FROM SELECTION TO CITY
From Selection to City

by Steele Rudd (A. H. Davis)

illustrations by Lionel Lindsay
Introduction to The University of Queensland
Press Edition

From Selection to City is essentially autobiographical, the story of Steele Rudd being in most respects the story of my father, Arthur Hoey Davis. This was the first of his books to contain references to Steele Rudd, who now tells his story in the first person. It was written toward the end of 1906 at "Myora", a house in New Sandgate Road, Clayfield, Brisbane. When completed, it appeared as a series of episodes in various magazines, being collected and published in book form in 1909 by the Sydney publisher A. C. Rowlandson, to whom my father sold the copyright for one hundred pounds. The dramatic rights, however, were reserved by Steele Rudd. The University of Queensland Press edition uses the text of the 1909 edition and reproduces the original illustrations by Lionel Lindsay.

The events recounted in From Selection to City were often told by my father at home, with special enjoyment when he was joined by his brothers Ned and Dick. The chapter "Off to the Shearing" shows Ned at sixteen and my father at twelve leaving home and starting work at Pilton Station. At this comparatively early age Ned was a competent shearer.

"My First Day in a Government Office" relates my father's experiences when he was appointed Junior Clerk in the office of the Curator of Estates in Brisbane. It can be freely accepted that all the stories related in this book are true to life.

ERIC DAVIS
BRISBANE
JUNE 1969
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1. The Invitation

I do not know where my memory commenced. I wasn’t very old, however, when the invitation for Bella Belford’s wedding came to our place, but I was ambitious, and loved enjoyment. I couldn’t tell you how much I loved enjoyment; I only know I never grew tired of it. Rarely was there any about the selection to grow tired of, anyway. Tramping the bush after cows; stirring blazing fires that roared through the heat of the day and scorched the green grass and vegetation for yards around; picking your way over the frosted earth, in bare feet at sunrise of a winter’s morning, were disheartening pastimes, and set one wondering if life was always to be the same, and if it would ever be worth living at all!

But when the enjoyment came along—ah! then was the time! All the terrors and tribulations of the selection vanished, or were forgotten, and the dull, dead land became a bright, laughing land, and the world a fine world, a good, grand, glorious old world. I cast away the rake on hearing that invitation, and threw up my hat, and, when it came down, jumped on it, and said I was going to that wedding. Joe, who was affected the same way, jumped too, but not on my hat. He jumped on the up-turned teeth of the rake. Then there was enjoyment! Joe roared like a young bull, and tried to kick himself free of the rake. But it was a good rake. It was one we bought. Mother screamed; Sarah screamed and danced clumsily about, and tramped on the handle of the rake with her big feet, and Joe came off it.

“Fetch some rag! Oh, dear me, dear me! Fetch some rag, quick!” mother moaned.

I ran for the rag. I didn’t know where I was going to get any, but I ran for it. Into the house I dashed, stopped all aflutter, and stared excitedly about. I saw only the papered walls, the gin cases, and the table. There was no time to lose. I rushed out again.
"I can't see any," I shouted. "Where'll I get it?"

"Oh dear, oh dear! the child will bleed to death!" mother cried. "Bring something; anything at all. Quick! oh my heavens!"

I rushed into the house again—and out. I was distracted. I knew Joe would die.

"There's none!" I blubbered.

"Oh, my God! bring something," from mother. Her words were touching. My eyes rested on something—something ballooning gaily on the clothes line, and which, to me, seemed capable of supplying a whole hospital with rag. I dashed for that clothes line with both arms outstretched.

"Not them! not them!" Sarah shrieked, rising up from beside Joe. I stopped and looked at Sarah.

"Go on with y'" she said, "have some sense!" and, racing past me, entered the house herself and returned with yards of calico. It was just in time. Joe's life was saved. After a while he lifted himself slowly, and limped cautiously about. Mother anxiously watched his movements for a long while. Mother was a good, careful nurse.

"Do you feel the pain going up your leg?" she asked.

Joe didn't feel any pain much, but, when mother was thoughtful enough to remind him, he hadn't the heart to disappoint her. He placed both hands on the uninjured limb by mistake, and pulled a face that explained the torture he was silently enduring.

"Do you?" mother repeated with increased anxiety. "Tell me!" And she put her hand on his shoulder to implore an answer. Joe screwed and twisted about some more, before he could speak.

"A b-b-bit," he murmured. Then there was fresh alarm.

"Oh, good gracious me!" mother exclaimed, turning to Sarah, "the pain's going up the child's leg, and it'll turn to blood poisoning. Fetch him in and put him on the sofa. And your father's not at home either! Oh, whatever will we do!"

Sarah cross-examined Joe.

"The pain's there, is it?" she said, squeezing his thigh.

"Y-y-yes—don't 'urt me." Joe groaned.

Then Sarah accidentally made a discovery.
He Jumped on the Up-turned Teeth of the Rake
“Why, that isn’t the leg your sore foot is on,” she said.
Mother stared then, and seemed to learn a lot.
“Go on, boy,” she said, sceptically; “and don’t be sham­ming, you young scamp.”
A conflict of feeling filled the heart of Joe. He was in doubt whether to feel ashamed of himself or to revile Sarah. He reviled Sarah.
“Well, it’s sore enough, anyhow,” he cried, “an’ if y-y-you had it, yer fool, yer wouldn’t like it.”
Then Joe went limp and started to sink to the ground.
“D-d-don’t—oh my!” Sarah gasped, clutching at Joe as she saw him in the act of making a chair of the still upturned rake. But she was too late. Down Joe flopped on the rake, and, with a yell, tried to get off it again. But it was a good rake. It kept its teeth in and clung to him like a signboard. He tried to turn but the long handle prevented him. Then he snatched at it like a dog biting at things on its tail.
“Stand steady, then,” Sarah commanded, taking hold of him with one hand and the rake with the other. Joe stood steady, but rolled his eyes about and shivered. Then Sarah rescued the rake, and even mother laughed.
“Did you ever see the like of it?” I heard mother say when they went inside.
“And what did you think of the other fellow?” (that was me) Sarah asked. “Did you see what he was going to fetch from the line to bandage the foot with?”
They both laughed again, and, feeling curious, I crept back to the clothes line for enlightenment. Then I laughed. I was looking up at the line laughing some more, when the voice of mother rang out through the open window: “Steele!”
I stole away and joined Joe.
“You are not going—neither of you.” “You will go home with Mrs. Brown and sleep at her place, and come back in the morning.”

That was mother’s decision after we had bellowed and blub-bered our lungs out to go with her and Sarah to Bella Belford’s wedding.

“Besides”—she added—“you haven’t coats or boots to go anywhere with.”

Then we broke out in a fresh place.

“Well, Ted Smith, and Mick Bailey,” I moaned, “have no boots either, and they’re going.”

“So is Jimmy Doolan,” Joe added.

“That’ll do, now—don’t let me hear another word!” And mother, who had taken us by surprise as we sat whining at the fireplace, glided up and stood shaking a piece of green-hide leg-rope threateningly over our heads. We became silent then. We didn’t even look up at her. We sat motionless, staring hard at the earthen floor, and mechanically scratching the surface of it with our toe-nails.

“I’d put it on them, I would.” Sarah called out heartlessly from the depths of the bedroom. “They want it if ever anyone did! Goin’ on the way they do! They think they’re getting mighty big men all at once!”

Sarah was not an affectionate sister when weddings or parties of any kind were in the air.

“For two pins I would,” mother hissed in our ears, and we fancied we could feel her raise the green hide, and we shud­dered and tried to shrivel up inside our clothes. But mother was a soft-hearted woman, and contented herself with admin­istering another caution, after which she returned to her room and continued dressing for the wedding.

We crept outside then, and entrenched ourselves beneath the window. There was more room for us outside. We felt we
could agitate more effectively in the open. We began where we left off, when mother interrupted us with the leg-robe.

"I don't care"—I said in a firm voice—"I'm goin' to go."

And in a plaintive key Joe made it known that he "wouldn't stay with Mrs. Brown."

Looking round during an interval in our lamentations, we saw the familiar figure of Mrs. Brown swinging along down the narrow track that led over a stony, barren ridge, dividing her selection from ours. Our hearts beat heavily. We wished she would fall dead before she reached our rails. We felt as condemned prisoners feel when the sheriff comes in sight.

"Hello!" Mrs. Brown said pleasantly, as she reached the door and passed inside—"Are you ready to come with me, boys?"

We were not; but for anything else—murder, suicide, treason—we were quite prepared. We scarcely looked at her. A few broken sobs was our only reply. And when Mrs. Brown had assisted mother and Sarah to put the finishing touches to their toilettes, and had complimented them upon their appearance in white muslin, and helped them to put out the cat and lock up the house, she turned cheerfully to us. She took our hands, and, with one of us on either side of her, marched off chatting glibly.

"Come along, boys"—she said—"come along; and you'll be able to see the men threshing with the new machine."

But we couldn't "come along" much. We hadn't the strength; and we didn't want to see the men threshing, anyway. We only wanted to see the wedding.

"There's good boys"—she added and proceeded to pull us. With a twist in our bodies, and our heads turned round watching mother and Sarah stepping it out through the timber, we dragged sulkily along. Every step we took we felt was widening the distance between us and our friends for ever. We felt we were being kidnapped, and would never see them any more. Ah, it was a terrible feeling! I got slower and slower in the legs, but my mind was going at high pressure. Its activity was threatening me with typhoid. Resolutions to escape kept shaping and shattering themselves. Then the tragedy of a whole night in a strange house, away from home and everyone, rose
up vividly before me. It was too much. I broke—bolted back full split after mother and Sarah. Oh, the glad feeling that freedom brings to the heart of the captive! What joy was mine as I bounded off! When I had covered about a hundred yards I glanced back over my shoulder to see if Mrs. Brown was pursuing me. She wasn't. Joe was, though, and coming like a racehorse. It didn't increase my delight when I saw him. Somehow I didn't approve of Joe escaping from Mrs. Brown. I had a notion that mother and Sarah might tolerate me if Joe was out of the road. I stopped. I was annoyed.

"Go on back. Don't you come!" I hissed.

"Eh?" he gasped, pulling up short, and staring.

"Don't you be follerin' me," I counselled. "I don't know where I'm goin' to."

My sudden disloyalty was perplexing to Joe. He could only gape.

"You'd better go back to 'er," I went on, offering good advice. "I'm goin' to stay at home, an' sleep all night be myself."

I was sure that would turn him. It didn't, though. Joe knew that sleeping alone in empty houses was not one of my strong points. He grinned and said: "So am I."

"What!" I answered, "and no one at home? And lots of travellers about? [I was always very suspicious of travellers myself.] And those dingoes that killed Snowy's calf howlin' round all night? [I never liked dingoes.]" I looked right into his eyes and waited for an answer. I was sure all those terrors would bring him to his senses.

"Yes, if you are," he replied stubbornly. I was disappointed. I commenced to think hard, and was debating with myself what line of argument to pursue next, when, all at once, Mrs. Brown appeared within a few yards of us. Startled brumbies were nothing to the way we made off. A small cloud of dust and dead leaves was all she embraced when she sprang for a hold of us, and the next moment Joe was leading by several lengths as we raced to overtake mother and Sarah. We overtook them; but deemed it wise to ease off at a safe distance and follow without alarming them. We kept as many big trees as
we could between us and them, so that, when they chanced to
look around, which they did at intervals, our presence would
not spoil their view. Besides we were shy and modest, and
hated publicity. We were not cut out for politicians.

It was a rough tramp through those grassy, heavily-timbered
paddocks, too, and after covering a mile or two, mother, who
was a big, stout woman, showed signs of fatigue. She sat on the
end of a log for a while and fanned herself with her handker-
chief. Under cover of the grass and a gigantic gum we stalked
them, and for a while were crouched within a few yards of
them enjoying their conversation.

"I wonder how the poor little chaps will get on with Mrs.
Brown?" mother said, with a touch of genuine regret in her
voice. "I wish we could have brought them! They would have
enjoyed themselves so much, too. It's hard to leave them like
that."

"Oh, they'll be all right, never fret," Sarah answered, coldly.
"And they're far better where they are; the Belfords don't want
them."

Mother sighed for us; and then she rose and they went on a
little further. We came out from behind the gum and went on
some too. And, knowing now how mother felt for us, we gained
courage and became hopeful.

When Belford's place came in sight, a feeling of joy and
reckless exultation took possession of us. We felt we would like
to be on good terms with everyone, and at peace with the whole
world. We longed to sink all petty differences and become
broad minded. We were sure, too, the same Christian feeling
had entered the souls of mother and Sarah, and had an idea
that if we only emerged into the open they would be overjoyed
to see us again. We emerged into the open; discarded tact and
cautions, and walked bravely in the wake of them. We longed
for them to look round and discover us. But somehow they
never looked around. Their eyes were on Belford's, and their
minds all on the wedding. They laughed merrily together, too,
over things they were saying. Their merry mood increased our
courage. It gave us our opportunity, and we laughed, too, a
hard, forced laugh, and looked up at the trees with one eye and
at them with the other. They jumped round as if they had been struck with something, and glared at us. The look on their faces disappointed us. We made a quick calculation and mentally measured the distance between them and us.

"Oh, you young wretches!" mother gasped, while Sarah snatched up a heavy stick and came our way. We started to retreat hurriedly. She dropped the stick and sprinted. It was a good go for fifty yards. But Sarah was hampered by her skirts, and we were in better condition, anyway. When beyond all chances of capture, we stopped and looked round. Mother and Sarah were standing watching us. We laughed together at our own bad judgment, for we found we had run a quarter of a mile further than was necessary. But that was because I thought Joe was Sarah, sometimes; and he thought the same of me. It depended on which of us was in the lead. We stood and watched them for a good while. They came on, making signs of aggression. We ran some more. They continued to come on. We continued to run till we reached our home fence, and crawled under it. Mother and Sarah seemed satisfied then, and made back for Belford's. We had the true instincts of good sports in us. We allowed them a liberal start, then with all the skill and stealth born of the bush, we pursued them. Our tactics were most successful. From the edge of Belford's tall corn, where we remained under cover till dark, we saw them mount the front steps and commingle with the crowd that thronged the verandah. And, as the sun disappeared and the gloomy shades of night settled on the land, the cheerful strains of the concertina fell on our ears; we saw the light of the big fire that blazed at the back to illuminate the proceedings; we heard the peals of merriment, and the thump and rattle of feet on the floor, and—we imagined the rest. All was joy to us then, and we didn't stop running any more till our coatless, bootless figures were lit up by the big blaze.

And such a scene! Large buckets of water were being boiled on the fire for tea; swings were in motion under the trees; crowds of guests in their best clothes capered and careered through the yard, some chasing others around the house with handkerchiefs. We were delighted. We didn't regret having come. We stood by the fire and grinned when any of the merry
gathering recognised us. Mrs. McCarthy, bless her memory, made a lot of us. She inquired if we had had anything to eat. Of course we hadn’t. In fact, we were as hungry as kangaroo dogs. She directed us to a table laden with provender on the back verandah. Oh, that was joy! Bless her some more! We remained at that table longer than we ever remained anywhere in our lives. Then we returned to the fire, feeling splendid. After a while a desire to join in the fun gripped us hard. We began by frisking round Teddy Belford. Teddy was our own age, and we knew him well at school. But Teddy was dressed in a new suit, and wore boots on his feet and a flower in his coat, and he despised us. Besides, several girls, dressed in white and with orange blossoms in their hair, were making much of Teddy. The comradeship of the school had left him so far as we were concerned. He sneered at our bare feet, and encouraged his girl friends to laugh at us. We went cold on Teddy. We sought the society of bigger game. Miss Anderson, rustling her silk sash and skirts, rushed past us to escape Percy Sharpe, who was pursuing her. We clutched at Miss Anderson with all our hands, to hold her for Percy, and render him a good turn. We clutched at her swinging arm, and secured a lot of her skirt, and her red sash, which ripped and tore away from her like a tree struck by lightning. It was a great surprise to her. It was a great surprise to us, too. It was the very last thing we thought would have happened.

“Oh, you young wretches, see what you’ve done!” Miss Anderson cried, gathering her damaged skirt about her.

“Wh-what!” Percy gasped, glaring at the damage, and then at us. “What the devil did you do that for?” We couldn’t say what we had done it for, and shuffled off amongst the guests and tried to lose ourselves. Miss Anderson’s friends, however, soon patched her up, and all went well with us again.

We found our way to the house, where the dance was in full swing, and took up positions each side the door, and looked in. We remained in for some time, until we saw mother and Sarah coming out with someone to get a breath of fresh air. Then we retreated into the shades of the peach trees. But as they re-entered the room we backed up again. Ah, yes! We enjoyed
We Clutched at Her Swinging Arm
watching a good dance, and that was the best one we had ever been at.

The night was well advanced, and the dancers were showing symptoms of fatigue, when we heard the voice of Mrs. McCarthy appealing for "a set for the young people." Then in lusty tones the M.C. announced "a first set for the kiddies," and next moment several large hands seized us by the shoulders and dragged us right into the ballroom, and found partners for us. Joy! It was more than joy. It was Heaven. But to mother and Sarah it was purgatory. They didn’t enter into the pleasure of the young people at all. They were different to the others. The others called us by name and cheered us on with loud shouts of hilarity. Mother and Sarah didn’t afford us as much as a smile. They sat looking at each other with long faces. But we pranced through that "set," manfully, and without scarcely being heard on the floor; and when it was ended we regarded ourselves fully initiated to all the rights and privileges of invited guests, and took our seats with the others. We sat opposite mother and Sarah, and nursed our bare feet. They stared at us as though they had never seen us before. After a while they rose and went out somewhere; and when they appeared again they had their hats and shawls on, and began shaking hands with everyone. We couldn’t understand their going home before it was all over, and became alarmed. A feeling that they would want us to see them home crept over us, and we glided quietly out, and crawling into Belford’s dray we hid our forms in the folds of a tarpaulin that lay in the bottom of it. We intended to come out again and take our places in the ball-room when they would be well on their way home. But we didn’t show out again. We went to sleep.

Next day, about 2 o’clock in the afternoon, when old Belford took hold of the corners of that tarpaulin with both his hands and pulled it out of the dray, we fell on the ground and got a great start. So did old Belford. And, though thirty years have rolled along the march of time since then, and old Belford has long and peacefully slumbered in an honoured grave in the hollow where the apple-trees wave, I still can hear the deep rumbling laugh he sent after us as we raced like hares across his yard.
There’s a lot I could write about Rosie Rhyne; but one chapter of her will be sufficient—

A nice girl was Rosie Rhyne. A tall, well-shaped girl, too; and a fine singer, and only eighteen. Everyone round our district liked Rosie—everyone except Charlie Brown and Dave. They didn’t dislike her, though. They loved her—loved her heart and soul. They were mad about her, in fact; and mad about each other. Charlie Brown saw more of Rosie, though, than Dave did—so everyone said. Charlie was built different to Dave. There was more go in him. Whenever he went to Rosie’s place he would always remain for dinner, whether he was asked to, or not, and all that sort of thing. Besides, Rosie’s brother was after Charlie’s sister, and that gave Charlie a pull over Dave. By helping Rosie’s brother he was able to make chances for himself that could never enter into Dave’s life. But Dave was a patient young man—a long-suffering sort of lover, and a great believer in the hoary old lie that “everything comes to the chap who waits”. Dave waited.

Dave’s opportunity came, however—came the day Rosie was bitten on the lip by a red spider, and he, having volunteered his services, was sent, full gallop, for the doctor. It never occurred to Dave to hurry Charlie off for the medico, and remain behind, himself, to soothe Rosie, and cheer her up by sitting beside her on the sofa and stroking her yellow hair, and murmuring nice things in her ear. Ah, no, Dave never thought of anything like that till it was too late. In that respect Dave was an Englishman.

The doctor was absent on an “urgent case” when Dave, all dust and perspiration, reached the place, and wouldn’t return for twelve hours. The nurse was very sorry about it—so she said; but that didn’t give Dave any comfort or help him at all.

“Won’t be back for twelve hours?” he said, frowning heavily, after the nurse had repeated the painful communication to
him at least six times.

"Fully that"—she answered, varying it a little, and looking away absent-mindedly.

"Oh, dammit!" Dave said, feelingly.
The nurse became attentive again. She stared at him, and then broke into a half smile.

"Twelve hours!" Dave said again, looking up and down the verandah.

"Twel-ve—hours." With a broad smile from the nurse.

"Blast 'im!" Dave said.
The nurse laughed right out, then composed herself and asked:

"Is it a very urgent case?"

"Me girl's bit be a red spider"—Dave answered in a broken voice.

"Oh!"—promptly from the nurse—"in cases of that kind the only thing to do is to make an incision in the wound and suck the poison out. Then you could drive her in, and the doctor would be here, perhaps."

"Make a what?" Dave said, puzzled-looking.

"An incision—that is, cut the wound with a clean razor."

"Oh, yairs," Dave said, beginning to understand—"I know."

Then after a pause:

"The wound did you say?"

"Yes, cut the wound to open it and make it bleed."

"But she wasn't shot with anything"—Dave explained—"she was bit be a spider!"

The nurse was a lady. She didn't laugh at Dave. She pretended she had misunderstood him, and said:

"Well, it doesn't matter, just lance the part that was bitten."

"Yairs, yairs; now I understand"—Dave replied eagerly, and waited to hear no more. The next moment he was gone again.

Rhyne's humble dining-room was filled with anxious sympathisers when Dave alighted from his horse and rushed in. Disappointment filled their faces, however, when they saw the doctor had not come.

"He's away, and won't be back till to-morrow," Dave
jerked out.

"Till to-morrow!" came sadly from them all.

"But they told me all what I'm to do," Dave added, assuming an air of wisdom and superiority. "Get me a razor. A slit has ter be made in th' bite."

