neither Uncle Ramsay nor Walton had the heart to add another sorrow to the Squire’s cup of misery. They knew that the fire had but brought on a little sooner a catastrophe which was already fulling; they knew that Squire Broadbent was virtually a ruined man.

All the machinery had been rendered useless; the most of the cattle were dead; the stacks were gone; and yet, strange to say, the Squire hoped on. Those horses and cattle which had been saved were housed now in rudely-built sheds, among the fire-blackened ruins of their former wholesome stables and byres.

One day Branson, who had always been a confidential servant, sent Mary in to say he wished to speak to the Squire. His master came out at once.

“Nothing else, Branson,” he said. “You carry a long face, man.”

“The wet weather and the cold have done their work, sir. Will you walk down with me to the cattle-sheds?”

Arrived there, he pointed to a splendid fat ox, who stood in his stall before his untouched turnips with hanging head and dry, parched nose. His hot breath was visible when he threw his head now and then uneasily round towards his loin, as if in pain. There was a visible swelling on the rump. Branson placed a hand on it, and the Squire could hear it “bog” and crackle.

“What is that, Branson? Has he been hurt?”

“No, sir, worse. I’ll show you.”

He took out his sharp hunting-knife.

“It won’t hurt the poor beast,” he said.

Then he cut deep into the swelling. The animal never moved. No blood followed the incision, but the gaping wound was black, and filled with air-bubbles.

“The quarter-ill,” said the cowman, who stood mournfully by.

That ox was dead in a few hours. Another died next day, two the next, and so on, though not in an increasing ratio; but in a month there was hardly an animal alive about the place except the horses.

It was time now the Squire should know all, and he did. He looked a chastened man when he came out from that interview with his brother and Walton. But he put a right cheery face on matters when he told his wife.

“We’ll have to retrench,” he said. “It’ll be a struggle for a time, but we’ll get over it right enough.”

Present money, however, was wanted, and raised it must be.

And now came the hardest blow the Squire had yet received. It was a staggering one, though he met it boldly. There was then at Burley Old Mansion a long picture gallery. It was a room in an upper story, and extended the whole length of the house—a hall in fact, and one that more than one Squire Broadbent had entertained his friends right royally in. From the walls not only did portraits of ancestors bold and gay, smile or frown down, but there hung there also many a splendid landscape and seascape by old masters.

Most of the latter had to be sold, and the gallery was closed, for the simple reason that Squire Broadbent, courageous though he was, could not look upon its bare and desecrated walls without a feeling of sorrow.

Pictures even from the drawing-room had to go also, and that room too was closed. But the breakfast-room, which opened to the lawn and rose gardens, where the wild birds sang so sweetly in summer, was left intact; so was the dining-room, and that cosy, wee green parlour in which the family delighted to assemble around the fire in the winter’s evenings.

Squire Broadbent had been always a favourite in the county—somewhat of an upstart and iconoclast though he was—so the sympathy he received was universal.

Iconoclast? Yes, he had delighted in shivering the humble idols of others, and now his own were cast down. Nobody, however, deserted him. Farmers and Squires might have said among themselves that they always knew Broadbent was “going the pace,” and that his new-fangled American notions were poorly suited to England, but in his presence they did all they could to cheer him.

When the ploughing time came round they gave him what is called in the far North “a love-darg.” Men with teams of horses came from every farm for miles around and tilled his ground. They had luncheon in a marquee, but they would not hear of stopping to dinner. They were indeed thoughtful and kind.

The parson of the parish and the doctor were particular friends of the Squire. They often dropped in of an evening to talk of old times with the family by the fireside.

“I’m right glad,” the doctor said one evening, “to see that you don’t lose heart, Squire.”

“Bless me, sir, why should I? To be sure we’re poor now, but God has left us a deal of comfort, doctor, and, after all, it doesn’t take much to make a man happy.”

Boys will be boys. Yes, we all know that. But there comes a time in the life of every right-thinking lad when another truth strikes home to him, that boys will be men.

I rather think that the sooner a boy becomes cognisant of this fact the better. Life is not all a dream; it must sooner or later become a stern reality. Life is not all pleasant parade and show, like a field-day at Aldershot; no, for sooner or later pomp and panoply have to be exchanged for camp-life and action, and bright uniforms are either rolled in blood and dust, or come triumphant, though tarnished, from the field of glory. Life is not all plain sailing over sunlit seas, for by-and-by the clouds bank up, storms come on, and the good ship has to do battle with wind and wave.

But who would have it otherwise? No one would who possesses the slightest ray of honest ambition, or a single spark of that pride of self which we need not blush to own.

One day, about the beginning of autumn, Rupert and Archie, and their sister Elsie, were in the room in the tower. They sat together in a turret chamber, Elsie gazing dreamily from the window at the beautiful scenery spread out beneath. The woods and wilds, the rolling hills, the silvery stream, the half-ripe grain moving in the wind, as waves at sea move, and the silvery sunshine over all. She was in a kind of a daydream, her fingers listlessly touching a chord on the harp now and then. A pretty picture she looked, too, with her bonnie brown hair, and her bonnie blue eyes, and thorough English face, thorough English beauty. Perhaps Archie had been thinking something of this sort as he sat there looking at her, while Rupert half-lay in the rocking-chair, which his brother had made for him, engrossed as usual in a book.

Whether Archie did think thus or not, certain it is that presently he drew his chair close to his sister’s, and laying one arm fondly on her shoulder.

“What is sissie looking at?” he asked.

“Oh, Archie,” she replied, “I don’t think I’ve been looking at anything; but I’ve been seeing everything and wishing!”

“Wishing, Elsie? Well, you don’t look merry. What were you wishing?”

“I was wishing the old days were back again, when—when father was rich; before the awful fire came, and the plague, and everything. It has made us all old, I think. Wouldn’t you like father was rich again?”

“I am not certain; but wishes are not horses, you know.”

“No,” said Elsie; “only if it could even be always like this, and if you and Rupert and I could be always as we are now. I think that, poor though we are, everything just now is so pretty and so pleasant. But you are going away to the university, and the place won’t be the same. I shall get older faster than ever then.”

“Well, Elsie,” said Archie, laughing, “I am so old that I am going to make my will.”

Rupert put down his book with a quiet smile.

“What are you going to leave me, old man? Scallowa?”

“No, Rupert, you’re too long in the legs for Scallowa, you have no idea what a bodkin of a boy you are growing. Scallowa I will and bequeath to my pretty sister here, and I’ll buy her a side-saddle, and two pennyworth of carrot seed. Elsie will also have Bounder, and you, Rupert, shall have Fuss.”

“Anything else for me?”

“Don’t be greedy. But I’ll tell you. You shall have my tool-house, and all my tools, and my gun besides. Well, this room is to be sister’s own, and she shall also have my fishing-rod, and the book of flies that poor Bob Cooper made for me. Oh, don’t despise them, they are all wonders!”

“Well really, Archie,” said Elsie, “you talk as earnestly as if you actually were going to die.”

“Who said I was going to die? No, I don’t mean to die till I’ve done much more mischief.”

“Hush! Archie.”

“Well, I’m hushed.”

“Why do you want to make your will?”

“Oh, it isn’t wanting to make my will! I am—I’ve done it. And the ‘why’ is this, I’m going away.”

“To Oxford?”

“No, Elsie, not to Oxford. I’ve got quite enough Latin and Greek out of Walton to last me all my life. I couldn’t be a doctor; besides father is hardly rich enough to make me one at present. I couldn’t be a doctor, and I’m not good enough to be a parson.”

“Archie, how you talk.”

There were tears in Elsie’s eyes now.

“I can’t help it. I’m going away to enter life in a new land. Uncle Ramsay has told me all about Australia. He says the old country is used up, and fortunes can be made in a few years on the other side of the globe.”

There was silence in the turret for long minutes; the whispering of the wind in the elm trees beneath could be heard, the murmuring of the river, and far away in the woods the cawing of rooks.

“Don’t you cry, Elsie,” said Archie. “I’ve been thinking about all this for some time, and my mind is made up. I’m going, Elsie, and I know it is for the best. You don’t imagine for a single moment, do you, that I’ll forget the dear old times, and you all? No, no, no. I’ll think about you every night, and all day long, and I’ll come back rich. You don’t think that I won’t make my fortune, do you? Because I mean to, and will. So there. Don’t cry, Elsie.”

“I’m not going to cry, Archie,” said Rupert.

“Right, Rupert, you’re a brick, as Branson says.”

“I’m not old enough,” continued Rupert, “to give you my blessing, though I suppose Kate would give you hers; but we’ll all pray for you.”

“Well,” said Archie thoughtfully, “that will help some.”

“Why, you silly boy, it will help a lot.”

“I wish I were as good as you, Rupert. But I’m just going to try hard to do my best, and I feel certain I’ll be all right.”

“You know, Roup, how well I can play cricket, and how I often easily bowl father out. Well, that is because I’ve just tried my very hardest to become a good player; and I’m going to try my very hardest again in another way. Oh, I shall win! I’m cocksure I shall. Come, Elsie, dry your eyes. Here’s my handkerchief. Don’t be a little old wife.”

“You won’t get killed, or anything, Archie?”

“No; I won’t get killed, or eaten either.”

“They do tell me,” said Elsie—“that is, old Kate told me—that the streets in Australia are all paved with gold, and that the roofs of the houses are all solid silver.”

“Well, I don’t think she is quite right,” said Archie, laughing. “Anyhow, uncle says there is a fortune to be made, and I’m going to make it. That’s all.”

Archie went straight away down from that boy’s room feeling every inch a man, and had an interview with his father and uncle.

It is needless to relate what took place there, or to report the conversation which the older folks had that evening in the little green parlour. Both father and uncle looked upon Archie’s request as something only natural. For both these men, singular to say, had been boys once themselves; and, in the Squire’s own words, Archie was a son to be proud of.

“We can’t keep the lad always with us, mother,” said Squire Broadbent; “and the wide world is the best of schools. I feel certain that, go where he will, he won’t lose heart. If he does, I should be ashamed to own him as a son. So there! My only regret is, Ramsay, that I cannot send the lad away with a better lined pocket.”

“My dear silly old brother, he will be better as he is. And I’m really not sure that he would not be better still if he went away, as many have gone before him, with only a stick and a bundle over his shoulder. You have a deal too much of the Broadbent pride; and Archie had better leave that all behind at home, or be careful to conceal it when he gets to the land of his adoption.”

The following is a brief list of Archie’s stock-in-trade when he sailed away in the good ship Dugong to begin the world alone: 1. A good stock of clothes. 2. A good stock of assurance. 3. Plenty of hope. 4. Good health and abundance of strength. 5. A little nest egg at an Australian bank to keep him partly independent till he should be able to establish a footing. 6. Letters of introduction, blessings, and a little pocket Bible.

His uncle chose his ship, and sent him away round the Cape in a good old-fashioned sailing vessel. And his uncle went to Glasgow to see him off, his last words being, “Keep up your heart, boy, whatever happens; and keep calm in every difficulty. Good-bye.”

Away sailed the ship, and away went Archie to see the cities that are paved with gold, and whose houses have roofs of solid silver.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eleven.

“Spoken Like His Father’s Son.”

“Cheer, boys, cheer, no more of idle sorrow,
Courage, true hearts shall bear us on our way;
Hope flies before, and points the bright to-morrow,
Let us forget the dangers of to-day.”

That dear old song! How many a time and oft it has helped to raise the drooping spirits of emigrants sailing away from these loved islands, never again to return!

The melody itself too is such a manly one. Inez dear, bring my fiddle. Not a bit of bravado in that ringing air, bold and all though it is. Yet every line tells of British ardour and determination—ardour that no thoughts of home or love can cool, determination that no danger can daunt.

“Cheer, boys, cheer.” The last rays of the setting sun were lighting up the Cornish cliffs, on which so few in that good ship would ever again set eyes, when those around the fore-castle-head took up the song.

“Cheer, boys, cheer.” Listen! Those on the quarterdeck join in the chorus, sinking in song all difference of class and rank. And they join, too, in that rattling “Three times three” that bids farewell to England.

Then the crimson clouds high up in the west change to purple and brown, the sea grows grey, and the distant shore becomes slaty blue. Soon the stars peep out, and the passengers cease to tramp about, and find their way below to the cosily-lighted saloon.

Archie is sitting on a sofa quite apart from all the others. The song is still ringing in his head, and, if the whole truth must be told, he feels just a trifle down-hearted. He cannot quite account for this, though he tries to, and his thoughts are upon the whole somewhat rambling. They would no doubt be quite connected if it were not for the distracting novelty of all his present surroundings, which are as utterly different from anything he has hitherto become acquainted with as if he had suddenly been transported to another planet.

No, he cannot account for being dull. Perhaps the motion of the ship has something to do with it, though this is not a very romantic way of putting it. Archie has plenty of moral courage; and as the ship encountered head winds, and made a long and most difficult passage down through the Irish Sea, he braced himself to get over his morsel of mal de mer, and has succeeded.

He is quite cross with himself for permitting his mind to be tinged with melancholy. That song ought to have set him up.

“Why should we weep to sail in search of fortune?”

Oh, Archie is not weeping; catch him doing anything so girlish and peevish! He would not cry in his cabin where he could do so without being seen, and it is not likely he would permit moisture to appear in his eyes in the saloon here. Yet his home never did seem to him so delightful, so cosy, so happy, as the thoughts of it do now. Why had he not loved it even more than he did when it was yet all around him? The dear little green parlour, his gentle lady mother that used to knit so quietly by the fire in the winter’s evenings, listening with pleasure to his father’s daring schemes and hopeful plans. His bonnie sister, Elsie, so proud of him—Archie; Rupert, with his pale, classical face and gentle smile; matter-of-fact Walton; jolly old Uncle Ramsay. They all rose up before his mind’s eye as they had been; nay but as they might be even at that very moment. And the room in the tower, the evenings spent there in summer when daylight was fading over the hills and woods, and the rooks flying wearily home to their nests in the swaying elm trees; or in winter when the fire burned brightly on the hearth, and weird old Kate sat in her high-backed chair, telling her strange old-world stories, with Branson, wide-eyed, fiddle in hand, on a seat near her, and Bounder—poor Bounder—on the bear’s skin. Then the big kitchen, or servants’ hall—the servants that all loved “master Archie” so dearly, and laughed and enjoyed every prank he used to play.

Dear old Burley! should he ever see it again? A week has not passed since he left it, and yet it seems and feels a lifetime.

He was young a week ago; now he is old, very old—nearly a man. Nearly? Well, nearly, in years; in thoughts, and feelings, and circumstances even—quite a man. But then he should not feel down-hearted for this simple reason; he had left home under such bright auspices. Many boys run away to sea. The difference between their lot and his is indeed a wide one. Yes, that must be very sad. No home life to look back upon, no friends to think of or love, no pleasant present, no hopeful future.

Then Archie, instead of letting his thoughts dwell any longer on the past, began at once to bridge over for himself the long period of time that must elapse ere he should return

to Burley Old Farm. Of course there would be changes. He dared say Walton would be away; but Elsie and Rupert would still be there, and his father and mother, looking perhaps a little older, but still as happy. And the burned farm-steading would be restored, or if it were not, it soon should be after he came back; for he would be rich, rolling in wealth in fact, if half the stories he had heard of Australia were true, even allowing that all the streets were not paved with gold, and all the houses not roofed with sparkling silver.

So engrossed was he with these pleasant thoughts, that he had not observed the advent of a passenger who had entered the saloon, and sat quietly down on a camp-stool near him. A man of about forty, dressed in a rough pilot suit of clothes, with a rosy weather-beaten but pleasant face, and a few grey hairs in his short black beard.

He was looking at Archie intently when their eyes met, and the boy felt somewhat abashed. The passenger, however, did not remove his glance instantly; he spoke instead.

“You’ve never been to sea before, have you?”

“No, sir; never been off the land till a week ago.”

“Going to seek your fortune?”

“Yes; I’m going to make my fortune.”

“Bravo! I hope you will.”

“What’s to hinder me?”

“Nothing; oh, nothing much! Everybody doesn’t though. But you seem to have a bit of go in you.”

“Are you going to make yours?” said Archie.

The stranger laughed.

“No,” he replied. “Unluckily, perhaps, mine was made for me. I’ve been out before too, and I’m going again to see things.”

“You’re going in quest of adventure?”

“I suppose that is really it. That is how the story-books put it, anyhow. But I don’t expect to meet with adventures like Sinbad the Sailor, you know; and I don’t think I would like to have a little old man of the sea with his little old legs round my neck.”

“Australia is a very wonderful place, isn’t it?”

“Yes; wonderfully wonderful. Everything is upside-down there, you know. To begin with, the people walk with their heads downwards. Some of the trees are as tall as the moon, and at certain seasons of the year the bark comes tumbling off them like rolls of shoeleather. Others are shaped like bottles, others again have heads of waving grass, and others have ferns for tops. There are trees, too, that drop all their leaves to give the flowers a chance; and these are so brilliantly red, and so numerous, that the forest where they grow looks all on fire. Well, many of the animals walk or jump on two legs, instead of running on four. Does that interest you?”

“Yes. Tell me something more about birds.”

“Well, ducks are everywhere in Australia, and many kinds are as big as geese. They seem to thrive. And ages ago, it is said by the natives, the moles in Australia got tired of living in the dark, and held a meeting above-ground, and determined to live a different mode of life. So they grew longer claws, and short, broad, flat tails, and bills like ducks, and took to the water, and have been happy ever since.

“Well, there are black swans in abundance; and though it is two or three years since I was out last, I cannot forget a beautiful bird, something betwixt a pheasant and peacock, and the cock’s tail is his especial delight. It is something really to be proud of, and at a distance looks like a beautiful lyre, strings and all. The cockatoos swarm around the trees, and scream and laugh at the lyre-bird giving himself airs, but I daresay this is all envy. The hen bird is not a beauty, but her chief delight is to watch the antics and attitudes of her lord and master as he struts about making love and fun to her time about, at one moment singing a kind of low, sweet song, at another mocking every sound that is heard in the forest, every noise made by man or bird or beast. No wonder the female lyre-bird thinks her lord the cleverest and most beautiful creature in the world!

“Then there is a daft-looking kingfisher, all head and bill, and wondering eyes, who laughs like a jackass, and makes you laugh to hear him laugh. So loud does he laugh at times that his voice drowns every other sound in the forest.

“There is a bird eight feet high, partly cassowary, partly ostrich, that when attacked kicks like a horse, or more like a cow, because it kicks sideways. But if I were to sit here till our

good ship reached the Cape, I could not tell you about half the curious, beautiful, and ridiculous creatures and things you will find in Australia if you move much about. I do think that that country beats all creation for the gorgeousness of its wild birds and wild flowers; and if things do seem a bit higgledy-piggledy at first, you soon settle down to it, and soon tire wondering at anything.

“But,” continued the stranger, “with all their peculiarities, the birds and beasts are satisfied with their get-up, and pleased with their surroundings, although all day long in the forests the cockatoos, and parrots, and piping crows, and lyre-birds do little else but joke and chaff one another because they all look so comical.

“Yes, lad, Australia you will find is a country of contrarities, and the only wonder to me is that the rivers don’t all run up-hill instead of running down; and mind, they are sometimes broader at their sources than they are at their ends.”

“There is plenty of gold there?” asked Archie.

“Oh, yes, any amount; but—”

“But what, sir?”

“The real difficulty—in fact, the only difficulty—is the finding of it.”

“But that, I suppose, can be got over.”

“Come along with me up on deck, and we’ll talk matters over. It is hot and stuffy down here; besides, they are going to lay the cloth.”

Arrived at the quarterdeck, the stranger took hold of Archie’s arm, as if he had known him all his life.

“Now,” he said, “my name is Vesey, generally called Captain Vesey, because I never did anything that I know of to merit the title. I’ve been in an army or two in different parts of the globe as a free lance, you know.”

“How nice!”

“Oh, delightful!” said Captain Vesey, though from the tone of his voice Archie was doubtful as to his meaning. “Well,” he added, “I own a yacht, now waiting for me, I believe, at the Cape of Good Hope, if she isn’t sunk, or burned, or something. And your tally?”

“My what, sir?”

“Your tally, your name, and the rest of it?”

“Archie Broadbent, son of Squire Broadbent, of Burley Old Farm, Northumberland.”

“What! you a son of Charlie Broadbent? Yankee Charlie, as we used to call him at the club. Well, well, well, wonders will never cease; and it only shows how small the world is, after all.”

“And you used to know my father, sir?”

“My dear boy, I promised myself the pleasure of calling on him at Burley. I’ve only been home for two months, however; and I heard—well, boy, I needn’t mince matters—I heard your father had been unfortunate, and had left his place, and gone nobody could tell me whither.”

“No,” said Archie, laughing, “it isn’t quite so bad as all that; and it is bound to come right in the end.”

“You are talking very hopefully, lad. I could trace a resemblance in your face to someone I knew the very moment I sat down. And there is something like the same cheerful ring in your voice there used to be in his. You really are a chip of the old block.”

“So they say.” And Archie laughed again, pleased by this time.

“But, you know, lad, you are very young to be going away to seek your fortune.”

“I’ll get over that, sir.”

“I hope so. Of course, you won’t go pottering after gold!”

“I don’t know. If I thought I would find lots, I would go like a shot.”

“Well, take my advice, and don’t. There, I do not want to discourage you; but you better turn your mind to farming—to squatting.”

“That wouldn’t be very genteel, would it?”

“Genteel! Why, lad, if you’re going to go in for genteelity, you’d best have stayed at home.”

“Well, but I have an excellent education. I can write like copper-plate. I am a fair hand at figures, and well up in Latin and Greek; and—”

“Ha! ha! ha!” Captain Vesey laughed aloud. “Latin and Greek, eh? You must keep that to yourself, boy.”

“And,” continued Archie boldly, “I have a whole lot of capital introductions. I’m sure to get into a good office in Sydney; and in a few years—”

Archie stopped short, because by the light that streamed from the skylight he could see that Captain Vesey was looking at him half-wonderingly, but evidently amused.

“Go on,” said the captain.

“Not a word more,” said Archie doggedly.

“Finish your sentence, lad.”

“I shan’t. There!”

“Well, I’ll do it for you. You’ll get into a delightful office, with mahogany writing-desks and stained glass windows, Turkey carpet and an easy-chair. Your employer will take you out in his buggy every Sunday to dine with him; and after a few years, as you say, he’ll make you a co-partner; and you’ll end by marrying his daughter, and live happy ever after.”

“You’re laughing at me, sir. I’ll go down below.”

“Yes, I’m laughing at you, because you’re only a greenhorn; and it is as well that I should squeeze a little of the lime-juice out of you as anyone else. No, don’t go below. Mind, I was your father’s friend.”

“Yes,” pouted poor Archie; “but you don’t appear to be mine. You are throwing cold water over my hopes; you are smashing my idols.”

“A very pretty speech, Archie Broadbent. But mind you this—a hut on solid ground is better far than a castle in the air. And it is better that I should storm and capsize your cloud-castle, than that an absolute stranger did so.”

“Well, I suppose you are right. Forgive me for being cross.”

“Spoken like his father’s son,” said Captain Vesey, grasping and shaking the hand that Archie extended to him. “Now we know each other. Ding! ding! ding! there goes the dinner-bell. Sit next to me.”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twelve.

“Keep on Your Cap. I was once a Poor Man Myself.”

The voyage out was a long, even tedious one; but as it has but little bearing on the story I forbear to describe it at length.

The ship had a passenger for Madeira, parcels for Ascension and Saint Helena, and she lay in at the Cape for a whole week.

Here Captain Vesey left the vessel, bidding Archie a kind farewell, after dining with him at the Fountain, and roaming with him all over the charming Botanical Gardens.

“I’ve an idea we’ll meet again,” he said as he bade him adieu. “If God spares me, I’ll be sure to visit Sydney in a year or two, and I hope to find you doing well. You’ll know if my little yacht, the Barracouta, comes in, and I know you’ll come off and see me. I hope to find you with as good a coat on your back as you have now.”

Then the Dugong sailed away again; but the time now seemed longer to Archie than ever, for in Captain Vesey he really had lost a good friend—a friend who was all the more valuable because he spoke the plain, unvarnished truth; and if in doing so one or two of the young man’s cherished idols were brought tumbling down to the ground, it was all the better for the young man. It showed those idols had feet of clay, else a little cold water thrown over them would hardly have had such an effect. I am sorry to say, however, that no sooner had the captain left the ship, than Archie set about carefully collecting the pieces of those said idols and patching them up again.

“After all,” he thought to himself, “this Captain Vesey, jolly fellow as he is, never had to struggle with fortune as I shall do; and I don’t think he has the same pluck in him that my father has, and that people say I have. We’ll see, anyhow. Other fellows have been fortunate in a few years, why shouldn’t I? ‘In a few years?’ Yes, these are the very words Captain Vesey laughed at me for. ‘In a few years?’ To be sure. And why not? What is the good of a fortune to a fellow after he gets old, and all worn down with gout and rheumatism? ‘Cheer, boys, cheer;’ I’m going in to win.”

How slow the ship sailed now, apparently; and when it did blow it usually blew the wrong way, and she would have to stand off and on, or go tack and half-tack against it, like a man with one long leg and one short. But she was becalmed more than once, and

this did seem dreadful. It put Archie in mind of a man going to sleep in the middle of his work, which is not at all the correct thing to do.

Well, there is nothing like a sailing ship after all for teaching one the virtue of patience; and at last Archie settled down to his sea life. He was becoming quite a sailor—as hard as the wheel-spokes, as brown as the binnacle. He was quite a favourite with the captain and officers, and with all hands fore and aft. Indeed he was very often in the forecastle or galley of an evening listening to the men’s yarns or songs, and sometimes singing a verse or two himself.

He was just beginning to think the Dugong was Vanderdecken’s ship, and that she never would make port at all, when one day at dinner he noticed that the captain was unusually cheerful.

“In four or five days more, please God,” said he, “we’ll be safe in Sydney.”

Archie almost wished he had not known this, for these four or five days were the longest of any he had yet passed. He had commenced to worship his patched-up idols again, and felt happier now, and more full of hope and certainty of fortune than he had done during the whole voyage.

Sometimes they sighted land. Once or twice birds flew on board—such bright, pretty birds too they looked. And birds also went wheeling and whirring about the ship—gulls, the like of which he had never seen before. They were more elegant in shape and purer in colour than ours, and their voices were clear and ringing.

Dick Whittington construed words out of the sound of the chiming bells. Therefore it is not at all wonderful that Archie was pleased to believe that some of these beautiful birds were screaming him a welcome to the land of gold.

Just at or near the end of the voyage half a gale of wind blew the ship considerably out of her course. Then the breeze went round to fair again, the sea went down, and the birds came back; and one afternoon a shout was heard from the foretop that made Archie’s heart jump for very joy.

“Land ho!”

That same evening, as the sun was setting behind the Blue Mountains, leaving a gorgeous splendour of cloud-scenery that may be equalled, but is never surpassed in any country, the Dugong sailed slowly into Sydney harbour, and cast anchor.

At last! Yes, at last. Here were the golden gates of the El Dorado that were to lead the ambitious boy to fortune, and all the pleasures fortune is capable of bestowing.

Archie had fancied that Sydney would prove to be a very beautiful place; but not in his wildest imaginings had he conjured up a scene of such surpassing loveliness as that which now lay before him, and around him as well.

On the town itself his eye naturally first rested. There it lay, miles upon miles of houses, towers, and steeples, spread out along the coast, and rising inland. The mountains and hills beyond, their rugged grandeur softened and subdued in the purple haze of the day's dying glory; the sky above, with its shades of orange, saffron, crimson, opal, and grey; and the rocks, to right and left in the nearer distance, with their dreamy clouds of foliage, from which peeped many a lordly mansion, many a fairy-like palace. He hardly noticed the forests of masts; he was done with ships, done with masts, for a time at least; but his inmost heart responded to the distant hum of city life, that came gently stealing over the waters, mingling with the chime of evening bells, and the music of the happy sea-gulls.

Would he, could he, get on shore to-night? "No," the first officer replied, "not before another day."

So he stood on deck, or walked about, never thinking of food—what is food or drink to a youth who lives on hope?—till the gloaming shades gave place to night, till the southern stars shone over the hills and harbour, and strings upon strings of lamps and lights were hung everywhere across the city above and below.

Now the fairy scene is changed. Archie is on shore. It is the forenoon of another day, and the sun is warm though not uncomfortably hot. There is so much that is bracing and invigorating in the very air, that he longs to be doing something at once. Longs to commence laying the foundation-stone of that temple of fortune which—let Captain Vesey say what he likes—he, Archie Broadbent, is bent upon building.

He has dressed himself in his very English best. His clothes are new and creaseless, his gloves are spotless, his black silk hat immaculate, the cambric handkerchief that peeps coyly from his breast pocket is whiter than the snow, his boots fit like gloves, and shine as softly black as his hat itself, and his cane even must be the envy of every young man he meets.

Strange to say, however, no one appears to take a very great deal of notice of him, though, as he glances towards the shop windows, he can see as if in a mirror that one or

two passengers have looked back and smiled. But it couldn't surely have been at him? Impossible!

The people, however, are apparently all very active and very busy, though cool, with a self-possession that he cannot help envying, and which he tries to imitate without any marked degree of success.

There is an air of luxury and refinement about many of the buildings that quite impresses the young man; but he cannot help noticing that there is also a sort of business air about the streets which he hardly expected to find, and which reminds him forcibly of Glasgow and Manchester. He almost wishes it had been otherwise.

He marches on boldly enough.

Archie feels as if on a prospecting tour—prospecting for gold. Of course he is going to make his fortune, but how is he going to begin? That is the awkward part of the business. If he could once get in the thin end of the wedge he would quickly drive it home.

“There is nothing like ambition. If we steer a steady course.”

Of course there isn't. But staring into a china-shop window will do him little good. I do not believe he saw anything in that window however. Only, on turning away from it, his foot goes splash into a pool of dirty water on the pavement, or rather on what ought to be a pavement. That boot is ruined for the day, and this reminds him that Sydney streets are not paved with gold, but with very unromantic matter-of-fact mud. Happy thought! he will dine.

The waiters are very polite, but not obsequious, and he makes a hearty meal, and feels more at home.

Shall he tip this waiter fellow? Is it the correct thing to tip waiters? Will the waiter think him green if he does, or green if he doesn't?

These questions, trifling though they may appear, really annoyed Archie; but he erred on the right side, and did tip the waiter—well too. And the waiter brightened up, and asked him if he would like to see a playbill.

Then this reminded Archie that he might as well call on some of the people to whom he had introductions. So he pulled out a small bundle of letters, and he asked the waiter where this, that, and t'other street was; and the waiter brought a map, and gave him so

many hints, that when he found himself on the street again he did not feel half so foreign. He had something to do now, something in view. Besides he had dined.

“Yes, he’d better drive,” he said to himself, “it would look better.” He lifted a finger, and a hansom rattled along, and drew up by the kerb. He had not expected to find cabs in Sydney. His card-case was handy, and his first letter also.

He might have taken a ’bus or tram. There were plenty passing, and very like Glasgow ’buses they were too; from the John with the ribbons to the cad at the rear. But a hansom certainly looked more aristocratic.

Aristocratic? Yes. But were there any aristocrats in Sydney? Was there any real blue blood in the place? He had not answered those questions to his satisfaction, when the hansom stopped so suddenly that he fell forward.

“Wait,” he said to the driver haughtily.

“Certainly, sir.”

Archie did not observe, however, the grimace the Jehu made to another cabman, as he pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, else he would hardly have been pleased.

There was quite a business air about the office into which the young man ushered himself, but no one took much notice of him. If he had had an older face under that brand-new hat, they might have been more struck with his appearance.

“Ahem! Aw—!” Archie began.

“One minute, sir,” said the clerk nearest him. “Fives in forty thousand? Fives in forty are eight—eight thousand.”

The clerk advanced pen in mouth.

“Do you come from Jenkins’s about those bills?”

“No, I come from England; and I’ve a letter of introduction to your master.” Archie brought the last word out with a bang.

“Mr Berry isn’t in. Will you leave a message?”

“No, thank you.”

“As you please.”

Archie was going off, when the clerk called after him, “Here is Mr Berry himself, sir.”

A tall, brown-faced, elderly gentleman, with very white hair and pleasant smile. He took Archie into the office, bade him be seated, and slowly read the letter; then he approached the young man and shook hands. The hand felt like a dead fish’s tail in Archie’s, and somehow the smile had vanished.

“I’m really glad to see your father’s son,” he said. “Sorry though to hear that he has had a run of bad luck. Very bad luck it must be, too,” he added, “to let you come out here.”

“Indeed, sir; but I mean to make my for—that is, I want to make my living.”

“Ay, young man, living’s more like it; and I wish I could help you. There’s a wave of depression over this side of our little island at present, and I don’t know that any office in town has a genteel situation to offer you.”

Archie’s soul-heat sank a degree or two.

“You think, sir, that—”

“I think that you would have done better at home. It would be cruel of me not to tell you the truth. Now I’ll give you an example. We advertised for a clerk just a week since—”

“I wish I’d been here.”

“My young friend, you wouldn’t have had the ghost of a chance. We had five-and-thirty to pick and choose from, and we took the likeliest. I’m really sorry. If anything should turn up, where shall I communicate?”

Where should he communicate? And this was his father’s best friend, from whom the too sanguine father expected Archie would have an invitation to dinner at once, and a general introduction to Sydney society.

“Oh, it is no great matter about communicating, Mr Berry; aw!—no matter at all! I can afford to wait a bit and look round me. I—aw!—good morning, sir.”

Away stalked the young Northumbrian, like a prince of the blood.

“A chip of the old block,” muttered Mr Berry, as he resumed his desk work. “Poor lad, he’ll have to come down a peg though.”

The cabby sprang towards the young nob.

“Where next, sir?”

“Grindlay’s.”

Archie was not more successful here, nor anywhere else.

But at the end of a week, during which time he had tried as hard as any young man had ever tried before in Sydney or any other city to find some genteel employment, he made a wise resolve; viz, to go into lodgings.

He found that living in a hotel, though very cheerful, made a terrible hole in his purse; so he brought himself “down a peg” by the simple process of “going up” nearer the sky.

Here is the explanation of this paradox. It was Archie’s custom to spend his forenoons looking for something to do, and his evenings walking in the suburbs.

Poor, lonely lad, that never a soul in the city cared for, any more than if he had been a stray cat, he found it wearisome, heart-breaking work wandering about the narrow, twisting streets and getting civilly snubbed. He felt more of a gentleman when dining. Afterwards his tiredness quite left him, and hope swelled his heart once more. So out he would go and away—somewhere, anywhere; it did not matter so long as he could see woods, and water, and houses. Oh, such lovely suburban villas, with cool verandahs, round which flowering creepers twined, and lawns shaded by dark green waving banana trees, beneath which he could oftentimes hear the voices of merry children, or the tinkle of the light guitar. He would give reins to his fancy then, and imagine things—such sweet things!

Yes, he would own one of the biggest and most delightful of these mansions; he should keep fleet horses, a beautiful carriage, a boat—he must have a boat, or should it be a gondola? Yes, that would be nicer and newer. In this boat, when the moonlight silvered the water, he would glide over the bay, returning early to his happy home. His bonnie sister should be there, his brother Rupert—the student—his mother, and his hero, that honest, bluff, old father of his. What a dear, delightful dream! No wonder he did not care to return to the realities of his city life till long after the sun had set over the hills, and the stars were twinkling down brighter and lovelier far than those lights he had so admired the night his ship arrived.

He was returning slowly one evening and was close to the city, but in a rather lonely place, when he noticed something dark under the shade of a tree, and heard a girl's voice say:

"Dearie me! as missus says; but ain't I jolly tired just!"

"Who is that?" said Archie.

"On'y me, sir; on'y Sarah. Don't be afear'd. I ain't a larrikin. Help this 'ere box on my back like a good chummie."

"It's too heavy for your slight shoulders," quoth gallant Archie. "I don't mind carrying it a bit."

"What, a gent like you! Why, sir, you're greener than they make 'em round here!"

"I'm from England."

"Ho, ho! Well, that accounts for the milk. So'm I from Hengland. This way, chummie."

They hadn't far to go.

"My missus lives two story up, top of a ware'us, and I've been to the station for that 'ere box. She do take it out o' me for all the wage. She do."

Archie carried the box up the steep stairs, and Sarah's mistress herself opened the door and held a candle. A thin, weary-looking body, with whom Sarah seemed to be on the best and most friendly terms.

"Brought my young man," said Sarah. "Ain't he a smartie? But, heigho! so green! You never!"

"Come in a minute, sir, and rest you. Never mind this silly girl."

Archie did go in a minute; five, ten, ay fifteen, and by that time he had not only heard all this ex-policeman's wife's story, but taken a semi-attic belonging to her.

And he felt downright independent and happy when next day he took possession.

For now he would have time to really look round, and it was a relief to his mind that he would not be spending much money.

Archie could write home cheerfully now. He was sure that something would soon turn up, something he could accept, and which would not be derogatory to the son of a Northumbrian squire. More than one influential member of commercial society had promised "to communicate with him at the very earliest moment."

But, alas! weeks flew by, and weeks went into months, and no more signs of the something were apparent than he had seen on the second day of his arrival.

Archie was undoubtedly "a game un," as Sarah called him; but his heart began to feel very heavy indeed.

Living as cheaply as he could, his money would go done at last. What then? Write home for more? He shuddered to think of such a thing. If his first friend, Captain Vesey, had only turned up now, he would have gone and asked to be taken as a hand before the mast. But Captain Vesey did not.

A young man cannot be long in Sydney without getting into a set. Archie did, and who could blame him. They were not a rich set, nor a very fast set; but they had a morsel of a club-room of their own. They formed friendships, took strolls together, went occasionally to the play, and often had little "adventures" about town, the narratives of which, when retailed in the club, found ready listeners, and of course were stretched to the fullest extent of importance.

They really were not bad fellows, and would have done Archie a good turn if they could. But they could not. They laughed a deal at first at his English notions and ideas; but gradually Archie got over his greenness, and began to settle down to colonial life, and would have liked Sydney very much indeed if he had only had something to do.

The ex-policeman's wife was very kind to her lodger. So was Sarah; though she took too many freedoms of speech with him, which tended to lower his English squirearchical dignity very much. But, to do her justice, Sarah did not mean any harm.

Only once did Archie venture to ask about the ex-policeman. "What did he do?"

"Oh, he drinks!" said Sarah, as quietly as if drinking were a trade of some kind. Archie asked no more.

Rummaging in a box one day, Archie found his last letter of introduction. It had been given him by Uncle Ramsay.

“You’ll find him a rough and right sort of a stick,” his uncle had said. “He was my steward, now he is a wealthy man, and can knock down his cheque for many thousands.”

Archie dressed in his best and walked right away that afternoon to find the address.

It was one of the very villas he had often passed, in a beautiful place close by the water-side.

What would be his reception here?

This question was soon put at rest.

He rang the bell, and was ushered into a luxuriously-furnished room; a room that displayed more richness than taste.

A very beautiful girl—some thirteen years of age perhaps—got up from a grand piano, and stood before him.

Archie was somewhat taken aback, but bowed as composedly as he could.

“Surely,” he thought, “she cannot be the daughter of the rough and right sort of a stick who had been steward to his uncle. He had never seen so sweet a face, such dreamy blue eyes, or such wealth of hair before.

“Did you want to see papa? Sit down. I’ll go and find him.”

“Will you take this letter to him?” said Archie.

And the girl left, letter in hand.

Ten minutes after the “rough stick” entered, whistling “Sally come up.”

“Hullo! hullo!” he cried, “so here we are.”

There he was without doubt—a big, red, jolly face, like a full moon orient, a loose merino jacket, no waistcoat or necktie, but a cricketer’s cap on the very back of his bushy head. He struck Archie a friendly slap on the back.

“Keep on yer cap,” he shouted, “I was once a poor man myself.”

Archie was too surprised and indignant to speak.

“Well, well, well,” said Mr Winslow, “they do tell me wonders won’t never cease. What a whirligig of a world it is. One day I’m cleanin’ a gent’s boots. Gent is a captin of a ship. Next day gent’s nephew comes to me to beg for a job. Say, young man, what’ll ye drink?”

“I didn’t come to drink, Mr Winslow, neither did I come to beg.”

“Whew-ew-ew,” whistled the quondam steward, “here’s pride; here’s a touch o’ the old country. Why, young un, I might have made you my under-gardener.”

The girl at this moment entered the room. She had heard the last sentence.

“Papa!” she remonstrated. Then she glided out by the casement window.

Burning blushes suffused Archie’s cheeks as he hurried over the lawn soon after; angry tears were in his eyes. His hand was on the gate-latch when he felt a light touch on his arm. It was the girl.

“Don’t be angry with poor papa,” she said, almost beseechingly.

“No, no,” Archie cried, hardly knowing what he did say. “What is your name?”

“Etheldene.”

“What a beautiful name! I—I will never forget it. Good-bye.”

He ran home with the image of the child in his mind—on his brain.

Sarah—plain Sarah—met him at the top of the stairs. He brushed past her.

“La! but ye does look glum,” said Sarah.

Archie locked his door. He did not want to see even Sarah—homely Sarah—that night.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Thirteen.

“Something in Soap.”

It was a still, sultry night in November. Archie's balcony window was wide open, and if there had been a breath of air anywhere he would have had the benefit of it. That was one advantage of having a room high up above the town, and there were several others. For instance, it was quieter, more retired, and his companions did not often take him by storm, because they objected to climb so many stairs. Dingy, small, and dismal some might have called it, but Archie always felt at home up in his semi-attic. It even reminded him of his room in the dear old tower at Burley. Then his morsel of balcony, why that was worth all the money he paid for the room itself; and as for the view from this charming, though non-aristocratic elevation, it was simply unsurpassed, unsurpassable—looking far away over a rich and fertile country to the grand old hills beyond—a landscape that, like the sea, was still the same, but ever changing; sometimes smiling and green, sometimes bathed in tints of purple and blue, sometimes grey as a sky o'ercast with rain clouds. Yes, he loved it, and he would take a chair out here on a moonlight evening and sit and think and dream.

But on this particular night sleep, usually so kind to the young man, absolutely refused to visit his pillow. He tried to woo the goddess on his right side, on his left, on his back; it was all in vain. Finally, he sat bolt upright in his little truckle bed in silent defiance.

“I don't care,” he said aloud, “whether I sleep or not. What does it matter? I've nothing to do to-morrow. Heigho!”

Nothing to do to-morrow! How sad! And he so young too. Were all his dreams of future fortune to fade and pass away like this—nothing to do? Why he envied the very boys who drove the mill wagons that went lazily rolling past his place every day. They seemed happy, and so contented; while he—why his very life—had come to be all one continued fever.

“Nothing to do yet, sir?” It was the ordinary salutation of his hard-working mite of a landlady when he came home to his meal in the afternoon. “I knows by the weary way ye walks upstairs, sir, you aren't successful yet, sir.”

“Nothink to do yet, sir?” They were the usual words that the slavey used when she dragged upstairs of an evening with his tea-things.

“Nothink to do,” she would say, as she deposited the tray on the table, and sank sans cérémonie into the easy-chair. “Nothink to do. What a ’appy life to lead! Now ’ere’s me a draggin’ up and down stairs, and a carryin’ of coals and a sweepin’, and a dustin’ and a hanswering of the door, till, what wi’ the ’eat and the dust and the fleas, my poor little life’s well-nigh worried out o’ me. Heigho! hif I was honly back again in merrie England, catch me ever goin’ to any Australia any more. But you looks a horned gent, sir. Nothink to do! My eye and Betty Martin, ye oughter to be ’appy, if you ain’t.”

Archie got up to-night, enrobed himself in his dressing-gown, and went and sat on his balcony. This soothed him. The stars were very bright, and seemed very near. He did not care for other companionship than these and his own all-too-busy thoughts. There was hardly a sound to be heard, except now and then the hum of a distant railway train increasing to a harsh roar as it crossed the bridge, then becoming subdued again and muffled as it entered woods, or went rolling over a soft and open country.

Nothing to do! But he must and would do something. Why should he starve in a city of plenty? He had arms and hands, if he hadn’t a head. Indeed, he had begun of late to believe that his head, which he used to think so much of, was the least important part of his body. He caught himself feeling his forearm and his biceps. Why this latter had got smaller and beautifully less of late. He had to shut his fist hard to make it perceptible to touch. This was worse and worse, he thought. He would not be able to lift a fifty-six if he wanted to before long, or have strength enough left to wield a stable broom if he should be obliged to go as gardener to Winslow.

“What next, I wonder?” he said to himself. “First I lose my brains, if ever I had any, and now I have lost my biceps; the worst loss last.”

He lit his candle, and took up the newspaper.

“I’ll pocket my pride, and take a porter’s situation,” he murmured. “Let us see now. Hullo! what is this? ‘Apprentice Wanted—the drug trade—splendid opening to a pushing youngster.’ Well, I am a pushing youngster. ‘Premium required.’ I don’t care, I have a bit of money left, and I’ll pay it like a man if there is enough. Why the drug trade is grand. Sydney drug-stores beat Glasgow’s all to pieces. Druggists and drysalters have their carriages and mansions, their town and country houses. Hurrah! I’ll be something yet!”

He blew out the candle, and jumped into bed. The gentle goddess required no further wooing. She took him in her lap, and he went off at once like a baby.

Rap—rap—rap—rap!

“Hullo! Yes; coming, Sarah; coming.”

It was broad daylight; and when he admitted Sarah at last, with the breakfast-tray, she told him she had been up and down fifty times, trying to make him hear. Sarah was given to a little exaggeration at times.

“It was all very well for a gent like he,” she said, “but there was her a-slavin’ and a-toilin’, and all the rest of it.”

“Well, well, my dear,” he cut in, “I’m awfully sorry, I assure you.”

Sarah stopped right in the centre of the room, still holding the tray, and looked at him.

“What!” she cried. “Ye ain’t a-going to marry me then, young man! What are ye my-dearing me for?”

“No, Sarah,” replied Archie, laughing; “I’m not going to marry you; but I’ve hopes of a good situation, and—”

“Is that all?” Sarah dumped down the tray, and tripped away singing.

Archie’s interview with the advertiser was of a most satisfactory character. He did not like the street, it was too new and out of the way; but then it would be a beginning.

He did not like his would-be employer, but he dared say he would improve on acquaintance. There was plenty in the shop, though the place was dingy and dirty, and the windows small. The spiders evidently had fine times of it here, and did not object to the smell of drugs. He was received by Mr Glorie himself in a little back sanctum off the little back shop.

The premium for apprenticing Archie was rather more than the young man could give; but this being explained to the proprietor of these beautiful premises, and owner of all the spiders, he graciously condescended to take half. Archie’s salary—a wretched pittance—was to commence at once after articles were signed; and Mr Glorie promised to give him a perfect insight into the drug business, and make a man of him, and “something else besides,” he added, nodding to Archie in a mysterious manner.

The possessor of the strange name was a queer-looking man; there did not appear much glory about him. He was very tall, very lanky, and thin, his shoulders sloping downwards

like a well-pointed pencil, while his face was solemn and elongated, like your own, reader, if you look at it in a spoon held lengthways.

The articles were signed, and Archie walked home on feathers apparently. He went upstairs singing. His landlady ran to the door.

“Work at last?”

Archie nodded and smiled.

When Sarah came in with the dinner things she danced across the room, bobbing her queer, old-fashioned face and crying—

“Lawk-a-daisy, diddle-um-doo, Missus says you’ve got work to do!”

“Yes, Sarah, at long last, and I’m so happy.”

“‘Appy, indeed!” sang Sarah. “Why, ye won’t be the gent no longer!”

Archie certainly had got work to do. For a time his employer kept him in the shop. There was only one other lad, and he went home with the physic, and what with studying hard to make himself au fait in prescribing and selling seidlitz powders and gum drops, Archie was pretty busy.

So months flew by. Then his long-faced employer took him into the back premises, and proceeded to initiate him into the mysteries of the something else that was to make a man of him.

“There’s a fortune in it,” said Mr Glorie, pointing to a bubbling grease-pot. “Yes, young sir, a vast fortune.”

“What is the speciality?” Archie ventured to enquire.

“The speciality, young sir?” replied Mr Glorie, his face relaxing into something as near a smile as it would permit of. “The speciality, sir, is soap. A transparent soap. A soap, young sir, that is destined to revolutionise the world of commerce, and bring my star to the ascendant after struggling for two long decades with the dark clouds of adversity.”

So this was the mystery. Archie was henceforward, so it appeared, to live in an atmosphere of scented soap; his hope must centre in bubbles. He was to assist this Mr Glorie’s star to rise to the zenith, while his own fortune might sink to nadir. And he had

paid his premium. It was swallowed up and simmering in that ugly old grease-pot, and except for the miserable salary he received from Mr Glorie he might starve.

Poor Archie! He certainly did not share his employer's enthusiasm, and on this particular evening he did not walk home on feathers, and when he sat down to supper his face must have appeared to Sarah quite as long and lugubrious as Mr Glorie's; for she raised her hands and said:

"Lawk-a-doodle, sir! What's the matter? Have ye killed anybody?"

"Not yet," answered Archie; "but I almost feel I could."

He stuck to his work, however, like a man; but that work became more and more allied to soap, and the front shop hardly knew him any more.

He had informed the fellows at the club-room that he was employed at last; that he was apprenticed to the drug trade. But the soap somehow leaked out, and more than once, when he was introduced to some new-comer, he was styled—

"Mr Broadbent," and "something in soap."

This used to make him bite his lips in anger.

He would not have cared half so much had he not joined this very club, with a little flourish of trumpets, as young Broadbent, son of Squire Broadbent, of Burley Old Castle, England.

And now he was "something in soap."

He wrote home to his sister in the bitterness of his soul, telling her that all his visions of greatness had ended in bubbles of rainbow hue, and that he was "something in soap." He felt sorry for having done so as soon as the letter was posted.

He met old Winslow one day in the street, and this gentleman grasped Archie's small aristocratic hand in his great brown bear's paw, and congratulated him on having got on his feet at last.

"Yes," said Archie with a sneer and a laugh, "I'm 'something in soap.'"

"And soap's a good thing I can tell you. Soap's not to be despised. There's a fortune in soap. I had an uncle in soap. Stick to it, my lad, and it'll stick to you."

But when a new apprentice came to the shop one day, and was installed in the front door drug department, while he himself was relegated to the slums at the back, his cup of misery seemed full, and he proceeded forthwith to tell this Mr Glorie what he thought of him. Mr Glorie's face got longer and longer and longer, and he finally brought his clenched fist down with such a bang on the counter, that every bottle and glass in the place rang like bells.

"I'll have the law on you," he shouted.

"I don't care; I've done with you. I'm sick of you and your soap."

He really did not mean to do it; but just at that moment his foot kicked against a huge earthenware jar full of oil, and shattered it in pieces.

"You've broke your indenture! You—you—"

"I've broken your jar, anyhow," cried Archie.

He picked up his hat, and rushing out, ran recklessly off to his club.

He was "something in soap" no more.

He was beggared, but he was free, unless indeed Mr Glorie should put him in gaol.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Fourteen.

The King may come in the Cadger's Way.

Mr Glorie did not put his runaway apprentice in gaol. He simply advertised for another—with a premium.

Poor Archie! His condition in life was certainly not to be envied now. He had but very few pounds between him and actual want.

He was rich in one thing alone—pride. He would sooner starve than write home for a penny. No, he could die in a gutter, but he could not bear to think they should know of it at Burley Old Farm.

Long ago, in the bonnie woods around Burley, he used to wonder to find dead birds in dark crannies of the rocks. He could understand it now. They had crawled into the crannies to die, out of sight and alone.

His club friends tried to rally him. They tried to cheer him up in more ways than one. Be it whispered, they tried to make him seek solace in gambling and in the wine-cup.

I do not think that I have held up my hero as a paragon. On the contrary, I have but represented him as he was—a bold, determined lad, with many and many a fault; but now I am glad to say this one thing in his favour: he was not such a fool as to try to drown his wits in wine, nor to seek to make money questionably by betting and by cards.

After Archie's letter home, in which he told Elsie that he was "something in soap," he had written another, and a more cheerful one. It was one which cost him a good deal of trouble to write; for he really could not get over the notion that he was telling white lies when he spoke of "his prospects in life, and his hopes being on the ascendant;" and as he dropped it into the receiver, he felt mean, demoralised; and he came slowly along George Street, trying to make himself believe that any letter was better than no letter, and that he would hardly have been justified in telling the whole truth.

Well, at Burley Old Farm things had rather improved, simply for this reason: Squire Broadbent had gone in heavily for retrenchment.

He had proved the truth of his own statement: "It does not take much in this world to make a man happy." The Squire was happy when he saw his wife and children happy. The former was always quietly cheerful, and the latter did all they could to keep up each other's hearts. They spent much of their spare time in the beautiful and romantic tower-room, and in walking about the woods, the grounds, and farm; for Rupert was well now, and was his father's right hand, not in the rough-and-tumble dashing way that Archie would have been, but in a thoughtful, considering way.

Mr Walton had gone away, but Branson and old Kate were still to the fore. The Squire could not have spared these.

I think that Rupert's religion was a very pretty thing. He had lost none of his simple faith, his abiding trust in God's goodness, though he had regained his health. His devotions were quite as sincere, his thankfulness for mercies received greater even than before, and he had the most unbounded faith in the efficacy of prayer.

So his sister and he lived in hope, and the Squire used to build castles in the green parlour of an evening, and of course the absent Archie was one of the kings of these castles.

After a certain number of years of retrenchment, Burley was going to rise from its ashes like the fabled phoenix—machinery and all. The Squire was even yet determined to show these old-fashioned farmer folks of Northumbria "a thing or two."

That was his ambition; and we must not blame him; for a man without ambition of some kind is a very humble sort of a clod—a clod of very poor clay.

But to return to Sydney.

Archie had received several rough invitations to go and visit Mr Winslow. He had accepted two of these, and, singular to say, Etheldene's father was absent each time. Now, I refuse to be misunderstood. Archie did not "manage" to call when the ex-miner was out; but Archie was not displeased. He had taken a very great fancy for the child, and did not hesitate to tell her that from the first day he had met her he had loved her like his sister Elsie.

Of course Etheldene wanted to know all about Elsie, and hours were spent in telling her about this one darling sister of his, and about Rupert and all the grand old life at Burley.

"I should laugh," cried Archie, "if some day when you grew up, you should find yourself in England, and fall in love with Rupert, and marry him."

The child smiled, but looked wonderfully sad and beautiful the next moment. She had a way like this with her. For if Etheldene had been taken to represent any month of our English year, it would have been April—sunshine, flowers, and showers.

But one evening Archie happened to be later out in the suburbs than he ought to have been. The day had been hot, and the night was delightfully cool and pleasant. He was returning home when a tall, rough-looking, bearded man stopped him, and asked “for a light, old chum.” Archie had a match, which he handed him, and as the light fell on the man’s face, it revealed a very handsome one indeed, and one that somehow seemed not unfamiliar to him.

Archie went on. There was the noise of singing farther down the street, a merry band of youths who had been to a race meeting that day, and were up to mischief.

The tall man hid under the shadow of a wall.

“They’re larrikins,” he said to himself, and “he’s a greenhorn.” He spat in his fist, and kept his eye on the advancing figures.

Archie met them. They were arm-in-arm, five in all, and instead of making way for him, rushed him, and down he went, his head catching the kerb with frightful force. They at once proceeded to rifle him. But perhaps “larrikins” had never gone to ground so quickly and so unexpectedly before. It was the bearded man who was “having his fling” among them, and he ended by grabbing one in each hand till a policeman came up.

Archie remembered nothing more then.

When he became sensible he was in bed with a bandaged head, and feeling as weak all over as a kitten. Sarah was in the room with the landlady.

“Hush, my dear,” said the latter; “you’ve been very ill for more than a week. You’re not to get up, nor even to speak.”

Archie certainly did not feel inclined to do either. He just closed his eyes and dozed off again, and his soul flew right away back to Burley.

“Oh, yes; he’s out of danger!” It was the doctor’s voice. “He’ll do first-rate with careful nursing.”

“He won’t want for that, sir. Sarah here has been like a little mother to him.”

Archie dozed for days. Only, whenever he was sensible, he could notice that Sarah was far better dressed, and far older-looking and nicer-looking than ever she had been. And now and then the big-bearded man came and sat by his bed, looking sometimes at him, some times at Sarah.

One day Archie was able to sit up; he felt quite well almost, though of course he was not really so.

“I have you to thank for helping me that night,” he said.

“Ay, ay, Master Archie; but don’t you know me?”

“No—no. I don’t think so.”

The big-bearded man took out a little case from his pocket, and pulled therefrom a pair of horn-bound spectacles.

“Why!” cried Archie, “you’re not—”

“I am, really.”

“Oh, Bob Cooper, I’m pleased to see you! Tell me all your story.”

“Not yet, chummie; it is too long, or rather you’re too weak. Why, you’re crying!”

“It’s tears of joy!”

“Well, well; I would join you, lad, but tears ain’t in my line. But somebody else will want to see you to-morrow.”

“Who?”

“Just wait and see.”

Archie did wait. Indeed he had to; for the doctor left express orders that he was not to be disturbed.

The evening sun was streaming over the hills when Sarah entered next day and gave a look towards the bed.

“I’m awake, Sarah.”

“It’s Bob,” said Sarah, “and t’other little gent. They be both a-comin’ upstairs athout their boots.”

Archie was just wondering what right Sarah had to call Bob Cooper by his christian name, when Bob himself came quietly in.

“Ah!” he said, as he approached the bed, “you’re beginning to look your old self already. Now who is this, think you?”

Archie extended a feeble white hand.

“Why, Whitechapel!” he exclaimed joyfully. “Wonders will never cease!”

“Well, Johnnie, and how are ye? I told ye, ye know, that ‘the king, might come in the cadger’s way.’”

“Not much king about me now, Harry; but sit down. Why I’ve come through such a lot since I saw you, that I begin to feel quite aged. Well, it is just like old times seeing you. But you’re not a bit altered. No beard, or moustache, or anything, and just as cheeky-looking as when you gave me that thrashing in the wood at Burley. But you don’t talk so Cockneyfied.”

“No, Johnnie; ye see I’ve roughed it a bit, and learned better English in the bush and scrub. But I say, Johnnie, I wouldn’t mind being back for a day or two at Burley. I think I could ride your buck-jumping ‘Eider Duck’ now. Ah, I won’t forget that first ride, though; I’ve got to rub myself yet whenever I think of it.”

“But how on earth did you get here at all, the pair of you?”

“Well,” said Harry, “that ain’t my story ’alf so much as it is Bob’s. I reckon he better tell it.”

“Oh, but I haven’t the gift of the gab like you, Harry! I’m a slow coach. I am a duffer at a story.”

“Stop telling both,” cried Archie. “I don’t want any story about the matter. Just a little conversational yarn; you can help each other out, and what I don’t understand, why I’ll ask, that’s all.”

“But wait a bit,” he continued. “Touch that bell, Harry. Pull hard; it doesn’t ring else. My diggins are not much account. Here comes Sarah, singing. Bless her old soul! I’d been dead many a day if it hadn’t been for Sarah.”

“Look here, Sarah.”

“I’m looking nowheres else, Mister Broadbent; but mind you this, if there’s too much talking, I’m to show both these gents downstairs. Them’s the doctor’s orders, and they’ve got to be obeyed. Now, what’s your will, sir?”

“Tea, Sarah.”

“That’s right. One or two words at a time and all goes easy. Tea you shall have in the twinkling of a bedpost. Tea and etceteras.”

Sarah was as good as her word. In ten minutes she had laid a little table and spread it with good things; a big teapot, cups and saucers, and a steaming urn.

Then off she went singing again.

Archie wondered what made her so happy, and meant to ask her when his guests were gone.

“Now, young Squire,” said Harry, “I’ll be the lady; and if your tea isn’t to your taste, why just holler.”

“But don’t call me Squire, Harry; I left that title at home. We’re all equal here. No kings and no cadgers.”

“Well, Bob, when last I saw you in old England, there was a sorrowful face above your shoulders, and I’ll never forget the way you turned round and asked me to look after your mother’s cat.”

“Ah, poor mother! I wish I’d been better to her when I had her. However, I reckon we’ll meet some day up-bye yonder.”

“Yes, Bob, and you jumped the fence and disappeared in the wood! Where did you go?”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Fifteen.

Bob's Story: Wild Life at the Diggings.

"Well, it all came about like this, Archie: 'England,' I said to myself, says I, 'ain't no place for a poor man.' Your gentry people, most o' them anyhow, are just like dogs in the manger. The dog couldn't eat the straw, but he wouldn't let the poor hungry cow have a bite. Your landed proprietors are just the same; they got their land as the dog got his manger. They took it, and though they can't live on it all, they won't let anybody else do it."

"You're rather hard on the gentry, Bob."

"Well, maybe, Archie; but they ain't many o' them like Squire Broadbent. Never mind, there didn't seem to be room for me in England, and I couldn't help noticing that all the best people, and the freest, and kindest, were men like your Uncle Ramsay, who had been away abroad, and had gotten all their dirty little meannesses squeezed out of them. So when I left you, after cutting that bit o' stick, I made tracks for London. I hadn't much money, so I tramped all the way to York, and then took train. When I got to London, why I felt worse off than ever. Not a soul to speak to; not a face I knew; even the bobbies looking sour when I asked them a civil question; and starvation staring me in the face."

"Starvation, Bob?"

"Ay, Archie, and money in my pocket. Plenty o' shilling dinners; but, lo! what was one London shilling dinner to the like o' me? Why, I could have bolted three! Then I thought of Harry here, and made tracks for whitechapel. I found the youngster—I'd known him at Burley—and he was glad to see me again. His granny was dead, or somebody; anyhow, he was all alone in the world. But he made me welcome—downright happy and welcome. I'll tell you what it is, Archie lad, Harry is a little gentleman, Cockney here or Cockney there; and deep down below that white, thin face o' his, which three years and over of Australian sunshine hasn't made much browner, Harry carries a heart, look, see! that wouldn't disgrace an English Squire."

"Bravo, Bob! I like to hear you speak in that way about our friend."

"Well, that night I said to Harry, 'Isn't it hard, Harry.' I says, 'that in this free and enlightened land a man is put into gaol if he snares a rabbit?'

“‘Free and enlightened fiddlestick!’ that was Harry’s words. ‘I tell ye what it is, Bob,’ says he, ‘this country is played out. But I knows where there are lots o’ rabbits for the catching.’

“‘Where’s that?’ I says.

“‘Australia O!’ says Harry.

“‘Harry,’ says I, ‘let us pool up, and set sail for the land of rabbits—for Australia O!’

“‘Right you are,’ says Harry; and we pooled up on the spot; and from that day we haven’t had more’n one purse between the two of us, have we, Harry?”

“‘Only one,” said Harry; “and one’s enough between such old, old chums.”

“He may well say old, old chums, Archie; he may well put the two olds to it; for it isn’t so much the time we’ve been together, it’s what we’ve come through together; and shoulder to shoulder has always been our motto. We’ve shared our bed, we’ve shared our blanket, our damper and our water also, when there wasn’t much between the two of us.

“We got helped out by the emigration folks, and we’ve paid them since, and a bit of interest thrown in for luck like; but when we stood together in Port Jackson for the first time, the contents of our purse wouldn’t have kept us living long, I can assure you.

“‘Cities aren’t for the like of us, Harry,’ says I.

“‘Not now,’ says Harry.

“So we joined a gang going west. There was a rush away to some place where somebody had found gold, and Harry and I thought we might do as well as any o’ them.

“Ay, Archie, that was a rush. ‘Tinklers, tailors, sodgers, sailors.’ I declare we thought ourselves the best o’ the whole gang, and I think so still.

“We were lucky enough to meet an old digger, and he told us just exactly what to take and what to leave. One thing we did take was steamboat and train, as far as they would go, and this helped us to leave the mob a bit in the rear.

“Well, we got high up country at long last—”

“Hold!” cried Harry. “He’s missing the best of it. Is that fair, Johnnie?”

“No, it isn’t fair.”

“Why, Johnnie, we hadn’t got fifty miles beyond civilisation when, what with the heat and the rough food and bad water, Johnnie, my London legs and my London heart failed me, and down I must lie. We were near a bit of a cockatoo farmer’s shanty.”

“Does it pay to breed cockatoos?” said Archie innocently.

“Don’t be the death o’ me, Johnnie. A cockatoo farmer is just a crofter. Well, in there Bob helped me, and I could go no farther. How long was I ill, Bob?”

“The best part o’ two mouths, Harry.”

“Ay, Johnnie, and all that time Bob there helped the farmer—dug for him, trenched and fenced, and all for my sake, and to keep the life in my Cockney skin.”

“Well, Harry,” said Bob, “you proved your worth after we got up. You hardened down fine after that fever.”

Harry turned towards Archie.

“You mustn’t believe all Bob says, Johnnie, when he speaks about me. Bob is a good-natured, silly sort of a chap; and though he has a beard now, he ain’t got more ’n ’alf the lime-juice squeezed out of him yet.”

“Never mind, Bob,” said Archie, “even limes and lemons should not be squeezed dry. You and I are country lads, and we would rather retain a shade of greenness than otherwise; but go on, Bob.”

“Well, now,” continued Bob, “I don’t know that Harry’s fever didn’t do us both good in the long run; for when we started at last for the interior, we met a good lot of the rush coming back. There was no fear of losing the tracks. That was one good thing that came o’ Harry’s fever. Another was, that it kind o’ tightened his constitution. La! he could come through anything after that—get wet to the skin and dry again; lie out under a tree or under the dews o’ heaven, and never complain of stiffness; and eat corn beef and damper as much as you’d like to put before him; and he never seemed to tire. As for me, you know, Archie, I’m an old bush bird. I was brought up in the woods and wilds; and, faith, I’m never so much at home as I am in the forests. Not but what we found the march inland wearisome enough. Worst of it was, we had no horses, and we had to do a

lot of what you might call good honest begging; but if the squatters did give us food going up, we were willing to work for it.”

“If they’d let us, Bob.”

“Which they didn’t. Hospitality and religion go hand in hand with the squatter. When I and Harry here set out on that terribly long march, I confess to both of ye now I didn’t feel at all certain as to how anything at all would turn out. I was just as bad as the young bear when its mother put it down and told it to walk. The bear said, ‘All right, mother; but how is it done?’ And as the mother only answered by a grunt, the young bear had to do the best it could; and so did we.

“‘How is it going to end?’ I often said to Harry.

“‘We can’t lose anything, Bob,’ Harry would say, laughing, ‘except our lives, and they ain’t worth much to anybody but ourselves; so I’m thinkin’ we’re safe.’”