"Oi told yez that," Regan explained with a triumphant glare at the others. "Oi told yez."

A razor was procured, and while Regan and Charlie Brown held Rosie lightly and tenderly, Dave took the razor and operated on her lip. Rosie never flinched. Turning to Charlie, Dave said, handing him the razor, "Hold that." Charlie held it tight, and watched closely for the next move.

"Now then," Dave said, extending his two long arms like a plain turkey taking wing, and brushing everyone away from Rosie. Then he closed them about her, and putting his head down fastened his lips on to hers and began to suck the poison out. Dave worked hard and made a noise like a pump.

"H'n-n-yum," he murmured at intervals.

Ah, it was an affectionate-looking operation, and Rosie didn't seem to mind it at all. The others all regarded it the right way too, and looked on with faces as solemn as a church—all except Charlie Brown. He kept shifting restlessly about, and changing colour, and when "H'n-n-yum" came from Dave again, Charlie poked him with the handle of the razor and growled:

"That ought to do, oughtn't it?"

Without disengaging his arms from Rosie, Dave let go with a "flouk," and turning his eyes to Charlie, spat on the floor and said: "Some o' th' pizen." Then like an infant interrupted at the breast, he turned longingly to the wound again, and murmured as he fastened himself to it: "H'n-n-yum." Ah, it was a beautiful time Dave was having. It was really a feast for the gods.

At last, however, Rosie became restless, and confessed with an effort to "feeling a lot better." Then Dave slowly released his hold and sat back staring at Rosie with a glow on his face.

"It'll have to be done again in the mornin'," he said—"that was the instructions."

Dave lied; but the lie was justifiable.
Charlie Brown with the Patient in His Arms
Rosie improved wonderfully, and became herself again within a few hours. And next morning, when Dave turned up to attend to the wound again, he found Charlie Brown with the patient in his arms. Dave stared, then coughed and mumbled, "mornin'." Charlie swayed about and murmured: "H'n-n-yum."

Then he looked round and spat, and said: "Pizen."
I cherish memories of my selection life for its freedom, its joys, its careless hopes and sorrows, its utter irresponsibility. Its freedom led me anywhere, and everywhere. Its joys presented me with a dog—a rare dog, a thick-skinned, shaggy-haired, blue dog, a smooging mongrel dog. Dogs were worth more than men or horses then, and I valued him. I honoured him. I called him Kidston. I treated him well. Whenever he caught something—a rat or a 'roo—I fed him. When he failed to catch something, which was very often, he fed himself from the pantry. As time went by Kidston became my unreliable servant, and my most constant and unfaithful companion.

Still I liked him. I liked him for his thick skin, for his presence of mind, his unreliability, and his unconscious humour. To see Kidston when a mob of kangaroos started up in front of him, and led the way across creek and fence, was a higher education. He never pursued the enemy like another dog. He would never run straight. He'd hit out when I cried “Sool 'em,” and run in a different direction to the enemy. He'd steer to the left or right. And I would scream violent language after him and order him to “come back!” But once having decided on his course, Kidston was the devil. He wasn't to be put off. He was as deaf then as he was hairy and humorous at other times.

Presently, however, I would be compelled to cease screaming after him, and in breathless expectation I'd hold my hand over my heart and scan the horizon. And there, away at the foot of a ridge, I would see the kangaroos taking an altered course, and bounding along right into the jaws of Kidston. And running my eye in advance of them I would discover Kidston's strategic movements. There he would lie, calm and confident, waiting for them to come to him. And when they came bounding over him, what a reception he gave them! What havoc he made amongst them! Kidston was deadly at close quarters. He snatched patches of hide and fur from a half-dozen of them.
before finally deciding on his 'roo. And then, how I would forgive Kidston everything! And how I would applaud him, and confess my ignorance of things and admit his superiority. But, of course, that was when Kidston went to the right. There were times, though, when he went to the left. In fact, he mostly went to the left, and it was then that his great intelligence and his humorous capacity for cloaking an error of judgment showed themselves at their best.

Kidston never looked disappointed when he took a short cut and found himself miles from the 'roos. He was full of natural resources and subterfuge. (He used to eat eggs.) He never lost his presence of mind. He would hunt industriously about till he stirred up a quail or something, and chase it hard and noisily. And when he returned he wouldn't come all the way to me. He was cautious. He would stand off a distance and study me to see how I was taking his performance. If I swung my arms about loosely, and didn't say anything to him, he knew he was forgiven, and would wag his tail and smooge. If one hand remained behind my back, Kidston knew a waddy was concealed there, and off he'd go home, and put an end to the day's fun. Kidston was a selfish hound when he took it in his head.

I gave up hunting 'roos with Kidston for a bad job. His unreliability was too much of a strain on me. Besides, a new and exciting species of vermin found its way into our district. Hares took possession of the land, and were as numerous as they were on Kidston's back. They started up from under-foot wherever one went. Everyone took to hare-hunting. It became the popular pastime—the sport of all us bush kings. I wished to be in the thick of it. I put Kidston on the chain for a week to make him fine. He used to bark and agitate untiringly when he couldn't get to the pantry, and it used to improve his wind. And when I took him off the chain again he was fit to race for a bank.

He relished the idea of hare-hunting, too; he fairly revelled in it. I took him out and he pursued his first hare with tremendous confidence, and with his mouth wide open. It was a treat to watch Kidston when he was extended. He opened and closed like a door. He was just in the act of grabbing that hare
in his teeth when it suddenly wheeled at a right-angle and Kidston went floundering on ahead somewhere. It was the only time I ever saw him look foolish. When he recovered and looked round he hadn’t the remotest idea where the hare had gone to. It was all a mystery to Kidston. But he made no noise about it. He just walked along thinking the matter over; and after awhile he brightened up and frisked hopefully about. I could see by his confident strut that he had solved the puzzle, and had his mind made up to have it all his own way with the next hare.

The next hare left cover suddenly. Kidston took after it for twenty yards, then cut across to the right. He was working a point by anticipating the hare. But Kidston continued “cutting across”. The hare never altered its course and Kidston was deceived again. Somehow he couldn’t make it out. He seemed disgusted and started to sulk. Just then Anderson’s greyhound flew past on the heels of another hare, but Kidston showed no anxiety to join in the hunt. He pricked his ears, though, and watched the contest. Kidston was always ready to learn. And he learned that when the greyhound got left every time it was only folly for him to try and catch a hare. Then it was that Kidston excelled himself. He began by displaying unusual eagerness for another chance. He soon got it. Up started a hare. Kidston nearly broke several blood vessels. For about thirty yards there was nothing between him and the hare. Then the hare wheeled, and Kidston went on—went on with intent to deceive, and started plunging in the air and bounding about in search of the enemy, and barking in a “lost ball” sort of way. Kidston was a great fraud, but he had brains.

Kidston conceived an incurable dislike to hare-hunting and avoided the sport. He avoided me, too, and was always out somewhere when I whistled for him. And when he wasn’t out he mostly refused to follow; and, if he did consent to follow, it was in a sad, low-spirited, indifferent sort of way, and after dragging along a few hundred yards or so he’d stand and look at me. I’d coax him and say nice things to him. He’d stand looking at me just the same. Then I’d lose patience and say: “You ——! ——!” And he’d run home.

Kidston took up with the women. He was a terror for
women, Kidston was. He would follow mother and Sarah when they visited the neighbours, and steal from the neighbours’ pantries, and, when he was full, lie under the table and fill their places with fleas. And Kidston could spare them a lot of fleas. He must have had millions on him. But it was useless trying to keep Kidston at home. If I held him with a hat over his eyes and hammered him till mother and Sarah were out of sight, he was off hot on their scent, the moment he was released; and he’d yelp with joy as he came up with them. Ah! it was humiliating to mother and Sarah to be followed about like that by Kidston; but it wasn’t my fault.

“You’ll have to tie that brute of a dog up,” mother said at breakfast one morning. “We’re going to see Mrs. Anderson’s sick little baby to-day, and don’t want him near the place, poking his nose into everything, and scratching the fleas off himself the way he does.”

“Well, their own dog has fleas!”—I said, defending Kidston for the first time in my life.

“It doesn’t matter!” Mother snapped firmly. “You tie him up.”

I said I would. But Kidston was a hard dog to beat. When he saw them getting ready he summed everything up, and cleared out. And when they reached Anderson’s, the first to come to the verandah to meet them was Kidston.

I had intended poisoning Kidston with matches, but he became suspicious and deserted our place. He went over to old Bob Philp’s place and lived with him.
5. A Bees’ Nest

Before the church went up, and the parson came along to hold service at Shingle Hut, Sunday was always a long, dull day. We had always to find something to do, or go somewhere to put in the time, and it was a place where there was lots of time.

One Sabbath we were all hanging round, wondering how we would pull through, when George Brown happened along and said he knew where there was a splendid bees’ nest. Joy! The excitement of felling a tree and robbing a bees’ nest was what we loved; and honey we delighted in. We hadn’t tasted any honey for weeks, either; and, besides, we were right out of sugar. We were always right out of sugar. George said it was only about three miles to the place in a straight line across the station paddocks, and it was an old nest, and was sure to be loaded with honey. He had known it for four years. Fresh joy!

We raced round and found the axe and the crosscut saw, and three kerosene tin buckets, and a billy can, and some mosquito curtain, and fought with each other for the honour of carrying them. When mother had stepped in and mediated, and our individual rights were settled according to seniority, we locked up the house; then in single and double file, from mother down to Barty, we stepped out and followed George. And George took some following. He took a straight line, and took it with long swinging strides.

We were an irregular, formidable looking band wending our way over ridge and through forests of box and brigalow. We were a sight for the gods; also for the kangaroos, and the sheep, and the cattle by the way. They took alarm at our approach, and fell over each other in their haste to leave us in full possession of the land. The first mile or so was nothing but poetry to us. We were walking on air, enjoying the breeze and the hum of the locusts, and the perfume of the blossoms, and racing and vieing with each other for possession of the wild
flowers and the hanging wattle bloom and loading ourselves up with them. But after a while the novelty of it all began to wear off, the wattle bloom and the wild flowers commenced to grow heavy, and the bees' nest to seem a long way off. We threw away the wattle bloom and the wild flowers one by one, and gazed wearily at the mountain peaks and spurs that loomed ahead, and in turn, asked George "how far it was now?"

"Do you see that mountain there?" George would answer as he pointed with his finger; "not the low one, nor the next one to it, but the one next to that?" And, like the Israelites looking to Moses for a glimpse of the promised land, we would collect round our guide and look long and hard in the direction he was pointing. Those of us who fixed our eyes on the wrong mountain cheered up and loudly declared it was no distance. The others sighed and stumbled on silently. Barty, who had been lagging far behind, threw up the sponge, and dropped in the grass and started to cry, and said he couldn't walk any further. Sarah pleaded with Dave to take up his little brother and carry him.

"Oh, hang him!" Dave growled. "I've got the axe; and I've got enough to do to carry meself. What did he want comin' for if he can't walk it?"

Then Sarah took Barty on her back, and Barty ceased to murmur, and was pleased to continue the journey.

When we had covered some more miles, George stopped, and, pointing with the crosscut, said encouragingly:—

"We've only got to go to the foot of that ridge, now." And "that ridge" looked a good three miles off! We mentally measured the distance, and perspired terribly.

"I thought you said it was only about three miles altogether, George!" Sarah said, in an aggrieved sort of way, puffing hard under the burden of Barty.

"Three mile! Oh, dear me!" mother echoed contemptuously, and dropped down on the end of a log.

"Well, I dunno," George answered, gazing back retrospectively. "It's not much more."

"Not much more! oh dear," and mother took out her pocket handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from her brow.
“Bah!” Dave sneered. “It’s seven miles if it’s a bloomin’ yard.”

“Well, I suppose I’ve walked it a hundred times ’tween shepherdin’ and huntin’ kangaroos, and I oughter know somethin’ about it,” George remarked warmly.

“You mighter walked it a thousand times,” Dave retorted, “but yer don’t know anything about it, all the same.”

“That’ll do, boy!” mother put in, reproving Dave.

“Well, I wouldn’t ask your opinion about it, any how,” George said, looking at Dave, “fer I don’t think you was ever here in your life before.”

“Wasn’t I?” Dave snapped. “I was here before ever you was.”

“Oh, hold your tongue, and let us get on,” Sarah said to Dave, “or it’ll be night time before we get there.”

“Before ever I was? I’ll swear you wasn’t!” from George.

“Well, I swear I was!” recklessly, from Dave.

“Shut up, can’t you, and come on,” mother said, addressing Dave as she rose from the log.

“You’re a liar, if you say that!” hotly from George.

Dave threw down the axe.

“Say that again,” he hissed, looking George square between the eyes.

“Dave!” mother squealed in alarm.

George threw down the crosscut.

“You’re a liar,” he repeated, again looking Dave square between the eyes.

Dave threw away his hat, then put up his hands and danced about.

George put up his hands and danced about. For quite a long interval they both danced about.

“My gracious me, they’re fighting!” mother screamed, throwing her arms about.

“Don’t take any notice of him, George, don’t mind him,” Sarah counselled in wild, impartial tones.

But just then Dave let out and hit George hard on the ear, and George was forced to pay a lot of attention to him. He showed his teeth, and hissed like a serpent, and aimed one at Dave’s chin. Dave dodged it, and planted a heavy one on
George’s ribs, which sounded like a bale of wool being belted with a spreader. George grunted and doubled up. George was a long thin chap, made more for running than fighting. Dave hit him again, and George went down in a heap on the grass. Then Dave stood over him, ready to give him some more when he would rise. But George wasn’t in a hurry to rise. He took the full time allowed by the rules.

“You scoundrel!” mother cried, “You’ve hurt him! and if he dies you’ll be hung!”

And Sarah flew at Dave and scratched him for disabling our Moses.

“Mind y’self,” Dave hissed at her, “or I’ll give you one to go on with.”

“You coward!” Sarah howled, and reached for Dave again.

Dave stepped back to avoid her, and tripped over the form of George. George rose suddenly to his hands and knees, and threw himself full length on Dave, and gripped him by the throat. Dave gripped George by the throat, too. Then they both roared like wild animals, and locked their legs round each other, and gurgled and choked and rolled over and over on the grass like two large dogs. Mother and Sarah screamed and tried in vain to separate them. The rest of us cried and yelled and did nothing material.

“They’ll be over, oh my gracious!” mother cried as the combatants rolled down a slope and struggled for supremacy right on the edge of a high bank that hung over a large waterhole.

She had scarcely spoken when away they went over and over, like a large log rolling down the side of a mountain. Talk about screaming! You should have heard mother and Sarah! You’d think they were on fire. Dave and George must have got a fright, too, because they let go each other and separated before they reached the bottom.

And the splash they made when they hit the water was tragic. Dave rose to the top in a hurry and started for the low ground on the other side. Dave could swim, but George couldn’t. He stayed in the middle and started to drown.

“Oh, my heavens, save him!” mother cried, wringing her hands. And Dave, who was sitting limp and breathless on a rock, lifted a long stick that lay near him, and feebly poked the
The Combatants Rolled Down
end of it at George. George grabbed it, and held on; then Sarah scrambled down the bank and pulled him ashore.

For a long while George lay on the rocks groaning and discharging water, and when he was himself again he rose, and said, we could go and find the bees’ nest ourselves. Then he left us, and took a short cut home.

“IT was all your fault,” Sarah whined, addressing Dave as we collected the axe and the buckets and commenced our retreat.

“Oh, of course,” Dave grunted, slouching along with the axe and the crosscut on his shoulder, “of course, blame it on me!”
6. Maggie

“Oh, you young wretches!” mother said to Joe and me, one afternoon, after the parson had mounted his horse and ridden away. “What is that you have been telling the magpie to say?”

We hung our heads, and scratched the ground with our big toes, and answered sullenly,

“It wasn’t us, it was Jim Miller told her to say it.”

“You young vagabonds!” mother went on, “if ever I hear it saying such things again, when anyone’s here, I’ll give it away to someone and have the pair of you flogged.”

The prospects of a flogging didn’t disconcert us much, but we didn’t cherish the thoughts of losing Maggie. Maggie we had fed, and fondled, and cared for since the day we got her out of the nest. For years she had been our constant companion, our joy, our amusement. She was one of us. We taught her all she knew, and what Maggie didn’t know wasn’t worth learning.

She could read, drive horses and bullocks, take clothes off a line, “coo-ee” the family to dinner, and discourse on almost any subject on earth but theology. In theology she had never received any tuition. We were not sound in theology ourselves. But in profanity, Maggie graduated wonderfully. In that she was an M.A., B.C. Her originality and delivery were gifts to envy and aspire to. But she knew a lot that we didn’t teach her. We didn’t teach her to drive bullocks. We had no bullocks.

In that branch she took lessons from old Joe, the station bullock driver. Old Joe used to pass our place once a month with loading, and, every time he passed, he used to swear at the bullocks from the weary polers to the panting leaders. If he didn’t he would never get over a steep dangerous pinch that formed the sides of an ugly gully running out of our paddock. And Maggie always seemed to know when the team was approaching, and would go out and perch herself on the slip-rail and assist old Joe to urge the bullocks:—
“Gee, Bugler!” she would scream.
“Wah, Bounce! Wah, Bounce! You ——, ——, ——, Star! You loafing ——, ——, crawler . . . . Wah, Bluey! Gee back, Cocky! Bee back.”

And when the lumbering dray was clear of the pinch old Joe would rest the team, and laugh and compliment Maggie, and offer to buy her from mother.
“She’d make a grand off-sider,” he used to say. “A grand off-sider.”

And mother would look at us and say,
“I’m afraid the boys wouldn’t let me part with her, though sometimes I threaten to give her away on them.”
“You’d be foolish if you did,” old Joe would advise. “She’s wuth money, she is.”

And we would secure Maggie and hurry her off out of the market.

But, one day, when old Joe was negotiating the pinch with a load of station wool, Maggie, perched as usual on the rails, remained silent until the dray was almost at the top. Then all at once she called in the deep bass voice of old Joe.
“Wa-a-a-y! Wa-a-a-y!” And, responding, the bullocks stopped at the critical moment, and the dray rolled back, taking them with it.

Old Joe countermanded the order in loud, frantic oaths, and flogged the team with the long whip, but it was too late. One of the wheels left the track and over went the dray, wool and all, into the bottom of the gully.

Poor old Joe! He threw up his hands in horror, then turned and furiously slashed the whip at Maggie and took one of her toes off.

“Murder! Murder!” she screamed, fluttering for the house.

We all ran out. Old Joe hobbled after Maggie to “ring her (awful) neck”. But Maggie always had a place to go in moments of danger. She got under the bed. Then old Joe turned his wrath on mother and us, and blasphemed, and said we should have all been hung for keeping a bird like that about the place. Joe nervously ventured to defend Maggie, but the maddened old bullock driver slashed at him with the whip, and we all ran inside and closed the door.
“Go and kill the wretch of a bird, kill it this minute,” mother moaned when old Joe had gone off. Joe and I went off to interview Maggie. We found her with a fast beating heart, and in a listening attitude, cocking her head from side to side.

“We've come to kill you, Maggie!” we said, with a grin. And in the despairing voice of old Joe she cried:—

“Gee, Tumbler! Gee, Star! Oh, my God!”

Then we laughed and caressed her.

Maggie visited Delaney's place one day, without being invited, and got us into fresh trouble. Mrs. Delaney had a lot of work to do assisting her husband in the field, and she was handicapped a lot by a nine months' old baby that insisted on crawling about everywhere and innocently taking risks with its young life. Delaney, who was of an original turn of mind, constructed a roomy “cage” out of stakes and wire netting, into which Mrs. Delaney used to dump the infant, and leave it without worrying when she would be out in the paddocks. And when Maggie came along the child had its face pressed close to the netting, bellowing boisterously for its liberty.

Maggie was in a matronly mood. She crooned to it in a motherly sort of way, then went off and procured a large grasshopper, which she handed through the wire on the point of her beak to Delaney's infant. Maggie pursued grasshoppers in the interests of that infant for about an hour. Then for dessert she brought some long, wriggling worms from the newly-ploughed ground. Maggie was handing in a lizard when Mrs. Delaney happened to return—and then,

“Murder! Murder!” she screamed, as Mrs. Delaney pursued in the direction of our place.

“Oh, it's too bad—too bad altogether!” mother moaned after visiting Delaney's to see if the child was going to die. “And there was a worm, ever so long, hanging on the wire when I went there, and grasshoppers! Oh, dear, dear, the place and the child’s frock were full of them.”

“Oh, kill the blessed magpie, and be done with her,” Sarah snapped angrily.

“Very well, you do it.” Then Joe and I rushed away and concealed Maggie from the eyes of the executioner. Joe planted
her in his shirt.

"Where is she?" Sarah cried, with a murderous look in her eye.

We said we didn't know.

"Damn it!" Maggie screamed from the folds of Joe's shirt.

Then Sarah rushed at Joe, but I got in Sarah's way; and Joe raced off down the paddock.

But a day came when we all regretted not having realised on Maggie and bought something with the money. Jim Smith was at our place boasting about his cattle pup, and showing how skilfully it could heel stock. One of our draught horses—Tiger—a wicked old warrior, happened to saunter into the yard in search of something to eat. There was never anything to eat in our yard, but somehow the horses always went there, to search for some.

"S-s-s, take him!" Jim whispered to his pup.

And the pup, without a whimper, stole up behind Tiger and took him by the heels. Tiger let fly at him, but the pup dropped flat on his stomach and the murderous hoofs went over him. Then the pup rose like a flash and fastened on to Tiger again. Tiger snorted and raced round the yard.

"That'll do," Jim said, and began patting the pup proudly. And, while he was patting him, Maggie, who had been watching the fun from the top of the dray, jumped down and danced lightly up to Tiger, and, when he was looking across the fence, plucked a beakful of hair out of his heel.

Tiger let out with the force of forty horses; and all that we saw of Maggie, when we looked round, was a heap of feathers separating from each other, high in the air, and blowing softly about.
7. The Minister

It was a hot day, hot in the paddock gathering sticks and limbs and stones off the patch that was to be ploughed some day, and sown with wheat and lucerne, and the Lord knows what, when we got money enough to buy the seed. We had just finished dinner and were sitting, and lounging, and lying on the sofa and the cool floor, digesting the corn beef and pumpkin, and dreaming of liqueurs and black coffees, and things we had never heard of, and at long intervals discussing our prospects and plans for the future. Our prospects didn't call for much discussion, however; they were like our Sundays, always much the same. But our plans for the future were numerous as hail stones and variable as the seasons. They occupied our minds perpetually, and kept us as busy as the bailiffs keep journalists and politicians. Our plans were always far-reaching too. There scope was tremendous. They embraced and provided for everything between earth and heaven—everything except disappointments and chances of missing the 'bus. And our chances of missing the 'bus were always worth backing. But we never backed them. We would have lost if we had. We lost, anyway.

Mother, with a lot of good advice, had just consigned me to a shearing shed.

"Yes," she was saying, "Steele can go next week, along with Dave, and get his name down for tar-boy," when Sarah, with a gasp and a bound, suddenly broke in and interrupted our "plans". "Oh-h," she said, "th' minister!" Then there was a wild disorderly scramble. The lot of us bounced up like kangaroos surprised in their morning slumbers, and made for different doors.

None of us loved being found at home when the minister paid the house a visit. He was such a lively, cheerful man, so excessively droll and funny, that we couldn't trust our risible faculties with him, and deemed it wise always to get out of the
way before he discovered us. But it was hard to avoid him when you weren’t sure which door he would enter by. We didn’t know which door he was making for now.

“Stay where you are,” mother cried, “and don’t be like a lot of wild children.”

But mother didn’t understand our feelings towards the minister. She might just as well have asked us to sit still if the house was in flames.

“Look out!” Dave cried excitedly, “he’ll come this way sure as eggs,” and, leaving the front door, from where he had observed the minister’s approach, hurried in the lead to the back one, which he opened just wide enough to squint through and admit the kitten’s head. Dave pinched the kitten’s neck with the door, and chuckled when it squealed and spat and fought for liberty. “Why couldn’t y’ stay out, then!” Dave growled, looking down at pussy’s upturned eyes, then he eased the door to locate the minister again, and the kitten raced inside and round the room and flew on to the side table and startled mother. We all grinned and remained behind Dave ready to escape when he would throw the door wide open, and rush out. And we knew Dave wouldn’t throw it open till he was sure the minister was coming in by the front one.

Meanwhile, mother bustled about and spread a cloth on the table and snatched up miscellaneous articles strewn untidily on the floor and put them out of sight.

“For heaven’s sake, sit down, all of you, and have a little sense,” she cried, but cried in vain.

Suddenly Dave banged the door, and, holding it tight, gasped, “Holy! he’s comin’ this way.”

Then there was fresh pandemonium. No bogey man or burglar could have had so much terror for us as the approach of that minister. Dave couldn’t abandon his position at the door half fast enough. We were all in his way. He plunged like a roped brumby, and fouled us. We fell back, one on top of the other. Dave jumped over us and rushed to get out at the front door.

“My heavens, look at them—just look at them!” mother moaned.

Dave grabbed the door, and pulled it hard. It was a well-
Dave Got a Great Surprise
hung door, and would only open a little at a time, if you were in a hurry and forced it unnecessarily. If you were not in a hurry, and humoured it a little by lifting it a few inches, it would respond smoothly. Dave was in a hurry—a wild, tearing, desperate hurry. He nearly tore the house down in his haste. Then he squeezed himself through the small aperture and fell out on to the verandah, and the door shook and rattled like a shattered sheep-hurdle. And when he found his feet the minister was standing wonderingly before him. Dave got a great surprise.

“Well, Davey,” the minister said, “it’s a fine day, is it not?”

“Yes, she’s at home,” Dave spluttered, not knowing whether he was standing on his head or his heels. Then the door rattled vigorously again, and I came out in pursuit of Dave.

“Hello, and how are you to-day?” the minister said. The shock was too much for me. I turned and tried to get inside again. But the way was blocked. Joe and Bill were straining and struggling to get out at the same time. “Let me out! Let me
out!” Joe gasped, “the parson’s at the back door.”

The minister stared at Joe’s head, for a moment, then turned to Dave. But Dave, taking long swift strides, was disappearing behind the haystack. The minister turned to me.

“What ever on earth is the ————” was all I heard him say. I didn’t draw breath till I overtook Dave.

“By cripes!” Dave said, breathing heavily, “right into his bloomin’ arms.”
8. My First Situation

Mother lost her leather purse—emptied it into the yard, one day, when she was airing her pillows, and one of the old cows that was always hovering about the back door on the look-out for choice things swallowed it and we couldn’t find it anywhere. We were turning the homestead inside out in search of it when Monihan rode up to the door and said he was in need of a smart lad, and asked mother could she spare me. Lawd, how I crimsoned with pride when I heard him say it! I suddenly realised my importance, and lost all interest in the missing purse. A “smart lad”. Me! Christmas! I shuffled closer to Monihan—came out into the open and struck the attitude of a drill instructor. I had never seen a drill instructor, but I struck the attitude of one.

“I’ll give him five shillings a week,” Monihan said, as he sucked at a straw that he held in his teeth. Plague and wooden legs! My hair began to stand. I became alarmed lest mother would hesitate, and the golden opportunity of my life be sacrificed. It seemed a year before she answered. One would have thought mother had no use for money.

“Well,” she said, at last, “he’s never been away from home yet, at all, Mr. Monihan, and——”

Thunder and lightning! what was mother thinking about! Surely she wasn’t going to put the man off me, and ruin my prospects! blast my whole career in life? My head drooped; my heart beat heavily.

“Oh, he’ll be all right. I’ll look after him,” Monihan answered lightly. “It will be just the same as bein’ at home for him. And he’ll have nothing to do but ride about after the cows and horses, and water them, and that kind of thing; and may be husk a bit of corn when he has nothing else to do.”

Mother seemed undetermined. She shook her head, and said slowly:

“Of course, I wouldn’t like him to be too much on horses. If
he got a buster and got hurt ——”

Confound it! if I got a buster!

Mother evidently thought I couldn’t ride! She was lowering me in the eyes of Monihan. She had no appreciation for danger and adventure. I had. I was indignant.

“Oh, there’s no fear,” Monihan said, with great assurance.

“The old pony I’ll give him to ride’s quiet as a sheep. A baby could crawl all over him.”

“Still I wouldn’t like him to get thrown, you know,” mother groaned in her persistent way.

“Of course, not! Of course, not! I wouldn’t like it meself,” from Monihan.

I felt the reflection on my horsemanship, and went red, and longed, hoped, looked round expectantly for some untamable brumby, for a wild bull, an old man kangaroo, for anything to come along and afford me a chance to prove my capabilities and mother’s foolishness.

“Well, then, I can rely on him coming?” and Monihan pressed the point.

Mother looked at Sarah, and asked her opinion.

“Oh, I dunno,” Sarah answered. “I suppose there’s no harm letting him go.”

“I’ll give him five shillings a week,” Monihan said; repeating the figure in a voice which seemed to imply that he was doubtful whether mother had realised the magnitude of the sum.

Five shillings a week! Heavens! It rang in my ears like gold dropping into a dish. And why mother didn’t rush it was beyond my comprehension. I was beginning to wonder if poverty was her idea of happiness, when all at once she said:

“Very well, Mr. Monihan,” and I jumped in the air like a wallaby.

“When would you want him?” she supplemented.

“Now—right away.”

Mother looked at Sarah again; then answered sensitively:

“He could hardly go to-day. We’ve nothing ready for him. His things are all out to dry,” and she glanced at the clothes line, where a skilful eye might have detected a calico shirt and a short pair of moles of mine battling with the wind. “But,”
she added, as an afterthought, "We could run the iron over them after dinner, and let him go to you in the morning."

I became apprehensive lest the case for my prospects in life might yet break down, and said nervously:

"I could go in these all right," and turned myself round to display the cleanest side of me.

"Pshaw!" Monihan said, "he's good enough—too good! You're too particular, Mrs. Rudd. God bless me, what does he want with clean clothes at all for? They get dirty as soon as they're put on, and washing them only wears them out."

But mother was an obstinate woman where dress and cleanliness were concerned, and would have her way. And upon the following morning, spick and span, in white moles and calico shirt, and with a small swag containing some "extras," and an old copy of the New Testament under my arm, I turned up at Monihan's place. Monihan, who was a bachelor, was inside with bare feet and sleeves rolled up, cutting a bullock's hide into long strips, and scraping the hair off them, for plough reins.

"Didn't get over in time to run the horses in," he grunted, straightening himself up as I darkened the door.

"They wouldn't let me," I answered truthfully.

"H'm; afraid you'd dirty your clothes."

I changed colour; and, while he went on hacking at the hide, stood nursing my swag, and wondering where my quarters were to be.

"Hold that," Monihan said, handing me the end of one of the strips of hide.

"Where'll I put this?" I asked, anxious to be relieved of my bundle.

"Oh, drop th' d— thing down anywhere," he answered impatiently.

I dropped it down on the dusty, greasy floor of his hovel; and, taking the end of the hide, held on to it with fingers and thumb. Starting perilously near my thumb, he began scraping the hair off in flakes. I had had two fingers cut off once with a tomahawk, whilst sinking a well, and the thoughts of it made me flinch.

"D— it, hold it tight! What are you frightent off?" he
yelled, glaring at me with a butcher's knife in his hand. I held it tight—held strip after strip for hours, while at regular intervals my employer would break out and blast me and wish me everywhere but in heaven for letting the strain off. Somehow Monihan wasn't the same man now that he was when he came to our place to engage me; and I began to wonder when the stock-riding would start. I could see no romance in holding greenhide all day while he swore, and shaved the hair off it. Still the munificent sum I was to receive in wages rose up in my mind at intervals and saved me.

"How many eggs can you eat?" my employer asked, banging a frying pan on the table and proceeding to crack eggs on the edge of it and empty them into it.

"Oh, one," I said, bashfully.

"One!" he exclaimed, glaring round at me; "why d—— it, I eat seven, and Bill eats seven.

"Oh well," I said, "I'll have seven."

Later on he said:

"Go and tell Bill to knock off for dinner."

I hadn't been introduced to Bill yet, and inquired his whereabouts.

"Down in th' paddock, there—ploughin' "—and he pointed over his shoulder with his thumb as he turned the steaming frying pan upside down and emptied layers of eggs into the plates.

I went off and located Bill's team without any difficulty, but Bill himself wasn't anywhere in sight. After some searching, though, I came upon him in a small patch of corn. He was sitting with his back to me, his head deep in a water melon.

I approached him nervously, wishing all the time he would look round and discover my presence.

"Heigh!" I said, and my voice must have resembled Monihan's. Bill jumped up suddenly, and let the melon fall into the black soil.

"Hah; blast you!" he said when he saw me. "What are you prowling round here for?"

He turned and lifted the melon, but it had fallen face downward, and was covered with dirt. "The devil bust it," he added, looking at me again. "Who sent you here?"

"'E told me to tell y' dinner is ready," I answered.
“Oh”—and Bill grinned—“you’re the cove that’s comin’ to pull the corn?”

“To run the horses and cows in,” I said, correcting him.

“You’ll get on well here,” Bill grunted encouragingly, “if you’re fond of hard work, and like fried eggs. Do you like eggs?” This with a grin.

“Sometimes,” I said.

“You’ll have to like ’em all times, if you’re going to stay here.”

After a pause.

“How much is he givin’ you a week?”

“Five shillings.”

“You’ll earn it,” and Bill strode over to the plough and unharnessed the team.

“Now wire in to that, and don’t waste any time,” and Monihan shoved a tin plate containing seven fried eggs before me.

“And when you’re finished, slither up and bring down those horses you see looking over the fence up there. We’ll pull a bit of corn this evenin’ and bring it in.”

I wired in, silently wondering all the while when the romantic side of my engagement was to commence.

“Eggs again, Boss?” Bill grunted insinuatingly, as he took his place at the table.

“You ought to be d—— lucky to have them,” the Boss answered, “any amount of men never see an egg.”

“I’d like to see something else, though, once in a while,” Bill mumbled.

“If you don’t like it, you can leave it,” the Boss yelled.

Bill didn’t leave it. Neither did I. I liked fried eggs, but I had never before tried to take seven in one breath. In the middle of the undertaking I stopped and looked up pathetically at my employer.

“Can’t you finish them?” he rasped out across the table.

I couldn’t, and feebly put down my knife and fork.

“Well, what the devil did you say you wanted them for?” he yelled. “You’re only wastin’ good grub. Go and get the horses.”

I went and got the horses.
“Do you know how to harness a horse?” Monihan asked, coming to the yard.

I knew.

“Well, put the shaft harness on the black mare there, and I’ll be back be the time you’re finished.”

Monihan came back, bringing Bill with him; and with the mare in the dray the three of us proceeded to the corn paddock.

It was a magnificent crop with cobs as long as your arm, and as thick as your leg, reader. And between the rows Bathurst burr and thistle, and all the weeds on earth flourished luxuriantly.

I didn’t see much fun or excitement in tearing those cobs from the stalks and tossing them into the dray. But it seemed an interesting occupation to Monihan. Whenever I missed a cob in the rows allotted me, he would go back and pull it, and curse me for my negligence. A heavy feeling entered my heart, I began to regard my employer with disfavour, and to think of home and mother.

When the dray filled in the centre, Bill mounted the load to level it and make room for more. Then it was that things began to go wrong. I was pulling cobs on one side of the dray; Monihan on the other.

“Lead the mare along, boy,” he said.

I took the animal by the head, and led her along.

“Look out! look out for that pumpkin!” he shouted, “don’t go over it.”

I went over it, and the wheel divided it.

“Damn you!” Monihan yelled, and threw a cob of corn across the mare’s back at me. I dodged it, and threw one at Monihan. I was a better shot than Monihan, and he had had no practice in dodging.

“D——! ———! ———! you!” he roared, and rushed round to my side the dray. I rushed round to his. He threw another cob across the mare. I ducked in time, and directed a miniature pumpkin at him. He stopped the pumpkin with his chest.

“You——! ———!” he howled again. Bill, perched placidly on the load, started to laugh, and drew the fire on to
He Stopped the Pumpkin with his Chest
himself. Monihan lifted the pumpkin and hit Bill on his dinner with it. Bill suddenly lost his temper, and began his defence with a round of profanity that made the very cornstalks tremble, and startled families of birds from out it; then he rained corn cobs down upon him till he nearly emptied the dray. Monihan turned and ran into the thick of the corn. I turned and ran home.

"You must have done something," mother moaned when I explained the cause of my return.

I said I was innocent.

"And didn't you bring your clothes?" Sarah exclaimed.

I said: "How could I?"

"Oh, I must go and see Mr. Monihan," mother whined; and next day she set out and saw Mr. Monihan.

"If you take my advice," he said to her, "you'll send him to a reformatory. You'll be sorry for it some day, if you don't."

Mother sent me to a shearing shed, and it was I who was sorry.
9. **Off to the Shearing**

“Well,” said mother as Dave and I jig-jogged into the yard after riding to the station and back, “how did you get on?”

“Oh-h, grand,” Dave answered, jumping from the saddle. “I'm down for rollin'-up at a pound a week, and (pausing and grinning disrespectfully at me) he's ter get on shearin’.”

“Shearing?” mother echoed in a surprised tone.

“Yes; that’s what they said they wanted yer for, isn’t it?” Dave answered, grinning at me again.

I ignored Dave, and addressing mother, said modestly: “No, as tar boy.”

“Oh,” Dave chuckled, “I thought it was a job of shearin’ you asked for!”

I said “Rats!”

“Then you both got your names down,” mother said with pride, and the prospects of a big cheque in her eye.

“Yairs,” Dave drawled, “but if it had been left to him (meaning me) his would never have been down. He didn’t even ask how much a week they were going to give him, when he did get it down. I had to ask that for him as well.”

“'N' had yer!” I said.

“Well, of course, you’re the oldest, Dave,” mother put in with a peaceful smile, “and it’s only right you should speak up for him, you know.”

“Yairs,” from Dave, with a nasty grin; “but he reckons he’s such a *smart* fellow, y' know.”

“Who said 'e reckoned 'e was?” And I flashed at Dave like lightning, and only that Joe rushed out of the house at the moment, serious complications might have happened, and the peace of our home been seriously disturbed.

“Hello!” Joe shouted, “did yer get a job?”

“Yairs,” Dave answered, with another grin at me. “He's goin' shearin’.”

‘E is? 'im?” and Joe laughed. “A f-f-fat lot 'e'd shear.”
Then Dave laughed. That laugh was the last straw. I ran round and looked for a stone. I was a great believer in stones for an argument.

"That'll do," mother cried; "don't be quarrelling over it."

"Well, isn't he goin' shearin'?" Dave added maliciously, and raced off inside. But the stone arrived at the door several seconds before him, and made a great noise when it went to pieces and scattered about. Dave stopped and turned on me with his fists clenched, and fight in his eye. Dave was an ugly looking foe when his blood was up. I got behind mother. I always liked to get behind mother in a fight. She was the English navy of our family, and carried a lot of guns. She was good cover, and having a lot of the military spirit in me I always favoured fighting under cover.

"Stop it!" mother cried, throwing her hands up at Dave to repel his advance.

"Well, why the diggin's can't he stand a bit of chaff, then, without chuckin' stones!" Dave bellowed.

"Well 'n why can't you, too," I replied from behind the fortress.

"Do y' call chuckin' stones, chaff?" and Dave dodged round mother in pursuit of me.

"That'll do, that'll do," and mother kept turning like a searchlight to keep Dave in check, and making it difficult for me to keep behind her.

"You never hit anyone with a stone—you never hit Jim Brown, did yer?" I hinted truthfully.

"Never hit Jim Brown, did yer?" Dave snarled in my voice. Dave was a nasty mimic when he was angry.

"You needn't talk," I mumbled in a grieved tone; "you haven't got such a pretty voice yourself." I thought it was a good opportunity to turn Dave from the question of fight.

"Got such a pretty voice yourself," Dave echoed again, then chuckled. Dave always chuckled when he thought he had wounded your susceptibilities. I remained silent. I dropped my head and looked conquered.

"Let the child alone," mother said.

Dave was satisfied.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed; "he's goin' shearin'," and ran off
again. But another stone made a dint in the door just as he reached it. Dave jumped round again.

"By cripes——-!" But I had nearly reached the corn before he could say any more.

"Good-bye, and God bless you and send you safe home again when the shearing's over," mother said with big tears in her eyes when Dave and I had strapped our swags to the old makeshift saddles, and remarked that we "were ready to make a start". Then we shook hands with Kate, and Norah, and Sarah, and Joe, and Bill, and kissed Barty, and, struggling into the saddles behind our swags, rode off with full and heavy hearts.

Passing out the sliprails which were always down, and about a hundred yards from the house, the road to the station brought us back past the door again, and afforded the opportunity of a second "goodbye". Mother and Kate, and the others, were all on the verandah, and, as they watched to see the last of us, waved their hands feebly.

"Now take care of yourselves," mother called in parting warning, and with large lumps in our throats we tried to smile as we answered back.

Ah, yes! it was all very well talking of going away, and looking forward to the day of our departure, but, when the moment came and we saw them all around the door of the old home with sorrowful faces and tears in their eyes, our minds became flooded with memories of the merriest moments at home, and all the kind words of the past, and big holes were made in our hearts that left us sad and relenting.

For the first mile we jogged along in silence, and the trailing of the horses' hoofs over the ground, and the creaking of the saddles were all that could be heard.

"Ah, well!" Dave said, pulling himself together at last, "it won't be long before we're back again."

I coughed several times, and tried to look right through the thin blue sky that draped the fringe of distant ranges away on my left. All the while I could feel Dave was looking at me.

"Never mind," he said, kindly, "don't think of it any more."

But I had rather he hit me with his stirrup iron. After all my
straining and struggling to "be a man," everything now snapped and I went to pieces inwardly. There was no help for it. The tears gushed through, and, casting a glance behind for the house now hidden from view, I cried, cried freely, and right-eously.

Dave kept silent. Dave understood. We must have travelled four or five miles, and were crossing one of the expansive station paddocks where woolly-headed sheep were flying from us on either side, when I dashed away the final tear and looked Dave's way.

"What sort do you call them?" I asked. Dave seemed glad I spoke.

"Crossbreds," he said, "They're all to be shorn. Every one o' them 'll have to go through the shed. You'll see plenty o' them to-morrer."

The ice was broken; and, for the rest of the way, we talked cheerfully of our prospects, wondering how we would get on the first day, and looking forward all the while to a glimpse of the station roofs.

Numbers of shearers and rouseabouts had arrived on the scene before us, and the station was all astir. A heavy cloud of dust rose from the yards where station-hands were yarding and drafting sheep. Dogs were barking, men yapping and yelling at the top of their voices. There were shearers hobbling their horses, and unrolling their swags at the huts, and spreading blankets on the grass, and over heads of fallen trees. Others were seated here, there, and everywhere, smoking and filing down their shears and fixing "dummies" on them. More were trooping in with bed-ticks newly stuffed with grass. Several were playing quoits with horseshoes, while an ambitious one was wobbling about on a wire stretched between two trees, and saying "blanky" everytime he lost his balance. And he lost his balance every time he attempted the feat.

The whole surroundings, as we approached, filled us with joy and pleasurable anticipation. We began to feel that we had been wasting our lives in a dull, uneventful existence at the selection.