Here Bob paused a moment to stir his tea, and look thoughtfully into the cup, as if there might be some kind of inspiration to be had from that.

He laughed lightly as he proceeded:

“I’m a bad hand at a yarn; better wi’ the gun and the ‘girn,’ Harry. But I’m laughing now because I remember what droll notions I had about what the Bush, as they call it, would be like when we got there.”

“But, Johnnie,” Harry put in, “the curious thing is, that we never did get there, according to the settlers.”

“No?”

“No; because they would always say to us, ‘You’re going Bush way, aren’t ye, boys?’ And we would answer, ‘Why, ain’t we there now?’ And they would laugh.”

“That’s true,” said Bob. “The country never seemed to be Bush enough for anybody. Soon’s they settled down in a place the Bush’d be farther west.”

“Then the Bush, when one is going west,” said Archie, “must be like to-morrow, always one day ahead.”

“That’s it; and always keeping one day ahead. But it was Bush enough for us almost anywhere. And though I feel ashamed like to own it now, there was more than once that I wished I hadn’t gone there at all. But I had taken the jump, you see, and there was no going back. Well, I used to think at first that the heat would kill us, but it didn’t. Then I made sure the want of water would. That didn’t either, because, one way or another, we always came across some. But I’ll tell you what nearly killed us, and that was the lonesomeness of those forests. Talk of trees! La! Archie, you’d think of Jack and the beanstalk if you saw some we saw. And why didn’t the birds sing sometimes? But no, only the constant bicker, bicker of something in the grass. There were sounds though that did alarm us. We know now that they were made by birds and harmless beasts, but we were all in the dark then.

“Often and often, when we were just dropping, and thought it would be a comfort to lie down and die, we would come out of a forest all at once, and feel in a kind of heaven because we saw smoke, or maybe heard the bleating o’ sheep. Heaven? Indeed, Archie, it seemed to be; for we had many a kindly welcome from the roughest-looking chaps you could possibly imagine. And the luxury of bathing our poor feet, with the certainty of a pair of dry, clean socks in the mornin’, made us as happy as a couple of kings. A lump of salt junk, a dab of damper, and a bed in a corner made us feel so jolly we could hardly go to sleep for laughing.

“But the poor beggars we met, how they did carry on to be sure about their bad luck, and about being sold, and this, that, and t’other. Ay, and they didn’t all go back. We saw dead bodies under trees that nobody had stopped to bury; and it was sad enough to notice that a good many of these were women, and such pinched and ragged corpses! It isn’t nice to think back about it.

“Had anybody found gold in this rush? Yes, a few got good working claims, but most of the others stopped till they couldn’t stop any longer, and had to get away east again, crawling, and cursing their fate and folly.

“But I’ll tell you, Archie, what ruined most o’ them. Just drink. It is funny that drink will find its way farther into the bush at times than bread will.

“Well, coming in at the tail o’ the day, like, as Harry and I did, we could spot how matters stood at a glance, and we determined to keep clear of bush hotels. Ah! they call them all hotels. Well, I’m a rough un, Archie, but the scenes I’ve witnessed in some of those drinking houffs has turned my stomach. Maudlin, drunken miners, singing, and blethering, and boasting; fighting and rioting worse than poachers, Archie, and among them—heaven help us!—poor women folks that would melt your heart to look on.

“Can we settle down here a bit?’ I said to Harry, when we got to the diggings.

“We’ll try our little best, old chum,’ was Harry’s reply.

“And we did try. It was hard even to live at first. The food, such as it was in the new stores, was at famine price, and there was not much to be got from the rivers and woods. But after a few months things mended; our station grew into a kind o’ working town. We had even a graveyard, and all the worst of us got weeded out, and found a place there.

“Harry and I got a claim after no end of prospecting that we weren’t up to. We bought our claim, and bought it cheap; and the chap we got it from died in a week. Drink? Ay, Archie, drink. I’ll never forget, and Harry I don’t think will, the last time we saw him. We had left him in a neighbour’s hut down the gully dying to all appearance, too weak hardly to speak. We bade him ‘good-bye’ for the last time as we thought, and were just sitting and talking like in our slab hut before turning in, and late it must have been, when the door opened, and in came Glutz, that was his name. La! what a sight! His face looked like the face of a skeleton with some parchment drawn tight over it, his hollow eyes glittered like wildfire, his lips were dry and drawn, his voice husky.

“He pointed at us with his shining fingers, and uttered a low cry like some beast in pain; then, in a horrid whisper, he got out these words:

“Give me drink, drink, I’m burning.’

“I’ve seen many a sight, but never such a one as that, Archie. We carried him back. Yes, we did let him have a mouthful. What mattered it. Next day he was in a shallow grave. I suppose the dingoes had him. They had most of those that died.

“Well, by-and-by things got better with Harry and me; our claim began to yield, we got dust and nuggets. We said nothing to anybody. We built a better sort of shanty, and laid out a morsel of garden, we fished and hunted, and soon learned to live better than we’d done before, and as we were making a bit of money we were as happy as sandboys.

“No, we didn’t keep away from the hotel—they soon got one up—it wouldn’t have done not to be free and easy. But we knew exactly what to do when we did go there. We could spin our bits o’ yarns, and smoke our pipes, without losing our heads. Sometimes shindies got up though, and revolvers were used freely enough, but as a rule it was pretty quiet.”

“Only once, when that little fellow told you to ‘bail up.’”

“What was that, Harry?” asked Archie.

“Nothing much,” said Bob shyly.

“He caught him short round the waist, Johnnie, and smashed everything on the counter with him, then flung him straight and clear through the doorway. When he had finished he quietly asked what was to pay, and Bob was a favourite after that. I reckon no one ever thought of challenging him again.”

“Where did you keep your gold?”

“We hid it in the earth in the tent. There was a black fellow came to look after us every day. We kept him well in his place, for we never could trust him; and it was a good thing we did, as I’m going to tell you.

“We had been, maybe, a year and a half in the gully, and had got together a gay bit o’ swag, when our claim gave out all at once as ’twere—some shift o’ the ground or lode. Had we had machinery we might have made a round fortune, but there was no use crying about it. We quietly determined to make tracks. We had sent some away to Brisbane already—that we knew was safe, but we had a good bit more to take about us. However, we wouldn’t have to walk all the way back, for though the place was half-deserted, there were horses to be had, and farther along we’d manage to get drags.

“Two of the worst hats about the place were a man called Vance, and a kind of broken-down surgeon of the name of Williams. They lived by their wits, and the wonder is they hadn’t been hanged long ago.

“It was about three nights before we started, and we were coming home up the gully. The moon was shining as bright as ever I’d seen it. The dew was falling too, and we weren’t sorry when we got inside. Our tame dingo came to meet us. He had been a pup that we found in the bush and brought up by hand, and a more faithful fellow never lived. We lit our fat-lamp and sat down to talk, and a good hour, or maybe more, went by. Then we lay down, for there was lots to be done in the morning.

“There was a little hole in the hut at one end where Wango, as we called the wild dog, could crawl through; and just as we were dozing off I heard a slight noise, and opened my eyes enough to see poor Wango creeping out. We felt sure he wouldn’t go far, and would rush in and alarm us if there were the slightest danger. So in a minute more I was sleeping as soundly as only a miner can sleep, Archie. How long I may have slept, or how late or early it was, I couldn’t say, but I awoke all at once with a start. There was a man

in the hut. Next minute a shot was fired. I fell back, and don't remember any more. Harry there will tell you the rest."

"It was the shot that wakened me, Archie, but I felt stupid. I groped round for my revolver, and couldn't find it. Then, Johnnie, I just let them have it Tom Sayers's fashion—like I did you in the wood, if you remember."

"There were two of them?"

"Ay, Vance and the doctor. I could see their faces by the light of their firing. They didn't aim well the first time, Johnnie, so I settled them. I threw the doctor over my head. His nut must have come against something hard, because it stilled him. I got the door opened and had my other man out. Ha! ha! It strikes me, Johnnie, that I must have wanted some exercise, for I never punished a bloke before as I punished that Vance. He had no more strength in him than a bandicoot by the time I was quite done with him, and looked as limp all over and just as lively as 'alf a pound of London tripe.

"I just went to the bluff-top after that, and coo-eed for help, and three or four right good friends were with us in as many minutes, Johnnie.

"We thought Bob was dead, but he soon spoke up and told us he wasn't, and didn't mean to die.

"Our chums would have lynched the ruffians that night. The black fellow was foremost among those that wanted to. But I didn't like that, no more did Bob. They were put in a tent, tied hand and foot, and our black fellow made sentry over them. Next day they were all gone. Then we knew it was a put-up job. Poor old Wango was found with his throat cut. The black fellow had enticed him out and taken him off, then the others had gone for us."

"But our swag was safe," said Bob, "though I lay ill for months after. And now it was Harry's turn to nurse; and I can tell you, Archie, that my dear, old dead-and-gone mother couldn't have been kinder to me than he was. A whole party of us took the road back east, and many is the pleasant evening we spent around our camp fire.

"We got safe to Brisbane, and we got safe here; but somehow we're a kind o' sick of mining."

"Ever hear more of your assailants?" asked Archie.

“What, the chaps who tried to bail us up? Yes. We did hear they’d taken to bush-ranging, and are likely to come to grief at that.”

“Well, Bob Cooper, I think you’ve told your story pretty tidily, with Harry’s assistance; and I don’t wonder now that you’ve only got one purse between you.”

“Ah!” said Bob, “it would take weeks to tell you one half of our adventures. We may tell you some more when we’re all together in the Bush doing a bit of farming.”

“All together?”

“To be sure! D’ye reckon we’ll leave you here, now we’ve found you? We’ll have one purse between three.”

“Indeed, Bob, we will not. If I go to the Bush—and now I’ve half a mind to—I’ll work like a New Hollander.”

“Bravo! You’re a chip o’ the old block. Well, we can arrange that. We’ll hire you. Will that do, my proud young son of a proud old sire?”

“Yes; you can hire me.”

“Well, we’ll pay so much for your hands, and so much for your head and brains.”

Archie laughed.

“And,” continued Bob, “I’m sure that Sarah will do the very best for the three of us.”

“Sarah! Why, what do you mean, Bob?”

“Only this, lad: Sarah has promised to become my little wife.”

The girl had just entered.

“Haven’t you, Sarah?”

“Hain’t I what?”

“Promised to marry me.”

“Well, Mister Archie Broadbent, now I comes to think on’t, I believes I ’ave. You know, mister, you wouldn’t never ’ave married me.”

“No, Sarah.”

“Well, and I’m perfectly sick o’ toilin’ up and down these stairs. That’s ’ow it is, sir.”

“Well, Sarah,” said Archie, “bring us some more nice tea, and I’ll forgive you for this once, but you mustn’t do it any more.”

It was late ere Bob and Harry went away. Archie lay back at once, and when, a few minutes after, the ex-policeman’s wife came in to see how he was, she found him sound and fast.

Archie was back again at Burley Old Farm, that is why he smiled in his dreams.

“So I’m going to be a hired man in the bush,” he said to himself next morning. “That’s a turn in the kaleidoscope of fortune.”

However, as the reader will see, it did not quite come to this with Archie Broadbent.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Sixteen.

A Miner's Marriage.

It was the cool season in Sydney. In other words, it was winter just commencing; so, what with balmy air and beauty everywhere around, no wonder Archie soon got well. He had the kindest treatment too, and he had youth and hope.

He could now write home to his parents and Elsie a long, cheerful letter without any twinge of conscience. He was going to begin work soon in downright earnest, and get straight away from city life, and all its allurements; he wondered, he said, it had not occurred to him to do this before, only it was not too late to mend even yet. He hated city life now quite as much as he had previously loved it, and been enamoured of it.

It never rains but it pours, and on the very day after he posted his packet to Burley he received a registered letter from his uncle. It contained a bill of exchange for fifty pounds. Archie blushed scarlet when he saw it.

Now had this letter and its contents been from his father, knowing all he did of the straits at home, he would have sent the money back. But his uncle evidently knew whom he had to deal with; for he assured Archie in his letter that it was a loan, not a gift. He might want it he said, and he really would be obliging him by accepting it. He—Uncle Ramsay—knew what the world was, and so on and so forth, and the letter ended by requesting Archie to say nothing about it to his parents at present.

“Dear old boy,” said Archie half aloud, and tears of gratitude sprang to his eyes. “How thoughtful and kind! Well, it’ll be a loan, and I’ll pray every night that God may spare him till I get home to shake his honest brown paw, and thrust the fifty pounds back into it. No, it would be really unkind to refuse it.”

He went straight away—walking on feathers—to Bob’s hotel. He found him and Harry sitting out on the balcony drinking sherbet. He took a seat beside them.

“I’m in clover, boys,” he cried exultingly, as he handed the cash to Bob to look at.

“So you are,” said Bob, reading the figures. “Well, this is what my old mother would call a Godsend. I always said your Uncle Ramsay was as good as they make ’em.”

“It looks a lot of money to me at present,” said Archie. “I’ll have all that to begin life with; for I have still a few pounds left to pay my landlady, and to buy a blanket or two.”

“Well, as to what you’ll buy, Archie,” said Bob Cooper, “if you don’t mind leaving that to us, we will manage all, cheaper and better than you could; for we’re old on the job.”

“Oh! I will with pleasure, only—”

“I know all about that. You’ll settle up. Well, we’re all going to be settlers. Eh? See the joke?”

“Bob doesn’t often say funny things,” said Harry; “so it must be a fine thing to be going to get married.”

“Ay, lad, and I’m going to do it properly. Worst of it is, Archie, I don’t know anybody to invite. Oh, we must have a dinner! Bother breakfasts, and hang honeymoons. No, no; a run round Sydney will suit Sarah better than a year o’ honeymooning nonsense. Then we’ll all go off in the boat to Brisbane. That’ll be a honeymoon and a half in itself. Hurrah! Won’t we all be so happy! I feel sure Sarah’s a jewel.”

“How long did you know her, Bob, before you asked her the momentous question?”

“Asked her what!”

“To marry you.”

“Oh, only a week! La! that’s long enough. I could see she was true blue, and as soft as rain. Bless her heart! I say, Archie, who’ll we ask?”

“Well, I know a few good fellows—”

“Right. Let us have them. What’s their names?”

Out came Bob’s notebook, and down went a dozen names.

“That’ll be ample,” said Archie.

“Well,” Bob acquiesced with a sigh, “I suppose it must. Now we’re going to be spliced by special licence, Sarah and I. None of your doing things by half. And Harry there is going to order the cabs and carriages, and favours and music, and the parson, and everything firstchop.”

The idea of “ordering the parson” struck Archie as somewhat incongruous; but Bob had his own way of saying things, and it was evident he would have his own way in doing things too for once.

“And,” continued Bob, “the ex-policeman’s wife and I are going to buy the bonnie things to-morrow. And as for the ‘bobby’ himself, we’ll have to send him away for the day. He is too fond of one thing, and would spoil the splore.”

Next day sure enough Bob did start off with the “bobby’s” wife to buy the bonnie things. A tall, handsome fellow Bob looked too; and the tailor having done his best, he was altogether a dandy. He would persist in giving his mother, as he called her, his arm on the street, and the appearance of the pair of them caused a good many people to look after them and smile.

However, the “bonnie things” were bought, and it was well he had someone to look after him, else he would have spent money uselessly as well as freely. Only, as Bob said, “It was but one day in his life, why shouldn’t he make the best of it?”

He insisted on making his mother a present of a nice little gold watch. No, he wouldn’t let her have a silver one, and it should be “set with blue-stones.” He would have that one, and no other.

“Too expensive? No, indeed!” he cried. “Make out the bill, master, and I’ll knock down my cheque. Hurrah! one doesn’t get married every morning, and it isn’t everybody who gets a girl like Sarah when he does get spliced! So there!”

Archie had told Bob and Harry of his first dinner at the hotel, and how kind and considerate in every way the waiter had been, and how he had often gone back there to have a talk.

“It is there then, and nowhere else,” said Bob, “we’ll have our wedding dinner.”

Archie would not gainsay this; and nothing would satisfy the lucky miner but chartering a whole flat for a week.

“That’s the way we’ll do it,” he said; “and now look here, as long as the week lasts, any of your friends can drop into breakfast, dinner, or supper. We are going to do the thing proper, if we sell our best jackets to help to pay the bill. What say, old chummie?”

“Certainly,” said Harry; “and if ever I’m fool enough to get married, I’ll do the same kind o’ thing.”

A happy thought occurred to Archie the day before the marriage.

“How much loose cash have you, Bob?”

“I dunno,” said Bob, diving his hands into both his capacious pockets—each were big enough to hold a rabbit—and making a wonderful rattling.

“I reckon I’ve enough for to-morrow. It seems deep enough.”

“Well, my friend, hand over.”

“What!” cried Bob, “you want me to bail up?”

“Bail up!”

“You’re a downright bushranger, Archie. However, I suppose I must obey.”

Then he emptied his pockets into a pile on the table—gold, silver, copper, all in the same heap. Archie counted and made a note of all, put part away in a box, locked it, gave Bob back a few coins, mostly silver, and stowed the rest in his purse.

“Now,” said Archie, “be a good old boy, Bob; and if you want any more money, just ask nicely, and perhaps you’ll have it.”

There was a rattling thunder-storm that night, which died away at last far beyond the hills, and next morning broke bright, and cool, and clear.

A more lovely marriage morning surely never yet was seen.

And in due time the carriages rolled up to the church door, horses and men bedecked in favours, and right merry was the peal that rang forth from Saint James’s.

Sarah did not make by any means an uninteresting bride. She had not over-dressed, so that showed she possessed good taste.

As for the stalwart Northumbrian, big-bearded Bob, he really was splendid. He was all a man, I can assure you, and bore himself as such in spite of the fact that his black

broadcloth coat was rather wrinkly in places, and that his white kid gloves had burst at the sides.

There was a glorious glitter of love and pride in his dark blue eyes as he towered beside Sarah at the altar, and he made the responses in tones that rang through all the church.

After the ceremony and vestry business Bob gave a sigh of relief, and squeezed Sarah's hand till she blushed.

The carriage was waiting, and a pretty bit of a mob too. And before Bob jumped in he said, "Now, Harry, for the bag."

As he spoke he gave a look of triumph towards Archie, as much as to say, "See how I have sold you."

Harry handed him a bag of silver coins.

"Stand by, you boys, for a scramble," shouted Bob in a voice that almost brought down the church.

"Coo-ee!"

And out flew handful after handful, here, there, and everywhere, till the sack was empty.

When the carriages got clear away at last, there was a ringing cheer went up from the crowd that really did everybody's heart good to hear.

Of course the bridegroom stood up and waved his hat back, and when at last he subsided:

"Och!" he sighed, "that is the correct way to get married. I've got all their good wishes, and they're worth their weight in gold, let alone silver."

The carriages all headed away for the heights of North Shore, and on to the top of the bay, from whence such a glorious panorama was spread out before them as one seldom witnesses. The city itself was a sight; but there were the hills, and rocks, and woods, and the grand coast line, and last, though not least, the blue sea itself.

The breakfast was al fresco. It really was a luncheon, and it would have done credit to the wedding of a Highland laird or lord, let alone a miner and quondam poacher. But Australia is a queer place. Bob's money at all events had been honestly come by, and

everybody hailed him king of the day. He knew he was king, and simply did as he pleased. Here is one example of his abounding liberality. Before starting back for town that day he turned to Archie, as a prince might turn:

“Archie, chummie,” he said.

“You see those boys?”

“Yes.”

“Well, they all look cheeky.”

“Very much so, Bob.”

“And I dearly love a cheeky boy. Scatter a handful of coins among them, and see that there be one or two yellow ones in the lot.”

“What nonsense!” cried Archie; “what extravagant folly, Bob!”

“All right,” said Bob quietly. “I’ve no money, but—” He pulled out his splendid gold hunter.

“What are you going to do?”

“Why, let them scramble for the watch.”

“No, no, Bob; I’ll throw the coins.”

“You have to,” said Bob, sitting down, laughing.

The dinner, and the dance afterwards, were completely successful. There was no overcrowding, and no stuck-up-ness, as Bob called it. Everybody did what he pleased, and all were as happy and jolly as the night was long.

Bob did not go away on any particular honeymoon. He told Sarah they would have their honeymoon out when they went to the Bush.

Meanwhile, day after day, for a week, the miner bridegroom kept open house for Archie’s friends; and every morning some delightful trip was arranged, which, faithfully carried out, brought everyone hungry and happy back to dinner.

There is more beauty of scenery to be seen around Sydney in winter than would take volumes to describe by pen, and acres of canvas to depict; and, after all, both author and artist would have to admit that they had not done justice to their subject.

Now that he had really found friends—humble though they might be considered in England—life to Archie, which before his accident was very grey and hopeless, became bright and clear again. He had a present, and he believed he had a future. He saw new beauties everywhere around him, even in the city; and the people themselves, who in his lonely days seemed to him so grasping, grim, and heartless, began to look pleasant in his eyes. This only proves that we have happiness within our reach if we only let it come to us, and it never will while we sit and sulk, or walk around and growl.

Bob, with his young wife and Archie and Harry, made many a pilgrimage all round the city, and up and through the sternly rugged and grand scenery among the Blue Mountains. Nor was it all wild and stern, for valleys were visited, whose beauty far excelled anything else Archie had ever seen on earth, or could have dreamt of even. Sky, wood, hill, water, and wild flowers all combined to form scenes of loveliness that were entrancing at this sweet season of the year.

Twenty times a day at least Archie was heard saying to himself, “Oh, how I wish sister and Rupert were here!”

Then there were delightful afternoons spent in rowing about the bay.

I really think Bob was taking the proper way to enjoy himself after all. He had made up his mind to spend a certain sum of money on seeing all that was worth seeing, and he set himself to do so in a thoroughly business way. Well, if a person has got to do nothing, the best plan is to do it pleasantly.

So he would hire one of the biggest, broadest-beamed boats he could find, with two men to row. They would land here and there in the course of the afternoon, and towards sunset get well out into the centre of the bay. This was the time for enjoyment. The lovely chain of houses, the woods, and mansions half hid in a cloudland of soft greens and hazy blues; the far-off hills, the red setting sun, the painted sky, and the water itself casting reflections of all above.

Then slowly homewards, the chains of lights springing up here, there, and everywhere as the gloaming began to deepen into night.

If seeing and enjoying such scenes as these with a contented mind, a good appetite, and the certainty of an excellent dinner on their return, did not constitute genuine happiness, then I do not know from personal experience what that feeling is.

But the time flew by. Preparations had to be made to leave this fascinating city, and one day Archie proposed that Bob and he should visit Winslow in his suburban villa.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Seventeen.

Mr Winslow in a Different Light.

“You’ll find him a rough stick,” said Archie.

“What, rougher than me or Harry?” said Bob.

“Well, as you’ve put the question I’ll answer you pat. I don’t consider either you or Harry particularly rough. If you’re rough you’re right, Bob, and it is really wonderful what a difference mixing with the world has done for both of you; and if you knew a little more of the rudiments of English grammar, you would pass at a pinch.”

“Thank ye,” said Bob.

“You’ve got a bit of the bur-r-r of Northumbria in your brogue, but I do believe people like it, and Harry isn’t half the Cockney he used to be. But, Bob, this man—I wish I could say gentleman—Winslow never was, and never could be, anything but a shell-back. He puts me in mind of the warty old lobsters one sees crawling in and out among the rocks away down at the point yonder.

“But, oh!” added Archie, “what a little angel the daughter is! Of course she is only a baby. And what a lovely name—Etheldene! Isn’t it sweet, Bob?”

“I don’t know about the sweetness; there is a good mouthful of it, anyhow.”

“Off you go, Bob, and dress. Have you darned those holes in your gloves?”

“No; bought a new pair.”

“Just like your extravagance. Be off!”

Bob Cooper took extra pains with his dressing to-day, and when he appeared at last before his little wife Sarah, she turned him round and round and round three times, partly for luck, and partly to look at him with genuine pride up and down.

“My eye,” she said at last, “you does look stunning! Not a pin in sight, nor a string sticking out anywheres. You’re going to see a young lady, I suppose; but Sarah ain’t jealous of her little man. She likes to see him admired.”

“Yes,” said Bob, laughing; “you’ve hit the nail straight on the head; I am going to see a young lady. She is fourteen year old, I think. But bless your little bobbing bit o’ a heart, lass, it isn’t for her I’m dressed. No; I’m going with t’ young Squire. He may be all the same as us out here, and lets me call him Archie. But what are they out here, after all? Why, only a set o’ whitewashed heathens. No, I must dress for the company I’m in.”

“And the very young lady—?”

“Is a Miss Winslow. I think t’ young Squire is kind o’ gone on her, though she is only a baby. Well, good-bye, lass.”

“Good-bye, little man.”

Etheldene ran with smiles and outstretched arms to meet Archie, but drew back when she noticed the immense bearded stranger.

“It’s only Bob,” said Archie. “Is your father in?”

“Yes, and we’re all going to have tea out here under the trees.”

The “all” was not a very large number; only Etheldene’s governess and father, herself, and a girl playmate.

Poor Etheldene’s mother had died in the Bush when she was little more than a baby. The rough life had hardly suited her. And this child had been such a little bushranger from her earliest days that her present appearance, her extreme beauty and gentleness, made another of those wonderful puzzles for which Australia is notorious.

Probably Etheldene knew more about the blacks, with their strange customs and manners, their curious rites and superstitions, and more about the home life of wallabies, kangaroos, dingoes, birds, insects, and every thing that grew wild, than many a professed naturalist; but she had her own names, or names given by blacks, to the trees and to the wild flowers.

While Etheldene, somewhat timidly it must be confessed, was leading big Bob round the gardens and lawns by the hand as if he were a kind of exaggerated schoolboy, and showing him all her pets—animate and inanimate—her ferns and flowers and birds,

Winslow himself came upon the scene with the Morning Herald in his hand. He was dressed—if dressing it could be called—in the same careless manner Archie had last seen him. It must be confessed, however, that this semi-negligent style seemed to suit him. Archie wondered if ever he had worn a necktie in his life, and how he would look in a dress suit. He lounged up with careless ease, and stuck out his great spade of a hand.

Archie remembered he was Etheldene's father, and shook it.

“Well, youngster, how are you? Bobbish, eh? Ah, I see Ethie has got in tow with a new chum. Your friend? Is he now? Well, that's the sort of man I like. He's bound to do well in this country. You ain't a bad sort yourself, lad; but nothing to that, no more than a young turkey is to an emu. Well, sit down.”

Mr Winslow flung himself on the grass. It might be rather damp, but he dared not trust his weight and bulk on a lawn-chair.

“So your friend's going to the Bush, and going to take you with him, eh?”

Archie's proud soul rebelled against this way of talking, but he said nothing. It was evident that Mr Winslow looked upon him as a boy.

“Well, I hope you'll do right both of you. What prospects have you?”

Archie told him how high his hopes were, and how exalted his notions.

“Them's your sentiments, eh? Then my advice is this: Pitch 'em all overboard—the whole jing-bang of them. Your high-flown notions sink you English greenhorns. Now, when I all but offered you a position under me—”

“Under your gardener,” said Archie, smiling. “Well, it's all the same. I didn't mean to insult your father's son. I wanted to know if you had the grit and the go in you.”

“I think I've both, sir. Father—Squire Broadbent—”

“Squire Fiddlestick!”

“Sir!”

“Go on, lad, never mind me. Your father—”

“My father brought me up to work.”

“Tossing hay, I suppose, raking flower-beds and such. Well, you’ll find all this different in Australian Bush-life; it is sink or swim there.”

“Well, I’m going to swim.”

“Bravo, boy!”

“And now, sir, do you mean to tell me that brains go for nothing in this land of contrariety?”

“No,” cried Winslow, “no, lad. Goodness forbid I should give you that impression. If I had only the gift of the gab, and were a good writer, I’d send stuff to this paper,” (here he struck the sheet that lay on the grass) “that would show men how I felt, and I’d be a member of the legislature in a year’s time. But this is what I say, lad, Brains without legs and arms, and a healthy stomach, are no good here, or very little. We want the two combined; but if either are to be left out, why leave out the brains. There is many an English youth of gentle birth and good education that would make wealth and honour too in this new land of ours, if he could pocket his pride, don a workman’s jacket, and put his shoulder to the wheel. That’s it, d’ye see?”

“I think I do.”

“That’s right. Now tell me about your uncle. Dear old man! We never had a cross word all the time I sailed with him.”

Archie did tell him all, everything, and even gave him his last letter to read.

By-and-by Etheldene came back, still leading her exaggerated schoolboy.

“Sit down, Mr Cooper, on the grass. That’s the style.”

“Well,” cried Archie, laughing, “if everybody is going to squat on the grass, so shall I.”

Even Etheldene laughed at this; and when the governess came, and servants with the tea, they found a very happy family indeed.

After due introductions, Winslow continued talking to Bob.

“That’s it, you see, Mr Cooper; and I’m right glad you’ve come to me for advice. What I don’t know about settling in Bushland isn’t worth knowing, though I say it myself. There

are plenty long-headed fellows that have risen to riches very quickly, but I believe, lad, the same men would have made money in their own country. They are the geniuses of finance; fellows with four eyes in their head, and that can look two ways at once. But they are the exception, and the ordinary man needn't expect such luck, because he won't get it.

"Now there's yourself, Mr Cooper, and your friend that I haven't seen; you've made a lucky dive at the fields, and you're tired of gold-digging. I don't blame you. You want to turn farmer in earnest. On a small scale you are a capitalist. Well, mind, you're going to play a game, in which the very first movement may settle you for good or evil.

"Go to Brisbane. Don't believe the chaps here. Go straight away up, and take time a bit, and look round. Don't buy a pig in a poke. Hundreds do. There's a lot of people whose interest is to sell A1 claims, and a shoal of greenhorns with capital who want to buy. Now listen. Maybe not one of these have any experience. They see speculation in each other's eyes; and if one makes a grab, the other will try to be before him, and very likely the one that lays hold is hoisted. Let me put it in another way. Hang a hook, with a nice piece of pork on it, overboard where there are sharks. Everyone would like the pork, but everyone is shy and suspicious. Suddenly a shark, with more speculation in his eye than the others, prepares for a rush, and rather than he shall have it all the rest do just the same, and the lucky one gets hoisted. It's that way with catching capitalists. So I say again, Look before you leap. Don't run after bargains. They may be good, but— This young fellow here has some knowledge of English farming. Well, that is good in its way, very good; and he has plenty of muscle, and is willing to work, that is better. If he were all alone, I'd tell him to go away to the Bush and shear sheep, build fences, and drive cattle for eighteen months, and keep his eyes wide open, and his ears too, and he'd get some insight into business. As it is, you're all going together, and you'll all have a look at things. You'll see what sort of stock the country is suited for—sheep, or cattle, or both; if it is exposed, or wet, or dry, or forest, or all together. And you'll find out if it be healthy for men and stock, and not 'sour' for either; and also you'll consider what markets are open to you. For there'd be small use in rearing stock you couldn't sell. See?"

"Yes," said Bob; "I see a lot of difficulties in the way I hadn't thought of."

"Go warily then, and the difficulties will vanish. I think I'll go with you to Brisbane," added Winslow, after a pause. "I'm getting sick already of civilised life."

Etheldene threw her arms round her father's neck.

"Well, birdie, what is it? 'Fraid I go and leave you too long?"

“You mustn’t leave me at all, father. I’m sometimes sick of civilised life. I’m going with you wherever you go.”

That same evening after dinner, while Etheldene was away somewhere with her new friend—showing him, I think, how to throw the boomerang—Winslow and Archie sat out in the verandah looking at the stars while they sipped their coffee.

Winslow had been silent for a time, suddenly he spoke.

“I’m going to ask you a strange question, youngster,” he said.

“Well, sir?” said Archie.

“Suppose I were in a difficulty, from what you have seen of me would you help me out if you could?”

“You needn’t ask, sir,” said Archie. “My uncle’s friend.”

“Well, a fifty-pound note would do it.”

Archie had his uncle’s draft still with him. He never said a word till he had handed it to Winslow, and till this eccentric individual had crumpled it up, and thrust it unceremoniously, and with only a grunt of thanks, into one of his capacious pockets.

“But,” said Archie, “I would rather you would not look upon it as a loan. In fact, I am doubting the evidence of my senses. You—with all the show of wealth I see around me—to be in temporary need of a poor, paltry fifty pounds! Verily, sir, this is the land of contrarities.”

Winslow simply laughed.

“You have a lot to learn yet,” he said, “my young friend; but I admire your courage, and your generous-heartedness, though not your business habits.”

Archie and Bob paid many a visit to Wistaria Grove—the name of Winslow’s place—during the three weeks previous to the start from Sydney.

One day, when alone with Archie, Winslow thrust an envelope into his hands.

“That’s your fifty pounds,” he said. “Why, count it, lad; don’t stow it away like that. It ain’t business.”

“Why,” said Archie, “here are three hundred pounds, not fifty pounds!”

“It’s all yours, lad, every penny; and if you don’t put it up I’ll put it in the fire.”

“But explain.”

“Yes, nothing more easy. You mustn’t be angry. No? Well, then, I knew, from all accounts, you were a chip o’ the old block, and there was no use offending your silly pride by offering to lend you money to buy a morsel of claim, so I simply borrowed yours and put it out for you.”

“Put it out for me?”

“Yes, that’s it; and the money is honestly increased. Bless your innocence! I could double it in a week. It is making the first thousand pounds that is the difficulty in this country of contrarities, as you call it.”

When Archie told Bob the story that evening, Bob’s answer was:

“Well, lad, I knew Winslow was a good-hearted fellow the very first day I saw him. Never you judge a man by his clothes, Archie.”

“First impressions certainly are deceiving,” said Archie; “and I’m learning something new every day of my life.”

“I am going round to Melbourne for a week or two, boys,” said Winslow one day. “Which of you will come with me?”

“I’ll stop here,” said Bob, “and stick to business. You had better go, Archie.”

“I would like to, if—if I could afford it.”

“Now, just look here, young man, you stick that eternal English pride of yours in your pocket. I ask you to come with me as a guest, and if you refuse I’ll throw you overboard. And if, during our journey, I catch you taking your pride, or your purse either, out of your pocket, I’ll never speak another word to you as long as I live.”

“All right,” said Archie, laughing; “that settles it. Is Etheldene going too?”

“Yes, the child is going. She won’t stay away from her old dad. She hasn’t a mother, poor thing.”

Regarding Archie’s visit to Victoria, we must let him speak himself another time; for the scene of our story must now shift.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eighteen.

“In This New Land of Ours.”

There was something in the glorious lonesomeness of Bush-life that accorded most completely with Archie's notions of true happiness and independence. His life now, and the lives of all the three, would be simply what they chose to make them. To use the figurative language of the New Testament, they had “taken hold of the plough,” and they certainly had no intention of “looking back.”

Archie felt (this too is figurative) as the mariner may be supposed to feel just leaving his native shore to sail away over the broad, the boundless ocean to far-off lands. His hand is on the tiller; the shore is receding; his eye is aloft, where the sails are bellying out before the wind. There is hardly a sound, save the creaking of the blocks, or rattle of the rudder chains, the joyous ripple of the water, and the screaming of the sea-birds, that seem to sing their farewells. Away ahead is the blue horizon and the heaving sea, but he has faith in his good barque, and faith in his own skill and judgment, and for the time being he is a Viking; he is “monarch of all he surveys.”

“Monarch of all he surveys?” Yes; these words are borrowed from the poem on Robinson Crusoe, you remember; that stirring story that so appeals to the heart of every genuine boy.

There was something of the Robinson Crusoe element in Archie's present mode of living, for he and his friends had to rough it in the same delightfully primitive fashion. They had to know and to practise a little of almost every trade under the sun; and while life to the boy—he was really little more—was very real and very earnest, it felt all the time like playing at being a man.

But how am I to account for the happiness—nay, even joyfulness—that appeared to be infused in the young man's very blood and soul? Nay, not appeared to be only, but that actually was—a joyfulness whose effects could at times be actually felt in his very frame and muscle like a proud thrill, that made his steps and tread elastic, and caused him to gaily sing to himself as he went about at his work. May I try to explain this by a little homely experiment, which you yourself may also perform? See, here then I have a small disc of zinc, no larger than a coat button, and I have also a shilling-piece. I place the

former on my tongue, and the latter between my lower lip and gum, and lo! the moment I permit the two metallic edges to touch I feel a tingling thrill, and if my eyes be shut I perceive a flash as well. It is electricity passing through the bodily medium—my tongue. The one coin becomes en rapport, so to speak, with the other. So in like manner was Archie's soul within him en rapport with all the light, the life, the love he saw around him, his body being but the wholesome, healthy, solid medium.

En rapport with the light. Why, by day this was everywhere—in the sky during its midday blue brightness; in the clouds so gorgeously painted that lay over the hills at early morning, or over the wooded horizon near eventide. En rapport with the light dancing and shimmering in the pool down yonder; playing among the wild flowers that grew everywhere in wanton luxuriance; flickering through the tree-tops, despite the trailing creepers; gleaming through the tender greens of fern fronds in cool places; sporting with the strange fantastic, but brightly-coloured orchids; turning greys to white, and browns to bronze; warming, wooing, beautifying all things—the light, the lovely light. En rapport with the life. Ay, there it was. Where was it not? In the air, where myriads of insects dance and buzz and sing and poise hawk-like above flowers, as if inhaling their sweetness, or dart hither and thither in their zigzag course, and almost with the speed of lightning; where monster beetles go droning lazily round, as if uncertain where to alight; where moths, like painted fans, hover in the sunshine, or fold their wings and go to sleep on flower-tops. In the forests, where birds, like animated blossoms, living chips of dazzling colours, hop from boughs, climb stems, run along silvery bark on trees, hopping, jumping, tapping, talking, chattering, screaming, with bills that move and throats that heave even when their voices cannot be heard in the feathered babel. Life on the ground, where thousands of busy beetles creep, or play hide-and-seek among the stems of tall grass, and where ants innumerable go in search of what they somehow never seem to find. Life on the water slowly sailing round, or in and out among the reeds, in the form of bonnie velvet ducks and pretty spangled teal. Life in the water, where shoals of fish dart hither and thither, or rest for a moment in shallows to bask in the sun, their bodies all a-quiver with enjoyment. Life in the sky itself, high up. Behold that splendid flock of wonga-wonga pigeons, with bronzen wings, that seem to shake the sunshine off them in showers of silver and gold, or, lower down, that mob of snowy-breasted cockatoos, going somewhere to do something, no doubt, and making a dreadful din about it, but quite a sight, if only from the glints of lily and rose that appear in the white of their outstretched wings and tails. Life everywhere.

En rapport with all the love around him. Yes, for it is spring here, though the autumn tints are on the trees in groves and woods at Burley. Deep down in the forest yonder, if you could penetrate without your clothes being torn from your back, you might listen to the soft murmur of the doves that stand by their nests in the green gloom of fig trees; you would linger long to note the love passages taking place among the cosy wee, bright,

and bonnie parrakeets; you would observe the hawk flying silently, sullenly, home to his castle in the inaccessible heights of the gum trees, but you would go quickly past the forest dens of lively cockatoos. For everywhere it is spring with birds and beasts. They have dressed in their gayest; they have assumed their fondest notes and cries; they live and breathe and buzz in an atmosphere of happiness and love.

Well, it was spring with Nature, and it was spring in Archie's heart.

Work was a pleasure to him.

That last sentence really deserves a line to itself. Without the ghost of an intention to moralise, I must be permitted to say, that the youth who finds an undoubted pleasure in working is sure to get on in Australia. There is that in the clear, pure, dry air of the back Bush which renders inactivity an impossibility to anyone except ne'er-do-wells and born idiots. This is putting it strongly, but it is also putting it truthfully.

Archie felt he had done with Sydney, for a time at all events, when he left. He was not sorry to shake the dust of the city from his half-wellingtons as he embarked on the Canny Scotia, bound for Brisbane.

If the Winslows had not been among the passengers he certainly would have given vent to a sigh or two.

All for the sake of sweet little Etheldene? Yes, for her sake. Was she not going to be Rupert's wife, and his own second sister? Oh, he had it all nicely arranged, all cut and dry, I can assure you!

Here is a funny thing, but it is also a fact. The very day that the Canny Scotia was to sail, Archie took Harry with him, and the two started through the city, and bore up for the shop of Mr Glorie.

They entered. It was like entering a gloomy vault. Nothing was altered. There stood the rows on rows of dusty bottles, with their dingy gilt labels; the dusty mahogany drawers; the morsel of railined desk with its curtain of dirty red; there were the murky windows with their bottles of crusted yellows and reds; and up there the identical spider still working away at his dismal web, still living in hopes apparently of some day being able to catch a fly.

The melancholy-looking new apprentice, who had doubtless paid the new premium, a long lantern-jawed lad with great eyes in hollow sockets, and a blue-grey face, stood looking at the pair of them.

“Where is your master, Mr—?”

“Mr Myers, sir. Myers is my name.”

“Where is Mr Glorie, Mr Myers?”

“D’ye wish to see’m, sir?”

“Don’t it seem like it?” cried Harry, who for the life of him “could not help putting his oar in.”

“Master’s at the back, among—the soap.”

He droned out the last words in such a lugubrious tone that Archie felt sorry for him.

Just then, thinking perhaps he scented a customer, Mr Glorie himself entered, all apron from the jaws to the knees.

“Ah! Mr Glorie,” cried Archie. “I really couldn’t leave Sydney without saying ta-ta, and expressing my sorrow for breaking—”

“Your indenture, young sir?”

“No; I’m glad I broke that. I mean the oil-jar. Here is a sovereign towards it, and I hope there’s no bad feeling.”

“Oh, no, not in the least, and thank you, sir, kindly!”

“Well, good-bye. Good-bye Mr Myers. If ever I return from the Bush I’ll come back and see you.”

And away they went, and away went Archie’s feeling of gloom as soon as he got to the sunny side of the street.

“I say,” said Harry, “that’s a lively coon behind the counter. Looks to me like a love-sick bandicoot, or a consumptive kangaroo. But don’t you know there is such a thing as being too honest? Now that old death-and-glory chap robbed you, and had it been me, and I’d called again, it would have been to kick him. But you’re still the old Johnnie.”

Now if I were writing all this tale from imagination, instead of sketching the life and struggles of a real live laddie, I should have ascended into the realms of romance, and made a kind of hero of him thus: he should have gone straight away to the bank when he received that 50 pounds from his uncle, and sent it back, and then gone off to the bush with twopence halfpenny in his pocket, engaged himself to a squatter as under-man, and worked his way right up to the pinnacle of fortune.

But Archie had not done that; and between you and me and the binnacle, not to let it go any further, I think he did an extremely sensible thing in sticking to the money.

Oh, but plenty of young men who do not have uncles to send them fifty-pound notes to help them over their first failures, do very well without such assistance! So let no intending emigrant be disheartened.

Again, as to Winslow's wild way of borrowing said 50 pounds, and changing it into 300 pounds, that was another "fluke," and a sort of thing that might never happen again in a hundred years.

Pride did come in again, however, with a jump—with a gay Northumbrian bound—when Bob and Harry seriously proposed that Johnnie, as the latter still called him, should put his money in the pool, and share and share alike with them.

"No, no, no," said the young Squire, "don't rile me; that would be so obviously unfair to you, that it would be unfair to myself."

When asked to explain this seeming paradox, he added:

"Because it would rob me of my feeling of independence."

So the matter ended.

But through the long-headed kindness and business tact of Winslow, all three succeeded in getting farms that adjoined, though Archie's was but a patch compared to the united great farms of his chums, that stretched to a goodly two thousand acres and more, with land beyond to take up as pasture.

But then there was stock to buy, and tools, and all kinds of things, to say nothing of men's and boys' wages to be paid, and arms and ammunition to help to fill the larder.

At this time the railway did not go sweeping away so far west as it does now, the colony being very much younger, and considerably rougher; and the farms lay on the edge of the Darling Downs.

This was a great advantage, as it gave them the run of the markets without having to pay nearly as much in transit and freight as the stock was worth.

They had another advantage in their selection—thanks once more to Winslow—they had Bush still farther to the west of them. Not adjacent, to be sure, but near enough to make a shift of stock to grass lands, that could be had for an old song, as the saying is.

The selection was procured under better conditions than I believe it is to be had to-day; for the rent was only about ninepence an acre, and that for twenty years, the whole payable at any time in order to obtain complete possession.

(At present agricultural farms may be selected of not more than 1280 acres, and the rent is fixed by the Land Board, not being less than threepence per acre per annum. A licence is issued to the selector, who must, within five years, fence in the land or make permanent improvements of a value equal to the cost of the fence, and must also live on the selection. If at the end of that time he can prove that he has performed the above conditions, he will be entitled to a transferable lease for fifty years. The rent for the first ten years will be the amount as at first fixed, and the rent for every subsequent period of five years will be determined by the Land Board, but the greatest increase that can be made at any re-assessment is fifty per cent.)

It must not be imagined that this new home of theirs was a land flowing with milk and honey, or that they had nothing earthly to do but till the ground, sow seed, and live happy ever after. Indeed the work to be performed was all earthly, and the milk and honey had all to come.

A deal of the very best land in Australia is covered with woods and forests, and clearing has to be done.

Bob wished his busy little body of a wife to stay behind in Brisbane till he had some kind of a decent crib, as he called it, ready to invite her to.

But Sarah said, “No! Where you go I go. Your crib shall be my crib, Bob, and I shall bake the damper.” This was not very poetical language, but there was a good deal of sound sense about Sarah, even if there was but little poetry.

Well, it did seem at first a disheartening kind of wilderness they had come to, but the site for the homesteads had been previously selected, and after a night's rest in their rude tents and waggons, work was commenced. Right joyfully too,—

“Down with them! Down with the lords of the forests.”

This was the song of our pioneers. Men shouted and talked, and laughed and joked, saws rasped and axes rang, and all the while duty went merrily on. Birds find beasts, never disturbed before in the solitude of their homes, except by wandering blacks, crowded round—only keeping a safe distance away—and wondered whatever the matter could be. The musical magpies, or laughing jackasses, said they would soon settle the business; they would frighten those new chums out of their wits, and out of the woods. So they started to do it. They laughed in such loud, discordant, daft tones that at times Archie was obliged to put his fingers in his ears, and guns had to be fired to stop the row. So they were not successful. The cockatoos tried the same game; they cackled and skraighed like a million mad hens, and rustled and ruffled their plumage, and flapped their wings and flew, but all to no purpose—the work went on.

The beautiful lorries, parrakeets, and budgerigars took little notice of the intruders, but went farther away, deserting half-built nests to build new ones. The bonnie little long-tailed opossum peeped down from his perch on the gums, looking exceedingly wise, and told his wife that not in all his experience had there been such goings on in the forest lands, and that something was sure to follow it; his wife might mark his words for that. The wonga-wongas grumbled dreadfully; but great hawks flew high in the air, swooping round and round against the sun, as they have a habit of doing, and now and then gave vent to a shrill cry which was more of exultation than anything else. “There will be dead bones to pick before long.” That is what the hawks thought. Snakes now and then got angrily up, puffed and blew a bit, but immediately decamped into the denser cover.

The dingoes kept their minds to themselves until night fell, and the stars came out; the constellation called the Southern Cross spangled the heaven's dark blue, then the dingoes lifted up their voices and wept; and, oh, such weeping! Whoso has never heard a concert of Australian wild dogs can have no conception of the noise these animals are capable of. Whoso has once heard it, and gone to sleep towards the end of it, will never afterwards complain of the harmless musical reunions of our London cats.

But sleep is often impossible. You have got just to lie in bed and wonder what in the name of mystery they do it for. They seem to quarrel over the key-note, and lose it, and try for it, and get it again, and again go off into a chorus that would “ding doon” Tantallan Castle. And when you do doze off at last, as likely as not, you will dream of howling winds and hungry wolves till it is grey daylight in the morning.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Nineteen.

Burley New Farm.

There was so much to be done before things could be got “straight” on the new station, that the days and weeks flew by at a wonderful pace. I pity the man or boy who is reduced to the expedient of killing time. Why if one is only pleasantly and usefully occupied, or engaged in interesting pursuits, time kills itself, and we wonder where it has gone to.

If I were to enter into a minute description of the setting-up of the stock and agricultural farm, chapter after chapter would have to be written, and still I should not have finished. I do not think it would be unprofitable reading either, nor such as one would feel inclined to skip. But as there are a deal of different ways of building and furnishing new places the plan adopted by the three friends might not be considered the best after all. Besides, improvements are taking place every day even in Bush-life. However, in the free-and-easy life one leads in the Bush one soon learns to feel quite independent of the finer arts of the upholsterer.

In that last sentence I have used the adjective “easy;” but please to observe it is adjoined to another hyphenically, and becomes one with it—“free-and-easy.” There is really very little ease in the Bush. Nor does a man want it or care for it—he goes there to work. Loafers had best keep to cities and to city life, and look for their little enjoyments in parks and gardens by day, in smoke-filled billiard-rooms or glaringly-lighted music-halls by night, go to bed at midnight, and make a late breakfast on rusks and soda-water. We citizens of the woods and wilds do not envy them. We go to bed with the birds, or soon after. We go to sleep, no matter how hard our couches may be; and we do sleep too, and wake with clear heads and clean tongues, and after breakfast feel that nothing in the world will be a comfort to us but work. Yes, men work in the Bush; and, strange to say, though they go there young, they do not appear to grow quickly old. Grey hairs may come, and Nature may do a bit of etching on their brows and around their eyes with the pencil of time, but this does not make an atom of difference to their brains and hearts. These get a trifle tougher, that is all, but no older.

Well, of the three friends I think Archie made the best Bushman, though Bob came next, then Harry, who really had developed his powers of mind and body wonderfully, which only just proves that there is nothing after all, even for a Cockney, like rubbing shoulders against a rough world.

A dozen times a week at least Archie mentally thanked his father for having taught him to work at home, and for the training he had received in riding to hounds, in tramping over the fields and moors with Branson, in gaining practical knowledge at the barnyards, and last, though not least, in the good, honest, useful groundwork of education received from his tutor Walton.

There was something else that Archie never failed to feel thankful to heaven for, and that was the education his mother had given him.

Remember this: Archie was but a rough, harum-scarum kind of a British boy at best, and religious teaching might have fallen on his soul as water falls on a duck's back, to use a homely phrase. But as a boy he had lived in an atmosphere of refinement. He constantly breathed it till he became imbued with it; and he received the influence also second-hand, or by reflection, from his brother Rupert and his sister.

Often and often in the Bush, around the log fire of an evening, did Archie speak proudly of that beloved twain to his companions. His language really had, at times, a smack of real, downright innocence about it, as when he said to Bob once: "Mind you, Bob, I never was what you might call good. I said, and do say, my prayers, and all the like of that; but Roup and Elsie were so high above me that, after coming in from a day's work or a day on the hill, it used to be like going into church on a week-day to enter the green parlour. I felt my own mental weakness, and I tried to put off my soul's roughness with my dirty boots in the kitchen."

But Archie was now an excellent superintendent of work. He knew when things were being well done, and he determined they should be. Nothing riled him more than an attempt on the part of any of the men to take advantage of him.

They soon came to know him; not as a tyrant, but simply as one who would have things rightly done, and who knew when they were being rightly done, even if it were only so apparently simple a matter as planting a fence-post; for there is a right way and a wrong way of doing that.

The men spoke of him as the young Boss. Harry being ignored in all matters that required field-knowledge.

"We don't want nary a plumbline," said a man once, "when the young Boss's around. He carries a plumbline in his eye."

Archie never let any man know when he was angry; but they knew afterwards, however, that he had been so from the consequences. Yet with all his strictness he was kind-hearted, and very just. He had the happy gift of being able to put himself in the servant's place while judging betwixt man and master.

Communications were constantly kept up between the station and the railway, by means of waggons, or drays and saddle-horses. Among the servants were several young blacks. These were useful in many ways, and faithful enough; but required keeping in their places. To be in any way familiar with them was to lose their respect, and they were not of much consequence after that. When completed, the homestead itself was certainly not devoid of comfort, though everything was of the homeliest construction; for no large amount of money was spent in getting it up. A Scotchman would describe it as consisting of "twa butts and a ben," with a wing at the back. The capital letter L, laid down longways thus—I will give you some notion of its shape. There were two doors in front, and four windows, and a backdoor in the after wing, also having windows. The wing portion of the house contained the kitchen and general sitting-room; the right hand portion the best rooms, ladies' room included, but a door and passage communicated with these and the kitchen.

This house was wholly built of sawn wood, but finished inside with lath and plaster, and harled outside, so that when roofed over with those slabs of wood, such as we see some old-English church steeples made of, called "shingles," the building was almost picturesque. All the more so because it was built on high ground, and trees were left around and near it.

The kitchen and wing were par excellence the bachelor apartments, of an evening at all events.

Every thing that was necessary in the way of furnishing found its way into the homestead of Burley New Farm; but nothing else, with the exception of that of the guests'-room. Of this more anon.

The living-house was completed first; but all the time that this was being built men were very busy on the clearings, and the sites were mapped out for the large wool-shed, with huge adjoining yards, where the sheep at shearing-time would be received and seen to.

There were also the whole paraphernalia and buildings constituting the cattle and horse-yards, a killing and milking-yard; and behind these were slab huts, roofed with huge pieces of bark, rudely but most artistically fixed, for the men.

These last had fire-places, and though wholly built of wood, there was no danger of fire, the chimneys being of stone.

Most of the yards and outhouses were separate from each other, and the whole steading was built on elevated ground, the store-hut being not far from the main or dwelling-house.

I hardly know what to liken the contents of this store, or the inside of the place itself, to. Not unlike perhaps the half-deck or fore-cabin of a Greenland ship on the day when stores are being doled out to the men. Or, to come nearer home, if ever the reader has been in a remote and rough part of our own country, say Wales or Scotland, where gangs of navvies have been encamped for a time, at a spot where a new line of railway is being pushed through a gully or glen.

Just take a peep inside. There is a short counter of the rudest description, on which stand scales and weights, measures and knives. Larger scales stand on the floor, and everywhere around you are heaps of stores, of every useful kind you could possibly name or imagine, and these are best divided into four classes—eatables, wearables, luxuries, and tools.

Harry is at home here, and he has managed to infuse a kind of regularity into the place, and takes a sort of pride in knowing where all his wares are stored. The various departments are kept separate. Yonder, for instance, stand the tea, coffee, and cocoa-nibs, and near them the sugar of two kinds, the bags of flour, the cheeses (in boxes), the salt (in casks), soda, soap, and last, but not least, the tobacco and spirits; this last in a place by itself, and well out of harm's way. Then there is oil and candles—by-and-bye they will make these on the farm—matches—and this brings us to the luxuries—mustard, pepper of various sorts, vinegar, pickles, curry, potted salmon, and meats of many kinds, and bags of rice. Next there is a small store of medicines of the simplest, not to say roughest, sorts, both for man and beast, and rough bandages of flannel and cotton, with a bundle of splints.

Then comes clothing of all kinds—hats, shirts, jackets, boots, shoes, etc. Then tools and cooking utensils; and in a private cupboard, quite away in a corner, the ammunition.

It is unnecessary to add that harness and horse-shoes found a place in this store, or that a desk stood in one corner where account-books were kept, for the men did not invariably pay down on the nail.

I think it said a good deal for Sarah's courage that she came right away down into the Bush with her "little man," and took charge of the cooking department on the station,

when it was little, if any, better than simply a camp, with waggons for bedrooms, and a morsel of canvas for gentility's sake.

But please to pop your head inside the kitchen, now that the dwelling-house has been up for some little time. Before you reach the door you will have to do a bit of stepping, for outside nothing is tidied up as yet. Heaps of chips, heaps of stones and sticks and builders' rubbish, are everywhere. Even when you get inside there is a new smell—a limy odour—to greet you in the passage, but in the kitchen itself all is order and neatness. A huge dresser stands against the wall just under the window. The legs of it are a bit rough to be sure, but nobody here is likely to be hypercritical; and when the dinner-hour arrives, instead of the vegetables, meat, and odds-and-ends that now stand thereon, plates, and even knives and forks, will be neatly placed in a row, and Sarah herself, her cooking apron replaced by a neater and nattier one, will take the head of the table, one of the boys will say a shy kind of grace, and the meal will go merrily on.

On a shelf, slightly raised above the floor, stand rows of clean saucepans, stewpans, and a big, family-looking business of a frying-pan; and on the wall hang bright, shining dish-covers, and a couple of racks and shelves laden with delf.

A good fire of logs burns on the low hearth, and there, among ashes pulled on one side for the purpose, a genuine “damper” is baking, while from a movable “sway” depends a chain and crook, on which latter hangs a pot. This contains corned beef—very well, call it salt if you please. Anyhow, when Sarah lifts the lid to stick a fork into the boiling mess an odour escapes and pervades the kitchen quite appetising enough to make the teeth of a Bushman water, if he had done anything like a morning's work. There is another pot close by the fire, and in this sweet potatoes are boiling.

It is a warm spring day, and the big window is open to admit the air, else poor Sarah would be feeling rather uncomfortable.

What is “damper”? It is simply a huge, thick cake or loaf, made from extremely well-kneaded dough, and baked in the hot ashes of the hearth. Like making good oat cakes, before a person can manufacture a “damper” properly, he must be in a measure to the manner born. There is a deal in the mixing of the dough, and much in the method of firing, and, after all, some people do not care for the article at all, most useful and handy and even edible though it be. But I daresay there are individuals to be found in the world who would turn up their noses at good oat cake. Ah, well, it is really surprising what the air of the Australian Bush does in the way of increasing one's appetite and destroying fastidiousness.

But it is near the dinner-hour, and right nimbly Sarah serves it up; and she has just time to lave her face and hands, and change her apron, when in comes Bob, followed by Archie and Harry. Before he sits down Bob catches hold of Sarah by both hands, and looks admiringly into her face, and ends by giving her rosy cheek a kiss, which resounds through the kitchen rafters like the sound of a cattle-man's whip.

"I declare, Sarah lass," he says heartily, "you are getting prettier and prettier every day. Now at this very moment your lips and cheeks are as red as peonies, and your eyes sparkle as brightly as a young kangaroo's; and if any man a stone heavier than myself will make bold to say that I did wrong to marry you on a week's courtship, I'll kick him over the river and across the creek. 'For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.' Sit in, boys, and fire away. This beef is delightful. I like to see the red juice following the knife; and the sweet potatoes taste well, if they don't look pretty. What, Sarah, too much done? Not a bit o' them."

The creek that Bob talked about kicking somebody across was a kind of strath or glen not very far from the steading, and lying below it, green and luxuriant at present. It wound away up and down the country for miles, and in the centre of it was a stream or river or burn, well clothed on its banks with bush, and opening out here and there into little lakes or pools. This stream was—so old Bushmen said—never known to run dry.

In the winter time it would at times well merit the name of river, especially when after a storm a "spate" came down, with a bore perhaps feet high, carrying along in its dreadful rush tree trunks, rocks, pieces of bank—everything, in fact, that came in its way, or attempted to withstand its giant power. "Spates," however, our heroes hoped would come but seldom; for it is sad to see the ruin they make, and to notice afterwards the carcasses of sheep and cattle, and even horses, that bestrew the haughs, or banks, and give food to prowling dingoes and birds of the air, especially the ubiquitous crow.

The ordinary state of the water, however, is best described by the word stream or rivulet, while in droughty summers it might dwindle down to a mere burn meandering from pool to pool.

The country all around was plain and forest and rolling hills. It was splendidly situated for grazing of a mixed kind. But our three friends were not to be content with this, and told off the best part of it for future agricultural purposes. Even this was to be but a nucleus, and at this moment much of the land then untilled is yielding abundance of grain.

Not until the place was well prepared for them were cattle bought and brought home. Sheep were not to be thought of for a year or two.

With the cattle, when they began to arrive, Winslow, who was soon to pay the new settlement a visit, sent up a few really good stockmen. And now Archie was to see something of Bush-life in reality.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty.

Runaway Stock—Bivouac in the Bush-Night Scene.

Australian cattle have one characteristic in common with some breeds of pigeons, notably with those we call "homers." They have extremely good memories as to localities, and a habit of "making back," as it is termed, to the pastures from which they have been driven. This comes to be very awkward at times, especially if a whole herd decamps or takes "a moonlight flitting."

It would be mere digression to pause to enquire what God-given instinct it is, that enables half-wild cattle to find their way back to their old homes in as straight a line as possible, even when they have been driven to a new station by circuitous routes. Many other animals have this same homing power; dogs for example, and, to a greater extent, cats. Swallows and sea-birds, such as the Arctic gull, and the albatross, possess it in a very high degree; but it is still more wonderfully displayed in fur seals that, although dispersed to regions thousands and thousands of miles away during winter, invariably and unerringly find their road back to a tiny group of wave and wind-swept islands, four in number, called the Prybilov group, in the midst of the fog-shrouded sea of Behring. The whole question wants a deal of thinking out, and life is far too short to do it in.

One morning, shortly after the arrival of the first great herd of stock, word was brought to head-quarters that the cattle had escaped by stampede, and were doubtless on their way to the distant station whence they had been bought.

It was no time to ask the question, Who was in fault? Early action was necessary, and was provided for without a moment's hesitation.

I rather think that Archie was glad to have an opportunity of doing a bit of rough riding, and showing off his skill in horse management. He owned what Bob termed a clipper. Not a very handsome horse to look at, perhaps, but fleet enough and strong enough for anything. As sure-footed as a mule was this steed, and as regards wisdom, a perfect equine Solomon.

At a suggestion of Bob's he had been named Tell, in memory of the Tell of other days. Tell had been ridden by Archie for many weeks, so that master and horse knew each other well. Indeed Archie had received a lesson or two from the animal that he was not likely to forget; for one day he had so far forgotten himself as to dig the rowel into Tell's

sides, when there was really no occasion to do anything of the sort. This was more than the horse could stand, and, though he was not an out-and-out buck-jumper, nevertheless, a moment after the stirrup performance, Archie found himself making a voyage of discovery, towards the moon apparently. He descended as quickly almost as he had gone up, and took the ground on his shoulder and cheek, which latter was well skinned. Tell had stood quietly by looking at him, and as Archie patted him kindly, he forgave him on the spot, and permitted a remount.

Archie and Bob hardly permitted themselves to swallow breakfast, so anxious were they to join the stockmen and be off.

As there was no saying when they might return, they did not go unprovided for a night or two out. In front of their saddles were strapped their opossum rugs, and they carried also a tin billy each, and provisions, in the shape of tea, damper, and cooked corned beef; nothing else, save a change of socks and their arms.

Bob bade his wife a hurried adieu, Archie waved his hand, and next minute they were over the paddocks and through the clearings and the woods, in which the trees had been ring-barked, to permit the grass to grow. And such tall grass Archie had never before seen as that which grew in some parts of the open.

“Is it going to be a long job, think you, Bob?”

“I hardly know, Archie. But Craig is here.”

“Oh, yes, Gentleman Craig, as Mr Winslow insists on calling him! You have seen him.”

“Yes; I met him at Brisbane. And a handsome chap he is. Looks like a prince.”

“Isn’t it strange he doesn’t rise from the ranks, as one might say; that he doesn’t get on?”

“I’ll tell you what keeps him back,” said Bob, reining his horse up to a dead stop, that Archie might hear him all the easier.

“I’ll tell you what keeps him back now, before you see him. I mustn’t talk loud, for the very birds might go and tell the fellow, and he doesn’t like to be ’minded about it. He drinks!”

“But he can’t get drink in the Bush.”

“Not so easily, though he has been known before now to ride thirty miles to visit a hotel.”

“A shanty, you mean.”

“Well, they call ’em all hotels over here, you must remember.”

“And would he just take a drink and come back?”

Bob laughed.

“Heaven help him, no. It isn’t one drink, nor ten, nor fifty he takes, for he makes a week or two of it.”

“I hope he won’t take any such long rides while he is with us.”

“No. Winslow says we are sure of him for six months, anyhow. Then he’ll go to town and knock his cheque down. But come on, Craig and his lads will be waiting for us.”

At the most southerly and easterly end of the selection they met Gentleman Craig himself.

He rode forward to meet them, lifting his broad hat, and reining up when near enough. He did this in a beautifully urbane fashion, that showed he had quite as much respect for himself as for his employers. He was indeed a handsome fellow, and his rough Garibaldian costume fitted him, and set him out as if he had been some great actor.

“This is an awkward business,” he began, with an easy smile; “but I think we’ll soon catch the runaways up.”

“I hope so,” Bob said.

“Oh, it was all my fault, because I’m boss of my gang, you know. I ought to have known better, but a small mob of stray beasts got among ours, and by-and-by there was a stampede. It was dirty-dark last night, and looked like a storm, so there wouldn’t have been an ounce of use in following them up.”

He flicked his long whip half saucily, half angrily, as he spoke.

“Well, never mind,” Bob replied, “we’ll have better luck next, I’ve no doubt.”

Away they went now at a swinging trot, and on crossing the creek they met Craig's fellows.

They laid their horses harder at it now, Bob and Archie keeping a bit in the rear, though the latter declared that Tell was pulling like a young steam-engine.

"Why," cried Archie at last, "this beast means to pull my arms out at the shoulders. I always thought I knew how to hold the reins till now."

"They have a queer way with them, those bush-ranging horses," said Bob; "but I reckon you'll get up to them at last."

"If I were to give Tell his head, he would soon be in the van."

"In the van? Oh, I see, in the front!"

"Yes; and then I'd be lost. Why these chaps appear to know every inch of the ground. To me it is simply marvellous."

"Well, the trees are blazed."

"I've seen no blazed trees. Have you?"

"Never a one. I say, Craig."

"Hullo!" cried the head stockman, glancing over his shoulder.

"Are you steering by blazed trees?"

"No," he laughed; "by tracks. Cattle don't mind blazed trees much."

Perhaps Bob felt green now, for he said no more. Archie looked about him, but never a trail nor track could he decipher.

Yet on they rode, helter-skelter apparently, but cautiously enough for all that. Tell was full of fire and fun; for, like Verdant Green's horse, when put at a tiny tree trunk in his way, he took a leap that would have carried him over a five-bar-gate.

There was many a storm-felled tree in the way also and many a dead trunk, half buried in ferns; there were steep stone-clad hills, difficult to climb, but worse to descend, and

many a little rivulet to cross; but nothing could interfere with the progress of these hardy horses.

Although the sun was blazing hot, no one seemed to feel it much. The landscape was very wild, and very beautiful; but Archie got weary at last of its very loveliness, and was not one whit sorry when the afternoon halt was called under the pleasant shade of trees, and close by the banks of a rippling stream.