We rode to the door of the hut that was set aside for the
accommodation of rouseabouts, let our horses go, and claimed
a space on the floor for our swags. It was a slab hut, with two
rooms and no bunks in it, and was surrounded with stones and
prickly pear. A well-ventilated hut it was, too. A lot of the
shingles were missing from the roof, and nearly all the slabs
that had once enclosed the fireplace were lying on the ground,
underneath the pear.

"I'd put me bed a little further over, if I wer' you," a ragged,
grey-bearded, old man, with grass seed in his hair, and a black,
stumpy clay pipe in his mouth, drawled advisedly to Dave
from his place in a corner of the hut, "an' cover up that hole.
A snake went down intil it jest now, an' he won't likely try ter
come up again if ye're lyin' on it."

"A snake! . . . down there?" Dave gasped, glaring at a hole
in the floor with wide-open eyes and mouth. Dave was nervous
amongst snakes. Dave was bitten on the leg by one once, and
somehow he never seemed to forget it.

"Ay!" the old chap replied, indifferently. "It weren't a very
big one, though, at least not what I see of it. There wer' about
four feet of 'im I suppose—p'raps five. . . There'll be two of
'em, may be more," he added, for our information.

"Holy!" Dave said, looking hard at me. And while Dave,
who was down on his knees on his blanket, was looking at me
the snake put its head up through the hole and started to glide
calmly over to the floor.

"Look out!" I shouted, and jumped back and fell all over
the old man, and broke his pipe in small pieces on the floor.

Dave hadn't time to jump, or do anything artistic. He threw
himself back and rolled out of danger.

"Blast yer! See what yer've done!" the old man howled
furiously at me, and shoved me from him.

"The snake! Quick!" Dave shouted, thinking to urge the
aged one into action, and glaring about for a weapon.

"Damn th' snake!" the old greybeard roared, "He's broke
my pipe!" And he glared terribly at me. I tried to murmur an
apology, but words failed me. It was all too unexpected.

The snake headed for the fireplace. Dave lifted a black billy-
can that stood on the floor and aimed it hard at the departing
reptile. Tea flew out of the can and splashed the ashes and stones.

"Damn ———, ———, ———!" the old man yelled, jumping frantically to his feet. "My——— billy, and all the tea I had! You———, ———, ———! You!"

"Oh, I didn't think it was yours!" Dave mumbled in humble apology. "By cripes, I'm sorry," and proceeded to gather up the can and put it together again.

"Who th' devil's did yer think it was—th' snake's?" and the derelict shoved his chin into Dave's face.

"Nuh," Dave mumbled nervously, "course I didn't."

"Well, why didn't yer leave it alone!" and the injured one sat on his blanket again, and swore and growled to himself for quite a while.

Dave and I explored the fireplace in search of the snake, but it had vanished.

"A good pipe it wer', too, damn it," came from the old man as he took its twin brother from his pocket and filled it with the tobacco dust that was strewn on the floor.

Dave and I finished unrolling our blankets, and sat and eyed our ill-humoured companion in silence for a while.

"Goin' to work at th' shearin', Mister?" Dave asked, wishing to become friendly.

"Pshaw!" the old man snarled, "work in a ole' of a place like this!" And he lay back and smoked up at the rafters.

We grinned at each other, and wondered who he was, and if he was well off. Then Dave remembered that our beds were not completed.

"We better go and fill our ticks," he said, and, rising, led the way to an old tumble-down hayshed that stood on the bank of the creek, where some grass and Bathurst burr and stuff had been mown and stored about the time Leichhardt disappeared from the earth. We stared in silence at the unprotected heap of rubbish for quite a while, wondering if it was worth while making a bed of it.

"Better try it, I suppose!" Dave murmured, at last, as he kicked some of it about with his foot.

"You hold th' ticks open, and I'll stick the best of it in."

I held the ticks; but it was useless trying to separate the
grass from the burr—there was more burr than grass. We just stuffed the ticks as full as wool bales, then pounded them with a heavy rail to bruise and break any prickles that might be pointing outward. That done we hurried back to the hut with them on our backs, and dumped them down into position.

"That's A1," Dave said, sinking down on his as if it were a velvet cushion. Dave seemed very satisfied with it till he bounced up suddenly and rubbed himself hard.

"There was something longer an' sharper 'n burr to come right through blanket an' all," he growled, staring down at his bed. Then he turned the blanket down and felt the tick all over for the thorn.

"Won't be long afore yer empty all that out," the old man mumbled. "Can't yer do without a tick?"

"Without one?" and Dave looked round in astonishment at the derelict. Dave never heard of anyone sleeping inside a place without a tick.

"Yes—boards are a lot better." And the ancient battler cuddled closer to his blanket as if he wanted to hug the hard floor.

Dave grinned, and went on feeling his tick.

"Hooh!" he stammered, and pulled his hand away quickly. Dave had found something. He pressed the spot cautiously and a steel point came through the calico.

"Cripes! just look at that," and Dave held up the broken prong of an old pitchfork.

I stared at Dave's discovery and wondered if there were any concealed in mine.

"Might have gone into a cove's stomach," Dave murmured, tossing the prong away, and rubbing himself again.

Some more rouseabouts, accompanied by the station overseer, arrived. The overseer put his head in at the door and spoke to Dave:—

"Getting fixed up?" he asked.

"Pretty well," Dave answered.

Then the eye of the overseer rested on the form of our hoary companion slumbering in the corner.

"Here, you infernal old caterpillar," he said, taking him by the two heels and dragging him to the door, "come out of this.
Didn’t I tell you to clear out yesterday and loaf somewhere else?” The boots came off the old man’s feet and the overseer threw them outside.

We laughed.

The old man, for the moment, thought it was Dave who was attacking him, and, with his head mixed up in the ruffled blanket, began to blaspheme and use threatening language. But when he discovered the overseer he started to shake as if he had the d.t.’s.

“Out of this,” the overseer persisted, gathering up the blanket and heaving it out in pursuit of the boots.

“Yer needn’t be in sich a flarin’ ’urry,” the ancient snarled, and strutted out.

We laughed again.

“He’s been here for a week,” the overseer said, “and if he was left much longer we might have to bury him.”

“What’s his name?” Dave asked.

“I don’t know,” the overseer said; “but they call him Morgan, because he’s such a d—— fraud.” Then he went off. He wasn’t long gone when Morgan, with his swag strapped to his back ready for the road, appeared at the door again.

“Have yer got a bit o’ tobaccer about y’, any o’ y’?” he asked.

Dave hadn’t; but one of the new arrivals had.

“That’ll do me,” Morgan said, stuffing the donation into his pocket. Then he went off without saying “good day,” and we saw no more of him.

Dave and I thought we would have a “look round,” and stalked down to the woolshed, and leaned over the yard watching the men penning up sheep. We watched them until the manager invited us to give a hand. Then we hopped over the rails and raced about, and whistled and shouted, and barked like dogs and swallowed dust until the shed was so full of sheep that the strength of several men was required to close the hurdle behind the heels of the last one.

There was nothing more to do, and we felt hungry.

“Come on,” Dave said, “we get our tucker at the shearer’s hut.”

I was never in a shearer’s hut before, and the crowd of big,
noisy men scrambling for their grub, and plunging pannikins into tea buckets, disconcerted me. Dave struck out, and taking a pannikin from the table journeyed to the tea bucket.

I hesitated.

"Go on, Johnny," a shearer man said to me; "don't be afraid; wire in. Collar a pint."

I collared a pint.

"A relation of yours, Jack?" another shearer asked of the one who had befriended me.

Jack smiled and said:—

"No, but he's got a couple of good-looking sisters, and he's going to put in a good word for me, ain't y', Johnny?"

I felt embarrassed.

"Oh be dad, if that's it," the other said, "I must keep in with him for one of them. Here, Sonny, have some spot," and he loaded me with a supply of currant cake, sufficient to repeat the miracle of the seven loaves with.

The cook, who was a sour old heathen, happened along with a limp and a calico cap.

"Now then, you youngster," he growled, "don't be stuffin' yourself with all the cake afore anyone else has any."

"Now then, cook," Jack said, "don't you insult the boy, he's promised to give me 'is sister."

Just then Dave dug me in the ribs and said:—

"Come on outside."

I followed Dave out, and together we sat and took our bread, and beef, and spot in private on the short, cool grass.

"What was that cove sayin' to y' about your sister?" Dave asked, when we had emptied our pannikins and sat back.

I told Dave all I could remember.

"Well, if he sez it again to yer, tell him to mind his own business," Dave growled. Dave was a sensitive chap where anything concerning the family was concerned.

"We'll have to be out as soon as the bell rings in th' mornin'," Dave said as we turned into bed. Then in feverish anticipation of the excitement the morning would bring, we closed our eyes and slept—slept until we moved about on our new beds and worked the prickles through into our skins.
10. The Wool Shed

We were awake long before the station bell rang, and were glad to get out of bed. Not that we disapproved altogether of the practice of lying in bed, but the burr prickles we had stuffed the ticks with had multiplied to such an extent that we felt we were sleeping on porcupines, and turned out to search for them. Porcupines, we knew, were harmless things, and we didn’t like to do them an injury.

A bucket of water that we had carried from the store tank before retiring, stood in the corner of the fireplace, and a rust-eaten tin dish, with numerous holes in it, was outside, near the door, where someone had used it the year before. Dave brought in that dish and filled it, and as the water was escaping through the holes and flooding the floor, washed his face hurriedly in it. Then, while he dried himself on a towel that mother had packed for us, I put more water through the dish, and took my turn, beating the leakage by about a splash and a half. Dave grinned when he saw me rap the empty dish with my knuckles and said:—

"Yer’ve got to be pretty sharp."

Then I stood waiting for the towel, and allowed the water that didn’t escape through the dish, to trickle down my neck.

"Look after it," Dave said, with a suspicious eye on the other rouseabouts, as they began to stir, "and put this under th’ piller when yer’ve done"; and along with the towel he handed me a piece of a comb, with scarcely any teeth in it, that mother had also carefully packed for us.

I used the towel and the comb, then we rolled up our beds and stacked them in a corner, so as they wouldn’t be used for carpets.

"Is this what yer washed in?" one of our hut companions said to me, lifting the tin dish and looking through the bottom of it.

I said: "Yes."
“In this?” in a surprised sort of way.

I nodded.

He chuckled and said: “Well I don’t know how th’ devil you did it.” Then he procured a piece of soap and wasted it blocking the holes. He wasted a lot of useful profanity over it, too, without blocking any holes.

The bell rang before he succeeded in making the dish watertight, and we all hurried to the woolshed. And as we entered the massive old wooden rookery I felt strange and nervous. Great things I was sure would be expected of me, and I began to lose confidence in myself. The fumes of tar and turps, and lamp black, and sweet oil, and dead wool, mingled with the smell and breath of a thousand sheep, just off the run, pervaded the whole place. The shearsers streamed in from the hut, and thronged the boards, and took up their stands. Some had a final touch to give to their shears; some a pint of tea to swallow. All were fresh and eager as racehorses. The cook, his white apron and cap matching his beard, struggled in with two kerosene tins of steaming black tea and a supply of “spot,” and dumped them down.

“Hurry up an’ collar a pint,” Dave said, dipping into a bucket and seizing a slug of cake.

I hurried up.

We had only gulped the tea down, and were wondering if we could do another, when the Boss, watch in hand, walked in. Word of his arrival was instantly passed along the boards, and the eagerness of the shearsers increased.

Like pedestrians on the mark waiting for the crack of the pistol, they hung on to the wicket gates opening into the pens.

The Boss, with lordly step, passed through the shed, ran his eye along the boards and looked at his watch.

Tommy Brady, a “picker-up,” approached me.

“You’re tarrin’ on my side,” he said. “This is our board, and here’s your broom, and them’s your tar-pots along there. I filled them for you yes’dy.”

I joined Tommy; and, armed with a new broom, stood in readiness.

“You’ll have to be pretty smart,” Tommy added, “and sweep up the pieces as soon as I pick up a fleece, ’cause they
won't wait a second.”

I nodded—nodded because I couldn’t speak; and somehow I began to wish that I had stayed away from the shearing.

It didn’t seem the sort of place I had pictured it in my mind to be. I had been looking forward to a term of sport and excitement with music. But instead, there was a grim seriousness about everything and everybody, that made me feel doomed.

The Boss looked at his watch again. Everyone looked at the Boss.

“Commence!” he called in a loud voice, then turned and walked into the wool room, and procured himself a pint of tea. And those shearers did commence! They threw open the wicket gates, rushed in like wolves amongst the sheep, grabbed one, rushed out with it, dumped it down on its thick end, snapped up the shears, and, before one had time to look, belly wools were flying all about the board. Then a quick change of position, and the shear-points disappeared in the neck wool, while all around only the swish! swish! click! click! of half a hundred shears could be heard. I was astonished. I stared from one to another. I saw that every man there was straining, bursting to out-do his fellow. Ah! this was where the excitement came in. I began to understand. I became intensely interested. I noticed one man in particular was leaving the others behind at every snip. My heart started jumping wildly on his account. I would have liked to put a pound on him.

“Tar!” one who was a few feet from me suddenly called, with a sly glance along the board to locate the Boss.

I didn’t hear him.

“Tar here!” he repeated in a louder key.

“Tar there!” Tommy Brady echoed, from his place down the board.

I woke up. I let fall the broom, and sprang to a tar-pot. The broom handle fell into the mouth of the shears of the man whom I had been interested in. He nearly cut it in two.

“Damn it,” he said, “what are you doing!” and stopped to look at his shears; then he threw the broom against the wall.

I rushed to the man who had called “tar,” and with a trembling hand poked the dripping stick under his nose.

“Where th’ devil do you want to put it?” he growled.
"There!" And he laid bare a wound about an inch long in the sheep's flank. I shuddered and dabbed tar on the polished blades of his shears.

"-----, ------, -----! it!" he howled like a profane animal. "What sort of a -----, ------, -----, of a boy are you?" and he snatched the tar-stick out of my hand and dabbed tar on the wound himself. Then he threw it yards from him, and casting another glance along the board to see where the Boss was, wiped his shears in the fleece and hissed: "Get out of this!"

I got out, and looked for the tar-stick.

"Tar here!" from a man at the bottom of the board.

"There! down there!" Tommy Brady said, pointing to the man who had called.

I bounded to the tar-pot for a fresh supply.

"Tar here!" from one at the opposite end.

"Up there," Tommy said.

I looked up. Then down; hesitated, and raced for the one at the top of the board.

"Tar here, boy!" the one at the bottom repeated angrily. I was confused. I showed the tar-stick to the man at the top, and turned and raced for the man at the bottom. When I was half way down the board two others, simultaneously, called "tar" right under my ear. I stopped to tar them.

"Where?" I said to one who, I thought, had called.

"Damn it!" he said, "I don't want tar."

"Here, boy," the man on the south side of him grunted, and the one on the north of him said:

"Tar, here, too, boy! tar! tar!"

The perspiration started to run off me in streams. The light seemed to go from my eyes. In an unconscious sort of way I hovered round the one on the south side.

"Tar here! damn it, tar here!" came in loud violent tones from the shearer at the bottom of the board. Several of the others chuckled. I heard those chuckles. They fell on my ears like a death sentence.

Tommy saw I was in distress and ran to procure a tar-stick, but just then there was a sharp rattle of hoofs on the boards, and the first sheep was let go. Tommy abandoned the idea of
"Tar Here!" He Repeated in a Louder Key
helping me, and rushed for the fleece. His innings was now commencing. I dashed some tears out of my eyes, and found my way to the angry man at the bottom of the board.

"Have you got wool in your ears?" he said savagely.

I regarded him seriously. I said: "I hadn't."

"Well you're —— deaf," he hissed.

I tarred his sheep in several places.

"Dammit," he yelled, "are you going to dip th' —— thing?"

The man who had let go the first sheep was back from the pen with another.

"Broom!" he yelled, pausing a moment before putting the animal on the floor. "Broom!"

I heard him, and rushed for the broom. I had just seized the handle of it when—

"Tar! Tar!" was called for in three places.

I was bewildered. I gave the floor a smack with the broom, and the man who was holding the sheep said:—

"Oh, that'll do!" and planted the animal down hard on the head of the broom. I released the handle and ran for the tar-stick.

"Tar! Tar! Tar! Damn it, tar!" came from all quarters of the board. Then another shearer, and another, and another, let go a sheep, and sent Tommy racing for dear life to pick the fleeces up in time. Cries of "wool away" became mingled with yells for "tar," and "broom"; and we were both racing, sometimes together, sometimes in a different direction. We raced without a spell till our limbs ached, till it was 8 o'clock, and the Boss called: "Knock off for breakfast."

We knocked off.

"Well," Dave said, coming from his place in the woolroom, after we had swept the board, "how do yer like it?"

"Oh, it's orright," I answered, forcing back a lump that was in my throat big enough to strangle a camel. "I think I'll (another lump) like it."
We had been a fortnight at the shearing, and nothing was left for me to learn—nothing was there that I didn’t know about it; all the poetry had gone from it, and each day was a weary replica of the other. It was turn out at daybreak as tired as when you had turned in at night, and rush off, half asleep, to the shed and rush up and down, up and down, the greasy, slippery, sweat-stained, blood-bespattered floor the whole live-long day. And when the Boss called: “Knock off for breakfast,” or “smoko,” or “dinner,” or whatever it was, there was no intermission for the poor rouseabout. He went all the harder to “clean up,” and when by any chance he had finished before the interval was spent his services would be required in the hot, dusty yards to augment the army of exhausted canines that slunk at the heels of the roaring, swearing, distracted penners-up.

But one day it rained. God bless it, how it came down! It fell in torrents and washed a lot of the sheep right off the station, and soaked to the skin every hoof that was housed in the old tumble-down woolshed, and we rejoiced. We felt we were the Israelites delivered from bondage, and lifted up our voices. The shearers lifted up their voices, too!

“You bellowing tar-pot,” a sour, stiff-backed old shearer, with a large family waiting at home for his cheque, said to me in grieved tones; “what are you glad about!”

“’Cause we’ll get a spell,” I answered exultingly.

“Get a spell!” he growled.

“O’ course,” in a higher key, “there’ll be no more shearin’ till the sheep can get dry again, will there?”

“If you don’t clear out o’ this,” he went off, “there’ll be a dern funeral before they’re dry again.”

I cleared out. And in the course of time learned, as I learned many other things, that rain meant loss and idleness to the shearer, and it is often wise to look sad when your heart is
A RAIN SPELL

full with joy.

Ah, it was heaven, though, to lie in bed undisturbed by the ring of the infernal station bell, until nearly breakfast time! And how we wished it would rain pell-mell every day!

After breakfast, we rouseabouts, in answer to a summons from the overseer, trooped along to the horseyard, where the regular station hands were receiving their orders for the day.

"Well, now, let me see," the overseer mused, stroking his beard and running his eye over us; "I suppose you boys can all ride."

Our eyes shone. Ride! rather! We thought we saw some reckless galloping after flash cattle on blood horses, ahead of us, and answered in one voice, and instantly began a mental summing-up of the mettle of the mixed lot of horses standing facing us in the yard. A magnificent grey resting his snout on the cap took my fancy, and in my mind I could already feel him reeling and bounding under me.

"That little yaller cove there is the one I'll go for," Steve Burton murmured, nudging me in the ribs. "Which of 'em de yeou like?"

"Well, then," the overseer went on, "you can take a horse each, and go down to the washpool paddock and cut the burr and thistle that's there. You'll get hoes at the store."

Joy! We rushed the stable for bridles and saddles, then entered the yard and pursued the animals we fancied.

"Oh, wait a bit," the overseer called, with a grin. "Don't take him (entering the yard). You take old Fairy," addressing me and pointing to a chestnut mare, very poor and subdued-looking, and with a sore back that seemed natural to her, and sad, hollow eyes that seemed to plead for mercy and forgiveness. I put the bridle on Fairy and pulled her out of the yard.

"And you," he said to Steve Burton, "ride old Boko," and he indicated an ancient bay with a big head, big legs, a switch tail, and an eye missing. Steve did the laughing act when introduced to Boko, and repeated it when he got astride him.

There were not enough old screws to provide the lot of us, so Dave and George Brown were given decent mounts, mounts that hadn't all the life galloped out of them. They were delighted—that is, Dave and George were, not the horses—
and left the yard with their hats tilted back, and their hands lightly on the reins. You’d think they were going out to break the record high jump of the world.

“Now, Pat.,” the overseer said, when handing out the hoes, “you take charge and see that everyone does his work,” and he gave Pat full and minute directions as to where the most burr and thistle were to be found. Pat nodded and said, “Yessir.” Pat was a steady, conscientious fellow, and had earned the confidence of the station for many shearing seasons. “And,” the overseer added as a final injunction, “see these boys don’t knock the horses about, Pat.”

Pat promised to protect the animals, and each with a hoe on his shoulder we rode off.

It was grand, glorious riding over those broad, grassy paddocks in the fresh of the glowing morn, and we felt that the world was a bright cheerful world, and were thankful for all the good things it promised.

“Come on,” Steve Burton said, stirring his one-eyed war steed into action with the handle of his hoe, and the weight of his heels, “and I’ll give you a race from here to the gate.” I applied the hoe handle to my quadruped, and away we went! “Steady there!” Pat called out; “don’t go racin’.” But our Norman Saxon blood was up, and we heard not the voice of Pat.

Pat whistled with all his fingers, so did Dave. Nothing could deter us, though. Steve was working Boko well into the lead, when somehow the brute’s legs got entangled in each other and he fell down and hit Steve hard against a stump. We stopped then, and Steve rolled about on the ground, and said: “Oh-h—oh-h,” and Boko, who was an opportunist, galloped for the station with Dave and some more going hard at his heels.