The horses were glad to drink as well as the men, then they were hobbled, and allowed to browse while all hands sat down to eat.

Only damper and beef, washed down by a billyful of the clear water, which, strange to say, was wonderfully cool.

When the sun was sinking low on the forest-clad horizon, there was a joyful but half-suppressed shout from Craig and his men. Part of the herd was in sight, quietly browsing up a creek.

Gentleman Craig pointed them out to Archie; but he had to gaze a considerable time before he could really distinguish anything that had the faintest resemblance to cattle.

“Your eye is young yet to the Bush,” said Craig, laughing, but not in any unmannerly way.

“And now,” he continued, “we must go cautiously or we spoil all.”

The horsemen made a wide *détour*, and got between the bush and the mob; and the ground being favourable, here it was determined to camp for the night. The object of the stockmen was not to alarm the herd, but to prevent them from getting any farther off till morning, when the march homewards would commence. With this intent, log fires were built here and there around the herd; and once these were well alight the mob was considered pretty safe. All, however, had been done very quietly; and during the livelong night, until grey dawn broke over the hills, the fellows would have to keep those fires burning.

Supper was a more pleasing meal, for there was the addition of tea; after which, with their feet to the log fire—Bob and Craig enjoying a whiff of tobacco—they lay as much at their ease, and feeling every whit as comfortable, as if at home by the “ingleside.” Gentleman Craig had many stories and anecdotes to relate of the wild life he had had, that both Archie and Bob listened to with delight.

"I'll take one more walk around," said Craig, "then stretch myself on my downy bed. Will you come with me, Mr Broadbent?"

"With pleasure," said Archie.

"Mind how you step then. Keep your whip in your hand, but on no account crack it. We have to use our intellect versus brute force. If the brute force became alarmed and combined, then our intellect would go to the wall, there would be another stampede, and another long ride to-morrow."

Up and down in the starlight, or by the fitful gleams of the log fires, they could see the men moving like uneasy ghosts. Craig spoke a word or two kindly and quietly as he passed, and having made his inspection, and satisfied himself that all was comparatively safe, he returned with Archie to the fire.

Bob was already fast asleep, rolled snugly in his blanket, with his head in the hollow of his upturned saddle; and Archie and Craig made speed to follow his example.

As for Craig, he was soon in the land of Nod. He was a true Bushman, and could go off sound as a bell the moment he stretched himself on his "downy bed," as he called it.

But Archie felt the situation far too new to permit of slumber all at once. He had never lain out thus before; and the experience was so delightful to him that he felt justified in lying awake a bit, and looking at the stars. The distant dingoes began to howl, and more than once some great dark bird flew over the camp, high overhead, but on silent wings.

His thoughts wandered away over the thousands and thousands of miles that intervened between him and home, and he began to wonder what they were all doing at Burley; for it would be broad daylight there, and very likely his father was trudging over the moors, or through the stubbles. But dreams came and mingled with his waking thoughts at last, and were just usurping them all when he became conscious of the approach of stealthy footsteps.

He lay perfectly still, though his hand sought his ready revolver; for stories of black fellows stealing on out-sleeping travellers began to crowd through his mind, and being young to the Bush, he could not prevent that heart of his from throbbing uneasily and painfully against his ribs.

How did they brain people, he was wondering, with a boomerang or nullah? or was it not more common to spear them?

But, greatly to his relief, the figure immediately afterwards revealed itself in the person of one of the men, silently placing an armful of wood on the half-dying embers. Then he silently glided away again, and next minute Archie was wrapt in the elysium of forgetfulness.

The dews lay all about, glittering in the first beams of the sun, when he awoke, feeling somewhat cold and considerably stiff; but warm tea and a breakfast of wondrous solidity soon put him all to rights again.

Two nights after this the new stock was safe in the yards; and every evening before sundown, for many a day to come, they had to be “tailed,” and brought within the strong bars of the rendezvous.

Branding was the next business. This is no trifling matter with old cattle. With the calves indeed it is a bit troublesome at times, but the grown-up ones resent the adding of insult to injury. It is no uncommon thing for men to be severely injured during the operation. Nevertheless the agility displayed by the stockmen and their excessive coolness is marvellous to behold.

Most of those cattle were branded with a “B.H.,” which stood for Bob and Harry; but some were marked with the letters “A.B.,” for Archibald Broadbent, and—I need not hide the truth—Archie was a proud young man when he saw these marks. He realised now fully that he had commenced life in earnest, and was a squatter, not only in name, but in reality.

The fencing work and improvements still went gaily on, the ground being divided into immense paddocks, many of which our young farmers trusted to see ere long covered with waving grain.

The new herds soon got used to the country, and settled down on it, dividing themselves quietly into herds of their own making, that were found browsing together mornings and evenings in the best pastures, or gathered in mobs during the fierce heat of the middle-day.

Archie quickly enough acquired the craft of a cunning and bold stockman, and never seemed happier than when riding neck and neck with some runaway semi-wild bull, or riding in the midst of a mob, selecting the beast that was wanted. And at a job like the latter Tell and he appeared to be only one individual betwixt the two of them, like the fabled Centaur. He came to grief though once, while engaged heading a bull in as ugly a bit of country as any stockman ever rode over. It happened. Next chapter, please.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty One.

A Wild Adventure—Archie's Pride Receives a Fall.

It happened—I was going to say at the end of the other page—that in a few weeks' time Mr Winslow paid his promised visit to Burley New Farm, as the three friends called it.

Great preparations had been made beforehand because Etheldene was coming with her father, and was accompanied by a black maid. Both Etheldene and her maid had been accommodated with a dray, and when Sarah, with her cheeks like ripe cherries, and her eyes like sloes, showed the young lady to her bedroom, Etheldene was pleased to express her delight in no measured terms. She had not expected anything like this. Real mattresses, with real curtains, a real sofa, and real lace round the looking-glass.

"It is almost too good for Bush-life," said Etheldene; "but I am so pleased, Mrs Cooper; and everything is as clean and tidy as my own rooms in Sydney. Father, do come and see all this, and thank Mrs Cooper prettily."

Somewhat to Archie's astonishment a horse was led round next morning for Etheldene, and she appeared in a pretty dark habit, and was helped into the saddle, and gathered up the reins, and looked as calm and self-possessed as a princess could have done.

It was Gentleman Craig who was the groom, and a gallant one he made. For the life of him Archie could not help envying the man for his excessive coolness, and would have given half of his cattle—those with the bold "A.B.'s" on them—to have been only half as handsome.

Never mind. Archie is soon mounted, and cantering away by the young lady's side, and feeling so buoyant and happy all over that he would not have exchanged places with a king on a throne.

"Oh, yes," said Etheldene, laughing, as she replied to a question of Archie's, "I know nearly everything about cattle, and sheep too! But," she added, "I'm sure you are clever among them already."

Archie felt the blood mount to his forehead; but he took off his broad hat and bowed for the compliment, almost as prettily as Gentleman Craig could have done himself.

Now, there is such a thing as being too clever, and it was trying to be clever that led poor Archie to grief that day.

The young man was both proud and pleased to have an opportunity of showing Etheldene round the settlement, all the more so that there was to be a muster of the herds that day, and neighbour-squatters had come on horseback to assist. This was a kind of a love-darg which was very common in Queensland a few years ago, and probably is to this day.

Archie pointed laughingly towards the stock whip Etheldene carried. He never for a moment imagined it was in the girl's power to use or manage such an instrument.

"That is a pretty toy, Miss Winslow," he said.

"Toy, do you call it, sir?" said this young Diana, pouting prettily. "It is only a lady's whip, for the thong is but ten feet long. But listen."

It flew from her hands as she spoke, and the sound made every animal within hearing raise head and sniff the air.

"Well," said Archie, "I hope you won't run into any danger."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "danger is fun!" And she laughed right merrily, and looked as full of life and beauty as a bird in spring time.

Etheldene was tall and well-developed for her age, for girls in this strange land very soon grow out of their childhood.

Archie had called her Diana in his own mind, and before the day was over she certainly had given proof that she well merited the title.

New herds had arrived, and had for one purpose or another to be headed into the stock yards. This is a task of no little difficulty, and to-day being warm these cattle appeared unusually fidgety. Twos and threes frequently stampeded from the mob, and went determinedly dashing back towards the creek and forest, so there was plenty of opportunities for anyone to show off his horsemanship. Once during a chase like this Archie was surprised to see Etheldene riding neck and neck for a time with a furious bull. He trembled for her safety as he dashed onwards to her assistance. But crack, crack, crack went the brave girl's whip; she punished the runaway most unmercifully, and had succeeded in turning him ere her Northumbrian cavalier rode up. A moment

more and the bull was tearing back towards the herd he had left, a stockman or two following close behind.

“I was frightened for you,” said Archie.

“Pray, don’t be so, Mr Broadbent. I don’t want to think myself a child, and I should not like you to think me one. Mind, I’ve been in the Bush all my life.”

But there was more and greater occasion to be frightened for Etheldene ere the day was done. In fact, she ran so madly into danger, that the wonder is she escaped. She had a gallant, soft-mouthed horse—that was one thing to her advantage—and the girl had a gentle hand.

But Archie drew rein himself, and held his breath with fear, to see a maddened animal, that she was pressing hard, turn wildly round and charge back on horse and rider with all the fury imaginable. A turn of the wrist of the bridle hand, one slight jerk of the fingers, and Etheldene’s horse had turned on a pivot, we might almost say, and the danger was over.

So on the whole, instead of Archie having had a very grand opportunity for showing off his powers before this young Diana, it was rather the other way.

The hunt ended satisfactory to both parties; and while Sarah was getting an extra good dinner ready, Archie proposed a canter “to give them an appetite.”

“Have you got an appetite, Mr Broadbent? I have.”

It was evident Etheldene was not too fine a lady to deny the possession of good health.

“Yes,” said Archie; “to tell you the plain truth, I’m as hungry as a hunter. But it’ll do the nags good to stretch their legs after so much wheeling and swivelling.”

So away they rode again, side by side, taking the blazed path towards the plains.

“You are sure you can find your way back, I suppose?” said Etheldene.

“I think so.”

“It would be good fun to be lost.”

“Would you really like to be?”

“Oh, we would not be altogether, you know! We would find our way to some hut and eat damper, or to some grand hotel, I suppose, in the Bush, and father and Craig would soon find us.”

“Father and you have known Craig long?”

“Yes, many, many years. Poor fellow, it is quite a pity for him. Father says he was very clever at college, and is a Master of Arts of Cambridge.”

“Well, he has taken his hogs to a nice market.”

“But father would do a deal for him if he could trust him. He has told father over and over again that plenty of people would trust him if he could only trust himself.”

“Poor man! So nice-looking too! They may well call him Gentleman Craig.”

“But is it not time we were returning?”

“Look! look!” she cried, before Archie could answer. “Yonder is a bull-fight. Whom does the little herd belong to?”

“Not to us. We are far beyond even our pastures. We have cut away from them. This is a kind of no-man’s land, where we go shooting at times; and I daresay they are trespassers or wild cattle. Pity they cannot be tamed.”

“They are of no use to anyone, I have heard father say, except to shoot. If they be introduced into a herd of stock cattle, they teach all the others mischief. But see how they fight! Is it not awful?”

“Yes. Had we not better return? I do not think your father would like you to witness such sights as that.”

The girl laughed lightly.

“Oh,” she cried, “you don’t half know father yet! He trusts me everywhere. He is very, very good, though not so refined as some would have him to be.”

The cows of this herd stood quietly by chewing their cuds, under the shade of a huge gum tree, while two red-eyed giant bulls struggled for mastery in the open.

It was a curious fight, and a furious fight. At the time Archie and his companion came in sight of the conflict, they had closed, and were fencing with their horns with as much skill, apparently, as any two men armed with foils could have displayed. The main points to be gained appeared to be to unlock or get out of touch of each other's horns long enough to stab in neck and shoulder, and during the time of being in touch to force back and gain ground. Once during this fight the younger bull backed his opponent right to the top of a slight hill. It was a supreme effort, and evidently made in the hope that he would hurl him from a height at the other side. But in this he was disappointed; for the top was level, and the older one, regaining strength, hurled his enemy down the hill again far more quickly than he had come up. Round and round, and from side to side, the battle raged, till at long last the courage and strength of one failed completely. He suffered himself to be backed, and it was evident was only waiting an opportunity to escape uncut and unscathed. This came at length, and he turned and, with a cry of rage, dashed madly away to the forest. The battle now became a chase, and the whole herd, holloaing good luck to the victor, joined in it.

As there was no more to be seen, Archie and Etheldene turned their horses' heads homewards.

They had not ridden far, however, before the vanquished bull himself hove in sight. He was alone now, though still tearing off in a panic, and moaning low and angrily to himself.

It was at this moment that what Archie considered a happy inspiration took possession of our impulsive hero.

"Let us wait till he passes," he said, "and drive him before us to camp."

Easily said. But how was it to be done?

They drew back within the shadow of a tree, and the bull rushed past. Then out pranced knight Archie, cracking his stock whip.

The monster paused, and wheeling round tore up the ground with his hoofs in a perfect agony of anger.

"What next?" he seemed to say to himself. "It is bad enough to be beaten before the herd; but I will have my revenge now."

The brute's roaring now was like the sound of a gong, hollow and ringing, but dreadful to listen to.

Archie met him boldly enough, intending to cut him in the face as he dashed past. In his excitement he dug his spurs into Tell, and next minute he was on the ground. The bull rushed by, but speedily wheeled, and came tearing back, sure now of blood in which to dip his ugly hoofs.

Archie had scrambled up, and was near a tree when the infuriated beast came down on the charge. Even at this moment of supreme danger Archie—he remembered this afterwards—could not help admiring the excessively business-like way the animal came at him to break him up. There was a terrible earnestness and a terrible satisfaction in his face or eyes; call it what you like, there it was.

Near as Archie was to the tree, to reach and get round it was impossible. He made a movement to get at his revolver; but it was too late to draw and fire, so at once he threw himself flat on the ground. The bull rushed over him, and came into collision with the tree trunk. This confused him for a second or two, and Archie had time to regain his feet. He looked wildly about for his horse. Tell was quietly looking on; he seemed to be waiting for his young master. But Archie never would have reached the horse alive had not brave Etheldene's whip not been flicked with painful force across the bull's eyes. That blow saved Archie, though the girl's horse was wounded on the flank.

A minute after both were galloping speedily across the plain, all danger over; for the bull was still rooting around the tree, apparently thinking that his tormentors had vanished through the earth.

"How best can I thank you?" Archie was saying.

"By saying nothing about it," was Etheldene's answer.

"But you have saved my life, child."

"A mere bagatelle, as father says," said this saucy Queensland maiden, with an arch look at her companion. But Archie did not look arch as he put the next question.

"Which do you mean is the bagatelle, Etheldene, my life, or the saving of it?"

"Yes, you may call me Etheldene—father's friends do—but don't, please, call me child again."

“I beg your pardon, Etheldene.”

“It is granted, sir.”

“But now you haven’t answered my question.”

“What was it? I’m so stupid!”

“Which did you mean was the bagatelle—my life, or the saving of it?”

“Oh, both!”

“Thank you.”

“I wish I could save Gentleman Craig’s life,” she added, looking thoughtful and earnest all in a moment.

“Bother Gentleman Craig!” thought Archie; but he was not rude enough to say so.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because he once saved mine. That was when I was lost in the Bush, you know. He will tell you some day—I will ask him to. He is very proud though, and does not like to talk very much about himself.”

Archie was silent for a short time. Why, he was wondering to himself, did it make him wretched—as it certainly had done—to have Etheldene look upon his life and the saving of it as a mere bagatelle. Why should she not? Still the thought was far from pleasant. Perhaps, if he had been killed outright, she would have ridden home and reported his death in the freest and easiest manner, and the accident would not have spoiled her dinner. The girl could have no feeling; and yet he had destined her, in his own mind, to be Rupert’s wife. She was unworthy of so great an honour. It should never happen if he could prevent it. Suddenly it occurred to him to ask her what a bagatelle was.

“A bagatelle?” she replied. “Oh, about a thousand pounds. Father always speaks of a thousand pounds as a mere bagatelle.”

Archie laughed aloud—he could not help it; but Etheldene looked merrily at him as she remarked quietly, “You wouldn’t laugh if you knew what I know.”

“Indeed! What is it?”

“We are both lost!”

“Goodness forbid!”

“You won’t have grace to say to-day—there will be no dinner; that’s always the worst of being lost.”

Archie looked around him. There was not a blazed tree to be seen, and he never remembered having been in the country before in which they now rode.

“We cannot be far out,” he said, “and I believe we are riding straight for the creek.”

“So do I, and that is one reason why we are both sure to be wrong. It’s great fun, isn’t it?”

“I don’t think so. We’re in an ugly fix. I really thought I was a better Bushman than I am.”

Poor Archie! His pride had received quite a series of ugly falls since morning, but this was the worst come last. He felt a very crestfallen cavalier indeed.

It did not tend to raise his spirits a bit to be told that if Gentleman Craig were here, he would find the blazed-tree line in a very short time.

But things took a more cheerful aspect when out from a clump of trees rode a rough-looking stockman, mounted on a sackful of bones in the shape of an aged white horse.

He stopped right in front of them.

“Hillo, younkers! Whither away? Can’t be sundowners, sure-ly!”

“No,” said Archie; “we are not sundowners. We are riding straight home to Burley New Farm.”

“’Xcuse me for contradicting you flat, my boy. It strikes me ye ain’t boss o’ the sitivation. Feel a kind o’ bushed, don’t ye?”

Archie was fain to confess it.

“Well, I know the tracks, and if ye stump it along o’ me, ye won’t have to play at babes o’ the wood to-night.”

They did “stump it along o’ him,” and before very long found themselves in the farm pasture lands.

They met Craig coming, tearing along on his big horse, and glad he was to see them.

“Oh, Craig,” cried Etheldene, “we’ve been having such fun, and been bushed, and everything!”

“I found this ’ere young gent a-bolting with this ’ere young lady,” said their guide, whom Craig knew and addressed by the name of Hurricane Bill.

“A runaway match, eh? Now, who was in the fault? But I think I know. Let me give you a bit of advice, sir. Never trust yourself far in the Bush with Miss Ethie. She doesn’t mind a bit being lost, and I can’t be always after her. Well, dinner is getting cold.”

“Did you wait for us?” said Etheldene.

“Not quite unanimously, Miss Ethie. It was like this: Mr Cooper and Mr Harry waited for you, and your father waited for Mr Broadbent. It comes to the same thing in the end, you know.”

“Yes,” said Etheldene, “and it’s funny.”

“What did you come for, Bill? Your horse looks a bit jaded.”

“To invite you all to the hunt. Findlayson’s compliments, and all that genteel nonsense; and come as many as can. Why, the kangaroos, drat ’em, are eating us up. What with them and the dingoes we’ve been having fine times, I can tell ye!”

“Well, it seems to me, Bill, your master is always in trouble. Last year it was the blacks, the year before he was visited by bushrangers, wasn’t he?”

“Ye-es. Fact is we’re a bit too far north, and a little too much out west, and so everything gets at us like.”

“And when is the hunt?”

“Soon’s we can gather.”

“I’m going for one,” said Etheldene.

“What you, Miss?” said Hurricane Bill. “You’re most too young, ain’t ye?”

The girl did not condescend to answer him.

“Come, sir, we’ll ride on,” she said to Archie.

And away they flew.

“Depend upon it, Bill, if she says she is going, go she will, and there’s an end of it.”

“Humph!” That was Bill’s reply. He always admitted he had “no great fancy for womenfolks.”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Two.

Round the Log Fire—Hurricane Bill and the Tiger-Snake—Gentleman Craig's Resolve.

Kangaroo driving or hunting is one of the wild sports of Australia, though I have heard it doubted whether there was any real sport in it. It is extremely exciting, and never much more dangerous than a ride after the hounds at home in a rough country.

It really does seem little short of murder, however, to surround the animals and slay them wholesale; only, be it remembered, they are extremely hard upon the herbage. It has been said that a kangaroo will eat as much as two sheep; whether this be true or not, these animals must be kept down, or they will keep the squatter down. Every other species of wild animal disappears before man, but kangaroos appear to imagine that human beings were sent into the bush to make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before, and that both blades belong to them.

The only people from Burley New Farm who went to the Findlayson kangaroo drive were Harry, Archie, and Etheldene, and Craig to look after her. Me. Winslow stopped at home with Bob, to give him advice and suggest improvements; for he well knew his daughter would be safe with Gentleman Craig.

It was a long ride, however, and one night was to be spent in camp; but as there was nothing to do, and nothing in the shape of cattle or sheep to look after, it was rather jolly than otherwise. They found a delightful spot near a clear pool and close by the forest to make their pitch on for the night.

Hurricane Bill was the active party on this occasion; he found wood with the help of Harry, and enough of it to last till the morning. The beauty, or one of the beauties, of the climate in this part of Australia is, that with the sun the thermometer sinks, and the later spring and even summer nights are very pleasant indeed.

When supper was finished, and tea, that safest and best of stimulants, had been discussed, talking became general; everybody was in good spirits in the expectation of some fun on the morrow; for a longish ride through the depth of that gloomy forest would bring them to the plain and to Findlayson's in time for a second breakfast.

Hurricane Bill told many a strange story of Australian life, but all in the way of conversation; for Bill was a shy kind of man, and wanted a good deal of drawing-out, as the dog said about the badger.

Archie gave his experiences of hunting in England, and of shooting and fishing and country adventure generally in that far-off land, and he had no more earnest listener than Etheldene. To her England was the land of romance. Young though she was, she had read the most of Walter Scott's novels, and had an idea that England and Scotland were still peopled as we find these countries described by the great wizard, and she did not wish to be disillusioned. The very mention of the word "castle," or "ruin," or "coat of mail," brought fancies and pictures into her mind that she would not have had blotted out on any account.

Over and over again, many a day and many a time, she had made Archie describe to her every room in the old farm; and his turret chamber high up above the tall-spreading elm trees, where the rooks built and cawed in spring, and through which the wild winds of winter moaned and souged when the leaves had fallen, was to Etheldene a veritable room in fairyland.

"Oh," she said to-night, "how I should love it all! I do want to go to England, and I'll make father take me just once before I die."

"Before ye die, miss!" said Hurricane Bill. "Why it is funny to hear the likes o' you, with all the world before ye, talkin' about dying."

Well, by-and-by London was mentioned, and then it was Harry's turn. He was by no means sorry to have something to say.

"Shall I describe to you, Miss Winslow," he said, "some of the wild sights of Whitechapel?"

"Is it a dreadfully wild place, Mr Brown?"

"It is rather; eh, Johnnie?"

"I don't know much about it, Harry."

"Well, there are slums near by there, miss, that no man with a black coat and an umbrella dare enter in daylight owing to the wild beasts. Then there are peelers."

"What are peelers? Monkeys?"

“Yes, miss; they are a sort of monkeys—blue monkeys—and carry sticks same as the real African ourang-outangs do. And can’t they use them too!”

“Are they very ugly?”

“Awful, and venomous too; and at night they have one eye that shines in the dark like a wild cat’s, and you’ve got to stand clear when that eye’s on you.”

“Well,” said Etheldene, “I wouldn’t like to be lost in a place like that. I’d rather be bushed where I am. But I think, Mr Brown, you are laughing at me. Are there any snakes in Whitechapel?”

“No, thank goodness; no, miss. I can’t stand snakes much.”

“There was a pretty tiger crept past you just as I was talking though,” she said with great coolness.

Harry jumped and shook himself. Etheldene laughed.

“It is far enough away by this time,” she remarked. “I saw something ripple past you, Harry, like a whip-thong. I thought my eyes had made it.”

“You brought it along with the wood perhaps,” said Craig quietly.

“Pon my word,” cried Harry, “you’re a lot of Job’s comforters, all of you. D’ye know I won’t sleep one blessed wink to-night. I’ll fancy every moment there is a snake in my blanket or under the saddle.”

“They won’t come near you, Mr Brown,” said Craig. “They keep as far away from Englishmen as possible.”

“Not always,” said Bill. “Maybe ye wouldn’t believe it, but I was bitten and well-nigh dead, and it was a tiger as done it. And if I ain’t English, then there ain’t an Englishman ’twixt ’ere and Melbourne. See that, miss?” He held up a hand in the firelight as he spoke.

“Why,” said Etheldene, “you don’t mean to say the snake bit off half your little finger?”

“Not much I don’t; but he bit me on the finger, miss. I was a swagsman then, and was gathering wood, as we were to-night, when I got nipped, and my chum tightened a

morsel of string round it to keep the poison away from the heart, then he laid the finger on a stone and chopped it off with his spade. Fact what I'm telling you. But the poison got in the blood somehow all the same. They half carried me to Irish Charlie's hotel. Lucky, that wasn't far off. Then they stuck the whiskey into me."

"Did the whiskey kill the poison?" said Archie.

"Whiskey kill the poison! Why, young sir, Charlie's whiskey would have killed a kangaroo! But nothing warmed me that night; my blood felt frozen. Well, sleep came at last, and, oh, the dreams! 'Twere worse ten thousand times than being wi' Daniel in the den o' lions. Next day nobody hardly knew me; I was blue and wrinkled. I had aged ten years in a single night."

"I say," said Harry, "suppose we change the subject."

"And I say," said Craig, "suppose we make the beds."

He got up as he spoke, and began to busy himself in preparations for Etheldene's couch. It was easily and simply arranged, but the arrangement nevertheless showed considerable forethought.

He disappeared for a few minutes, and returned laden with all the necessary paraphernalia. A seven-foot pole was fastened to a tree; the other end supported by a forked stick, which he sharpened and drove into the ground. Some grass was spread beneath the pole, a blanket thrown carefully over it, the upturned saddle put down for a pillow, and a tent formed by throwing over the pole a loose piece of canvas that he had taken from his saddle-bow, weighted down by some stones, and the whole was complete.

"Now, Baby," said Craig, handing Etheldene a warm rug, "will you be pleased to retire?"

"Where is my flat candlestick?" she answered. Gentleman Craig pointed to the Southern Cross. "Yonder," he said. "Is it not a lovely one?"

"It puts me in mind of old, old times," said Etheldene with a sigh. "And you're calling me 'Baby' too. Do you remember, ever so long ago in the Bush, when I was a baby in downright earnest, how you used to sing a lullaby to me outside my wee tent?"

"If you go to bed, and don't speak any more, I may do so again."

"Good-night then. Sound sleep to everybody. What fun!" Then Baby disappeared.

Craig sat himself down near the tent, after replenishing the fire—he was to keep the first watch, then Bill would come on duty—and at once began to sing, or rather ‘croon’ over, an old, old song. His voice was rich and sweet, and though he sang low it could be heard distinctly enough by all, and it mingled almost mournfully with the souging of the wind through the tall trees.

“My song is rather a sorrowful ditty,” he had half-whispered to Archie before he began; “but it is poor Miss Ethie’s favourite.” But long before Craig had finished no one around the log fire was awake but himself.

He looked to his rifle and revolvers, placed them handy in case of an attack by blacks, then once more sat down, leaning his back against a tree and giving way to thought.

Not over pleasant thoughts were those of Gentleman Craig’s, as might have been guessed from his frequent sighs as he gazed earnestly into the fire.

What did he see in the fire? Tableaux of his past life? Perhaps or perhaps not. At all events they could not have been very inspiring ones. No one could have started in life with better prospects than he had done; but he carried with him wherever he went his own fearful enemy, something that would not leave him alone, but was ever, ever urging him to drink. Even as a student he had been what was called “a jolly fellow,” and his friendship was appreciated by scores who knew him. He loved to be considered the life and soul of a company. It was an honour dearer to him than anything else; but deeply, dearly had he paid for it.

By this time he might have been honoured and respected in his own country, for he was undoubtedly clever; but he had lost himself, and lost all that made life dear—his beautiful, queenly mother. He would never see her more. She was dead, yet the memory of the love she bore him was still the one, the only ray of sunshine left in his soul.

And he had come out here to Australia determined to turn over a new leaf. Alas! he had not done so.

“Oh, what a fool I have been!” he said in his thoughts, clenching his fists until the nails almost cut the palms.

He started up now and went wandering away towards the trees. There was nothing that could hurt him there. He felt powerful enough to grapple with a dozen blacks, but none were in his thoughts; and, indeed, none were in the forest.

He could talk aloud now, as he walked rapidly up and down past the weird grey trunks of the gum trees.

“My foolish pride has been my curse,” he said bitterly. “But should I allow it to be so? The thing lies in a nutshell I have never yet had the courage to say, ‘I will not touch the hateful firewater, because I cannot control myself if I do.’ If I take but one glass I arouse within me the dormant fiend, and he takes possession of my soul, and rules all my actions until sickness ends my carousal, and I am left weak as a child in soul and body. If I were not too proud to say those words to my fellow-beings, if I were not afraid of being laughed at as a coward! Ah, that’s it! It is too hard to bear! Shall I face it? Shall I own myself a coward in this one thing? I seem compelled to answer myself, to answer my own soul. Or is it my dead mother’s spirit speaking through my heart? Oh, if I thought so I—I—”

Here the strong man broke down. He knelt beside a tree trunk and sobbed like a boy. Then he prayed; and when he got up from his knees he was calm. He extended one hand towards the stars.

“Mother,” he said, “by God’s help I shall be free.”

When the morning broke pale and golden over the eastern hills, and the laughing jackasses came round to smile terribly loud and terribly chaffingly at the white men’s preparation for their simple breakfast, Craig moved about without a single trace of his last night’s sorrow. He was busy looking after the horses when Etheldene came bounding towards him with both hands extended, so frank and free and beautiful that as he took hold of them he could not help saying:

“You look as fresh as a fern this morning, Baby.”

“Not so green, Craig. Say ‘Not so green.’”

“No, not so green. But really to look at you brings a great big wave of joy surging all over my heart. But to descend from romance to common-sense. I hope you are hungry? I have just been seeing to your horse. Where do you think I found him?”

“I couldn’t guess.”

“Why in the water down yonder. Lying down and wallowing.”

“The naughty horse! Ah, here come the others! Good morning all.”

“We have been bathing,” said Archie. “Oh, how delicious!”

“Yes,” said Harry; “Johnnie and I were bathing down under the trees, and it really was a treat to see how quickly he came to bank when I told him there was an alligator taking stock.”

“We scared the ducks though. Pity we didn’t bring our guns and bag a few.”

“I believe we’ll have a right good breakfast at Findlayson’s,” said Craig; “so I propose we now have a mouthful of something and start.”

The gloom of that deep forest became irksome at last; though some of its trees were wondrous to behold in their stately straightness and immensity of size, the trunks of others were bent and crooked into such weird forms of contortion, that they positively looked uncanny.

Referring to these, Archie remarked to Craig, who was riding by his side:

“Are they not grotesquely beautiful?”

Craig laughed lightly.

“Their grotesqueness is apparent anyhow,” he replied. “But would you believe it, in this very forest I was a week mad?”

“Mad!”

“Yes; worse than mad—delirious. Oh, I did not run about, I was too feeble! but a black woman or girl found me, and built a kind of bark gunja over me, for it rained part of the time and dripped the rest. And those trees with their bent and gnarled stems walked about me, and gibbered and laughed, and pointed crooked fingers at me. I can afford to smile at it now, but it was very dreadful then; and the worst of it was I had brought it all on myself.”

Archie was silent.

“You know in what way?” added Craig.

“I have been told,” Archie said, simply and sadly.

“For weeks, Mr Broadbent, after I was able to walk, I remained among the blacks doing nothing, just wandering aimlessly from place to place; but the woods and the trees looked no longer weird and awful to me then, for I was in my right mind. It was spring—nay, but early summer—and I could feel and drink in all the gorgeous beauty of foliage, of tree flowers and wild flowers, nodding palms and feathery ferns; but, oh! I left and went south again; I met once more the white man, and forgot all the religion of Nature in which my soul had for a time been steeped. So that is all a kind of confession. I feel the better for having made it. We are all poor, weak mortals at the best; only I made a resolve last night.”

“You did?”

“Yes; and I am going to keep it. I am going to have help.”

“Help!”

“Yes, from Him who made those stately giants of the forest and changed their stems to silvery white. He can change all things.”

“Amen!” said Archie solemnly.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Three.

At Findlayson's Farm—The Great Kangaroo Hunt—A Dinner and Concert.

Gentleman Craig was certainly a strange mortal; but after all he was only the type of a class of men to be found at most of our great universities. Admirable Crichtons in a small way, in the estimation of their friends—bold, handsome, careless, and dashing, not to say clever—they may go through the course with flying colours. But too often they strike the rocks of sin and sink, going out like the splendid meteors of a November night, or sometimes—if they continue to float—they are sent off to Australia, with the hopes of giving them one more chance. Alas! they seldom get farther than the cities. It is only the very best and boldest of them that reach the Bush, and there you may find them building fences or shearing sheep. If any kind of labour at all is going to make men of them, it is this.

Two minutes after Craig had been talking to Archie, the sweet, clear, ringing notes of his manly voice were awaking echoes far a-down the dark forest.

Parrots and parrakeets, of lovely plumage, fluttered nearer, holding low their wise, old-fashioned heads to look and listen. Lyre-birds hopped out from under green fern-bushes, raising their tails and glancing at their figures in the clear pool. They listened too, and ran back to where their nests were to tell their wives men-people were passing through the forest singing; but that they, the cock lyre-birds, could sing infinitely better if they tried.

On and on and on went the cavalcade, till sylvan beauty itself began to pall at last, and no one was a bit sorry when all at once the forest ended, and they were out on a plain, out in the scrub, with, away beyond, gently-rising hills, on which trees were scattered.

The bleating of sheep now made them forget all about the gloom of the forest. They passed one or two rude huts, and then saw a bigger smoke in the distance, which Bill told Archie was Findlayson's.

Findlayson came out to meet them. A Scot every inch of him, you could tell that at a glance. A Scot from the soles of his rough shoes to the rim of his hat; brown as to beard and hands, and with a good-natured face the colour of a badly-burned brick.

He bade them welcome in a right hearty way, and helped "the lassie" to dismount.

He had met “the lassie” before.

“But,” he said, “I wadna hae kent ye; you were but a bit gilpie then. Losh! but ye have grown. Your father’s weel, I suppose? Ah, it’ll be a while afore anybody makes such a sudden haul at the diggin’ o’ gowd as he did! But come in. It’s goin’ to be anither warm day, I fear.

“Breakfast is a’ ready. You’ll have a thistle fu’ o’ whiskey first, you men folks. Rin butt the hoose, my dear, and see my sister. Tell her to boil the eggs, and lift the bacon and the roast ducks.”

He brought out the bottle as he spoke. Both Harry and Archie tasted to please him. But Craig went boldly into battle.

“I’m done with it, Findlayson,” he said. “It has been my ruin. I’m done. I’m a weak fool.”

“But a wee drap wadna hurt you, man. Just to put the dust out o’ your wizen.”

Craig smiled.

“It is the wee draps,” he replied, “that do the mischief.”

“Well, I winna try to force you. Here comes the gude wife wi’ the teapot.”

“Bill,” he continued, “as soon as you’ve satisfied the cravins o’ Nature, mount the grey colt, and ride down the Creek, and tell them the new chums and I will be wi’ them in half an hour.”

And in little over that specified time they had all joined the hunt.

Black folks and “orra men,” as Findlayson called them, were already detouring around a wide track of country to beat up the kangaroos.

There were nearly a score of mounted men, but only one lady besides Etheldene, a squatter’s bold sister.

The dogs were a sight to look at. They would have puzzled some Englishmen what to make of them. Partly greyhounds, but larger, sturdier, and stronger, as if they had received at one time a cross of mastiff. They looked eminently fit, however, and were

with difficulty kept back. Every now and then a distant shout was heard, and at such times the hounds seemed burning to be off.

But soon the kangaroos themselves began to appear thick and fast. They came from one part or another in little groups, meeting and hopping about in wonder and fright. They seemed only looking for a means of escape; and at times, as a few rushing from one direction met others, they appeared to consult. Many stood high up, as if on tiptoe, gazing eagerly around, with a curious mixture of bewilderment and fright displayed on their simple but gentle faces.

They got small time to think now, however, for men and dogs were on them, and the flight and the murder commenced with a vengeance. There were black fellows there, who appeared to spring suddenly from the earth, spear-armed, to deal terrible destruction right and left among the innocent animals. And black women too, who seemed to revel in the bloody sight. If the whites were excited and thirsty for carnage, those aborigines were doubly so.

Meanwhile the men had dismounted, Archie and Harry among the rest, and were firing away as quickly as possible. There is one thing to be said in favour of the gunners; they took good aim, and there was little after-motion in the body of the kangaroo in which a bullet had found a billet.

After all Archie was neither content with the sport, nor had it come up as yet to his beau ideal of adventure from all he had heard and read of it. The scene was altogether noisy, wild, and confusing. The blacks gloated in the bloodshed, and Archie did not love them any the more for it. It was the first time he had seen those fellows using their spears, and he could guess from the way they handled or hurled them that they would be pretty dangerous enemies to meet face to face in the plain or scrub.

“Harry,” he said after a time, “I’m getting tired of all this; let us go to our horses.”

“I’m tired too. Hallo! where is the chick-a-biddy?”

“You mean Miss Winslow, Harry.”

“Ay, Johnnie.”

“I have not seen her for some time.”

They soon found her though, near a bit of scrub, where their own horses were tied.

She was sitting on her saddle, looking as steady and demure as an equestrian statue. The sunshine was so finding that they did not at first notice her in the shade there until they were close upon her.

“What, Etheldene!” cried Archie; “we hardly expected you here.”

“Where, then?”

“Following the hounds.”

“What! into that mob? No, that is not what I came for.”

At that moment Craig rode up.

“So glad,” he said, “to find you all here. Mount, gentlemen. Are you ready, Baby?”

“Ready, yes, an hour ago, Craig.”

They met horsemen and hounds not far away, and taking a bold *détour* over a rough and broken country, at the edge of a wood, the hounds found a “forester,” or old man kangaroo. The beast had a good start if he had taken the best advantage of it; but he failed to do so. He had hesitated several times; but the run was a fine one. A wilder, rougher, more dangerous ride Archie had never taken.

The beast was at bay before very long, and his resistance to the death was extraordinary.

They had many more rides before the day was over; and when they re-assembled in farmer Findlayson’s hospitable parlour, Archie was fain for once to own himself not only tired, but “dead beat.”

The dinner was what Harry called a splendid spread. Old Findlayson had been a gardener in his younger days in England, and his wife was a cook; and one of the results of this amalgamation was, dinners or breakfasts either, that had already made the Scotchman famous.

Here was soup that an epicure would not have despised, fish to tempt a dying man, besides game of different kinds, pies, and last, if not least, steak of kangaroo.

The soup itself was made from the tail of the kangaroo, and I know nothing more wholesome and nourishing, though some may think it a little strong.

While the white folks were having dinner indoors, the black fellows were doing ample justice to theirs al fresco, only they had their own cuisine and menu, of which the least said the better.

“You’re sure, Mr Craig, you winna tak’ a wee drappie?”

If the honest squatter put this question once in the course of the evening, he put it twenty times.

“No, really,” said Craig at last; “I will not tak’ a wee drappie. I’ve sworn off; I have, really. Besides, your wife has made me some delightful tea.”

“Weel, man, tak’ a wee drappie in your last cup. It’ll cheer ye up.”

“Take down your fiddle, Findlayson, and play a rattling strathspey or reel, that’ll cheer me up more wholesomely than any amount of ‘wee drappies.’”

“Come out o’ doors then.”

It was cool now out there in Findlayson’s garden—it was a real garden too. His garden and his fiddle were Findlayson’s two fads; and that he was master of both, their present surroundings of fern and flower, and delicious scent of wattle-blossom, and the charming strains that floated from the corner where the squatter stood were proof enough. The fiddle in his hands talked and sang, now bold or merrily, now in sad and wailing notes that brought tears to even Archie’s eyes. Then, at a suggestion of Craig’s, Etheldene’s sweet young voice was raised in song, and this was only the beginning of the concert. Conversation filled up the gaps, so that the evening passed away all too soon.

Just as Findlayson had concluded that plaintive and feeling air “Auld Robin Gray,” a little black girl came stealthily, silently up to Etheldene, and placed a little creature like a rabbit in her lap, uttering a few words of Bush-English, which seemed to Archie’s ear utterly devoid of sense. Then the black girl ran; she went away to her own camp to tell her people that the white folks were holding a corroboree.

The gift was a motherless kangaroo, that at once commenced to make itself at home by hiding its innocent head under Etheldene’s arm.

The party soon after broke up for the night, and next day but one, early in the morning, the return journey was commenced, and finished that night; but the sun had gone down, and the moon was shining high and full over the forest, before they once more reached the clearing.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Four

A New Arrival

Winslow made months of a stay in the Bush, and his services were of great value to the young squatters. The improvements he suggested were many and various, and he was careful to see them carried out.

Dams were made, and huge reservoirs were dug; for, as Winslow said, their trials were all before them, and a drouthy season might mean financial ruin to them.

“Nevertheless,” he added one day, addressing Bob, “I feel sure of you; and to prove this I don’t mind knocking down a cheque or two to the tune of a thou or three or five if you want them.

“I’ll take bank interest,” he added, “not a penny more.”

Bob thanked him, and consulted the others that evening. True, Archie’s aristocratic pride popped up every now and then, but it was kept well under by the others.

“Besides, don’t you see, Johnnie,” said Harry, “this isn’t a gift. Winslow is a business man, and he knows well what he is about.”

“And,” added Bob, “the fencing isn’t finished yet. We have all those workmen’s mouths to fill, and the sooner the work is done the better.”

“Then the sheep are to come in a year or so, and it all runs away with money, Johnnie. Our fortunes are to be made. There is money on the ground to be gathered up, and all that Winslow proposes is holding the candle to us till we fill our pockets.”

“It is very kind of him,” said Archie, “but—”

“Well,” said Bob, “I know where your ‘huts’ will end if you are not careful. You will give offence to Mr Winslow, and he’ll just turn on his heel and never see us again.”

“Do you think so?”

“Think so? Yes, Archie, I’m sure of it. A better-hearted man doesn’t live, rough and all as he is; and he has set his mind to doing the right thing for us all for your sake, lad, and so I say, think twice before you throw cold water over that big, warm heart of his.”

“Well,” said Archie, “when you put it in that light, I can see matters clearly. I wouldn’t offend my good old Uncle Ramsay’s friend for all the world. I’m sorry I ever appeared bluff with him. So you can let him do as he pleases.”

And so Winslow did to a great extent.

Nor do I blame Bob and Harry for accepting his friendly assistance. Better far to be beholden to a private individual, who is both earnest and sincere, than to a money-lending company, who will charge double interest, and make you feel that your soul is not your own.

Better still, I grant you, to wait and work and plod; but this life is almost too short for much waiting, and after all, one half of the world hangs on to the skirts of the other half, and that other half is all the more evenly balanced in consequence.

I would not, however, have my young readers misunderstand me. What I maintain is this, that although a poor man cannot leave this country in the expectation that anybody or any company will be found to advance the needful to set him up in the business of a squatter, still, when he has worked hard for a time, beginning at the lowermost ring of the ladder, and saved enough to get a selection, and a few cattle and sheep, then, if he needs assistance to heave ahead a bit, he will—if everything is right and square—have no difficulty in finding it.

So things went cheerily on at Burley New Farm. And at last Winslow and Etheldene took their departure, promising to come again.

“So far, lads,” said Winslow, as he mounted his horse, “there hasn’t been a hitch nowheres. But mind keep two hands at the wheel.”

Mr Winslow’s grammar was not of the best, and his sentences generally had a smack of the briny about them, which, however, did not detract from their graphicness.

“Tip us your flippers, boys,” he added, “and let us be off. But I’m just as happy as if I were a father to the lot of you.”

Gentleman Craig shook hands with Mr Winslow. He had already helped Etheldene into her saddle.

Archie was standing by her, the bridle of his own nag Tell thrown carelessly over his arm; for good-byes were being said quite a mile from the farm.

“I’ll count the days, Etheldene, till you come again,” said Archie. “The place will not seem the same without you.”

Craig stood respectfully aside till Archie had bade her adieu, then, with his broad hat down by his side, he advanced. He took her hand and kissed it.

“Good-bye, Baby,” he said.

There were tears in Etheldene’s eyes as she rode away. Big Winslow took off his hat, waved it over his head, and gave voice to a splendid specimen of a British cheer, which, I daresay, relieved his feelings as much as it startled the lories. The “boys” were not slow in returning that cheer. Then away rode the Winslows, and presently the grey-stemmed gum trees swallowed them up.

Two whole years passed by. So quickly, too, because they had not been idle years. Quite the reverse of that, for every day brought its own duties with it, and there was always something new to be thought about or done.

One event had taken place which, in Bob’s eyes, eclipsed all the others—a little baby squatter saw the light of day. But I should not have used the word eclipsed. Little “Putty-face,” as Harry most irreverently called her, did not eclipse anything; on the contrary, everything grew brighter on her arrival, and she was hailed queen of the station. The news spread abroad like wildfire, and people came from far and near to look at the wee thing, just as if a baby had never been born in the Bush before.

Findlayson dug the child with his forefinger in the cheek, and nodded and “a-goo-ed” to it, and it smiled back, and slobbered and grinned and jumped. Findlayson then declared it to be the wisest “wee vision o’ a thing the world ever saw.” Sarah was delighted, so was the nurse—a young sonsy Scotch lass brought to the station on purpose to attend to baby.

“But,” said Findlayson, “what about bapteezin’ the blessed wee vision.”

“Oh,” said Bob, “I’ve thought of that! Craig and I are going to Brisbane with stock, and we’ll import a parson.”

It so happened that a young missionary was on his way to spread the glad tidings among the blacks, and it did not need much coaxing on Bob's part to get him to make a détour, and spend a week at Burley New Farm. So this was the imported parson.

But being in Brisbane, Bob thought he must import something else, which showed what a mindful father he was.

He had a look round, and a glance in at all the shop windows in Queen Street, finally he entered an emporium that took his fancy.

"Ahem!" said Bob. "I want a few toys."

"Yes, sir. About what age, sir?"

"The newest and best you have."

"I didn't refer to the age of the toys," said the urbane shopkeeper, with the ghost of a smile in his eye. "I should have said, Toys suitable for what age?"

"For every age," replied Bob boldly.

The shopkeeper then took the liberty of remarking that his visitor must surely be blessed with a quiverful.

"I've only the one little girl," said Bob. "She fills the book as yet. But, you see, we're far away in the Bush, and baby will grow out of gum-rings and rattles, won't she, into dolls and dung-carts? D'ye see? D'ye understand?"

"Perfectly."

It ended in Bob importing not only the parson in a dray, but a box of toys as big as a sea-chest, and only Bob himself could have told you all that was in it. That box would have stocked a toyshop itself and Harry and Archie had the grandest of fun unpacking it, and both laughed till they had to elevate their arms in the air to get the stitches out of their sides.

The amusing part of it was that innocent Bob had bought such a lot of each species.

A brown paper parcel, for example, was marked "1 gross: gum-rings."

“That was a job lot,” said Bob, explaining. “I got them at a reduction, as the fellow said. Besides, if she has one in each hand, and another in her mouth, it will keep her out of mischief for a month or two to begin with.”

There was no mistake about it, baby was set up; for a time, at all events.

Not only did visitors—rough and smooth, but mostly rough—come from afar, but letters of congratulation also. Winslow said in a letter that Etheldene was dying to come and see “the vision,” and so was he, though not quite so bad. “Only,” he added, “as soon Eth is finished we’ll both run up. Eth is going to Melbourne to be finished, and I think a year will do the job.”

“Whatever does he mean,” said stalwart Bob, “by finishing Eth, and doing the job?”

“Why, you great big brush turkey,” said Sarah, “he means finishing her education, in coorse!”

“Oh, I see now!” said Bob. “To be sure; quite right. I say, Sarah, we’ll have to send ‘the vision’ to a slap-up lady’s school one of these days, won’t us?”

“Bob,” replied Sarah severely, “tell that lazy black chap, Jumper, to dig some potatoes.”

“I’m off, Sarah! I’m off!”

Both Harry and Archie had by this time become perfect in all a squatter’s art.

Both had grown hard and hardy, and I am not sure that Harry was not now quite as bold a rider as Archie himself, albeit he was a Cockney born, albeit he had had to rub himself after that first ride of his on Scallowa, the “Eider Duck.”

Well, then, both he and Archie were perfectly au fait at cattle work in all its branches, and only those who have lived on and had some interest in farming have an idea what a vast amount of practical work breeding cattle includes. One has really to be Jack-of-all-trades, and a veterinary surgeon into the bargain. Moreover, if he be master, and not merely foreman, there are books to be kept; so he must be a good accountant, and a good caterer, and always have his weather eye lifting, and keeping a long lookout for probable changes in the markets.

But things had prospered well at Burley New Station. One chief reason of this was that the seasons had been good, and that there was every prospect that the colony of Queensland was to be one of the most respected and favourite in the little island.

For most of his information on the management of sheep, Archie and his companions were indebted to the head stockman, Gentleman Craig. He had indeed been a Godsend, and proved himself a blessing to the station. It is but fair to add that he had sacredly and sternly kept the vow he had registered that night.

He did not deny that it had been difficult for him to do so; in fact he often referred to his own weakness when talking to Archie, whose education made him a great favourite and the constant companion of Craig.

“But you don’t feel any the worse for having completely changed your habits, do you?” said Archie one day.

Craig’s reply was a remarkable one, and one that should be borne in mind by those teetotallers who look upon inebriety as simply a species of moral aberration, and utterly ignore the physiology of the disease.

“To tell you the truth, Mr Broadbent, I am both better and worse. I am better physically; I am in harder, more robust, muscular health; I’m as strong in the arms as a kicking kangaroo. I eat well, I sleep fairly well, and am fit in every way. But I feel as if I had passed through the vale of the shadow of death, and it had left some of its darkness on and in my soul. I feel as if the cure had mentally taken a deal out of me; and when I meet, at Brisbane or other towns, men who offer me drink I feel mean and downcast, because I have to refuse it, and because I dared not even take it as food and medicine. No one can give up habits of life that have become second nature without mental injury, if not bodily. And I’m more and more convinced every month that intemperance is a disease of periodicity, just like gout and rheumatism.”

“You have cravings at certain times, then?”

“Yes; but that isn’t the worst. The worst is that periodically in my dreams I have gone back to my old ways, and think I am living once again in the fool’s paradise of the inebriate; singing wild songs, drinking recklessly, talking recklessly, and looking upon life as but a brief unreality, and upon time as a thing only to be drowned in the wine-cup. Yes, but when I awake from these pleasantly-dreadful dreams, I thank God fervidly I have been but dreaming.”

Archie sighed, and no more was said on the subject.

Letters came from home about once a month, but they came to Archie only. Yet, though Bob had never a friend to write to him from Northumbria, nor Harry one in Whitechapel, the advent of a packet from home gave genuine joy to all hands.

Archie's letters from home were read first by Archie himself, away out under the shade of a tree as likely as not. Then they were read to his chums, including Sarah and Diana.

Diana was the baby.

But they were not finished with even then. No; for they were hauled out and perused night after night for maybe a week, and then periodically for perhaps another fortnight. There was something new to talk about found in them each time; something suggesting pleasant conversation.

Archie was often even amused at "his dear old dad's" remarks and advice. He gave as many hints, and planned as many improvements, as though he had been a settler all his life, and knew everything there was any need to know about the soil and the climate.

He believed—i.e., the old Squire believed—that if he were only out among them, he would show even the natives (white men born in the Bush) a thing or two.

Yes, it was amusing; and after filling about ten or twelve closely-written pages on suggested improvements, he was sure to finish up somewhat as follows in the postscript:

"But after all, Archie, my dear boy, you must be very careful in all you do. Never go like a bull at a gate, lad. Don't forget that I—even I—was not altogether successful at Burley Old Farm."

"Bless that postscript," Archie would say; "mother comes in there."

"Does she now?" Sarah would remark, looking interested.

"Ay, that she does. You see father just writes all he likes first—blows off steam as it were; and mother reads it, and quietly dictates a postscript."

Then there were Elsie's letters and Rupert's, to say nothing of a note from old Kate and a crumpled little enclosure from Branson. Well, in addition to letters, there was always a bundle of papers, every inch of which was read—even the advertisements, and every paragraph of which brought back to Archie and Bob memories of the dear old land they were never likely to forget.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Stream of Life Flows Quietly on.

One day a grand gift arrived from England, being nothing less than a couple of splendid Scotch collies and a pair of Skye terriers. They had borne the journey wonderfully well, and set about taking stock, and settling themselves in their new home, at once.

Archie's pet kangaroo was an object of great curiosity to the Skyes at first. On the very second day of their arrival Bobie and Roup, as they were called, marched up to the kangaroo, and thus addressed him:

"We have both come to the conclusion that you are something that shouldn't be."

"Indeed!" said the kangaroo.

"Yes; so we're going to let the sawdust out of you."

"Take that then to begin with!" said Mr Kangaroo; and one of the dogs was kicked clean and clear over a fern bush.

They drew off after that with their tails well down. They thought they had made a mistake somehow. A rabbit that could kick like a young colt was best left to his own devices.

The collies never attempted to attack the kangaroo; but when they saw the droll creature hopping solemnly after Archie, one looked at the other, and both seemed to laugh inwardly.

The collies were placed under the charge of Craig to be broken to use, for both were young, and the Skyes became the vermin-killers. They worked in couple, and kept down the rats far more effectually than ever the cats had done. They used to put dingoes to the rout whenever or wherever they saw them; and as sometimes both these game little animals would return of a morning severely bitten about the face and ears, it was evident enough they had gone in for sharp service during the night.

One curious thing about the Skyes was, that they killed snakes, and always came dragging home with the loathsome things. This was very clever and very plucky;

nevertheless, a tame laughing jackass that Harry had in a huge cage was to them a pet aversion. Perhaps the bird knew that; for as soon as he saw them he used to give vent to a series of wild, defiant “ha-ha-ha’s” and “hee-hee-hee’s” that would have laid a ghost.

The improvements on that portion of Burley New Farm more immediately adjoining the steading had gone merrily on, and in a year or two, after fencing and clearing the land, a rough style of agriculture was commenced. The ploughs were not very first-class, and the horses were oxen—if I may make an Irish bull. They did the work slowly but well. They had a notion that every now and then they ought to be allowed to go to sleep for five minutes. However, they were easily roused, and just went on again in a dreamy kind of way.

The land did not require much coaxing to send up crops of splendid wheat. It was a new-born joy to Bob and Archie to ride along their paddocks, and see the wind waving over the growing grain, making the whole field look like an inland sea.

“What would your father say to a sight like that?” said Bob one morning while the two were on their rounds.

“He would start subsoiling ploughs and improve it.”

“I don’t know about the improvement, Archie, but I’ve no doubt he would try. But new land needs little improving.”

“Maybe no; but mind you, Bob, father is precious clever, though I don’t hold with all his ways. He’d have steam-ploughs here, and steam-harrows too. He’d cut down the grain to the roots by steam-machines, or he’d have steam-strippers.”

“But you don’t think we should go any faster?”

“Bob, I must confess I like to take big jumps myself. I take after my father in some things, but after my Scottish ancestors in others. For instance, I like to know what lies at the other side of the hedge before I put my horse at it.”

The first crops of wheat that were taken off the lands of Burley New Farm were gathered without much straw. It seemed a waste to burn the latter; but the distance from the railway, and still more from a market-town, made its destruction a necessity.

Nor was it altogether destruction either; for the ashes served as a fertiliser for future crops.

As things got more settled down, and years flew by, the system of working the whole station was greatly improved. Bob and Harry had become quite the home-farmers and agriculturists, while the cattle partially, and the sheep almost wholly, became the care of Archie, with Gentleman Craig as his first officer.

Craig certainly had a long head on his broad shoulders. He did not hesitate from the first to give his opinions as to the management of the station. One thing he assured the three friends of: namely, that the sheep must be sent farther north and west if they were to do well.

“They want higher and dryer ground,” he said; “but you may try them here.”

I think at this time neither Bob nor Archie knew there was anything more deadly to be dreaded than foot-rot, which the constant attention of the shepherds, and a due allowance of blue-stone, served out from Harry’s stores, kept well under.

They gained other and sadder experience before very long, however.

At first all went as merrily as marriage bells. The first sheep-shearing was a never-to-be-forgotten event in the life of our Bushmen.

The season was October—a spring month in Australia—and the fleeces were in fine form, albeit some were rather full of grass seed. They were mostly open, however, and everyone augured a good clip.

Sarah was very busy indoors superintending everything; for there was extra cooking to be done now. Wee Diana, who had developed into quite a Bush child, though a pretty one, toddled about here, there, and everywhere; the only wonder is—as an Irishman might say—that she did not get killed three or four times a day. Diana had long since abjured gum-rings and rattles, and taken to hoops and whips. One of the collie dogs, and the pet kangaroo, were her constant companions. As previously stated, both collies had been sent to Craig to be trained; but as Bounce had a difference of opinion with one of the shepherds, he concluded he would make a change by the way of bettering himself, so he had taken French leave and come home to the steading. He would have been sent off again, sure enough, if he had not—collie-like—enlisted Sarah herself on his behalf. This he had done by lying down beside little Diana on the kitchen floor. The two kissed each other and fell asleep. Bounce’s position was assured after that.

Findlayson, who did not mean to commence operations among his own fleeces for another month, paid a visit to Burley, and brought with him a few spare hands. Harry

had plenty to do both out of doors and in his stores; for many men were now about the place, and they must all eat and smoke.

“As sure as a gun,” said Findlayson the first morning, “that Joukie-daidles o’ yours ’ill get killed.”

He said this just after about three hundred sheep had rushed the child, and run over her. It was the fault of the kangaroo on one hand, and the collie, Bounce, on the other. Findlayson had picked her off the ground, out of a cloud of dust, very dirty, but smiling.

“What is to be done with her?” said Bob, scratching his head.

“Fauld her,” said Findlayson.

“What does that mean?”

Findlayson showed him what “faulding” meant. He speedily put up a little enclosure on an eminence, from which Diana could see all without the possibility of escaping. So every day she, with her dog and the pet kangaroo, to say nothing of a barrow-load of toys, including a huge Noah’s ark, found herself happy and out of harm’s way. Diana could be seen at times leaning over the hurdle, and waving a hand exultingly in the air, and it was presumed she was loudly cheering the men’s performance; but as to hearing anything, that seemed utterly out of the question, with the baa-ing and maa-ing of the sheep.

When the work was in full blast it certainly was a strange sight, and quite colonial. Archie had been at sheep-shearings before at home among the Cheviot Hills, but nothing to compare to this.

There was, first and foremost, the sheep to be brought up in batches or flocks from the distant stations, men and dogs also having plenty to do to keep them together, then the enclosing them near the washing-ground. The dam in which the washing took place was luckily well filled, for rain had fallen not long before. Sheep-washing is hard work, as anyone will testify who has tried his hand at it for even half a day. Sheep are sometimes exceedingly stupid, more particularly, I think, about a time like this. The whole business is objected to, and they appear imbued with the idea that you mean to drown them, and put every obstacle in your way a stubborn nature can invent.

The sheep, after being well scrubbed, were allowed a day to get dry and soft and nice. Then came the clipping. Gentleman Craig was stationed at a platform to count the

fleeces and see them ready for pressing, and Archie's work was cut out in seeing that the fellows at the clipping did their duty properly.

It was a busy, steaming time, on the whole, for everybody, but merry enough nevertheless. There was "lashins" of eating and drinking. Findlayson himself took charge of the grog, which was mostly rum, only he had a small store of mountain dew for his own special consumption.

Harry was quite the Whitechapel tradesman all over, though you could not have told whether the grocer or butcher most predominated in his appearance.

The clipping went on with marvellous speed, a rivalry existing between the hands apparently; but as they were paid by the number of fleeces, there was evident desire on the part of several to sacrifice perfection to rapidity.

When it was all over there was still a deal to be done in clearing up and getting the whole station resettled, one part of the resettling, and the chief too, being the re-establishing of the sheep on their pasturage after marking them.

The wool was pressed into bales, and loaded on huge bullock-waggons, which are in appearance something between an ordinary country wood-cart and a brewer's dray. The road to the distant station was indeed a rough one, and at the slow rate travelled by the bullock teams the journey would occupy days.

Craig himself was going with the last lot of these, and Archie had started early and ridden on all alone to see to business in Brisbane.

He had only been twice at the town in the course of three years, so it is no wonder that now he was impressed with the notion that the well-dressed city folks must stare at him, to see if he had any hay-seed in his hair.

Winslow was coming round by boat, and Etheldene as well; she had been at home for some time on a holiday.

Why was it, I wonder, that Archie paid a visit to several outfitters' shops in Brisbane, and made so many purchases? He really was well enough dressed when he entered the town; at all events, he had looked a smart young farmer all over. But when he left his bedroom on the morning of Winslow's arrival, he had considerably more of the English Squire than the Australian Squatter about his tout ensemble. But he really looked a handsome, happy, careless young fellow, and that bit of a sprouting moustache showed off his good looks to perfection. He could not help feeling it sometimes as he sat reading

a paper in the hotel hall, and waiting for his friends, and was fool enough to wonder if Etheldene would think him improved in appearance.

But Archie was neither “masher” nor dandy at heart. He was simply a young man, and I would not value any young man who did not take pains with his personal appearance, even at the risk of being thought proud.

Archie had not long to wait for Winslow. He burst in like a fresh sea-breeze—hale, hearty, and bonnie. He was also a trifle better dressed than usual. But who was that young lady close by his left hand? That couldn’t be—yes, it was Etheldene, and next moment Archie was grasping a hand of each.

Etheldene’s beauty had matured; she had been but a girl, a child, when Archie had met her before. Now she was a bewitching young lady, modest and lovely, but, on the whole, so self-possessed that if our hero had harboured any desire to appear before her at his very best, and keep up the good impression by every means in his power, he had the good sense to give it up and remain his own natural honest self.

But he could not help saying to himself, “What a wife she will make for Rupert! And how Elsie will love and adore her! And I—yes, I will be content to remain the big bachelor brother.”

There was such a deal to ask of each other, such a deal to do and to say, that days flew by before they knew where they were, as Winslow expressed it.

On the fifth day Gentleman Craig arrived to give an account of his stewardship.

Etheldene almost bounded towards him.

But she looked a little shy at his stare of astonishment as he took her gloved hand.

“Baby,” he exclaimed, “I would hardly have known you! How you have improved!”

Then the conversation became general.

When accounts were squared, it was discovered that, by the spring wool, and last year’s crops and bullocks, the young squatters had done wonderfully well, and were really on a fair way to wealth.

“Now, Archie Broadbent,” said Winslow that night, “I am going to put you on to a good thing or two. You are a gentleman, and have a gentleman’s education. You have brains, and can do a bit of speculation; and it is just here where brains come in.”

Winslow then unfolded his proposals, which were of such an inviting kind that Archie at once saw his way to benefit by them. He thanked Winslow over and over again for all he had done for him, and merely stipulated that in this case he should be allowed to share his plans with Bob and Harry.

To this, of course, Winslow made no objection.

“As to thanking me for having given ye a tip or two,” said Winslow, “don’t flatter yourself it is for your sake. It is all to the memory of the days I spent as steward at sea with your good old uncle. Did you send him back his fifty pounds?”

“I did, and interest with it.”

“That is right. That is proper pride.”

Archie and the Winslows spent a whole fortnight in Brisbane, and they went away promising that ere long they would once more visit the station.

The touch of Etheldene’s soft hand lingered long in Archie’s. The last look from her bonnie eyes haunted him even in his dreams, as well as in his waking thoughts. The former he could not command, so they played him all kinds of pranks. But over his thoughts he still had sway; and whenever he found himself thinking much about Etheldene’s beauty, or winning ways, or soft, sweet voice, he always ended up by saying to himself, “What a love of a little wife she will make for Rupert!”

One day, while Archie was taking a farewell walk along Queen Street, glancing in here and there at the windows, and now and then entering to buy something pretty for Sarah, something red—dazzling—for her black servant-maid, and toys for Di, he received a slap on the back that made him think for a moment a kangaroo had kicked him.

“What!” he cried, “Captain Vesey?”

“Ay, lad, didn’t I say we would meet again?”

“Well, wonders will never cease! Where have you been? and what have you been doing?”

“Why I’ve gone in for trade a bit. I’ve been among the South Sea Islands, shipping blacks for the interior here; and, to tell you the truth, my boy, I am pretty well sick of the job from all I’ve seen. It is more like buying slaves, and that is the honest truth.”

“And I suppose you are going to give it up?” The captain laughed—a laugh that Archie did not quite like.

“Yes,” he said, “I’ll give it up after—another turn or two. But come and have something cooling, the weather is quite summery already. What a great man you have grown! When I saw you first you were just a—”

“A hobbledehoy?”

“Something like that—very lime-juicy, but very ardent and sanguine. I say, you didn’t find the streets of Sydney paved with gold, eh?”

“Not quite,” replied Archie, laughing as he thought of all his misery and struggles in the capital of New South Wales.

“But,” he added, “though I did not find the streets paved with gold, I found the genuine ore on a housetop, or near it, in a girl called Sarah.”

“What, Archie Broadbent, you don’t mean to say you’re married?”

“No; but Bob is.”

“What Bob? Here, waiter, bring us drinks—the best and coolest you have in the house. Now, lad, you’ve got to begin at the beginning of your story, and run right through to the end. Spin it off like a man. I’ll put my legs on a chair, smoke, and listen.”

So Archie did as he was told, and very much interested was Captain Vesey.

“And now, captain, you must promise to run down, and see us all in the Bush. We’re a jolly nice family party, I can assure you.”

“I promise, my boy, right heartily. I hope to be back in Brisbane in six months. Expect to see me then.”

They dined together, and spent the evening talking of old times, and planning all that they would do when they met.

Next day they parted.

The end of this spring was remarkable for floods. Never before had our heroes seen such storms of rain, often accompanied with thunder and lightning. Archie happened to be out in the forest when it first came on.

It had been a hot, still, sulphurous morning, which caused even the pet kangaroo to lie panting on his side. Then a wind came puffing and roaring through the trees in uncertain gusts, shaking the hanging curtains of climbing plants, rustling and rasping among the sidelong leaved giant gums, tearing down tree ferns and lovely orchids, and scattering the scented bloom of the wattle in every direction.

With the wind came the clouds, and a darkness that could be felt.

Then down died the fitful breeze, and loud and long roared and rattled the thunder, while the blinding lightning seemed everywhere. It rushed down the darkness in rivers like blood, it glanced and glimmered on the pools of water, and zigzagged through the trees. From the awful hurtling of the thunder one would have thought every trunk and stem were being rent and riven in pieces.