“Well, I sung out to you not to go racin’,” Pat said angrily, as he came up and dismounted to see if Steve was injured. Steve said: “Oh-h!” some more.

“Are y’ hurt?” Pat asked, lifting him up. “Oh-h!” from Steve.

He Fell, and Hit Steve Hard against a Stump
Steve, with a great effort, and a greater groan, stood a little.
"Where are y' hurt?"
"Here, oh-h!" and Steve clasped his thigh with his hand.
"Gee! Oh-h! when I get 'im I'll—Oh-h! cut his—gee! Oh-h!—
blanky throat!"
Then he hopped around some, and we laughed.
"It's nothing—s-s-s, oh-h (bending down) to laugh at,"
Steve groaned. And we laughed again. We laughed with joy—
laughed because we wished to bring him round quickly, and
get him off our hands as a corpse.
Dave, and George Brown, and the others, came galloping
back in charge of the runaway.
"Did he go right back to the yard before you got 'im?" Pat.
asked apprehensively.
"Right back!" Dave answered, "and the Boss was there, and
wanted to know what happened."
A look of distress and fear came into Steve's eyes.
"And we told him," Dave went on, "that he pulled away
when Steve got off to cut a burr he saw growin' near the road."
We all chuckled. We admired Dave. We reckoned he was
cut out for a Queensland politician.
"An' he said," George Brown put in, with a smile that was
good enough for a long journey, "that he forgot to tell us Boko
was a terrible old dog to clear home if he got the chance, and
to look out for him."
We all laughed again.
"You old cow!" Steve said, taking the bridle reins from
Dave, "I'll teach yer!" And he gave Boko one with the hoe to
go on with; and Boko plunged back, and broke right away
from him, and raced for the station again in faster time than
he did before. We all dashed in pursuit. "Stop him! Stop him!"
Pat shouted to Dave, who was in the lead. But Boko was as
hard to stop as Tommy Burns. Whenever Dave headed him,
he raced on Dave's heels till he headed Dave. And once when
George Brown drew up on the blind side of him, Boko pre-
tended he didn't know George was about anywhere, and
forced George against a tree and lamed him for the rest of the
shearing. It was no use; we couldn't stock-ride Boko, and he
led the way straight back to the yard, where the overseer was
"That's quite enough!" we heard him say, as one after another we pulled up like the ruck finishing in the Melbourne Cup. "Get off your horses, the whole lot of you!"

We got off, slowly, sadly, disapprovingly. "Ther's a patch of pear on the hill there," he added severely, "go and cut that, and waste no more time."

"It was your bloomin' fault, you yahoo!" Dave hissed into my ear as we all slunk up the hill to attack the pear. "Couldn't do what y' wer' told ter!"

"Yes," Pat moaned, "they would go racin', th' blessed ejits! An' we all got ter suffer for it."

I looked sadly round to see if Steve was coming. I felt it was unduly hard to suffer all the censure and chagrin without him. But Steve didn't come. Unobserved he crept into the hut, and joined us at dinner time.
12. The First Money

It was the end of the shearing. And how we—that is Dave and I—rejoiced when the shed was cut out, and the click, click, of the shears, and the cries of "Wool away," and "Tar," suddenly ceased. The rush and rattle of cloven hoofs, the slamming of gates, and dragging of hurdles; the ordering here, and the ordering there; the scamper and hustle through shed and yard; the picking and clipping of smellsome wool, and the growling and the swearing were all over, and nought was in our minds but the cheques we were to receive and carry home, and the happiness they would bring there. Ah, yes! we knew how they were waiting for them there, and it was a grand feeling—a fascinating compensation.

The shearers straightened their bent backs, collected their paraphernalia, and, with coats thrown loosely over their shoulders, to keep out the chill, left their pens, and returned to the hut to roll their swags.

Horses were run from this paddock and that till the yards were full of horses, and the rails surrounded by men with bridles on their arms peering through to see if "their's was there".

An hour or so later and the station looked like a large circus breaking camp.

"Here you are, Steele," the Boss said, handing me the first cheque I had earned—the first I had ever seen, in fact—"six weeks, three pounds. What are you going to have to drink?" This with a smile at the open bottle that stood on the counter.

I grinned, and crept away with a wildly beating heart.

Three pounds! Great jumping kangaroos! How my hand trembled at touch of the precious paper! I was perplexed to know how to carry it home safely—on what part of my person to secrete it. A premonition that I'd be bailed up and robbed took possession of me. It made me downhearted.

"You better give it ter me," Dave said, stuffing his own down
deep in his trouser pocket and drawing his belt over the aperture; “I’ll carry th’ two.”

I hesitated. I doubted if Dave would be a safe depository for so much wealth.

“You’ll lose it,” he added, “if yer ain’t got a good pocket.”

I hadn’t a good pocket. I hadn’t any pocket. That was mother’s idea. And she expected me to go out into the world and return with them full of money. Mother was always a woman.

“Well, give it ter me again before we get home,” I answered.

Orright,” from Dave.

“Strike yer breast,” from me.

“Oh, yer can have it, don’t fear,” Dave growled like a bank manager. “Ain’t I got one o’ me own?” And he slapped his trouser pocket hard with his hand, while his eyes twinkled like diamonds in a window.

I was satisfied; and allowed Dave to become my gold escort. He folded my cheque in his, and slapped his trouser pocket again—slapped it twice this time. Then what a hurry we were in to pack our bits of things and depart!

“We won’t want that no more, anyway,” Dave said, tossing the grass and Bathurst burr out of the bed-ticks, on to the floor of the old hut, and rousing the fleas. “But chuck that bit o’ soap in,” he added covetously. “I don’t know whose it is, but we might as well take it as anyone else.”

I threw the scrap of soap in.

“Goin’ to take those?” and Dave disparagingly eyed a collection of discarded shears that I had collected at the shed as a souvenir, and was fondly nursing.

“Oh, my word!” I said, “they’re all good.”

“What, are they new?” and Dave stared like a pawnbroker.

I lied.

“Never been used?”

I lied again.

“Oh, my bloomin’ oath!” Dave said, “chuck them in.”

I chucked them in. Then Dave rolled the swags, and strapped them to the saddles, and away we went.

How we rode! thinking of nothing but home— home! We
hadn't seen it for six weeks.

We reined up to open a station gate, and I said to Dave, with a sudden feeling of apprehension:—

"Have yer got th' cheques?"

Dave glanced out of the corner of his eye down along his left arm, buried elbow-deep in his trouser-pocket, where his fingers were in close touch with the treasure. My apprehensions were allayed. I was assured Dave was a careful custodian.

We pushed on again, straining all the while for a glimpse of the familiar mountain-top that marked the lay of our selection. And as we crossed paddock after paddock the white-skinned, newly-shorn sheep started out of the long grass by the roadside and raced from us.

"My word!" Dave said, "we had a good lot to do with those beggars, I bet."

"My word!" I gasped, fighting the wind for my hat, as we rattled along. Then Dave yelled "Hool em," after the affrighted mobs.

We were rounding the edge of a plain with timber on our right, and lagoons on our left, when Dave, who was in front, shouted excitedly:—

"A dorg! A nater dorg! A dingo!" And off he went, hell-for-leather, in pursuit. I went in pursuit of Dave. There was a station sovereign on that dingo's head, or tail, and for a sovereign Dave would have pursued it for a week without food. The dingo didn't see us, or know we were about till Dave swooped down on him like a hawk. Then we didn't see the dingo any more. We only saw a long, straight streak of dust, and dead leaves reaching to the horizon. Still Dave followed—followed till there wasn't a trot left in his horse. When we pulled up Dave looked the colour of a corpse.

"By cripes!" he gasped, and felt and fumbled his pockets, "I've lost th'—th' cheques!"

I nearly choked. I felt ill.

"L-1-lost them!" I gurgled.

Dave felt himself over some more, and said:—"Blast it!" in a hallowed, reverend sort of way.

He looked at me. I looked at him.

"Cripes!" he gasped, "how—how—(he swallowed a lump
that was in his throat) th' devil (he swallowed another lump) did I do that!"

Once more he searched himself. Then he sat, patting his cheek, and reflecting.

"Must have dragged them out," he murmured, "when I started after th' dingo. Damn 'im! Wish we hadn't seen him! Blast 'im!"

I suggested returning to the station.

"By cripes! they're gone, blowed if they ain't!" and Dave felt himself again. After a while he looked inside his hat, but there was nothing there. It was all up. We were penniless—poor as wood, and destitute of hope.

We sat there in the saddles, staring upon each other in grim silence, while our minds ran sadly upon the welcome we had been looking forward to at home, and all the things mother had planned to do with our earnings. We were broken-hearted.

"I dunno," Dave moaned, looking at the sun, "p'r'aps we had better try and run our tracks back to where we started th' dog. We might find them."

And slowly we rode back, straining our eye-nerves all the time in useless effort to convert every particle of feathery grass into the lost cheques, and never speaking a word.

Away in the distance shearerers were crossing the plain, making homeward, and at sight of them our spirits took another drop. Remorse set in.

"Fools! fools! fools! that we were!" Dave groaned.

I shed tears. But, just when we reached the point where we had left the road, Dave uttered a shout of joy.

"Here they are, blowed if they ain't!" he shouted, jumping from his horse and falling on the treasure. "Cripes!" he said, lifting the cheques, "wasn't that a stroke of luck?"

We both smiled. We nearly went off our heads, the reaction was so great.

"Give me mine," I said, hysterically. "I'll carry it now." I had lost faith in Dave as a safe deposit. "Give it ter me," I cried.

Dave raised no objection. He seemed pleased to be relieved of the responsibility.

"I've had ernough of it," he said, handing me the cheque.
I spelt it through to make sure it was all there. It was quite intact. I placed it carefully in the lining of my hat, and dragged the old felt tight over my head, and with one hand clung to the leaf to keep it in position. Then off we raced again. And how we rode to make up lost time! We never stopped till we were near home. And what feelings of pride and joy filled our heart as we entered the sliprails and approached the house. We felt we had all the wealth of the world upon us, and were about to do away with want and care and make every one happy.

Mother and Kate, and Sarah, and Joe and Bill ran out to meet and greet us. How delighted they were! They surrounded us, and shook our hands, and said how pleased they were we had come back. And they carried our swags into the house for us. We could hardly say anything. We just handed our cheques over in silence to mother.

"Gee wiz!" Joe said excitedly, "how much?" And Kate murmured, "Oh my," in a kind encouraging way. And the others all said something that was good to hear, and crowded round mother.

Mother looked at the cheques thoughtfully, and for a moment played with them in her lap. Then her large, soft eyes rested kindly upon Dave and me, and glistened, and filled with tears till they seemed to swim. She didn’t speak. But we understood.
13. Boy on a Station

Like all things earthly, the joy that our shearing cheques brought to the home came to an end; and, in a few weeks or less, matters had drifted back into the same uneventful old groove, and life was dragging along in the same hopeless, old way, when a messenger from the station happened along one day, and said that the Boss required a boy to yard the horses every morning, and run the mail twice a week, and perform sundry other light work on horseback. In fact, a permanent billet was open to him, and the wage was to be £25 a year. The messenger looked at me, said I was just the chap for the job, and added that “the Boss had mentioned my name”.

Then mother looked at me. I looked round for my share of the family blanket to roll my belongings in and, telling the man “to hold on a bit,” rushed away to saddle the old moke that I was in the habit of calling mine.

A permanent station hand and £25 a year! Great money bags! My goal was reached. It was what I had dreamed of every night since I had been born. My millennium had arrived.

I caught the moke, and was ready to start—ready to leave home, and mother, and Kate, and all the rest for all time.

I heard mother say, as I climbed into the saddle: “I would like to have kept him at his books a little longer, to see if we could make something more of him than we have of the others, but ———” I spurred my charger into action lest mother should change her mind and call me back again. Ah, yes! Mother had great hopes of me then. But it wasn’t her fault. She couldn’t help it. All mothers do see promises of great things in some member or other of their families; and I happened to be that unfortunate one in our family. But it made no difference to the others. My early genius never created jealousy in any of them.

For five years I remained on that station, five years running
In horses at early morning, when the white frost cracked under hoof and bit at your ears, and drew blood from the cracks in your hands—five years picking wool from the carcases of dead sheep that lay strewn over the sunbaked plains, and stuffing it into smellsome bags to lumber before me on the saddle to the woolshed—five years following the creek banks in all their windings to rescue sheep that were bogged, and skin others that were dead (they were mostly dead)—five years running the mail through drought and flood to the township, twenty miles off, and lumbering packets of tea, and kettles, and reels of cotton, and yards of calico, and brooms and frying pans, when "I didn't mind," or "if it wasn't too much trouble," for selectors' wives isolated by the roadside!

Ah, yes, the life of the permanent station hand wasn't all sport and butter-fat! It was dull and hard enough sometimes, but it had its moods and bright spots. It had its romance and excitements, too. When the manager announced a general muster of cattle for a draught of fats for the butcher, and warned us to be well-mounted, and see to our girths; ah, that was the time! Those were the moments when dull care was thrown to the winds, and the warm blood surged and tingled through every vein. The eager expectancy of a mad, reckless gallop down ridge and spur, filled one with new life and a desire to live long.

And when the staring, rushing herds assembled from all quarters, "their voices all blent into one," and we had to hold them together on the camp while the fats were cut out, the life then was grand! The galloping, the yelling, the swearing, the wheeling, and the "spills," were extra grand. But when all that was over, and the order of the day was cutting burr on the sheltered plains, or draughting stubborn, sulky sheep in the dust-choked yards, or chopping wood, the reaction was heart-breaking. It was like being sentenced to hard labour. I was never sentenced to hard labour, but it was like that.

Sometimes I was given a pack-horse, and told to take rations to the shepherds stationed at different parts of the run. Ration-carrying was not an objectionable job. I preferred it to cutting burr or polishing the Boss's boots. There was more variety—more novelty in it. It afforded an opportunity for a yarn with
the shepherds. I liked yarning with the shepherds. They were so entertaining, so interesting, so well informed—they were an education—and a cheap one. And the shepherds loved to get the ear of someone to yarn into. The circle of their society was pretty limited. It was confined to the sheep, and the dogs—and themselves. It was wonderful, though, how they could keep going! how they could sustain a conversation. I believe they could have kept going for a week, if the audience remained. Still some were not so interesting as others; some were more gifted, the hair some had was worth showing. Old Ben, who was stationed at the washpool, showed the most. He was a university man. He wouldn't have been shepherding if he hadn't been. Ben was a saver of words. He never wasted any on preliminary courtesies. He never said "good day" when you arrived.

"Well, now," he would begin, on hearing you approach, and without looking up—"if it was so, and Scripture say it was, that from seven small loaves and five small fishes (or was it five small loaves?) the Lord caused a multitude of hungry people to feast in plenty, how is it"—here he would look up and stare steadily at you—"that all these sheep, and bullocks, and goats, and fowl of the air are required to feed the people of the world to-day?"

Once I tried to supply some answer to his question, but that was on my first visit to him. On the second I was prepared; and, acting on the storekeeper's advice, said "rats!" to him, and rode away.

But old Charlie was different to Ben. Charlie wasn't a thinker or a reader. Nothing ever worried Charlie. He simply sat on a log all day and dozed, and allowed his hair to get long and white. If you failed to shout a greeting to him when you came upon him to announce your presence, he would take convulsions, and clutch the log to save himself from falling off it, and gasp.

"Oh-h, yer frightened me—damme if I saw yer comin'!"

But when he had recovered from the shock he would want to know all that was going on, and everyone's business at the head station. Charlie loved gossip. In that respect he was a woman. I don't know in what respect he was a man.
“What th’ devil are they up ter, in there?” he would ask in a grieved tone. And, on being told, he would sneer, “They’re bally well killed with work, they are. Why don’t they come out here if they want somethin’ to do?”

Then, after a short doze,

“When are they goin’ to send a man out here to shift me, and let that bally old fool Ben come here? I’m gettin’ full o’ this, an’ it looks as if they’d like ter see me buried in this blasted hole. You tell th’ overseer.”

And one Xmas Eve, when work was slack, and we thought we had finished for the year, the overseer remembered Charlie’s prayer, and sent me with a pack-horse to shift his belongings to the washpool, and settle him in the hut there. The pack-horse I was given was a saddle-horse—a touchy, nervous, headstrong brute, that had been spelling. It was the first time he had carried a pack, and Charlie’s belongings made a formidable-looking burden. They consisted of blankets, a full bed tick, a billy can and pint pots, a supply of cabbage-tree that he made hats out of, sometimes, a frying pan, a bucket, a bottle of pickles, a tin of jam, and other luxuries he had promised himself for Xmas Day. And when it was all packed on the saddle, there was hardly any of the horse to be seen. The horse, himself, couldn’t see anything but the pack, and the situation heightened his nervousness. For the first few miles of the way he led beside me in an uncertain sort of way; but when the plain was reached he seemed to get used to the business and jogged along good-naturedly. I had twelve miles to go, and crawling slowly along in the heat and flies was the devil. I couldn’t see why that pack-horse shouldn’t raise a canter and break the monotony. He raised a canter. He broke the monotony, too! He also broke all station records for that distance, and he broke everything that was tied on him, and he pretty well broke my heart.

It was like this—when he started to canter, the billy can and pint pots started to beat out a refrain on the frying pan. That horse had no ear for music. He took fright and started to buck and bolt alternately. I bolted with him. It was my only hope to steady him, but trouble set in. The billy can separated from the pack and travelled heavenward like a rocket. I didn’t hear it
The Billy Can Travelled Heavenward Like a Rocket
fall. I must have been a furlong from it when it hit the earth. Then the pickles were hurled at my head, and the jam was propelled into the long grass. I was distracted; but steady that pack-horse I couldn’t.

I spurred my own mount to keep pace with him. It must have been a fine race to watch. He gradually forged ahead of me. I leaned out of the saddle, clinging to my grip of the halter. I was in hopes he would tire. He never tired. I tired, and let go the halter. He went faster. Then I got a splendid view of the frying pan as it was whirled from the pack and floated through the air. The bed-tick showed signs of unrest. It flopped about like a plain turkey on the wing, then ducked under the animal’s belly and turned into straw and dust and scraps of rag. Straw and rag fell all over the plain. Still that horse was going strong. Thoughts of old Charlie, and the Boss, and home, flashed through me, and my heart sank.

A white gate showed itself on ahead. Joy! There was a chance of the runaway pulling up there, and handing himself over. He pulled up, and he handed himself over, too. But that was all he did hand over. He had nothing on but the halter. He was naked. Misery, me! What was to be done! I could never collect the wreck. I wept—leaned on the brute’s foam-flaked neck and wept. After a while the uselessness of my emotion struck me, and I swore manfully, kicked the brute in the ribs, and then led him back to the station.

There have been instances in my life when I didn’t know how to act. This was not one of them. I acted silently. I saw no use of making a song about the disaster, and let no one into the secret. I ate well at tea time, but somehow I went right off my sleep that night. Old Charlie seemed to be sleeping at the foot of my bunk. I fancied I could see him standing over me, brandishing the frying pan.

There was no room in my mind, though, for fancy when he turned up at the station next day, searching for his Xmas dinner. There was no room for me at the station, either. I detested explanations. Besides I was “full up” of station life.

I left.

I was sixteen now, and out of work. One day I rolled up my swag to go west along with Johnny McRae in search of some. We had listened to many lies about the glory of running wild horses and cattle in the mulga, and took the "fever" badly. But a hitch occurred, and our start was delayed. Some would say it was Fate; some a dispensation of Providence. I never called it anything myself. I have never worried about useless things. Life has always been a matter of chance to me, with a lot of hard graft thrown in to make the most of one, whenever it happened my way.

One happened now. A letter arrived from an old friend of the family who had become a Cabinet Minister — even the poorest family has a friend about it sometimes — saying: "Bring you son down and let me see him. I will do what I can if he is at all suitable to an office."

Great Professors, and Prime Ministers! Was there ever so much excitement in a home before?

"Steele is to go to the city to be a clerk in an office," mother told everyone in the district, and many who were not in it. And Kate and Sarah, and Dave told them, too. And everyone who came near the house was shown that Cabinet Minister's letter. And the wonder to them all was how we ever came to be on speaking terms with such a person. Ah, yes! it was harder to understand than the loaves and small fishes act. But there it was in writing, just as the other was in the Bible, and couldn't be disputed.

And how I rose in the minds of the little community! I went up like shares in a gold mine. A clerk, a swell, a gentleman, a toff sitting in an office all day with tweed clothes and a white shirt on, and, of course, drawing large pay. Talk about luck, and being born with a silver spoon in your mouth! They reckoned I was born with my head in a gold goblet as big as a barrel.
It never occurred to them or me, either, that offices down in the city were teeming with white-skinned, hollow-cheeked, nervous, poor devils in tweed suits and white shirts, who scarcely got any pay at all—helpless poor beggars, creeping through life along the slough of fear and grovel and servility—men to whom the “service” offered no prospects, while it robbed them of all independence and manhood. Ah, yes! there were lots of things didn’t occur to anyone just then!

I was taken to the city, and that Cabinet Minister put on his glasses and had a good look at me. He was a kind and court­eious gentleman. But shall I ever forget the moment, shall I ever forget the impression the surroundings made on me! Such luxurious furniture I had never seen before—not even in pictures. And the carpet! It puzzled me. I wasn’t sure if it was the right thing to tramp on it with your boots, or whether you were expected to take them off, or to crawl over it on your hands and knees.

“Let me see a specimen of your handwriting,” said that Minister to me, swinging himself round on a revolving chair that attracted a lot of my notice.

A specimen of my handwriting! I was taken by surprise. My handwriting hadn’t occurred to me as something I would require on the journey—as something he would ask for, and I felt undone when I hadn’t any about me. I felt the corpuscles race through my veins like mice careering after each other behind a papered wall. My hair started to lie down. I could feel it flattening against my skull like a sensitive plant closing its doors.

I said: “Er—eh?” and twisted my fingers tight round each other as if they were wire-strainers.

The Minister mentioned the matter again, with just the sus­picion of a twinkle in his eye.

I told him in a gentle murmur that I had forgotten to bring some with me.

“Just write me something,” he said, shoving a pen and paper across the table to me—“t’ll I see what sort of a penman you are.”

That took more out of me than a fall from a horse. I
stumbled off the chair I was sitting on, and in an unconscious sort of way reached for the pen.

"Write anything at all," he added, quite off-handedly, and sat and waited.

My old felt hat that I had been carefully nursing all the while now began to play a leading part in my embarrassment. I didn't know what to do with it. I tried to balance it on my knee again while I wrestled for the correct grip, or what I vaguely remembered as the correct grip, of the pen. But the old felt started to slip, and was nearly on the carpet when I grabbed it, and put it in my teeth. I don't remember if the Minister smiled. I adjusted the pen several times, then leaned heavily on the paper, and trembled till all the ink dropped off the nib. I dipped for more ink. I began to think hard. I thought of Shingle Hut, and home, and Dave and Joe.

"What'll I write, S'?" I said, dipping some more.

"Oh, anything at all; it doesn't matter," he replied. "Write your name and address." And he took up a large document, and started studying it on his own account.

I was relieved. I proceeded laboriously, but with tremendous confidence.

The Minister finished reading that document, which contained as much as a newspaper, and took up another. He had just concluded that one when I finished, and glanced up. He reached for my name and handwriting, and looked at it.

"Steal rud, shingelut," I had written.

"Is that the right spelling?" he asked quietly.

A terrible feeling lest I had shown a weakness in my orthography fastened itself onto my vitals, and I stammered something incoherent in reply.

"H'm!" he said, and looked grave.

I wondered what his verdict would be. But he didn't pass judgment. Taking my name and handwriting with him, he stepped into an outer room. I didn't know then, but I know now, it was to consult his Under Secretary, and reveal to him the talent he had discovered.

When he returned he said:

"Yes, I'll be able to find him a post as messenger in one of the offices here, and his salary will be fifty-two pounds a year."
Then he offered me a lot of good advice, and pointed out the possibilities there would be of rising in the world if I was diligent and studious, and looked after myself, and avoided evil companions. But I didn’t hear all he said. My mind was running on the “messenger” and the “£52 a year.” It got a great grip of me. I struggled hard to realise just how much it all meant. I was still struggling in a dazed sort of way, when the Minister rose and held out his hand.

“That’s as much as I’ll be able to do for him,” he said kindly—“the rest now depends upon himself.”

A few mornings after I left the boarding house, where I had with great confidence undertook to pay fifteen shillings a week for board out of my fifty-two pounds a year (the balance was to clothe me in tweed suits and white shirts, and keep me in pocket money to spend about the town), and nervously presented myself to the head of my department. I must have been a coming event in his office, because I found he expected me.

“Oh, yes,” he said, putting aside his pen and looking me all over. “You’ll be all right here. Come along into the clerk’s room.”

I followed him. He shoved the door in, and introduced me to the staff. The staff were a well-groomed, high-collared bunch of swells, who looked at me as though I had escaped from the circus. One was a long-legged, clean-faced fellow with a heavy gold ring on his finger, and a smile that came from his eyes. The chief introduced him as the clerk. Another was a perky old bachelor, with hair dyed the colour of a taffy horse’s tail, and a face that glowed like polished cedar. He was the principal clerk. And a third was a knock-kneed man with a violent brogue, and a large foot that had been developed in the Irish constabulary. He wore a war-like moustache, and looked worried. (The clerk informed me confidentially in after years that he was child-hungry.) He was the deputy, and next in command to the chief.

“You sit here,” the chief said, after introducing me,—“and occupy this table.” Then, turning to the six and a-half feet of clerk: “You’ll see that Rudd is fixed up with pens and ink,
and all that, won’t you, old fellow? And just show him what he’s got to do.” Then he rushed back to his own room.

The tall clerk unfolded his stilts-like limbs, and slowly opened a cedar press, from which he took various articles of stationery, and turned to me.

“What sort of nibs do you write with?” he asked.

“Oh, any kind,” I said.

“How will these suit you?”

“Oh, orright,” I said, and he tossed the lot on to my table.

“I don’t know what I can give you to do just now,” he went on, casting his eyes about his own table. “What sort of a hand do you write?”

“Pretty fair,” I said.

“Any way,” he decided, “You can sit down and amuse yourself for the present.”

I sat down and looked all round the room till I became familiar with it. After a while I placed a pen behind one ear, and a pencil behind the other, and looked round the room some more. I looked round it till lunch-time. A gun went off somewhere outside, and rattled the windows.

“One o’clock,” the clerk said to himself.

“Is that the gun?” the old bachelor asked, and rose from his chair, and washed his hands in a basin and looked at himself in a glass.

The door banged open, and the chief entered, and putting his face close to mine in a confidential sort of way, said:

“Are you busy, old chap?”

“N—not very,” I said.

“Well, you know East Brisbane, don’t you?”

I stared at him. He might just as well have assumed that I knew some of the many ends of London, or was on visiting terms with the President of the United States.

He seemed to read my thoughts, or my looks.

“Well, you know South Brisbane?”

That, I guessed, must be something easier; but could only answer with a far-away shake of the head. I had been under the impression that there was only one Brisbane.

“Well,” the chief went on, “I want you to deliver this letter
for me.” I looked suspiciously and apprehensively at the letter he held in his hand.

“Take the South Brisbane 'bus; get out at Shafton Road, and turn down to the right. Then it’s the second house on your left after you cross the second street. Just hand this note to whoever is there, and they’ll give you something to bring back for me. You can’t miss the place. It’s a large new house with a white gate in front.”

“South Brisbane. 'Bus.” I muttered, feeling more bewildered than I was ever in my life before.

“What name did y’ say, S’?” And I broke out into a heavy perspiration.

The chief looked a little bewildered, too. He turned to the clerk:

“Just direct him how to find this place like a good fellow,” he said, and handed him the letter, and rushed out again.

The clerk looked at me, and struck a sitting attitude. Then he took a piece of white paper, and, with his pencil, struck a couple of lines across it that looked like a lane.

“That’s Shafton Road,” he said, indicating the lane.

I stared blankly at Shafton Road.

The clerk dashed the pencil across the paper again, and said:

“That’s the road the 'bus takes from Woolloongabba.”

“Woollen—what?” I moaned.

“Woolloongabba,” he repeated with wonderful ease.

“Wollengabba,” I echoed with an effort.

“You know where it is?” And he looked up at me.

I confessed my ignorance. I was forced to. He looked at me in astonishment.

“Don’t you know where Woolloongabba is?”

I didn’t. I had never even heard of it.

The clerk laughed. You’d think he had discovered something humorous.

“Do you know where South Brisbane is?” he asked, with a broad grin.

I shook my head. I was in great pain.

He probed me some more.

“Where do you come from?” he asked.
“Shingle Hut.”
He grinned again, and inquired its whereabouts.
I gave him its geographical position as near as possible.
“And don’t you know anything about Brisbane at all?” he added curiously.
When I shook my head, he jumped up.
“Come on,” he said, “and I’ll put you on the right ’bus.”

After timorously interrogating a policeman, and exhibiting the letter I carried to numerous people, who led me further and further astray, I came on the house I was seeking accidentally, after hunting for it about three hours. It was the home of a ship’s captain.

“Oh, yes,” a woman to whom I delivered the message said, “they were landed yesterday. Do you think you can carry them?”

I had formed the opinion that whatever I was to procure for the chief I would be able to put in my pocket. But, when I was confronted with a bundle of formidable war weapons, the pride of some South Sea Islanders, a cargo of spears of all lengths, one as long as a tram section, and pointed and jagged with fish bones and sharks’ teeth—I fell back several paces, and ran my palm across my perspiring brow.

“I don’t think they’re very heavy, though,” the woman said, seeing my distress; “but you’ll have to be very careful with them, for they’re most valuable curios.”

I made no response. I stood mentally endeavouring to conciliate my exalted dreams of an office with the lumbering of these infernal things through the streets. A small rebellion began to rise within me. I only wanted a leader, or a little encouragement to make trouble—to make tracks, anyway. But that woman was not the person to inflame me to violence. She didn’t seem to be aware of my social status. She took a lot for granted. She also took up the gruesome consignment of pointed sticks and shark’s teeth, and balanced them on my shoulder without asking leave. I thought I saw dry blood on one, and shuddered.

“Mind them going out the gate,” she squeaked as a final injunction, “and give my regards to Mr. ———” And off I
strode with nothing but evil and animus in my heart for the chief of my department. I felt he had deceived and humiliated me.

A large dog bounded for me as I started, and woke my instincts of self-preservation. I immediately descended to the level of the savage. I unloaded slightly, and thrust the spear points at him. The woman screeched assurances that "Carlo wouldn't bite." But I had my own opinion. I distrusted dogs, and Carlo, I could see, was all over a dog. I made another dig at him with the shark's teeth, and the woman, in a high key, cried:

"You impudent fellow; I'll report you to your master!"

Then I made for the gate, with one eye keeping a lookout in the rear, and the other on the spear tips, which were pointing the way out, some yards in advance of me.

I hurried along a footpath. The first turn to the left I remembered was mine. I reached the corner, or rather, the fishbone and sharks' teeth reached it, and was negotiating it successfully, when an unwieldy man with a large corporation, coming in the opposite direction, reached it too. He threw up his hands and howled, just as he was about to be speared in the stomach. I saved his life, and quickened my pace.

"Young man!" he gasped after me. I looked round, but didn't stop. And when I turned my head again the sharks' teeth were flirting with the back hair of a young lady wheeling a pram a little in front of me. I directed them past her ear, and when they crossed her vision she gave an appalling scream, and deserted her pram. The wild stare in her eyes when she faced me made me feel like an assassin. But I said nothing. I kept going. And how I began to sweat! And I wished myself back on the open plains, away from the gaze of the strange and gaping crowd! I thought to minimise the chances of murder, and halted and reversed arms.

It was several miles to the office, and I made up my mind to walk, and avoid trouble on the 'bus. Past this person and that person and again evading a charge of manslaughter by a hair's breadth. Once, with a deal of skill, I steered clear of a wobbling, inattentive Chinaman, carrying a pair of baskets, and heard a woman squeal just behind me. I
He Threw up His Hands and Howled
eased up, and looked round to see what was going on, and as my shoulders turned I caught sight of the woman frantically clutching for a red parasol that was gliding away from her in the sharks' teeth. Thoughts of handcuffs and lockups rushed through me; but I kept my presence of mind. I used my body like a crane, and swung the parasol back, and lowered it into the arms of the woman—into the arms of a dozen women, in fact, and as many men, for a crowd quickly collected. Then the woman screamed things, and dodged under the barbed curios, and brandished her damaged property in my face. I silently damned the chief of my department for the interest he took in barbarians, and escaped.

After that I deemed it safer to keep the sharks' teeth in front of me, and changed ends again. I was getting on well. I was becoming skilled in the art of shaving the hair off people's ears with a spear without hurting them. Old fools of men who came along, half-screwed, arguing things, and waving their hands about, and looking into each other's faces, gave me most trouble. It required all I had learned about handling the weapons to save their lives. Whenever I ported helm, they ported helm. Then I would have to stand still and yell a danger signal to them. And how they would wake up when they found themselves within an inch or two of being impaled as trophies on the handiwork of Tommy Tanna! I didn't laugh at them, an omission I have always regretted. It was one of the "perfect moments" I failed to seize.

The newsboys, though, worried me a lot; and impeded my way more than all the others put together. And they were pretty thick at that hour. They followed me, ran along beside me, shouting at the top of their voices:—

"Th' new Gov'nor! He's lost 'eself outer th' percession." And one snatched a rival's newspaper and impaled it on the spear points. The additional weight wasn't perceptible, so I made no demur. I bore that evening rag aloft as a savage would a scalp, and the news rascals were delighted. They cheered, and jeered in triumph, and used me as one hired to advertise their wares. An elderly man, with sympathy in his eye, overtook me and released that newspaper and hurled it on to the
street. The newsboys scowled at him, and in injured tones growled in chorus, "Dicken! "

I saw the great stone building where the office was located, and felt intense relief. A short distance further and I mounted the steps and guided those spear heads into the main corridor. It was a long one with numerous doors on each side. Some of the occupants on their way out—it was closing-time now—saw me advancing and flattened themselves against the wall till I had passed. Others poked their heads out of the doors and withdrew them again hurriedly. I thanked heaven I had only a few more paces to go. The door of the chief's room opened as I approached it, and the deputy, in all the glory of a volunteer's uniform, rushed out in a blind hurry. I saw him before he saw me. I only had time to say "Hoh!" when he bunted the fish bone and shark's teeth with his military shoulder and knocked me back.

"Oh, my heaven!" he exclaimed, "my heaven!" holding his shoulder and doing the wriggling act in the corridor. I felt sure I had fatally wounded somebody at last. And while I was engaged in this pleasant feeling a bellow came from the deputy that brought all the building along, including the charwoman.

"Phwhat ar-r-e them?" he howled, eyeing Tanna's implements of war as though they were snakes. Then he lifted his voice an octave higher, and announced to the world that he was "pizend—pizend! bigod!"

"Dear me! dear me!" the chief said, appearing on the scene, "what is the matter?" And he looked first at me, then at the wounded deputy, and then at his own lovely curios which I still held balanced on my shoulder.

"Th-th-that d—— fool! ——" the deputy began.

But I didn't hear any more. I jumped from under the spears and rushed into the office and put my head on the table.

After a while the clerk came in, and said:—

"How did you manage to do that?"

I made no reply. Visions of the deputy's funeral came to me. I was lost.

"Pity you didn't put one right through him," came from the clerk. Then I heard him open the door and go home.
A little later the charwoman entered with her broom and pans, and started throwing the furniture about.

"Was it you as stuck thet thing into Mr. ——?" she asked with a chuckle.

"But it wasn't my fault," I murmured.

"I wished yer had er'——," she broke off, and added: "Ah, well, I won't say what I was goin' to."

Then I went off to the boarding-house. And that was my first day in an office.
15. Mulcahy’s Pigs

Two buyers were scouring our district, giving high prices for fat pigs. They purchased thirty-four from us, and six from Martin Mulcahy, a bachelor eking out a hard, lonely existence out on the hot, sweltering plains of the Darling Downs. Martin got excited over his prospects—’twas the first lot of porkers he had raised—and rushed into our yard early next morning to know if Dave or Joe or someone could give him a hand to cart them to the railway yard and truck for the buyers. Dave was sorry he couldn’t assist him—so was Joe. Their hands were full with the handling of our own. Martin was in distress, and stood scratching his head through his thin felt hat.

Dad came out and asked what was the matter.

Joe explained.

“Well,” Dad said, “I’ll help him.”

Martin demurred.

“I wouldn’t expect it from you, Mr. Rudd,” he said, remembering Dad had once been a Member of Parliament. But Dad was not a snob.

“Tut, tut,” he said, and went inside, and put on an old hat.

“You’re the man for the country,” Martin said, when Dad returned. (Martin had a flattering way with him when he liked.)

Then they both went off together.

As they crossed the paddocks Martin explained that he had kept his horses in the yard all night, and would have been able to make an early start, only that old Regan, passing by before daylight, saw them, and thinking they had been left there by mistake, threw the sliprail down and let them out.

“They’re down be the grass tree,” Martin added, “an’ if you don’t mind, we’ll go round that way, an’ drive them up before us.”

“Very well, very well,” Dad answered cheerfully, and followed Martin on a four-mile tramp through long wet grass,
over broken gullies and melon holes, and amongst acres and acres of Bathurst burr and Scotch thistles, and beds of weeds and rubbish where snakes and hares and kangaroo rats and all the vermin of the earth abounded in any number.

Dad began to get tired.

"Confound it!" he would break out at intervals, as he stumbled along after Martin; "what th' devil did the feller want letting th' horses out for?"

And Martin, without pausing or turning his head, would explain the reason all over again.

"But he had no right," Dad would shout out, "to throw down another man's sliprails, and let his horses out." And Martin would agree with Dad, and to keep him in good humour would curse old Regan fluently and with violence. There were times when Martin used to show a lot of tact.

At last they found the horses, and hunted them to the yard just about dinner time. The brutes were in a sportive mood, and raced up and stood waiting with their tails elevated. Martin urged Dad to run so as to be up in time to block them coming out of the yard. But they didn't come out of the yard. They didn't go into the yard. They couldn't get in. Someone had been there since Martin had left and put the rails up. Martin struck himself on the thigh with the palm of his hand, and swore earnestly. Dad grunted, and said that the sliprails of a yard should always be left down.

"Well, it's a holy terror," Martin murmured. Then, after thinking hard, he told Dad to walk up quietly and throw the sliprails down again, and he would block the horses himself if they broke back. Dad stalked up quietly, and threw one rail down. The sound of it startled the animals, and away they went at full gallop. Martin threw up his arms and shouted at them to stop. They went faster. They nearly ran over Martin, and raced down the plain till they were only dim specks moving in the distance. Martin followed in pursuit. Dad fixed the sliprails, and hobbled along after Martin with an angry scowl on his face.

Another hour and they were back with the horses, and this time secured them in the yard.

"If I'd known it meant all this runnin' about," Dad said,
removing his hat, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with a large coloured handkerchief—"I wouldn't 'a come for fifty poun'."

"Ah, we've got 'em now, Mr. Rudd," Martin answered soothingly, "and I'll have 'em caught and harnessed while you're lookin', and in half an hour we'll be loaded an' away."

But Martin didn't catch the horses with the ease he anticipated. The black mare had not had a pair of winkers on since she had had the foal, and she snorted and rushed and poked her head into the cow bail and into every hole and corner of the yard for a good solid hour—until Dad wanted to know "what th' devil was th' use of thinkin' of takin' pigs to the railway with a fool of a thing like her." But Martin explained it was the foal that was doing it, and assured him she would be as right as rain when they got loaded and going.

They didn't get loaded for another hour—not until Dad had wasted a lot of profanity on the pigs, and had fallen down several times under them in the sty, and broken several waddies on them, and left the imprint of his big right foot on the ribs of almost every porker. And they didn't get going until the black mare had bucked all round the humpy in the shafts, and buried the point of one in the hindquarters of the leader, and run the wheel of the dray through the water cask, and bumped the side out of the dwelling with the tail board; and not until Martin had found some wire and greenhide, and mended all the harness again.

"How th' devil do you expect to get to the railway to-night with a mad mare like that?" Dad raved, "She'll never pull."

But Martin reckoned she would be "orrright drekeley," and patted the trembling beast on the neck.

"She's collar proud, that's all. She'll settle down soon as we get outer the gate," he said. Martin had a lot of confidence in the black mare.

He adjusted the reins, and patting the brute again, turned to Dad.

"Now, if you jump up behind the pigs (the pigs were enclosed in a rough paling frame open at the top like a small garden, and which was as deep as Dad was tall), I'll walk and drive."
Dad hesitated and suspiciously eyed the rickety old dray, with its extravagant bandages of wire and greenhide; then looked at the horses, and said—

“Maybe it would be better if I drove.”

But Martin wouldn’t hear of Dad driving.

“No, no, no,” he said, “‘tis a long distance to —(wa-ah)—walk is eight mi—(wa-ah)—miles; you jump up.”

Dad looked askance at the feverish, restless black mare, and again at the fractured shafts and plugged wheels; then slowly and reluctantly crawled up into the back of the dray and stood behind the “cage.”

“Now then,” Martin said, addressing the horses, and touching them lightly with the reins. Both animals started, the leader at a prance, the black mare with a bound and a buck. Martin ran beside them holding the reins and keeping their heads straight for the open gate. Dad got a feeling into his head that the whole turnout was going to pieces under him, and became alarmed.

“Confound it! Hold them! hold them, man!” he yelled.

Martin was doing his best—so were the horses.

Dad glanced round to see if there was any chance of jumping off with safety. There was no chance. Then he appealed to the animals.

“Wa-ay, horses, wa-ay there,” he shouted. Just then one of the wheels struck the gatepost with a loud bang, and the dray and the pigs and Dad were for a moment on the verge of eternity.

“Stop them, man, and let me down! Confound you!” Dad roared, clinging to the “cage.” But Martin swung the horses round into the road, and kept them going, and, with nothing before her but open plain, the black mare settled down.

“She’s orright now,” Martin called out, looking up at Dad with a grin, “good little puller?”

But Dad didn’t pass any compliments upon the black mare, nor upon her prancing companion. He saw nothing but the steep banks of the creek looming ahead, and was thinking of his neck.

Martin eased up when he came to the creek to let the horses get their wind.
"Do you reckon they can take it up that other bank?" Dad asked, staring at the cutting with deep concern.

Martin in his own heart had a deal of doubt about it, but said they would "manage it easy," and started them into it.

"Careful now," Dad shouted, as the dray began to descend, "careful."

"Right, right, right," Martin answered, hanging on to the mare's head.

The pigs tumbled and rolled about and crowded to the front (the low end going down hill) of the "cage," and the black mare staggered under the extra weight, but got safely down.

The water in the bed of the creek was a couple of feet deep, and at the edge of it, Martin called "Wa-ay." The animals "wa-ayed," and puffed and pawed the water into foam.

Martin looked at Dad, and said—

"Get in with the pigs, and keep them from coming back when we're going up the other side. Keep them up in front of the 'cage'."

Dad demurred again.

"Damn it," he growled, "can't you manage without me getting in there?"

"You see," Martin said persuasively, "the pigs'll come back to the tail end going up the bank, and the weight might lift the mare off her feet."