Tell—the horse—seemed uneasy, so Archie made for home. The rain had come on long before he reached the creek, but the stream was still fordable.

But see! He is but half-way across when, in the interval between the thunder peals, he can hear a steady rumbling roar away up the creek and gulley, but coming closer and closer every moment.

On, on, on, good Tell! Splash through that stream quicker than ever you went before, or far down the country to-morrow morning two swollen corpses will be seen floating on the floods!

Bewildered by the dashing rain, and the mist that rose on every side, Archie and his trusty steed had but reached high ground when down came the bore.

A terrible sight, though but dimly seen. Fully five feet high, it seemed to carry everything before it. Alas! for flocks and herds. Archie could see white bodies and black, tumbling and trundling along in the rolling “spate.”

The floods continued for days. And when they abated then losses could be reckoned. Though dead cattle and sheep now lay in dozens about the flat lands near the creek, only a small percentage of them belonged to Burley.

Higher up Findlayson had suffered, and many wild cattle helped to swell the death bill.

But it was bad enough.

However, our young squatters were not the men to sit down to cry over spilt milk.

The damage was repaired, and the broken dams were made new again. And these last were sadly wanted before the summer went past. For it was unusually hot, the sun rising in a cloudless sky, blazing down all day steadily, and setting without even a ray being intercepted by a cloud.

Bush fires were not now infrequent. While travelling in a distant part of the selection, far to the west, in company with Craig, whom he had come to visit, they were witnesses to a fire of this sort that had caught a distant forest. Neither pen nor pencil could do justice to such a scene. Luckily it was separated from the Burley estate by a deep ravine. One of the strangest sights in connection with it was the wild stampede of the panic-stricken kangaroos and bush horses.

To work in the fields was now to work indeed. Bob's complexion and Archie's were "improved" to a kind of brick-red hue, and even Harry got wondrously tanned.

There was certainly a great saving in clothes that year, for excepting light, broad-brimmed hats, and shirts and trousers, nothing else was worn by the men.

But the gardens were cool in the evening, in spite of the midday glare of the sun, and it was delightful to sit out in the open for an hour or two and think and talk of the old country; while the rich perfume of flowers hung warm in the air, and the holy stars shimmered and blinked in the dark blue of the sky.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Six.

“I’ll Write a Letter Home.”

The summer wore away, autumn came, the harvest was made good, and in spite of the drought it turned out well; for the paddocks chosen for agricultural produce seldom lacked moisture, lying as they did on the low lands near the creek, and on rich ground reclaimed from the scrub.

Our Bushmen were congratulating themselves on the success of their farming; for the banking account of all three was building itself, so to speak, slowly, but surely.

Archie was now quite as wealthy as either of his companions; for his speculations, instigated by his friend Winslow, had turned out well; so his stock had increased tenfold, and he had taken more pasture to the westward and north, near where Bob’s and Harry’s sheep now were; for Craig’s advice had been acted on.

None too soon though; for early in the winter an old shepherd arrived in haste at the homesteading to report an outbreak of inflammatory catarrh among the flocks still left on the lower pastures.

The events that quickly followed put Archie in mind of the “dark days” at Burley Old Farm, when fat beasts were dying in twos and threes day after day. Sheep affected with this strange ailment lived but a day or two, and the only thing to do was to kill them on the very first symptoms of the ailment appearing. They were then just worth the price of their hides and tallow.

Considering the amount of extra work entailed, and the number of extra hands to be hired, and the bustle and stir and anxiety caused by the outbreak, it is doubtful if it would not have been better to bury them as they fell, skin and all.

This was one of the calamities which Winslow had pointed out to Archie as likely to occur. But it was stamped out at last. The sheep that remained were sent away to far-off pastures; being kept quite separate, however, from the other flocks. So the cloud passed away, and the squatters could breathe freely again, and hope for a good lambing season, when winter passed away, and spring time came once more.

“Bob,” said Archie one evening, as they all sat round the hearth before retiring to bed, “that fire looks awfully cosy, doesn’t it? And all the house is clean and quiet—oh, so quiet and delightful that I really wonder anyone could live in a city or anywhere near the roar and din of railway trains! Then our farm is thriving far beyond anything we could have dared to expect. We are positively getting rich quickly, if, indeed, we are not rich already. And whether it be winter or summer, the weather is fine, glorious sometimes. Indeed, it is like a foretaste of heaven, Bob, in my humble opinion, to get up early and wander out of doors.”

“Well,” said Bob, “small reason to be ashamed to say that, my boy.”

“Hold on, Bob, I’m coming to the part I’m ashamed of; just you smoke your pipe and keep quiet. Well, so much in love am I with the new country that I’m beginning to forget the old. Of course I’ll always—always be a true Englishman, and I’d go back to-morrow to lay down my life for the dear old land if it was in danger. But it isn’t, it doesn’t want us, it doesn’t need us; it is full to overflowing, and I daresay they can do without any of us. But, Bob, there is my dear old father, mother, Elsie, and Rupert. Now, if it were only possible to have them here. But I know my father is wedded to Burley, and his life’s dream is to show his neighbours a thing or two. I know too that if he starts machinery again he will be irretrievably lost.”

Archie paused, and the kangaroo looked up into his face as much as to say, “Go on, I’m all attention.”

“Well, Bob, if I make a pile here and go home, I’ll just get as fond of Burley as I was when a boy, and I may lose my pile too. It seems selfish to speak so, but there is no necessity for it. So I mean to try to get father to emigrate. Do you think such a thing is possible, Bob?”

“It’s the same with men as with trees, Archie. You must loosen the ground about them, root by root must be carefully taken up if you want to transplant them, and you must take so much of the old earth with them that they hardly know they are being moved. Sarah, bring the coffee. As for my own part, Archie, I am going back; but it is only just to see the old cottage, the dear old woods, and—and my mother’s grave.”

“Yes,” said Archie, thoughtfully. “Well, root by root you said, didn’t you?”

“Ay, root by root.”

“Then I’m going to begin. Rupert and Elsie will be the first roots. Roup isn’t over strong yet. This country will make a man of him. Bob and you, Harry, can go to bed as soon as

you like. I'm going out to think and walk about a bit. Stick another log or two on the fire, and as soon as you have all turned in I'll write a letter home. I'll begin the uprooting, though it does seem cruel to snap old ties."

"Well," said Harry, "thank goodness, I've got no ties to snap. And I think with you, Archie, that the old country isn't a patch on the new. Just think o' the London fogs. You mind them, Sarah."

"I does, 'Arry."

"And the snow."

"And the slush, 'Arry."

"And the drizzle."

"And the kitchen beetles, boy. It would take a fat little lot to make me go back out o' the sunshine. Here's the coffee."

"Keep mine hot, Sarah."

Away went Archie out into the night, out under the stars, out in the falling dew, and his kangaroo went jumping and hopping after him.

The sky was very bright and clear to-night, though fleece-shaped, snow-white clouds lay low on the horizon, and the moon was rising through the distant woods, giving the appearance of some gigantic fire as its beams glared red among the topmost branches.

There was the distant howling or yelling of dingoes, and the low, half-frightened bleat of sheep, and there was the rippling murmur of the stream not far off, but all else was still.

It was two hours before Archie found his way back. The kangaroo saw him to the door, then went off to curl up in the shed till the hot beams of the morning sun should lure him forth to breakfast.

And all alone sat Archie, by the kitchen table, writing a letter home by the light of candles made on the steading.

It was very still now in the house—only the ticking of the clock, the occasional whirr of some insect flying against the window, anxious to come into the light and warmth and scratching of the young man's pen.

Surely the dog knew that Archie was writing home, for presently he got slowly up from his corner and came and leant his head on his master's knee, in that wise and kindly way collies have of showing their thoughts and feelings. Archie must leave off writing for a moment to smooth and pet the honest "bawsent" head.

Now it would be very easy for us to peep over Archie's shoulder and read what he was writing, but that would be rude; anything rather than rudeness and impoliteness. Rather, for instance, let us take a voyage across the wide, terribly wide ocean, to pay a visit to Burley Old Farm, and wait till the letter comes.

"I wonder," said Elsie with a gentle sigh, and a long look at the fire, "when we may expect to hear from Archie again. Dear me, what a long, long time it is since he went away! Let me see, Rupert, it is going on for six years, isn't it?"

"Yes. Archie must be quite a man by now."

"He's all right," said the Squire.

"That he is, I know," said Uncle Ramsay.

"He's in God's good hands," said the mother, but her glasses were so moist she had to take them off to wipe them; "he is in God's good hands, and all we can do now is to pray for him."

Two little taps at the green-parlour door and enter the maid, not looking much older, and not less smart, than when last we saw her.

"If you please, sir, there's a gentleman in the study as would like to see you."

"Oh," she added, with a little start, "here he comes!"

And there he came certainly.

"God bless all here!" he cried heartily.

"What," exclaimed the Squire, jumping up and holding out his hand, "my dear old friend Venturesome Vesey!"

"Yes, Yankee Charlie, and right glad I am to see you."

“My wife and children, Vesey. Though you and I have often met in town since my marriage, you’ve never seen them before. My brother, whom you know.”

Vesey was not long in making himself one of the family circle, and he gave his promise to stay at Burley Old Farm for a week at least.

Rupert and Elsie took to him at once. How could they help it? a sailor and gentleman, and a man of the world to boot. Besides, coming directly from Archie.

“I just popped into the house the very morning after he had written the letter I now hand to you,” said Captain Vesey. “He had an idea it would be safer for me to bring it. Well, here it is; and I’m going straight away out to the garden to smoke a pipe under the moon while you read it. Friend as I am of Archie’s, you must have the letter all to yourselves;” and away went Vesey.

“Send for old Kate and Branson,” cried the Squire, and they accordingly marched in all expectancy.

Then the father unfolded the letter with as much reverence almost as if it had been Foxe’s Book of Martyrs.

Every eye was fixed upon him as he slowly read it. Even Bounder, the great Newfoundland, knew something unusual was up, and sat by Elsie all the time.

Archie’s Letter Home.

“My dearest Mother,—It is to you I write first, because I know that a proposal I have to make will ‘take you aback,’ as my friend Winslow would say. I may as well tell you what it is at once, because, if I don’t, your beloved impatience will cause you to skip all the other parts of the letter till you come to it. Now then, my own old mummy, wipe your spectacles all ready, catch hold of the arm of your chair firmly, and tell Elsie to ‘stand by’—another expression of Winslow’s—the smelling-salts bottle. Are you all ready? Heave oh! then. I’m going to ask you to let Rupert and Elsie come out to me here.

“Have you fainted, mummy? Not a bit of it; you’re my own brave mother! And don’t you see that this will be only the beginning of the end? And a bright, happy end, mother, I’m looking forward to its being. It will be the reunion of us all once more; and if we do not live quite under one roof, as in the dear old days at Burley Old Farm, we will live in happy juxtaposition.

“‘What!’ you cry, ‘deprive me of my children?’ It is for your children’s good, mummy. Take Rupert first. He is not strong now, but he is young. If he comes at once to this glorious land of ours, on which I am quite enthusiastic, he will get as hardy as a New Hollander in six months’ time. Wouldn’t you like to see him with roses on his face, mother, and a brow as brown as a postage stamp? Send him out. Would you like him to have a frame of iron, with muscles as tough as a mainstay? Send him out. Would you like him to be as full of health as an egg is full of meat? and so happy that he would have to get up at nights to sing? Then send him here.

“Take poor me next. You’ve no notion how homesick I am; I’m dying to see some of you. I am making money fast, and I love my dear, free, jolly life; but for all that, there are times that I would give up everything I possess—health, and hopes of wealth—for sake of one glance at your dear faces, and one run round Burley Old Farm with father.”

This part of Archie’s letter told home. There were tears in Mrs Broadbent’s motherly eyes; and old Kate was heard to murmur, “Dear, bonnie laddie!” and put her apron to her face.

“Then,” the letter continued, “there is Elsie. It would do her good to come too, because—bless the lassie!—she takes her happiness at second-hand; and knowing that she was a comfort to us boys, and made everything cheery and nice, would cause her to be as jolly as the summer’s day is long or a gum tree high. Then, mother, we three should work together with only one intent—that of getting you and father both out, and old Kate and Branson too.

“As for you, dad, I know you will do what is right; and see how good it would be for us all to let Roup and Elsie come. Then you must remember that when we got things a bit straighter, we would expect you and mother to follow. You, dear dad, would have full scope here for your inventive genius, and improvements that are thrown away in England could be turned to profit out here.

“We would not go like a bull at a gate at anything, father; but what we do want here is machinery, easily worked, for cutting up and dealing with wood; for cutting up ground, and for destroying tree stumps; and last, but not least, we want wells, and a complete system of irrigation for some lands, that shall make us independent to a great extent of the sparsely-failing rains of some seasons. Of course you could tell us something about sheep disease and cattle plague, and I’m not sure you couldn’t help us to turn the wild horses to account, with which some parts of the interior swarm.”

Squire Broadbent paused here to exclaim, as he slapped his thigh with his open palm:

“By Saint Andrews, brother, Archie is a chip of the old block! He’s a true Broadbent, I can tell you. He appreciates the brains of his father too. Heads are what are wanted out there; genius to set the mill a-going. As for this country—pah! it’s played out. Yes, my children, you shall go, and your father will follow.”

“My dear Elsie and Rupert,” the letter went on, “how I should love to have you both out here. I have not asked you before, because I wanted to have everything in a thriving condition first; but now that everything is so, it wants but you two to help me on, and in a year or two—Hurrah! for dad and the mum!

“Yes, Elsie, your house is all prepared. I said nothing about this before. I’ve been, like the duck-bill, working silently out of sight—out of your sight I mean. But there it is, the finest house in all the district, a perfect mansion; walls as thick as Burley Old Tower—that’s for coolness in summer. Lined inside with cedar—that’s for cosiness in winter. Big hall in it, and all the rooms just facsimile of our own house at home, or as near to them as the climate will admit.

“But mind you, Elsie, I’m not going to have you banished to the Bush wilds altogether. No, lassie, no; we will have a mansion—a real mansion—in Sydney or Brisbane as well, and the house at Burley New Farm will be our country residence.

“I know I’ll have your answer by another mail, and it will put new life into us all to know you are coming. Then I will start right away to furnish our house. Our walls shall be polished, pictures shall be hung, and mirrors everywhere; the floors shall glitter like beetles’ wings, and couches and skins be all about. I’m rather lame at house description, but you, Elsie, shall finish the furnishing, and put in the nicknacks yourself.

“I’m writing here in the stillness of night, with our doggie’s head upon my knee. All have gone to bed—black and white—in the house and round the Station. But I’ve just come in from a long walk in the moonlight. I went out to be alone and think about you; and what a glorious night, Rupert! We have no such nights in England. Though it is winter, it is warm and balmy. It is a delight to walk at night either in summer or winter. Oh, I do wish I could describe to you my garden as it is in spring and early summer! That is, you know, our garden that is going to be. I had the garden laid out and planted long before the house was put up, and now my chief delight is to keep it up. You know, as I told you before, I went to Melbourne with the Winslows. Well, we went round everywhere, and saw everything; we sailed on the lovely river, and I was struck with the wonderful beauty of the gardens, and determined ours should be something like it. And when the orange blossom is out, and the fragrant verbenas, and a thousand other half-wild flowers, with ferns, ferns, ferns everywhere, and a fountain playing in the shadiest nook—this was an

idea of Harry's—you would think you were in fairyland or dreamland, or 'through the looking-glass,' or somewhere; anyhow, you would be entranced.

"But to-night, when I walked there, the house—our house you know—looked desolate and dreary, and my heart gave a big superstitious thud when I heard what I thought was a footstep on the verandah, but it was only a frog as big as your hat.

"That verandah cost me and Harry many a ramble into the scrub and forest, but now it is something worth seeing, with its wealth of climbing flowering plants, its hanging ferns, and its clustering marvellous orchids.

"Yes, the house looks lonely; looks haunted almost; only, of course, ghosts never come near a new house. But, dear Elsie, how lovely it will look when we are living in it! when light streams out from the open casement windows! when warmth and music are there! Oh, come soon, come soon! You see I'm still impulsive.

"You, Elsie, love pets. I daresay Bounder will come with you. Poor Scallowa! I was sorry to hear of his sad death. But we can have all kinds of pets here. We have many. To begin with, there is little Diana, she is queen of the station, and likely to be; she is everybody's favourite. Then there are the collies, and the kangaroo. He is quite a darling fellow, and goes everywhere with me.

"Our laughing jackass is improving every day. He looks excessively wise when you talk to him, and if touched up with the end of a brush of turkey's feathers, which we keep for the purpose, he goes off into such fits of mad hilarious, mocking, ringing laughter that somebody has got to pick him up, cage and all, and make all haste out of the house with him.

"We have also a pet bear; that is Harry's. But don't jump. It is no bigger than a cat, and far tamer. It is a most wonderful little rascal to climb ever you saw. Koala we call him, which is his native name, and he is never tired of exploring the roof and rafters; but when he wants to go to sleep, he will tie himself round Sarah's waist, with his back downwards, and go off as sound as a top.

"We have lots of cats and a cockatoo, who is an exceedingly mischievous one, and who spends most of his life in the garden. He can talk, and dance, and sing as well. And he is a caution to snakes, I can tell you. I don't want to frighten you though. We never see the 'tiger' snake, or hardly ever, and I think the rest are harmless. I know the swagsmen, and the sundowners too, often kill the carpet snake, and roast and eat it when they have no other sort of fresh meat. I have tasted it, and I can tell you, Rupert, it is better than roasted rabbit.

“I’m going to have a flying squirrel. The first time I saw these creatures was at night among the trees, and they startled me—great shadowy things sailing like black kites from bough to bough.

“Kangaroos are cautions. We spend many and many a good day hunting them. If we did not kill them they would eat us up, or eat the sheep’s fodder up, and that would be all the same.

“Gentleman Craig has strange views about most things; he believes in Darwin, and a deal that isn’t Darwin; but he says kangaroos first got or acquired their monster hindlegs, and their sturdy tails, from sitting up looking over the high grass, and cropping the leaves of bushes. He says that Australia is two millions of years old at the very least.

“I must say I like Craig very much. He is so noble and handsome. What a splendid soldier he would have made! But with all his grandeur of looks—I cannot call it anything else—there is an air of pensiveness and melancholy about him that is never absent. Even when he smiles it is a sad smile. Ah! Rupert, his story is a very strange one; but he is young yet, only twenty-six, and he is now doing well. He lives by himself, with just one shepherd under him, on the very confines of civilisation. I often fear the blacks will bail up his hut some day, and mumkill him, and we should all be sorry. Craig is saving money, and I believe will be a squatter himself one of these days. Etheldene is very fond of him. Sometimes I am downright jealous and nasty about it, because I would like you, Rupert, to have Etheldene for a wife. And she knows all about the black fellows, and can speak their language. Well, you see, Rupert, you could go and preach to and convert them; for they are not half so bad as they are painted. The white men often use them most cruelly, and think no more of shooting them than I should of killing an old man kangaroo.

“When I began this letter, dearest Elsie and old Roup, I meant to tell you such a lot I find I shall have no chance of doing—all about the grand trees, the wild and beautiful scenery, the birds and beasts and insects, but I should have to write for a week to do it. So pray forgive my rambling letter, and come and see it all for yourself.

“Come you must, else—let me see now what I shall threaten. Oh, I have it; I won’t ever return! But if you do come, then in a few years we’ll all go back together, and bring out dad and the dear mummy.

“I can’t see to write any more. No, the lights are just as bright as when I commenced; but when I think of dad and the mum, my eyes will get filled with moisture. So there!

“God bless you all, all, from the mum and dad all the way down to Kate, Branson, and Bounder.

“Archie Broadbent, C.O.B.

“P.S.—Do you know what C.O.B. means? It means Chip of the Old Block. Hurrah!”

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Seven Rumours of War

As soon as Squire Broadbent read his son's letter he carefully folded it up, and with a smile on his face handed it to Rupert. And by-and-bye, when Captain Vesey returned, and settled into the family circle with the rest, and had told them all he could remember about Archie and Burley New Farm in Australia, the brother and sister, followed by Bounder, slipped quietly out and told old Kate they were going to the tower. Would she come? That she would. And so for hours they all sat up there before the fire talking of Archie, and all he had done and had been, and laying plans and dreaming dreams, and building castles in the air, just in the same way that young folks always have done in this world, and will, I daresay, continue to do till the end of time.

But that letter bore fruit, as we shall see.

Things went on much as usual in the Bush. Winter passed away, spring came round and lambing season, and the shepherds were busy once more. Gentleman Craig made several visits to the home farm, and always brought good news. It was a glorious time in every way; a more prosperous spring among the sheep no one could wish to have.

On his last visit to the house Craig stayed a day or two, and Archie went back with him, accompanied by a man on horseback, with medicines and some extra stores—clothing and groceries, etc, I mean, for in those days live stock was sometimes called stores.

They made Findlayson's the first night, though it was late. They found that the honest Scot had been so busy all day he had scarcely sat down to a meal. Archie and Craig were "in clipping-time" therefore, for there was roast duck on the table, and delightful potatoes all steaming hot, and, as usual, the black bottle of mountain dew, a "wee drappie" of which he tried in vain to get either Craig or Archie to swallow.

"Oh, by-the-bye, men," said Findlayson, in the course of the evening—that is, about twelve o'clock—"I hear bad news up the hills way."

"Indeed," said Craig.

"Ay, lad. You better ha'e your gun loaded. The blacks, they say, are out in force. They've been killing sheep and bullocks too, and picking the best."

“Well, I don’t blame them either. Mind, we white men began the trouble; but, nevertheless, I’ll defend my flock.”

Little more was said on the subject. But next morning another and an uglier rumour came. A black fellow or two had been shot, and the tribe had sworn vengeance and held a corroboree.

“There’s a cloud rising,” said Findlayson. “I hope it winna brak o’er the district.”

“I hope not, Findlayson. Anyhow, I know the black fellows well. I’m not sure I won’t ride over after I get back and try to get to the bottom of the difference.”

The out-station, under the immediate charge of Gentleman Craig, was fully thirty miles more to the north and west than Findlayson’s, and on capital sheep-pasture land, being not very far from the hills—a branch ridge that broke off from the main range, and lay almost due east and west.

Many a splendidly-wooded glen and gully was here; but at the time of our story these were still inhabited by blacks innumerable. Savage, fierce, and vindictive they were in all conscience, but surely not so brave as we sometimes hear them spoken of, else could they have swept the country for miles of the intruding white man. In days gone by they had indeed committed some appallingly-shocking massacres; but of late years they had seemed contented to either retire before the whites or to become their servants, and receive at their hands that moral death—temptation to drink—which has worked such woe among savages in every quarter of the inhabitable globe.

As Archie and his companion came upon the plain where—near the top of the creek on a bit of tableland—Craig’s “castle,” as he called it, was situated, the owner looked anxiously towards it. At first they could see no signs of life; but as they rode farther on, and nearer, the shepherd himself came out to meet them, Roup, the collie, bounding joyfully on in front, and barking in the exuberance of his glee.

“All right and safe, shepherd?”

“All right and safe, sir,” the man returned; “but the blacks have been here to-day.”

“Then I’ll go there to-morrow.”

“I don’t think that’s a good plan.”

“Oh! isn’t it? Well, I’ll chance it. Will you come, Mr Broadbent?”

“I will with pleasure.”

“Anything for dinner, George?”

“Yes, sir. I expected you; and I’ve got a grilled pheasant, and fish besides.”

“Ah, capital! But what made you expect me to-day?”

“The dog Roup, sir. He was constantly going to the door to look out, so I could have sworn you would come.”

The evening passed away quietly enough.

Dwelling in this remote region, and liable at any time to be attacked, Gentleman Craig had thought it right to almost make a fort of his little slab hut. He had two black fellows who worked for him, and with their assistance a rampart of stones, earth, and wood was thrown up, although these men had often assured him that “he,” Craig, “was ‘corton budgery,’ and that there was no fear of the black fellows ‘mumkill’ him.”

“I’m not so very sure about it,” thought Craig; “and it is best to be on the safe side.”

They retired to-night early, having seen to the sheep and set a black to watch, for the dingoes were very destructive.

Both Craig and Archie slept in the same room, and they hardly undressed, merely taking off their coats, and lying down on the rough bed of sacking, with collie near the door to do sentry.

They had not long turned in when the dog began to growl low.

“Down charge, Roup,” said Craig.

Instead of obeying, the dog sprang to the door, barking fiercely.

Both Archie and Craig were out of bed in a moment, and handling their revolvers. Craig managed to quieten Roup, and then listened attentively.

The wind was rising and moaning round the chimney, but above this sound they could hear a long-prolonged “Coo—oo—ee!”

“That’s a white man’s voice,” said Craig; “we’re safe.”

The door and fort was at once opened, and a minute after five squatters entered.

“Sorry we came so late,” they said; “but we’ve been and done it, and it took some time.”

“What have you done?” said Craig.

“Fired the woods all along the gullies among the hills.”

“Is that fair to the blacks?”

“Curse them!” exclaimed the spokesman. “Why do they not keep back? The law grumbles if we shoot the dogs, unless in what they please to call self-defence, which means after they have speared our beasts and shepherds, and are standing outside our doors with a nullah ready to brain us.”

Craig and Archie went to the door and looked towards the hills.

What a scene was there! The fire seemed to have taken possession of the whole of the highlands from east to west, and was entwining wood and forest, glen and ravine, in its snake-like embrace. The hills themselves were cradled in flames and lurid smoke. The stems of the giant gum trees alone seemed to defy the blaze, and though their summits looked like steeples on fire, the trunks stood like pillars of black marble against the golden gleam behind them. The noise was deafening, and the smoke rolled away to leeward, laden with sparks thick as the snowflakes in a winter’s fall. It was an appalling sight, the description of which is beyond the power of any pen.

“Well, men,” said Craig when he re-entered the hut, “I don’t quite see the force of what you have done. It is like a declaration of war, and, depend upon it, the black fellows will accept the challenge.”

“It’ll make the grass grow,” said one of the men with a laugh.

“Yes,” said another; “and that grass will grow over a black man’s grave or two ere long, if I don’t much mistake.”

“It wouldn’t be worth while burying the fiends,” said a third. “We’ll leave them to the rooks.”

“Well,” said Craig, “there’s meat and damper there, men. Stir up the fire, warm your tea, and be happy as long as you can. We’re off to bed.”

Gentleman Craig was as good as his word next day. He rode away in search of the tribe, and after a long ride found them encamped on a tableland.

As it turned out they knew him, and he rode quietly into their midst.

They were all armed with spear, and nullah, and boomerang. They were tattooed, nearly naked, and hideous enough in their horrid war-paint.

Craig showed no signs of fear. Indeed he felt none. He told the chief, however, that he had not approved of the action of the white men, his brothers, and had come, if possible, to make peace. Why should they fight? There was room enough in the forest and scrub for all. If they—the blacks—would leave the cattle and flocks of the squatters alone, he—Craig—could assure them things would go on as happily as before.

“And if not?” they asked.

“If not, for one black man there was in the country, there were a thousand white. They would come upon them in troops, even like the locusts; they would hunt them as they hunted the dingoes; they would kill them as dingoes were killed, and before long all the black fellows would be in the land of forgetfulness. What would it profit them then that they had speared a few white fellows?”

Craig stayed for hours arguing with these wild men, and left at last after having actually made peace with honour.

The cloud had rolled away, for a time at all events.

In the course of a few days Archie and his man left on his return journey. Findlayson made up his mind to go on with him to Burley New Farm; for this Scot was very fond of an occasional trip eastwards, and what he called a “two-handed crack” with Bob or Harry.

Everybody was glad to see him; for, truth to tell, no one had ever seen Findlayson without a smile on his old-fashioned face, and so he was well liked.

Bob came galloping out to meet them, and with him, greatly to Archie’s astonishment, was what he at first took for a black bear.

The black bear was Bounder.

Archie dismounted and threw his arms round the great honest dog's neck, and almost burst into tears of joy.

For just half a minute Bounder was taken aback; then memory came rushing over him; he gave a jump, and landed Archie on his back, and covered his face and hair with his canine kisses. But this was not enough. Bounder must blow off steam. He must get rid of the exuberance of his delight before it killed him. So with a half-hysterical but happy bark he went off at a tangent, and commenced sweeping round and round in a circle so quickly that he appeared but a black shape. This wild caper he kept up till nearly exhausted, then returned once more to be embraced.

"So they've come." It was all that Archie could say.

Yes, they had come. Elsie had come, Rupert had come, Branson and Bounder had come.

And oh, what a joyful meeting that was! Only those who have been separated for many long years from all they love and hold dear, and have met just thus, as Archie now met his sister and brother, can have any appreciation of the amount of joy that filled their hearts.

The very first overflowing of this joy being expended, of course the next thing for both Archie and the newcomers to say was, "How you've changed!"

Yes, they had all changed. None more so than Elsie. She always gave promise of beauty; but now that Archie held her at arms' length, to look at and criticise, he could not help exclaiming right truthfully:

"Why, Elsie, you're almost as beautiful as Etheldene!"

"Oh, what a compliment!" cried Rupert. "I wouldn't have it, Elsie. That 'almost' spoils it."

"Just you wait till you see Etheldene, young man," said Archie, nodding his head. "You'll fall in love at once. I only hope she won't marry Gentleman Craig. And how is mother and father?"

Then questions came in streams. To write one half that was spoken that night would take me weeks. They all sat out in the verandah of the old house; for the night was sultry and warm, and it was very late indeed before anyone ever thought of retiring.

Findlayson had been unusually quiet during the whole of the evening. To be sure, it would not have been quite right for him to have put in his oar too much, but, to tell the truth, something had happened which appeared to account for his silence. Findlayson had fallen in love—love at first sight. Oh, there are such things! I had a touch of the complaint myself once, so my judgment is critical. Of course, it is needless to say that Elsie was the bright particular star, that had in one brief moment revolutionised the existence and life of the ordinarily placid and very matter-of-fact Findlayson. So he sat to-night in his corner and hardly spoke, but, I daresay, like Paddy's parrot, he made up for it in thinking; and he looked all he could also, without seeming positively rude.

Well, a whole fortnight was spent by Archie in showing his brother and sister round the station, and initiating them into some of the mysteries and contrarities of life in the Australian Bush.

After this the three started off for Brisbane and Sydney, to complete the purchase of furniture for Archie's house. Archie proved himself exceedingly clever at this sort of thing, considering that he was only a male person. But in proof of what I state, let me tell you, that before leaving home he had even taken the measure of the rooms, and of the windows and doors. And when he got to Sydney he showed his taste in the decorative art by choosing "fixings" of an altogether Oriental and semi-aesthetic design.

At Sydney Elsie and Rupert were introduced to the Winslows, and, as soon as he conveniently could, Archie took his brother's opinion about Etheldene.

Very much to his astonishment, Rupert told him that Etheldene was more sisterly than anything else, and he dare say she was rather a nice girl—"as far as girls go."

Archie laughed outright at Rupert's coolness, but somehow or other he felt relieved.

First impressions go a far way in a matter of this kind, and it was pretty evident there was little chance of Rupert's falling in love with Etheldene, for some time at least.

Yet this was the plan of campaign Archie had cut out: Rupert and Etheldene should be very much struck with each other from the very first; the young lady should frequently visit at Burley New Farm, and, for the good of his health, Rupert should go often to Sydney. Things would progress thus, off and on, for a few years, then the marriage would follow, Rupert being by this time settled perhaps, and in a fair way of doing well. I am afraid Archie had reckoned without his host, or even his hostess.

He was not long in coming to this conclusion either; and about the same time he made another discovery, very much to his own surprise; namely, that he himself was in love with Etheldene, and that he had probably been so for some considerable length of time, without knowing it. He determined in his own mind therefore that he would steel his heart towards Miss Winslow, and forget her.

Before Elsie and Rupert came to settle down finally at the farm, they enjoyed, in company with Mr Winslow and his daughter, many charming trips to what I might call the show-places of Australia. Sydney, and all its indescribably-beautiful surroundings, they visited first. Then they went to Melbourne, and were much struck with all the wealth and grandeur they saw around them, although they could not help thinking the actual state of the streets was somewhat of a reproach to the town. They sailed on the Yarra-Yarra; they went inland and saw, only to marvel at, the grandeur of the scenery, the ferny forests, the glens and hills, the waterfalls and tumbling streams and lovely lakes. And all the time Rupert could not get rid of the impression that it was a beautiful dream, from which he would presently awake and find himself at Burley Old Farm.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Eight. The Massacre at Findlayson's Farm.

By the time Elsie and Rupert had returned from their wanderings winter was once more coming on; but already both the sister and brother had got a complexion.

The house was quite furnished now, guest room and all. It was indeed a mansion, though I would not like to say how much money it had cost Archie to make it so. However, he had determined, as he said himself to Bob, to do the thing properly while he was about it.

And there is no doubt he succeeded well. His garden too was all he had depicted it in his letter home.

That Archie had succeeded to his heart's content in breaking ties with the old country was pretty evident, from a letter received by him from his father about mid-winter.