"It's a fool of a way to bring pigs to a railway, anyhow," Dad grunted, and climbed up stiffly, and entered the "cage."

Then Martin didn't lose any time. He gathered the reins together again, and jumped on the back of the black mare.

"What th' devil are you doing?" Dad yelled down at him.

"She's quiet," Martin answered calmly, "and I might as well get over dry as soakin' wet."

"Confound it! Hold on till I get down, you fool of a fellow." And Dad made an effort to descend. But Martin spoke to the horses, "Git erp," he said, and the black mare, who had never been broken to saddle, feeling something astride her, bounded through the water and started up the opposite bank at full gallop. Martin clung to her like an ourang-outang, and yelled at the leader for not keeping in front.
Dad hung on to the “cage,” and kicked at the porkers, and reviled at the top of his voice.

Another bound or two from the black mare, and the dray would have landed safely out of the cutting, but somehow or other, just when it was in the steepest place, the catch of it—it was a tip tray—got loose, and up it went without any warning, and the “cage” and Dad and all the pigs toppled back and landed in the water.

“Good girl, good girl,” Martin called out, complimenting the mare on her performance, as she reached the top. Then he said, “Wa-ay,” and looked smilingly round to see how Dad was getting on. But he saw Dad wasn’t on at all.

“Oh my, my!” he murmured, and dismounted, and rushed down the cutting. Dad was there wrestling with a heavy porker right in the middle of the stream. The other pigs were promiscuously poking about the bank.

Martin took in the situation at a glance.

“Hold him, hold him,” he shouted, “till I bring a rein.”

“Hold him be dashed,” Dad answered, releasing his grip of the porker’s ear, and delivering the brute a farewell kick in the flanks. Then he waded out of the water, and called Martin a lunatic, and said he should be in the asylum.

“Well, I can’t understand how it happened,” Martin murmured, returning to the dray.

“It happened,” Dad snorted, “because a fool was driving.”

Martin said no more but straightened the dray in silence, and waited till Dad cooled down, and was amenable to reason. Then he made a suggestion.

“Ryan’s place,” he said, “is not far along. We’ll get the pigs together, and if you drive them, I’ll take the dray along, and we can load them there.”

Dad swore some more at Martin, then sulkily went with him after the pigs.

At Ryan’s—with the assistance of two other men—they reloaded the porkers and started again, and reached the railway without further mishap.

The buyers had finished trucking, and were just turning away.

“Back your dray up to that truck there,” one of them said.
pointing to a waggon that was almost packed with pigs—
"and lift them in carefully."

The buyers then crossed over to the hotel.

Martin, after a lot of pushing and grunting and swearing, in
which Dad joined heartily, worked the dray into position. Then
he pushed back the sliding door of the truck, and commenced
trucking. Everything went smoothly. There was only one more
pig to lift in.

"The last, thank God," Dad said, as Martin caught the brute
by the ear. Then Dad gripped the other ear, and locked hands
with Martin under the brute's belly.

"Now then," Martin said, and they were just going to heave
it into the truck when something disturbed the black mare,
and she jumped forward, and Dad and Martin and the porker
fell in a struggling heap on the ground.

"Wa-ay," Martin shouted to the mare.

The pig found its legs first and made off up the line. Martin
rose and pursued it. Dad pulled himself together and hobbled
after Martin.

After running about two hundred yards, Martin gave up
and turned around. Nothing but pigs met his eyes.

"Oh hang it! Why didn't you shut the door?" he shouted to
Dad, who was still hobbling along.

Dad looked round then, and saw a long, coloured line of
pigs—about fifty in all—reaching from within a couple of
yards of himself to the door of the railway truck.

Dad's two arms went up like a pair of railway signals, and
his mouth and eyes opened wide. Then he turned with a savage
glare to Martin. But Dad didn't speak. He couldn't. His mouth
closed with a snap like a spring trap, and he rushed through
the fence, and left.
16. *Dad and the Pigs*

Dad disregarded our advice and went in heavily for pigs. He reckoned there was money in pigs, and argued they would “rise,” but he didn’t say how. We wondered if he meant they would fly.

Dad bred the brutes for several years—bred till the sties couldn’t hold them—till the yard contained swine of all sorts and sizes. Black, white, brown, grey, sandy, and piebald pigs—fat, sleepy pigs—poor pigs, scaly, scabby pigs, and pigs with snouts like the nose of a smithy’s bellows, roamed round at all hours raking and rooting into every hole and corner of the place.

If a bucket, a can, or a cask were left about anywhere, they’d swarm round it, and fight for its contents, if it contained anything, and when they had cleaned it out they would roll it away somewhere and leave it. Pigs! The farm was overrun with the rubbish. If a stranger approached the house on horseback, ’twas at the risk of breaking his neck, for if his horse didn’t fall over a heap of slumbering swine, a family of suckers would start out noisily from some corner or other to greet him, and make the animal bolt. Strangers always spoke disparagingly of our pigs.

To remonstrate with Dad was only waste of time.

“Wait a while,” he’d say, confidently, “they’ll be valuable directly; they’ll go up when this new Government gets things into shape.”

’Twas wonderful the faith Dad had in new Governments! Far more than he had in new braces or boots. Of the new Government, we knew nothing; but we understood a lot about Dad’s pigs, and wished a flood would come and wash them all away. We were sick of seeing them—weary of cursing the wretches; tired of throwing things at them, and of hearing the Regans and others complain of their crops being rooted out of the ground by them.
“Why don’t y’ get rid o’ them?” Dave said to Dad one day, “you get six or seven shillings a-piece for them, just now.”
“Tut, tut,” Dad answered—“pig’ll be valuable directly man; hold on a while.”

We held on for twelve months. Then the newspapers began to talk about pigs, and about a “bacon industry,” till at last factories sprang up in the city, and agents came round on the heels of each other buying up “porkers.”

They came to Dad.
“Yes,” Dad grunted, “I’ve a few,” and reluctantly parted with forty of them for £100. He just as reluctantly promised to have forty more ready in three months’ time. Dave and Joe couldn’t understand it. They said they had no idea pigs would ever be worth anything.

“Pshaw!” Dad answered, “anyone with brains would have known. It was clear enough t’ me. I could see it years ago.”

Dave and Joe smiled placidly. So much foresight on Dad’s part was a novelty to them.
Pigs went up in our estimation. We treated them with kindness and respect now. To disparage their presence or heave a stone at them was as much as one’s life was worth.

Dad spent a few pounds in proper paling yards and made extensive additions to the sties, and as much care was bestowed on the pigs as on the dairy cows. All the wasters were weeded out, boars of the best blood introduced, and breeding carried on with care and discrimination.

When corn was selling cheap in the markets, Dad gave every grain we grew to the pigs, and every month, as regular as clockwork, sold a score or more, and pocketed thirty and forty, and sometimes fifty pounds. Money! Dad was making heaps of it.

Mother worried Dad for a change of diet. Salt beef every day of the year, she reckoned, was injurious.

“It gets sickening,” she said, and Dad, after brooding over the matter for about three months, decided to kill a pig. Killing a pig for our own use was a big sacrifice for Dad to make. To him it was throwing good money away. But we were ready to eat the lot of them.

We were to kill the pig one Saturday, and from the excitement and preparations that were made you would think there
was to be a wedding.

A cask was emptied and cleaned; the salting bench renovated and scrubbed; a huge fire kindled in the yard beneath a boilerful of water and the knives touched up on the grindstone. When evening came all of us left work, and, headed by Dad carrying the axe, proceeded to the sty.

"The black one with th' white foot ought t' do," Dad said, in answer to Dave.

"You stun 'im, then," Dave said, "an' we'll stick 'im."

But it wasn't an easy matter to stun the brute. All of them seemed seized with a presentiment of evil, and when Dad entered the sty, they raced round in confusion, and fought with each other. Dad couldn't get a hit in on the black one with the white foot, at all. He knocked a piece of ear off one of the others, and roused its ferocity.
Joe made a suggestion.

"Come out," he said to Dad, "and stand off a yard or two; and when I fetch a dish of corn they'll put their front feet on the top rail an' look over. Then go up quietly, an' y'll get him."

Dad complied.

Joe went away and returned with the corn. The pigs placed their front feet on the top rail, and stared and clamoured as he approached.

Joe rattled the corn to show there was no deception.

Dad became excited. He gripped the axe and moved stealthily by inches.

Dave grinned, sitting on his haunches.

"Not yet," Joe said in a low tone, "wait till I get a bit closer."

Joe stood within a foot or two of the sty, and held the dish out invitingly. The pigs strained to reach it.

"Now," he said, turning the corners of his eyes round at Dad.

Dad stepped up cautiously, and swung the axe with force enough to knock a house down. He hit the black pig on its white foot. You never heard anything like the squeals that came from that pig! It went fairly mad, and rushed about on three legs trying to get out. Dad bounced into the sty with a determined look in his eye, and in mistake struck an old boar hard on the back. There was commotion then!

"Look out! look out!" Dave shouted. But it was too late. The old boar shoved his head between the rails and burst the side of the sty away, and out they all rushed.

Joe pursued the brute that Dad had maimed. So did Dave. The dogs took to the boar, and fell over each other fighting for a hold of his ear. Dad swore and yelled at them to desist.

Joe captured the black pig with the white foot in the middle of the yard, and held on to his hind legs barrow fashion.

The pig poked his nose in the dirt, opened its mouth, and squealed appallingly. You'd think it knew it was to die. The cries of the brute drove Mother and Sarah into the house with their fingers in their ears. Joe felt like a murderer. He was on the verge of reprieving the animal when Dad rushed up waving the axe wildly. The pig struggled in a circle, and fought for liberty. Dad aimed a heavy blow at its forehead, and drove the
axe up to the handle in the ground. He became exasperated, and danced round excitedly.

"Take y'r time," yelled Joe.

Dad missed again, and sunk another hole in the earth.

"Use th' back—th' back," angrily from Joe.

Dad reversed arms, swung again, and this time the pig went out.

Then there was confusion. Success depended on prompt and proper bleeding.

"Th' knife, quick," Joe cried, placing a foot on the neck of the fallen, and holding out his hand.

Dad jumped round.

"Joe Rattled the Corn to Show There Was No Deception"
"Out They All Rushed"
“Where’re th’ knives?” he roared to Dave.
“You had them,” Dave answered, looking anxiously about,
“what did y’ do with them?”
“Damn it!” and Dad ran toward the sties.
Joe called inquiringly to Sarah.
Dad kicked the earth up near the sties, threw his arms about,
and yelled more profanity.
Dave rushed away to search the kitchen.
Mother called out that she “saw father with them”.
All at once Joe became engaged in a new struggle. The pig recovered, jumped up, and filled the air with his screams again.
Dad ran back calling out, “Hold ’im.”
Joe held him.

“Joe Captured the Pig with the White Foot and Held on to His Hind Legs, Barrow Fashion”

“Here they are,” Dave cried, having discovered the knives—“y’ left them on the post.”
But Dad’s attention was all on the pig.
“Give th’ axe t’ Dave,” Joe shouted, holding the animal by the hind legs again.
Dad sparred murderously with the weapon.

"Now, now!" Joe jerked out—"While he's quiet."

Then down came the axe, and once more the pig was silenced.

Joe seized the long knife, and probed and poked till the brute was bled successfully, and it was almost dark when we dragged its form across the yard, and spread it on the bench that Dad had prepared.

Dad yelled for a light. Sarah brought one. Then we rushed about, procured buckets, and poured gallons of hot water on the hog, scalded it from head to foot—and it never flinched.

And while mother and Sarah stood round holding lighted candles, Dad took an old knife, and Dave and Joe the lids of saucepans, and the three of them scraped till there wasn't a hair left on any part of that pig.

When it was dressed and hung up you wouldn't have known it—it made a lovely corpse, smooth and white as marble except where Dad had bruised it with the axe.

"Fine bit o' pork," Dad said, holding up a candle and eyeing the carcass closely—"plenty of bacon now for a while."

Then we collected the knives and the buckets and the saucepan lids, tied the dogs up, cleaned ourselves, and went inside and had tea.
ON AN AUSTRALIAN FARM
On an Australian Farm

by Steele Rudd  (A. H. DAVIS)

illustrations by Ben Jordan

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS
Introduction to The University of Queensland
Press Edition

As in all of Steele Rudd's books, the incidents related in On An Australian Farm are true to the life my father knew. The book itself was actually written on a farm—while he was living at "The Firs", Nobby, on the Darling Downs—although he was never a farmer in the proper sense. "The Firs" was a property purchased by my parents after they left Sydney late in 1907, but most of the farming was done by my brothers, Lindsay and Gower. In 1915 Gower enlisted in the A.I.F., and two years later the family left the farm for Brisbane.

The time my father spent at "The Firs" probably was the happiest period of his life.

On an Australian Farm was first published in 1910, with illustrations by C. Marquet. The University of Queensland Press edition contains illustrations by Ben Jordan which come from the edition of 1913, as does the text.

ERIC DAVIS
Brisbane
June 1969
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1. The Biter Bit

A cold winter morning at “Fairfield”. The land was white with frost. The wood-heap, smothered in it, lay like a mass of melting salt, and on the water in the trough by the windmill rested a sheet of ice twenty feet long. Cold! it was cold!

“Heggs an’ bacon; bacon an’ heggs,” said old John Dashwood, rubbing his horny hands together as he cheerily eyed the savoury breakfast his wife set on the table of the old-fashioned country kitchen.

Then as he took his seat—the seat nearest the stove—and proceeded to serve out: “What be for you, James?”

James, the eldest son, was about twenty-one.

“Eggs and bacon, I suppose, Father,” drawled he, his frost-bitten face, after a hard scrubbing in the “roller” towel, hanging outside, glowing like an Australian sunset.

“An’ thee, Peter?”

“Bacon and eggs,” said Peter with a laugh.

Peter was the second son, and had inherited his parent’s peculiar idea of humour. And old John’s idea of humour was to make jokes—good, bad, and indifferent jokes—and to enjoy them himself.

“Be there no ’n’ else for break’ast, mother?” And old John’s eyes roamed round in search of the rest of the family.

“Polly and Tilly are at the separator,” Mrs. Dashwood answered—“don’t mind them, they’ll have theirs directly, along with Grandma and little Andy.”

“Ah-h—— then what abaht ’n’ self, Mother?”

“Oh, I’ll wait and take mine with the others, too, Father.”

“Ah-h; then beint so, Ah’ll help maself to a little o’ heach.” And old John proceeded to burden his plate with “heggs an’ bacon, and bacon an’ heggs.”

Mrs. Dashwood smiled at the simple, good-natured husband, and said:

“Is that what you call a little of each, John?”
“Thet wer’ what ma old gran’fether alez used to say, Elahser,” he explained, drawing his knife through the fried egg in several directions and leaving a track that resembled the Southern Cross. “Heggs an’ bacon, bacon an’ heggs, wer’ a great old sayin’ o’ his, poor old boy!”

“He must have been a humorous old boy: that grandfather of yours, Father,” James, the cynic of the family put in without lifting his head.

Old John stared at his wife and grinned. Then he looked at James. He seemed to suspect James of insincerity. Finally he said:

“Ah-h. It never struck me that he wer’, lad, when he wer’ alahve; but when Ah coomes to look at some o’ his great gran’sons Ah thinks he must ha’ hed a lot o’ it abaht ‘n”. And he broke into a series of low, rumbling chuckles, which he put down to the score against James.

Peter, with a loud, shrill laugh, joined in his parent’s mirth, and rocked about on his chair in thorough enjoyment of the joke.

To Peter, old John was the fountain of humour—he was the wag, the wit, the comic opera of the farm.

“Fine! jolly fine indeed, Father—really splendid!” he shrieked in commendation. Then he rocked about again, and, to emphasise his appreciation, struck the corner of the table with his hand, and kicked his feet about, till Tom, the cattle dog, who always lurked unmolested there at meal-times, was compelled to defend himself. Tom, an impartial sort of dog, promptly defended himself by biting James on the calf of the leg. James immediately made trouble.

“Oh, wow! oh—th’ devil!” he cried with extraordinary suddenness, and, in a wild effort to lift all of himself above the table, lost a lot of his bacon and eggs.

Old John misunderstood the situation.

“Never mahnd, lad,” he said apologetically, “Never mahnd.” And, reaching over, he administered a soothing pat to the crown of his son’s head. “Ah wouldn’t hurt yow’er feelin’s; noh, noh.”

“Feelings! It wasn’t you,” James growled. “That infernal dog under there!” And he kicked out blindly at Tom.
"Oh, wow! Oh, the devil!"
Old John understood.
“What! did’nt bahte thee?” he asked in surprise.
“Did he!” and James sulkily reached down and rubbed the wound, then aimed another kick at the canine.
Old John ordered Tom to leave the kitchen.
“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!” Peter broke out in a most unexpected sort of way. “It was—was me!” he cried, throwing himself back. “I remember now, touching Tom with my foot. Ha ha, ha ha! And he bit James. Ha ha, ha ha!” Peter spread himself all over his breakfast, and shed tears of delight on it.
“Ah-h!” and old John eyed the laughing one with serious countenance. “Then shouldst been thee to get th’ bahte.”
“Yes! Ha Ha Ha!” the other yelled.
“Ah-h!”
Old John seemed to feel that there had been a miscarriage of justice.
“Of course! Ha Ha, Ha Ha!” from Peter again. “That’s where all the fun of it is—don’t you see it, Father?” Convulsions seemed to take hold of Peter. He threw himself about until his breakfast toppled over on to the floor. And Tom, who hadn’t obeyed his master’s command to leave the premises, instantly pounced on the fallen provender.
“Strut! Strut! look at ’n!” old John exclaimed.
“Tom! Shah! Oh, you brute! my eggs!” from Peter.
“Flick! flop!” from Tom; and all that was left for Peter to rescue was a clean plate.
“Did ’n get it?” old John, who had half risen in his place, asked excitedly.
“Did he what, Father!” and Peter, with a sort of grin, displayed the empty plate.
Peter’s loss acted as a palliative to James, who brightened up.
“Serves you right,” he said with a pleased smile. “It’ll stop some of your tomfoolery perhaps.”
“A case o’ th’ bahter bein’ bit,” said the parent, with a philosophical grin, as he settled down to proceed with his breakfast.
“But that doesn’t apply in this case, does it, Father?” Peter answered.
Peter was a student of logic, and, in a heart-breaking kind of way, was always engaging his parent in debate.

“In this instance I was not the biter,” he went on—“you must admit that?”

For a moment old John reflected hard. His love of argument was even greater than Peter’s.

Peter laughed. He always laughed when he felt he had his opponent cornered. He always laughed when he felt he was cornered himself.

“You see, James was the person bit,” he giggled, going deep into the matter for the benefit of his baffled sire.

“Well?” said old John calmly—“an’ what then, lad?”

“And Tom was the biter; isn’t that so?”

“So, lad.”

“Then how can you make out that the biter was bit, Father? Tom you admit was the biter—well, who bit Tom?”

“Oh, shut up and have your breakfast!” in tones of disgust from James.

“Noh, noh!” protested old John, upholding Peter’s attitude, “let ’n ’lone; let ’n ’lone.” And putting down his knife and fork he looked steadily at Peter like a huge snake mesmerising its breakfast.

“Now, see ’n here,” he said, “it wer’ thee, lad, who wert at fault, he kickin’ of Tom, and causin’ ’n to baht James, wert so?”

Peter nodded his head, and grinned asent.

“Thet beint so, then ’twer thee bit James, lad, and not Tom. Wert so?” And a grin came into old John’s face that broadened and broadened like the light spreading over the sky at daybreak.

“Good! By Jove, very good—very fine, Father,” Peter broke out when he saw the logic of his parent’s brilliant argument. Peter was liberal and just in debate.

“I never saw it that way; blessed if I did,” he added. “And I was sure I had you beat for once.”

“Ah-h, noh,” said old John, shaking his head, “no un ever had me lad—’cept it might ’a’ been your mother.”
“Except mother?” Peter echoed, wonderingly. Mrs. Dashwood, who had just entered from the inner part of the house, smiled and said:

“Indeed, I’m sure your mother never had him, Peter.”

“No?” responded old John, with another grin. “If that wert so, mother, an’ yo’ never had me, Ah’d be single yet. Ho, Ho, Ho!” And he laughed heavily at his own peculiar joke; while Peter, who regarded it as a brilliant coruscation, yelled in cheerful appreciation. James, with a look of torment in his face, turned to Peter and snapped: “Have a bit of sense!”

But Peter was only provoked into fresh merriment, and, when he recovered, pointed his fork at James, and addressing his parent, cried:

“He doesn’t see the joke, Father.”

“Doan’t un see it, lad?” old John asked in a sympathetic way of James.

“See it!” the other grunted contemptuously, “it’s hard to see a thing that’s not there.”

“Not there?” cried old John. Ah-h? Noh? is’n not?” And he laughed at James for having no sense of humour. “Ah wouldn’t lahke to be born lahke thee, lad,” he added, and went on eating.

Peter laughed several more bars at James’s expense. James silently reached across and helped himself to another egg.

“Thee baint be blahnd in every way, then, lad?” came slowly from old John. “Thee can see th’ point o’ a hegg in front of yow easy enough!”

More noise from Peter, and when his mirth was ended, James, steadily devouring the egg, looked up and drawled:

“Yes, I can see the point of a egg when it’s before me without any trouble; but I suppose either of you can see the hen there as well?”

Peter felt inclined to laugh, but controlled himself. He seemed in doubt as to whether James had really made a joke or not.

“Well, noh, lad, noh; but——” And old John paused; while Peter, his mouth agape, his eyes sparkling in joyful anticipation of the gem of humour he knew was about to fall from his brilliant parent, sat ready to greet it with full measure of
merriment—"boot we’s may be able to see the checkin."