"He had noticed for quite a long time," the Squire wrote, "and was getting more and more convinced, that this England was, agriculturally speaking, on its last legs. Even American inventions, and American skill and enterprise, had failed to do much for the lands of Burley. He had tried everything, but the ground failed to respond. Burley was a good place for an old retired man who loved to potter around after the partridges; but for one like himself, still in the prime of his life, it had lost its charms. Even Archie's mother, he told him, did not see the advisability of throwing good money after bad, and Uncle Ramsay was of the same way of thinking. So he had made up his mind to let the place and come straight away out. He would allow Archie to look out for land for him, and by-and-bye he would come and take possession. Australia would henceforth reap the benefit of his genius and example; for he meant to show Australians a thing or two."

When Archie read that letter, he came in with a rush to read it to Bob, Harry, and Sarah.

"I think your father is right," said Bob.

"I tell you, Bob, my boy, it isn't father so much as mother. The dear old mummy speaks and breathes through every line and word of this epistle. Now I'm off to astonish Elsie and Roup. Come along, Bounder."

Meanwhile Findlayson became a regular visitor at the farm.

“Why,” Archie said to him one evening, as he met him about the outer boundary of the farm, “why, Findlayson, my boy, you’re getting to be a regular ‘sundowner.’ Well, Miss Winslow has come, and Craig is with us, and as I want to show Branson a bit of real Australian sport, you had better stop with us a fortnight.”

“I’ll be delighted. I wish I’d brought my fiddle.”

“We’ll send for it if you can’t live without it.”

“Not very weel. But I’ve something to tell you.”

“Well, say on; but you needn’t dismount.”

“Yes, I’ll speak better down here.”

Findlayson sat up on top of the fence, and at once opened fire by telling Archie he had fallen in love with Elsie, and had determined to make her his wife. Archie certainly was taken aback.

“Why, Findlayson,” he said, “you’re old enough to be her father.”

“A’ the better, man. And look here, I’ve been squatting for fifteen years, ever since there was a sheep in the plains almost. I have a nice little nest egg at the bank, and if your sister doesna care to live in the Bush we’ll tak’ a hoose in Sydney. For, O man, man, Elsie is the bonniest lassie the world e’er saw. She beats the gowan (mountain daisy).”

Archie laughed.

“I must refer you to the lady herself,” he said.

“Of course, man, of course—

““He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the test
To win or lose it all.””

So away went Findlayson to put his fate to the test.

What he said or what she said does not really concern us; but five minutes after his interview Archie met the honest Scot, and wondrously crestfallen he looked.

“She winna hae me,” he cried, “but nil desperandum, that’ll be my motto till the happy day.”

The next fortnight was in a great measure given up to pleasure and sport. Both Branson and Bounder received their baptism of fire, though the great Newfoundland was wondrously exercised in his mind as to what a kangaroo was, and what it was not. As to the dingoes, he arrived at a conclusion very speedily. They could beat him at a race, however; but when Bounder one time got two of them together, he proved to everybody’s satisfaction that there was life in the old dog yet.

Gentleman Craig never appeared to such excellent advantage anywhere as in ladies’ society. He really led the conversation at the dinner-table, though not appearing to do so, but rather the reverse, while in the drawing-room he was the moving spirit.

He also managed to make Findlayson happy after a way. The Scotchman had told Craig all his troubles, but Craig brought him his fiddle, on which he was a really excellent performer.

“Rouse out, Mr Findlayson, and join the ladies at the piano.”

“But, man,” the squatter replied, “my heart’s no in it; my heart is broken. I can play slow music, but when it comes to quick, it goes hard against the grain.”

Nevertheless, Findlayson took his stand beside the piano, and the ice thus being broken, he played every night, though it must be confessed, for truth’s sake, he never refused a “cogie” when the bottle came round his way. Towards ten o’clock Findlayson used, therefore, to become somewhat sentimental. The gentleman sat up for a wee half hour after the ladies retired, and sometimes Findlayson would seize his fiddle.

“Gentlemen,” he would say, “here is how I feel.”

Then he would play a lament or a wail with such feeling that even his listeners would be affected, while sometimes the tears would be quivering on the performer’s eyelashes.

At the end of the fortnight Findlayson went to Brisbane. He had some mysterious business to transact, the nature of which he refused to tell even Archie. But it was rumoured that a week or two later on, drays laden with furniture were seen to pass along the tracks on their way to Findlayson’s farm.

Poor fellow, he was evidently badly hit. He was very much in love indeed, and, like a drowning man, he clutched at straws.

The refurnishing of his house was one of these straws. Findlayson was going to give “a week’s fun,” as he phrased it. He was determined, after having seen Archie’s new house, that his own should rival and even outshine it in splendour. And he really was insane enough to believe that if Elsie only once saw the charming house he owned, with the wild and beautiful scenery all around it, she would alter her mind, and look more favourably on his suit.

In giving way to vain imaginings of this kind, Findlayson was really ignoring, or forgetting at all events, the sentiments of his own favourite poet, Burns, as impressed in the following touching lines:

“It ne’er was wealth, it ne’er was wealth,
That bought contentment, peace, or pleasure;
The bands and bliss o’ mutual love,
O that’s the chiefest world’s treasure!”

His sister was very straightforward, and at once put her brother down as a wee bit daft. Perhaps he really was; only the old saying is a true one: “Those that are in love are like no one else.”

It was the last month of winter, when early one morning a gay party from Burley New Farm set out to visit Findlayson, and spend a week or two in order to “liven him up,” as Harry expressed it.

Bob was not particularly fond of going much from home—besides, Winslow and he were planning some extensions—so he stopped on the Station. But Harry went, and, as before, when going to the kangaroo hunt, Gentleman Craig was in the cavalcade, and of course Rupert and Elsie.

It would have been no very difficult matter to have done the journey in a single day, only Archie was desirous of letting his brother and sister have a taste of camping out in the Bush.

They chose the same route as before, and encamped at night in the self-same place.

The evening too was spent in much the same way, even to singing and story-telling, and Craig’s lullaby to Baby, when she and Elsie had gone to their tent.

Morning dawned at last on forest and plain, and both Harry and the brothers were early astir. It would have been impossible to remain asleep much after daybreak, owing to the noise of the birds, including the occasional ear-splitting clatter of the laughing jackasses.

Besides, towards morning it had been exceedingly cold. The first thing that greeted their eyes was a thorough old-fashioned hoar frost, the like of which Archie had not seen for many a year. Everything gleamed, white almost as coral. The grass itself was a sight to see, and the leaves on the trees were edged with lace. But up mounted the sun, and all was speedily changed. Leaves grew brightly green again, and the hoar frost was turned into glancing, gleaming, rainbow-coloured drops of dew.

The young men ran merrily away to the pool in the creek, and most effectually scared the ducks.

The breakfast to-day was a different sort of a meal to the morsel of stiff damper and corned junk that had been partaken of at last bivouac. Elsie made the tea, and Etheldene and she presided. The meat pies and patties were excellent, and everyone was in the highest possible spirits, and joyously merry.

Alas! and alas! this was a breakfast no one who sat down to, and who lives, is ever likely to forget.

Have you ever, reader, been startled on a bright sunshiny summer's day by a thunder peal? And have you seen the clouds rapidly bank up after this and obscure the sky, darkness brooding over the windless landscape, lighted up every moment by the blinding lightning's flash, and gloom and danger brooding all round, where but a short half hour ago the birds carolled in sunlight? Then will you be able, in some measure, to understand the terribleness of the situation in which an hour or two after breakfast the party found themselves, and the awful suddenness of the shock that for a time quite paralysed every member of it.

They had left the dismal depths of the forest, and were out on the open pasture land, and nearing Findlayson's house, when Craig and Archie, riding on in front, came upon the well-known bobtailed collie, who was the almost constant companion of the squatter. The dog was alive, but dying. There was a terrible spear-gash in his neck. Craig dismounted and knelt beside him. The poor brute knew him, wagged his inch-long tail, licked the hand that caressed him, and almost immediately expired. Craig immediately rode back to the others.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies," he said. "But I fear the worst. There is no smoke in Findlayson's chimney. The black fellows have killed his dog."

Though both girls grew pale, there were no other signs of fear manifested by them. If Young Australia could be brave, so could Old England.

The men consulted hurriedly, and it was agreed that while Branson and Harry waited with the ladies, Archie and Craig should ride on towards the house.

Not a sign of life; no, not one. Signs enough of death though, signs enough of an awful struggle. It was all very plain and simple, though all very, very sad and dreadful.

Here in the courtyard lay several dead natives, festering and sweltering in the noonday sun. Here were the boomerangs and spears that had fallen from their hands as they dropped never to rise again. Here was the door battered and splintered and beaten in with tomahawks, and just inside, in the passage, lay the bodies of Hurricane Bill and poor Findlayson, hacked about almost beyond recognition.

In the rooms all was confusion, every place had been ransacked. The furniture, all new and elegant, smashed and riven; the very piano that the honest Scot had bought for sake of Elsie had been dissected, and its keys carried away for ornaments. In an inner room, half-dressed, were Findlayson's sister and her little Scotch maid, their arms broken, as if they had held them up to beseech for mercy from the monsters who had attacked them. Their arms were broken, and their skulls beaten in, their white night-dresses drenched in blood. There was blood, blood everywhere—in curdled streams, in great liver-like gouts, and in dark pools on the floor. In the kitchen were many more bodies of white men (the shepherds), and of the fiends in human form with whom they had struggled for their lives.

It was an awful and sickening sight.

No need for Craig or Archie to tell the news when they returned to the others. Their very silence and sadness told the terrible tale.

Nothing could be done at present, however, in the way of punishing the murderers, who by this time must be far away in their mountain fastnesses.

They must ride back, and at once too, in order to warn the people at Burley and round about of their great danger.

So the return journey was commenced at once. On riding through the forest they had to observe the greatest caution.

Craig was an old Bushman, and knew the ways of the blacks well. He trotted on in front. And whenever in any thicket, where an ambush might possibly be lurking, he saw no sign of bird or beast, he dismounted and, revolver in hand, examined the place before he permitted the others to come on.

They got through the forest and out of the gloom at last, and some hours afterwards dismounted a long way down the creek to water the horses and let them browse. As for themselves, no one thought of eating. There was that feeling of weight at every heart one experiences when first awakening from some dreadful nightmare.

They talked about the massacre, as they sat under the shadow of a gum tree, almost in whispers; and at the slightest unusual noise the men grasped their revolvers and listened.

They were just about to resume their journey when the distant sound of galloping horses fell on their ears. Their own nags neighed. All sprang to their feet, and next moment some eight or nine men rode into the clearing.

Most of them were known to Craig, so he advanced to meet them.

“Ah! I see you know the worst,” said the leader.

“Yes,” said Craig, “we know.”

“We’ve been to your place. It is all right there with one exception.”

“One exception?”

“Yes; it’s only the kid—Mr Cooper’s little daughter, you know.”

“Is she dead?” cried Archie aghast.

“No, sir; that is, it isn’t likely. Mr Cooper’s black girl left last night, and took the child.”

“Good heavens! our little Diana! Poor Bob! He will go raving mad!”

“He is mad, sir, or all but, already; but we’ve left some fellows to defend the station, and taken to the trail as you see.”

“Craig,” said Archie, “we must go too.”

“Well,” said the first speaker, “the coast is all clear betwixt here and Burley. Two must return there with the ladies. I advise you to make your choice, and lose no time.”

It was finally arranged that Branson and one of the newcomers should form the escort; and so Archie, Harry, and Craig bade the girls a hurried adieu, and speedily rode away after the men.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Twenty Nine On The War Trail

Twelve men all told to march against a tribe consisting probably of over a hundred and fifty warriors, armed for the fight, and intoxicated with their recent success! It was a rash, an almost mad, venture; but they did not for one moment dream of drawing back. They would trust to their own superior skill to beat the enemy; trust to that fortune that so often favours the brave; trusting—many of them I hope—to that merciful Providence who protects the weak, and who, in our greatest hour of need, does not refuse to listen to our pleadings.

They had ridden some little way in silence, when suddenly Archie drew rein.

“Halt, men!” he cried. “Halt for a moment and deliberate. Who is to be the commander of this little force?”

“Yourself,” said Gentleman Craig, lifting his hat. “You are boss of Burley Farm, and Mr Cooper’s dearest friend.”

“Hear, hear!” cried several of the others.

“Perhaps it is best,” said Archie, after a moment’s thoughtful pause, “that I should take the leadership under the circumstances. But, Craig, I choose you as my second in command, and one whose counsel I will respect and be guided by.”

“Thank you,” said Craig; “and to begin with, I move we go straight back to Findlayson’s farm. We are not too well armed, nor too well provisioned.”

The proposal was at once adopted, and towards sundown they had once more reached the outlying pastures.

They were dismounting to enter, when the half-naked figure of a black suddenly appeared from behind the storehouse.

A gun or two was levelled at him at once.

“Stay,” cried Craig. “Do not fire. That is Jacoby, the black stockman, and one of poor Mr Findlayson’s chief men. Ha, Jacoby, advance my lad, and tell us all you know.”

Jacoby's answer was couched in such unintelligible jargon—a mixture of Bush-English and broad Scotch—that I will not try the reader's patience by giving it verbatim. He was terribly excited, and looked heartbroken with grief. He had but recently come home, having passed "plenty black fellows" on the road. They had attempted to kill him, but here he was.

"Could he track them?"

"Yes, easily. They had gone away there." He pointed north and east as he spoke.

"This is strange," said Craig. "Men, if what Jacoby tells us be correct, instead of retreating to their homes in the wilderness, the blacks are doubling round; and if so, it must be their intention to commit more of their diabolical deeds, so there is no time to be lost."

It was determined first to bury their dear friends; and very soon a grave was dug—a huge rough hole, that was all—and in it the murdered whites were laid side by side.

Rupert repeated the burial-service, or as much of it as he could remember; then the rude grave was filled, and as the earth fell over the chest of poor old-fashioned Findlayson, and Archie thought of all his droll and innocent ways, tears trickled over his face that he made no attempt to hide.

The men hauled the gates of a paddock off its hinges, and piled wood upon that, so that the wandering dingoes, with their friends the rooks, should be baulked in their attempts to gorge upon the dead.

The blacks had evidently commenced to ransack the stores; but for some reason or another had gone and left them mostly untouched.

Here were gunpowder and cartridges in abundance, and many dainty, easily-carried foods, such as tinned meats and fish, that the unhappy owner had evidently laid in for his friends. So enough of everything was packed away in the men's pockets or bags, and they were soon ready once more for the road.

The horses must rest, however; for these formed the mainstay of the little expedition. The men too could not keep on all night without a pause; so Archie and Craig consulted, and it was agreed to bivouac for a few hours, then resume the journey when the moon should rise.

Meanwhile the sun went down behind the dark and distant wooded hills, that in their strange shapes almost resembled the horizon seen at sea when the waves are high and stormy. Between the place where Archie and his brother stood and the light, all was rugged plain and forest land, but soon the whole assumed a shade of almost blackness, and the nearest trees stood up weird and spectre-like against the sky's strange hue. Towards the horizon to-night there was a deep saffron or orange fading above into a kind of pure grey or opal hue, with over it all a light blush of red, and hurrying away to the south, impelled by some air-current not felt below, was a mighty host of little cloudlets of every colour, from darkest purple to golden-red and crimson.

There was now and then the bleating of sheep—sheep without a shepherd—and a slight tinkle-tinkle, as of a bell. It was in reality the voice of a strange bird, often to be found in the neighbourhood of creeks and pools.

Hardly any other sound at present fell on the ear. By-and-bye the hurrying clouds got paler, and the orange left the horizon, and stars began to twinkle in the east.

“Come out here a little way with me,” said Rupert, taking Archie by the hand.

When they had gone some little distance, quite out of hearing of the camp, Rupert spoke:

“Do you mind kneeling down here,” he said, “to pray, Archie?”

“You good old Rupert, no,” was the reply.

Perhaps no more simple, earnest, or heart-felt prayer was ever breathed under such circumstances, or in such a place. And not only was Rupert earnest, but he was confident. He spoke to the great Father as to a friend whom he had long, long known, and One whom he could trust to do all for the best. He prayed for protection, he prayed for help for the speedy restoration of the stolen child, and he even prayed for the tribe they soon hoped to meet in conflict—prayed that the God who moves in so mysterious a way to perform His wonders would bless the present affliction to the white man, and even to the misguided black.

Oh, what a beautiful religion is ours—the religion of love—the religion taught by the lips of the mild and gentle Jesus!

When they rose from their knees they once more looked skywards at the stars, for they were brightly shining now; then hand-in-hand, as they had come, the brothers returned to the camp.

No log fire was lit to-night. The men just lay down to sleep rolled in their blankets, with their arms close by their saddle pillows, two being told off to walk sentry in case of a sudden surprise.

Even the horses were put in an enclosure, lest they might roam too far away.

About twelve o'clock Archie awoke from an uneasy dreamful slumber, and looked about him. His attention was speedily attracted to what seemed a huge fire blazing luridly behind the hills, and lighting up the haze above with its gleams. Was the forest on fire again? No; it was only moonrise over the woods. He awakened Craig, and soon the little camp was all astir, and ready for the road. Jacoby was to act as guide. No Indian from the Wild West of America could be a better tracker.

But even before he started he told Craig the task would be an easy one, for the black fellows had drunk plenty, and had taken plenty rum with them. They would not go far, he thought, and there was a probability that they would meet some of the band returning. Even in the moonlight Jacoby followed the trail easily and rapidly.

It took them first straight for the forest that had been burned recently—a thoughtless deed on the part of the whites, that probably led to all this sad trouble.

There was evidence here that the blacks had gone into camp on the very night of the massacre, and had held a corroboree, which could only have been a day or two ago. There were the remains of the camp fires and the trampled ground and broken branches, with no attempt at concealment. There was a chance that even now they might not be far away, and that the little band might come up with them ere they had started for the day. But if they ventured to hope so, they were doomed to disappointment.

Morning broke at last lazily over the woods, and with but a brief interval they followed up the trail, and so on and on all that day, till far into the afternoon, when for a brief moment only Jacoby found himself puzzled, having fallen in with another trail leading south and west from the main track. He soon, however, discovered that the new trail must be that of some band who had joined the Findlayson farm raiders.

It became painfully evident soon after that this was the correct solution, for, going backwards some little way, Archie found a child's shoe—one of a crimson pair that Bob had bought in Brisbane for his little Diana.

“God help her, poor darling!” said Archie reverently, as he placed the little shoe in his breast pocket. When he returned he held it up for a moment before the men, and the

scowl of anger that crossed their faces, and the firmer clutch they took of their weapons, showed it would indeed be bad for the blacks when they met these rough pioneers face to face.

At sunset supper was partaken of, and camp once more formed, though no fire was lit, cold though it might be before morning.

The men were tired, and were sound asleep almost as soon as they lay down; but Craig, with the brothers, climbed the ridge of the hill to look about them soon after it grew dark.

The camp rested at the entrance of a wild gully, a view of which could be had, darkling away towards the east, from the hill on which the three friends now found themselves.

Presently Rupert spoke.

“Archie,” he said, “in this land of contrarities does the moon sometimes rise in the south?”

“Not quite,” replied Archie.

“Look, then. What is that reflection over yonder?” Craig and Archie both caught sight of it at the same time.

“By Saint George and merry England!” Craig cried exultingly, “that is the camp of the blacks. Now to find Diana’s other shoe, and the dear child herself wearing it. Now for revenge!”

“Nay,” said Rupert, “call it justice, Craig.”

“What you will; but let us hurry down.”

They stayed but for a moment more to take their bearings. The fire gleams pointed to a spot to the south-east, on high ground, and right above the gully, and they had a background of trees, not the sky. It was evident then that the enemy was encamped in a little clearing on a forest tableland; and if they meant to save the child’s life—if indeed she was not already dead—the greatest caution would be necessary.

They speedily descended, and a consultation being held, it was resolved to commence operations as soon as the moon should rise; but meanwhile to creep in the darkness as near to the camp as possible.

But first Jacoby was sent out to reconnoitre. No cat, no flying squirrel could glide more noiselessly through an Australian forest than this faithful fellow. Still he seemed an unconsciously long time gone. Just as Craig and Archie were getting seriously uneasy the tinkle, tinkle of the bell-bird was heard. This was the signal agreed upon, and presently after, Jacoby himself came silently into their midst.

“The child?” was Archie’s first question.

“Baâl mumhill piccaninny, belong a you. Pidney you.”

“The child is safe,” said Craig, after asking a few more questions of this Scotch Myell black.

“Safe? and they are holding a corroboree and drinking. There is little time to lose. They may sacrifice the infant at any time.”

Craig struck a light as he spoke, and every man examined his arms.

“The moon will rise in an hour. Let us go on. Silent as death, men! Do not overturn a stone or break a twig, or the poor baby’s life will be sacrificed in a moment.”

They now advanced slowly and cautiously, guided by Jacoby, and at length lay down almost within pistol-shot of the place where the horrid corroboree was going on.

Considering the noise—the shrieking, the clashing of arms, the rude chanting of songs, and awful din, of the dancers and actors in this ugly drama—to maintain silence might have seemed unnecessary; but these blacks have ears like wolves, and, in a lull of even half a second, would be sharp to hear the faintest unusual noise.

Craig and Archie, however, crept on till they came within sight of the ceremonies.

At another time it might have been interesting to watch the hideous grotesqueness of that awful war-dance, but other thoughts were in their minds at present—they were looking everywhere for Diana. Presently the wild, naked, dancing blacks surged backwards, and, asleep in the arms of a horrid gin, they discovered Bob’s darling child. It was well Bob himself was not here or all would quickly have been lost. All was nearly lost as it was; for suddenly Archie inadvertently snapped a twig. In a moment there was silence, except for the barking of a dog.

Craig raised his voice, and gave vent to a scream so wild and unearthly that even Archie was startled.

At once all was confusion among the blacks. Whether they had taken it for the yell of Bunyip or not may never be known, but they prepared to fly. The gin carrying Diana threw down the frightened child. A black raised his arm to brain the little toddler. He fell dead instead.

Craig's aim had been a steady one. Almost immediately after a volley or two completed the rout, and the blacks fled yelling into the forest.

Diana was saved! This was better than revenge; for not a hair of her bonnie wee head had been injured, so to speak, and she still wore the one little red-morocco shoe.

There was not a man there who did not catch that child up in his arms and kiss her, some giving vent to their feelings in wild words of thankfulness to God in heaven, while the tears came dripping over their hardy, sun-browned cheeks.

From Squire to Squatter by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Thirty.

Chest to Chest with Savages—How it all Ended.

No one thought of sleeping again that night. They went back for their horses, and, as the moon had now risen, commenced the journey in a bee line, as far as that was possible, towards Burley New Farm.

They travelled on all night, still under the guidance of Jacoby, who needed no blazed trees to show in which direction to go. But when morning came rest became imperative, for the men were beginning to nod in their saddles, and the horses too seemed to be falling asleep on their feet, for several had stumbled and thrown their half-senseless riders. So camp was now formed and breakfast discussed, and almost immediately all save a sentry went off into sound and dreamless slumber, Diana lying close to Craig, whom she was very fond of, with her head on his great shoulder and her fingers firmly entwined in his beard.

It was hard upon the one poor fellow who had to act as sentry. Do what he might he could scarcely keep awake, and he was far too tired to continue walking about. He went and leant his body against a tree, and in this position, what with the heat of the day, and the drowsy hum of insects, with the monotonous song of the grasshopper, again and again he felt himself merging into the land of dreams. Then he would start and shake himself, and take a turn or two in the sunshine, then go back to the tree and nod as before.

The day wore on, the sun got higher and higher, and about noon, just when the sentry was thinking or rather dreaming of waking the sleepers, there was a wild shout from a neighbouring thicket, a spear flew past him and stuck in the tree. Next moment there was a terrible *melée*—a hand-to-hand fight with savages that lasted for long minutes, but finally resulted in victory for the squatters.

But, alas! it was a dearly-bought victory. Three out of the twelve were dead, and three more, including Gentleman Craig, grievously wounded.

The rest followed up the blacks for some little way, and more than one of them bit the dust. Then they returned to help their fellows.

Craig's was a spear wound through the side, none the less dangerous in that hardly a drop of blood was lost externally.

They drew the killed in under a tree, and having bound up the wounds of the others, and partly carrying them or helping them along, they resumed the march.

All that day they dragged themselves along, and it was far into the early hours of morning ere they reached the boundaries of Burley New Farm.

The moon was shining, though not very brightly, light fleecy clouds were driving rapidly across the sky, so they could see the lights in both the old house and in the lower windows of Archie's own dwelling. They fired guns and coo-ee-ed, and presently Bob and Winslow rushed out to bid them welcome.

Diana went bounding away to meet him.

"Oh, daddy, daddy!" she exclaimed, "what a time we've been having! but mind, daddy, it wasn't all fun."

Bob could not speak for the life of him. He just staggered in with the child in his arms and handed her over to Sarah; but I leave the reader to imagine the state of Sarah's feelings now.

Poor Craig was borne in and put to bed in Archie's guest room, and there he lay for weeks.

Bob himself had gone to Brisbane to import a surgeon, regardless of expense; but it was probably more owing to the tender nursing of Elsie than anything else that Craig was able at length to crawl out and breathe the balmy, flower-scented air in the verandah.

One afternoon, many weeks after this, Craig was lying on a bank, under the shade of a tree, in a beautiful part of the forest, all in whitest bloom, and Elsie was seated near him.

There had been silence for some time, and the girl was quietly reading.

"I wonder," said Craig at last; "if my life is really worth the care that you and all the good people here have lavished on me?"

"How can you speak thus?" said Elsie, letting her book drop in her lap, and looking into his face with those clear, blue eyes of hers.

“If you only knew all my sad, sinful story, you would not wonder that I speak thus.”

“Tell me your story: may I not hear it?”

“It is so long and, pardon me, so melancholy.”

“Never mind, I will listen attentively.”

Then Craig commenced. He told her all the strange history of his early demon-haunted life, about his recklessness, about his struggles and his final victory over self. He told her he verily did believe that his mother’s spirit was near him that night in the forest when he made the vow which Providence in His mercy had enabled him to keep.

Yes, it was a long story. The sun had gone down ere he had finished, a crescent moon had appeared in the southern sky, and stars had come out. There was sweetness and beauty everywhere. There was calm in Craig’s soul now. For he had told Elsie something besides. He had told her that he had loved her from the first moment he had seen her, and he had asked her in simple language to become his wife—to be his guardian angel.

That same evening, when Archie came out into the garden, he found Elsie still sitting by Craig’s couch, but her hand was clasped in his.

Then Archie knew all, and a great, big sigh of relief escaped him, for until this very moment he had been of opinion that Craig loved Etheldene.

In course of a few months Squire Broadbent was as good as his word. He came out to the new land to give the Australians the benefit of his genius in the farming way; to teach Young Australia a thing or two it had not known before; so at least he thought.

With him came Mrs Broadbent, and even Uncle Ramsay, and the day of their arrival at Brisbane was surely a red-letter day in the annals of that thriving and prosperous place.

Strange to say, however, none of the squatters from the Bush, none of the speculating men, nor anybody else apparently, were very much inclined to be lectured about their own country, and the right and wrong way of doing things, by a Squire from the old country, who had never been here before. Some of them were even rude enough to laugh in his face, but the Squire was not offended a bit. He was on far too good terms with himself for that, and too sure that he was in the right in all he said. He told some of these Bush farmers that if they did not choose to learn a wrinkle or two from him he was not the loser, with much more to the same purpose, all of which had about the same effect on his hearers that rain has on a duck’s back.

To use a rather hackneyed phrase, Squire Broadbent had the courage of his convictions.

He settled quietly down at Burley New Farm, and commenced to study Bush-life in all its bearings. It soon began to dawn upon him that Australia was getting to be a great country, that she had a great future before her, and that he—Squire Broadbent—would be connected with it. He was in no great hurry to invest, though eventually he would. It would be better to wait and watch. There was room enough and to spare for all at Archie's house, and that all included honest Uncle Ramsay of course. He and Winslow resumed acquaintance, and in the blunt, straightforward ways of the man even Squire Broadbent found a deal to admire and even to marvel at.

"He is a clever man," said the Squire to his brother; "a clever man and a far-seeing. He gets a wonderful grasp of financial matters in a moment. Depend upon it, brother, he is the right metal, and it is upon solid stones like him that the future greatness of a nation should be founded."

Uncle Ramsay said he himself did not know much about it. He knew more about ships, and was quite content to settle down at Brisbane, and keep a morsel of a 20-tonner. That was his ambition.

What a delight it was for Archie to have them all round his breakfast-table in the green parlour at Burley New Farm, or seated out in the verandah all so homelike and happy.

His dear old mummy too, with her innocent womanly ways, delighted with all she saw, yet half afraid of almost everything—half afraid the monster gum trees would fall upon her when out in the forest; half afraid to put her feet firmly to the ground when walking, but gathering up her skirts gingerly, and thinking every withered branch was a snake; half afraid the howling dingoes would come down in force at night, as wild wolves do on Russian wastes, and kill and eat everybody; half afraid of the most ordinary good-natured-looking black fellow; half afraid of even the pet kangaroo when he hopped round and held up his chin to have his old-fashioned neck stroked; half afraid—but happy, so happy nevertheless, because she had all she loved around her.

Gentleman Craig was most deferential and attentive to Mrs Broadbent, and she could not help admiring him—indeed, no one could—and quite approved of Elsie's choice; though, mother-like, she thought the girl far too young to marry yet, as the song says.

However, they were not to be married yet quite. There was a year to elapse, and a busy one it was. First and foremost, Craig took the unfortunate Findlayson's farm. But the old steadying was allowed to go to decay, and some one told me the other day that there is

now a genuine ghost, said to be seen on moonlight nights, wandering round the ruined pile. Anyhow, its associations were of far too terrible a character for Craig to think of building near it.

He chose the site for his house and outbuildings near the creek and the spot where they had bivouacked before the murder was discovered. It was near here too that Craig had made his firm resolve to be a free man—made it and kept it. The spot was charmingly beautiful too; and as his district included a large portion of the forest, he commenced clearing that, but in so scientific and tasteful a manner that it looked, when finished, like a noble park.

During this year Squire Broadbent also became a squatter. From Squire to Squatter may sound to some like a come-down in life; but really Broadbent did not think so.

He managed to buy out a station immediately adjoining Archie's, and when he had got fairly established thereon he told his brother Ramsay that fifteen years had tumbled off his shoulders all in a lump—fifteen years of care and trouble, fifteen years of struggle to keep his head above water, and live up to his squiredom.

"I'm more contented now by far and away," he told his wife, "than I was in the busy, boastful days before the fire at Burley Old Farm; so, you see, it doesn't take much in this world to make a man happy."

Rupert did not turn squatter, but missionary. It was a great treat for him to have Etheldene to ride with him away out into the bush whenever he heard a tribe had settled down anywhere for a time. Etheldene knew all their ways, and between the two of them they no doubt did much good.

It is owing to such earnest men as Rupert that so great a change has come over the black population, and that so many of them, even as I write, sit humbly at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in their right mind. To quote the words of a recent writer: "The war-paints and weapons for fights are seen no more, the awful heathen corroborees have ceased, the females are treated with kindness, and the lamentable cries, accompanied by bodily injuries, when death occurred, have given place to Christian sorrow and quiet tears for their departed friends."

It came to pass one day that Etheldene and Archie, towards the end of the year, found themselves riding alone, through scrub and over plain, just as they were that day they were lost. The conversation turned round to Rupert's mission.

"What a dear, good, young man your brother is, Archie!" said the girl.

“Do you really love him?”

“As a brother, yes.”

“Etheldene, have him for a brother, will you?”

The rich blood mounted to her cheeks and brow. She cast one half-shy, half-joyful look at Archie, and simply murmured, “Yes.”

It was all over in a moment then. Etheldene struck her horse lightly across the crest with the handle of her stock whip, and next minute both horses were galloping as if for dear life.

When Archie told Rupert how things had turned out, he only smiled in his quiet manner.

“It is a queer way of wooing,” he said; “but then you were always a queer fellow, Archie, and Etheldene is a regular Bush baby, as Craig calls her. Oh, I knew long ago she loved you!”

At the year’s end then both Elsie and Etheldene were married, and married, too, at the same church in Sydney from which Bob led Sarah, his blushing bride. It might not have been quite so wild and daft a wedding, but it was a very happy one nevertheless.

No one was more free in blessing the wedded couples than old Kate. Yes, old as she was, she had determined not to be left alone in England.

We know how Bob spent his honeymoon. How were the new young folks to spend theirs? Oh, it was all arranged beforehand! And on the very morning of the double marriage they embarked—Harry and Bob going with them for a holiday—on board Captain Vesey’s pretty yacht, and sailed away for England. Etheldene’s dream of romance was about to become a reality; she was not only to visit the land of chivalry, but with Archie her husband and hero by her side.

The yacht hung off and on the shore all day, as if reluctant to leave the land; but towards evening a breeze sprang up from the west, the sails filled, and away she went, dancing and curtsying over the water like a thing of life.

The sunset was bewitchingly beautiful; the green of the land was changed to a purple haze, that softened and beautified its every outline; the cloudless sky was clear and

deep; that is, it gave you the idea you could see so far into and through it. There was a flush of saffron along the horizon; above it was of an opal tint, with here and there a tender shade of crimson—only a suspicion of this colour, no more; and apparently close at hand, in the east, were long-drawn cloudlets of richest red and gold.

Etheldene looked up in her husband's face.

“Shall we have such a sky as that to greet our arrival on English shores?” she said.

Archie drew her closer to his side.

“I'm not quite sure about the sky,” he replied, shaking his head and smiling, “but we'll have a hearty English welcome.”

And so they had.

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