The laugh that burst from Peter, could it have been staged, would have enriched a theatrical manager. Old John’s red, glossy face broke out into acres of smiles as he looked up and gazed in a self-satisfied sort of way at Mrs. Dashwood.

Peter’s excessive mirth irritated James.

“Well, I’m hanged if I know”, he said, “what the deuce the Government want to protect laughing jackasses for.”

But his satire was too subtle. It was altogether beyond the comprehension of the others. They suspected him of trying to evade the subject, and regarded him as a fugitive from the stings of their witticisms.

“Protect laughin’ jackasses, lad?” grinned old John, filling his mouth with bacon. “No un be atalkin’ abaat them.”

There was an interruption. Granny Dashwood, mother of old John, huddled beneath a brown shawl, and a white calico cap which sat on her head like a home-made pen-wiper, hobbled into the breakfast table, rubbing her long, bony hands together.

“Ah be ahearin’ great foon amang yow,” she squeaked, crouching into a seat beside James.

“It was the jackasses you heard, Granny,” James answered, speaking into her ear.

“Jaik Hedley?” said Granny, looking round the table, “be he amang yow?”

“Jeckesses, he said, Mother,” old John shouted in a loud voice.

Granny, whose sense of hearing was most unreliable, made an ear trumpet of her hand and said:

“Who?”

Peter laughed. Granny cast a look of scorn at him.

“Jackasses, Grandma,” Mrs. Dashwood said, approaching the aged one’s chair. Then in remonstration with the cheerful one: “You mustn’t laugh at her, Peter!”

“This kind of jackass, Granny!” and James, with his thumb, indicated Peter.

“Jaik Hedley,” Granny rattled on, “roon’d off with Mrs. Belly Brown when us wer’ ashepperdin’ on The Falls, an’ no un never see him again but Sammy Selby. He seen his ghost.
Yes, he seen he’s ghost. It was about 8 o’clock one naht when he be camped at th’ crick——”

A general laugh went round the table at Granny.

“Oh, Sammy ded,” Granny persisted. “He swore to it when he wer’ alahve. He seen th’ ghost coom oop aht o’ th’ watter in the middle o’ th’ naht, an’ it set raht besahd un. We wer’ ashepperdin’ at The Falls——”

Old John, pointing to the breakfast dish, shouted:

“Doan’t mahnd th’ ghost, Mother. What’ll yow take, heggs an’ bacon or bacon an’ heggs?”

“It’s forty-nahne year sence Jaik Hedley went off,” Granny continued, “an’ yow wasn’t born then, mah boy——”

“Ah wern’t?” interrupted old John, “wern’t born forty-nahne year ago? Ho, Ho, Ho! Ah-h, an’ many a year afore ‘n’, if Ah remembers raht.” (Lifting his voice.) “Yow fergets Ah wer’ born at sea, Mother.”

“Oh, that accounts for you being always at sea now, Father!” Peter, delighted at the opportunity to make a joke, broke in.

“What ’n did thou say?” Granny asked, fixing her sunken eyes on Peter.

“Peter is only joking with his father, Granny,” Mrs. Dashwood tried to explain. “Don’t mind him.”

“In chokey—his father?” Granny chirped. “Noh, mah boy wer’ never in th’ chokey; but mah good man, James, wer’, but only for a moonth.”

Here Granny broke off into meditation, and old John felt called upon to make an explanation in the family interest.

“What she’s thinkin’ abaht,” he said, “wer’ one tahme yow’er grandfather walloped a chap for sayin’ something to him, an’ he wer’ fined two pounds or a month in the lock-up.”

“And he preferred the lock-up, eh, Father?” Peter put in.

“Ah-h, he preferred the lock-up, ’cause he wanted the money.”

Then to Granny:

“Will you have a hegg?”

“No, she won’t have any, John,” Mrs. Dashwood said. “I’ve some porridge in the stove for her,” and she turned and placed a plate of steaming porridge before Granny.
"Yes, it be forty-one years since Jaik Hedley dahed," Granny proceeded again, and Peter broke out with a loud "Ha Ha Ha! it was forty-nine awhile ago."

"She can’t get over Jack Hadley," Mrs. Dashwood said with an amused smile, "can she?"

"Yow have got Jack Hedley on th’ brain, Mother," said old John.

Granny looked up at him and answered:
"Yow think it will rain? Ah thinks it will too, mah boy. Mah back and mah poor knees wer’ all a achin’ this mornin’.

Peter nearly went into fits.

Polly and Tilly bounced in from the dairy.
"Whatever on earth is going on?" Polly exclaimed. "We could hear Peter yelling a mile off—and just look at him now."

"Hear him!" Tilly added. "He laughs like a great calf. Listen to him. What in the name of goodness is he laughing at? Have you been making a fresh lot of jokes, Father?"

"Me? Well, yes," old John answered calmly. "It wer’—"

He was interrupted by Granny.

"Mah poor pet lembs," she said caressingly to the robust, fair-skinned girls, "yow’re perished with th’ coald. Come yow to the fire an’ get warm" (starting to rise from her seat). "Ah’ll bring summit to put on yow’er showlders."

The two girls pounced on the kindly-disposed grandmother and gently forced her back into her chair.

"Just you stay where you are and have a good breakfast, Granny," they said, "we’re as warm as toast. You know you shouldn’t have got up until we came to dress you."

Granny felt their hands.

"Poor little kittens!" she murmured, "yow’re cold as death."

"Ha, ha, ha!" from Peter. "They were pet lambs a minute ago—now they’re kittens. They’ll be cats directly. Ha, ha, ha, Tom-cats! Ha ha, ha ha, just about fits them, don’t you think so, Father?"

"More lahke tom-boys," was his parent’s answer, and Peter became seized with a fresh spasm of mirth, in the throes of which he upset his tea.

"Look at the silly!" Polly cried. "I knew Father would crown it."
Peter gasped "Tom-boys; that's just what they are. Ha ha, ha ha!"

"Oh, you!" Tilly snapped. "I'd sooner be a tom-boy any day than a Tom Thumb."

Tilly was reflecting on her brother's small stature. Peter was undersized for his age.

"Or a tomfool!" James put in.

It was the girls' turn to laugh, now.

Peter's eyes rolled about in his head, and he seemed lost for a suitable retort.

"Cans't not answer 'n, lad?" old John queried, looking at Peter.

"No, he's waiting for you to do it for him, Father," Polly said.

Old John laughed.

"Doan't let 'n beat yow," he went on. "Hit 'n hard, lad."

"I was trying to think of something I saw in the book I was reading last night," Peter stammered, scratching his head in pretence to recall a quotation that would silence his sisters—"something about the want—the want of——"

"Oh yes, I know," Tilly laughed. "Want is the scorn of every boyish fool, and wit in rags, Peter" (reaching over and tugging at a rent in his jacket), "is turned to ridicule."

All but old John and Granny joined in the laugh against Peter.

"Was that what you were trying to think of?" James asked maliciously of his brother. But Peter was a good actor in times of distress. He shook his head and snapped his fingers and said:

"No; I'm blowed if I can think what it was now."

"It baint be that," old John said with a wise air. "That be from aht the Babble, mah girl."

Tilly, who was a good reader, and had just left the Grammar School, exchanged a laugh with James, also a reader.

"The Bible? Oh Father!" she said.

"Ah-h, the Babble," replied old John confidently, "but it baint be any argerment for yow, girl, for it also sez, an' what he ought to 'a' thought on" (meaning Peter). "' Aht on the mahths o' babes an' sooklin's coomes wurds o' wesdom.' "
"Ha, ha, ha; ho, ho, ho!" yelled Peter: "The very thing I was trying to think of. It takes you, Father."

Old John was delighted with himself. His eyes became obscured behind the rolls of skin that gathered in his face as he leaned back and chuckled.

“What he was trying to think of!” James guffawed incredulously, as he rose and went off to work.

“That was from the Bible, Father,” Tilly conceded pleasantly, “but you surely don’t want to make out that I’m a babe or a suckling, do you?” (Appealing to Granny as she took a seat beside her), “Do you think I am, Granny?”

“What be yow sayin’, mah babby?” asked Granny.

“Stop it John!” Mrs. Dashwood said, struggling from her frolicking husband. “Be quiet, will you?”

“Ah would thet same.” And old John proceeded to prove his words. Loud expressions of delight greeted Mrs. Dashwood’s attempts to escape the embraces of her husband.

“What be he tryin’ to do?” Granny asked.

“Father and Mother are courting again,” Tilly cried into her ear.

“The boys used to love Granny one tahme,” the old lady murmured, “but ’n’ doan’t now, ’n’ doan’t now.”

Fresh delight entered the hearts of the two girls. The idea of boys making love to Granny was too much for them.

“And did you have boys, Granny?” they asked, curiously.
Granny smiled and nodded and counted them up on her fingers. Then answered:
"Fahve—yes, fahve."
"Five! Oh, you flirt, Granny," Tilly laughed. "I would never have thought it of you."
Granny wagged her head in childish delight, and added:
"But Ah only married yun."
The girls went off again into shrieks, and Peter, throwing bread scraps at old John to attract his notice, cried:
"Father! Father! did you hear that? Granny had five chaps and only married one. Ha! ha! ha! ha! only married one."
"Well," answered old John as he held his wife by the shoulders, "Ah hed a girl for every Sunda' in th' year, an' only married this yun." Then giving Mrs. Dashwood a parting squeeze went off to the yard.
"Father's a blooming caution," Peter said, as he reached for his hat and followed him.
2. City Anticipations

The close of a summer day.
Tea was over at "Fairfield". Polly and Tilly were in the
drawing room searching for pieces to try on the piano. Old
John, with a newspaper in his hands, was stretched on the
couch in the dining room studying the prices of produce. Mrs.
Dashwood sat at the sewing machine running up a suit for little
Andy. In the workshed, outside, surrounded with lights, James
worked steadily at a sulky he was building after his own heart.
James was a mechanic—a genius in the line of machinery. No
implement ever came to the farm but what he pulled to pieces
and improved upon in some way or other. In a small, untidy
room, off the front verandah, full of all manners of odds and
ends from books and magazines to bullocks' horns and bean
seeds, reclined Peter, his feet on the table, studying a maga­
zine. Buried in a padded arm chair in the drawing room with
her knees crossed, silently manipulating a set of knitting need­
les with rare dexterity, sat Granny talking to herself. At her
feet sprawled little Andy, at intervals removing one of her
slippers and fitting it on again.
"Ah sees maize be a pound a beg, Elahser," remarked old
John, putting aside the newspaper and turning to his wife.
"A pound a bag! That’s a lot, isn’t it, Father?" she answered,
taking up the scissors and snipping a thread.
"Ah-h; more’n it’s been for a good few year."
"And will we have much this season, John?"—adjusting the
cloth to her machine.
"Abaht 600 begs—may be more."
"That’s very good, isn’t it?" wheeling on her chair and facing
her husband.
"Ah-h, it be then, when yow coomes to thank how things
wer' with us twenty year ago."
"Indeed yes!"—with a hint of sadness in her voice—"we
could hardly make both ends meet then, John!"
“Very of’en us didn’t, did us? But noothin’ soocceeds lahke sooccess. In them days when us sold a crop, Elahser, we be as of’en as not in debt. Wert so? An’ nah as theer’s no much need to manhnd how thengs go, the mooney it rolls in bah the bushel.”

Then taking pencil and paper old John went into calculations on the year’s returns from maize, wheat, pigs, horses, cattle, etc.

“Abaht £1800 we be amakin’ a-year, Elahser,” he said, glancing up.

“£1800! So much as that! Why, you won’t know what to do with all soon, Father.” And Mrs. Dashwood laughed pleasantly.

“Waint Ah but,” and old John fell into reflection.

Then, as he returned the pencil to his pocket:

“Well, we’s ’ll be all atakin’ a halliday for one theng wi’ soome on it, Elahser. What abaht this trip to the city? If us don’t make it soon may be soome yun o’ us ’ll be trippin’ to ’tother sahde o’ th’ grave wi’out a return ticket.”

Feeling he had made rather a good joke old John began to chuckle.

“Oh, that will be splendid,” and Mrs. Dashwood’s eyes sparkled with the pleasure of anticipation. “The children will be pleased when they hear of it.”

“Ah baint be sure abaht it bein’ splendid,” and old John chuckled more. “Thet will derpend bah soome o’ us have kept th’ Commendments.”

Mrs. Dashwood saw the joke, and said with a smile:

“But I mean the trip to the city, John.”

“Ah-h, I knows,” old John replied kindly.

“And you’ll take Maria, too, won’t you, Father?” (Maria was their married daughter.) “She would be so glad to come, and it would do the baby a lot of good.”

“Take ’n? Whah not? Let ’n all coome. There be lots o’ room for ’n dahh there, an’ the more of ’em th’ merrier.”

The piano was heard to rumble and vibrate like the warning notes of an approaching thunderstorm.

“That’s Tilly!” Mrs. Dashwood said, assuming a listening attitude.
"Ah-h," rejoined the husband indifferently. Music was not one of his strong points.
Then the voice of Polly rang through the house as she began to sing full and sweet.
"One of the songs Tilly brought from the Grammar School," Mrs. Dashwood informed old John. "'Dear Orothong.' It's pretty, isn't it?"
"Ah-h," was the answer. "Ah-h. The spiles they're singin' but, bah tin-kettlin' the words wi' the pianny the way un do. Thet wern't how as us used to give a song. Thet be neither oon thing or 'noother."

The front door of the drawing room was heard to burst open, and Peter, magazine in hand, unceremoniously intruded on the musical evening.
"Where's Father?" he shouted at the broad of Polly's back as she stood to the piano.
"Those mem-o-ries sweet and dear," poured from Polly.
"Where's Father?" louder than before from Peter.
"He's a rum 'un, that fellow," said old John, with an amused chuckle.
"But he shouldn't interrupt them," Mrs. Dashwood said. Then calling from her place in the dining-room: "Peter! Peter!"
Polly reached the psychological moment in the song. She was taking a run of high notes. Her voice dwelt long and tenderly on the words: "Orothong! De-ar Oro-thong, will you for-r-r-get me!"
"Forget you! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter broke in. "Never! I couldn't, unless I lost my memory."
Polly ceased in the middle of her song, and turned and looked indignantly at her brother.
Tilly sprang from the piano stool.
"Peter!" she cried, "you silly angora! Go away. It's like your cheek to come in and interrupt."
"It's like your bad manners not to answer a civil question. Ha! ha! ha!" from Peter.
"A civil question!" Tilly echoed. "You should be answered like every other fool, according to your folly! You should be answered with a kick."
"Oh, Tilly!" from Polly, who was modest in all things.
“So he should—it’s too good for him,” the other insisted. But Peter had no temper. No epithet could perturb him. Shoving his nose close to Tilly’s flushed face, he bellowed: “WHERE’S FATHER!”

“Hear ’em agoin’ at it,” said old John, with another chuckle. “How do I know,” Tilly snapped, turning to the piano again.

“In his skin I suppose.”

“And when he jumps out I suppose you can jump in. Ha, Ha, Ha!” was the other’s answer.

“He’s in the dining room along with mother,” Polly said quietly.

“Oh, well! why didn’t you say so before?” And Peter, with a broad grin, made a mock bow as he departed. At the door he turned, and lifting his voice to the roof sang in a most execrable key: “Oroth-th-th-thong, don’t for-r-r-get me-e-e.” The absurdity of the effort was too great even for his sisters. They both burst into laughter.

“What ded yow stop for, pet lambs?” Granny innocently inquired as she rattled on with her needles.

But the girls offered no explanation to Granny.

“Start it again, Polly,” Tilly said, touching the keyboard. Polly started the song again.

“Now what’s your opinion of this, Father?” Peter, turning over the pages of the magazine commenced as he entered the dining room.

“What be it, lad?” said the parent.

“There’s someone writing in this about different kinds of humour, and explaining what is humour, and what isn’t humour; and he quotes this as a sample, or whatever you like to call it, of the best jokes that have made people laugh.”

“Did it make thee laugh, lad?” interrupted the parent.

“It wouldn’t make a cat laugh, Father, I reckon,” answered Peter.

“Ah-h; then it baint be a good yun, Ah reckons. Read un aht.” And old John, with confident, critical air, settled himself to listen and adjudge. In all points and questions of humour old John was the High Court and Privy Council of the Farm.

“Well, I can’t read it all to you,” Peter explained, “because there’s a picture with it. There, see?” displaying Phil May’s
black and white sketch of an asylum wall with a man outside it, fishing in the river, and a warder on the wall watching the angler.

"Ah-h," remarked the parent, "thet be-th' mad house, an' Ah sooppose th' joake it be a bit cracked."

"Just what it is. Ha, ha, ha! You've struck it, Father. Not bad, not bad. Ha, ha, ha!"

Old John accepted the compliment with one of his broadest smiles.

"Did you hear that one, Mother?" Peter asked enthusiastically of Mrs. Dashwood.

Mrs. Dashwood nodded and smiled at the great humorist.

"Doan't matter," said he. "Go on, read 'n aht."

Peter continued:

"The cove, the warder on the wall, says to the chap fishing: 'Gettin' any bites?'"

"Well, 'n what do 'e say?" inquired old John.

"'None yet.'"

"Well," and old John shifted position so as to collect all his mental forces, "'n what then?"

"Then the cove on the wall sez——" Peter peered hard into the magazine.

"What 'n do 'e say?" the parent interrupted.

"Sez to him: 'How long have you been fishing?'

"Hah long 'e been feshin'," repeated the other for his own benefit. Then to Peter:

"Be there any more?"

"The cove then sez," Peter went on, "'About three hours.'"

"Abaht three hours," old John repeated. "Abaht three hours." Then leaned back as if to solve the problem.

"Wait a bit, Father—that ain't all of it. This is where the joke is." And Peter prepared to read some more.

"Ah-h," said old John, "Ah thought summit wer' left aht," and he came to attention again.

"'Come inside,' the cove on the wall sez," and Peter looked up and grinned at his perplexed looking parent. "Did ever you hear such a joke?" he said, putting down the magazine.

Old John stroked his chin and pondered profoundly.

"Coome insahd!" he muttered, staring up at the ceiling.
"Coome insahd! . . . Abaht three hours! . . . Coome insahd!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Peter burst out. "Did ever you hear such a rotten thing?"

"Wait tho', wait tho', wait on," and old John leaned further back, and pressed his brow with his big palms.

"Come insahd," he mumbled once more.

"Come out of the wet, I suppose he meant," and Peter laughed in ridicule once more. Peter seemed anxious to cajole the High Court into a hurried and impartial decision. But old John wasn’t to be hustled.

"Yow’ve got ’n mixed wi’ th’ picture lad," he said at last. "There be summit missin’. Read ’n all aht in one piece."

Peter took up the magazine again, and read quickly:

"Getting any bites?"

"None yet."

"How long have you been fishing?"

"About three hours."

"Come inside."


Peter was perplexed.

His parent whacked him on the back with his big hand, and cheerfully delivered judgment:

"Coome insahd," he chuckled, "an get a fesh from th’ ketch-in’ and put ’n on his lahne."

"Ha, ha, ha, hah," Peter broke out like a crack of lightning, and banging his knee with the flat of the magazine, yelled: "That’s it, Father; that’s it, and I’m hanged if I saw it! Ha, ha, ha! A good one it is too. Come inside! Ha ha, ha, ha, hah. Well, I’m blowed."

"Oh, it be plain as a furrow," said old John, "plain as you like. Oh, yes. Coome insahd!" And he shook his head merrily.

Peter returned to the magazine and began to study the joke again.

"Can you see it, Mother?" he asked, grinning at Mrs. Dashwood.

"Oh yes," she answered with quiet indifference, "but I’m more interested in the trip to the city."
“Eh, what Mother?” Peter asked, pricking his ears quickly. Mrs. Dashwood explained. Peter forgot all about the joke in an instant. “What?” he cried, “the whole lot of us for a month?” His mother nodded. Peter jumped over several chairs. “Ah-h,” old John confirmed. Then quoting the inscription on a post-card that had been going the rounds: “Th' whole dem family.” “John!” Mrs. Dashwood said reprovingly. Peter rushed away to the drawing room, and shouted the glad news to his sisters. They both deserted the piano. “The city! All of us?” they cried, and flew to their parents for confirmation. “Yes, your father is going to take us all,” Mrs. Dashwood answered. And old John added: “Ah-h, th’ whole lot on y’.” “The whole dam family,” Peter shouted, appropriating his parent’s jest with a loud laugh. Tilly was carried away with excitement. She ran to her father, and pinched his ruddy cheeks, and called him her “dear old Father.” Old John made no demur. He smiled in enjoyment of it all. “And when do we go, Mother?” Polly asked. “As soon as we can get ready,” was the answer. Tilly wrung her hands. “And it’s the opera season,” she cried. “We’ll see an opera, Poll. The Gondoliers” (breaking into a lively air, and singing), “Oh, the beautiful Gondoliers.” Then seizing hold of her sister, dancing fashion, she began swinging her round. Polly responded willingly, and around they careereed like a whirlwind. “Girls! be careful!” Mrs. Dashwood called as the furniture became endangered. “Oh, hoh; them beautiful Gondoliers!” Peter shouted in imitation of Tilly, and grabbing a chair for a partner joined furiously in the waltz. “Peter!” his mother protested, “Peter!” “Oh, them beautiful Gondo——” Peter bumped heavily
against his sisters, and his refrain was cut short. “Gondoliers,” he continued, regaining his equilibrium and pursuing them.

Through the door and into the drawing room the girls twirled, where with a shriek Polly separated from her partner and dropped into a chair. But Tilly’s delight knew no bounds. Taking a short grip of her skirts she she cinematographed to a series of high kicks and cake walk. Once she kicked over Granny’s head, while Polly leaned back in her chair and shrieked.

Tilly’s antics flooded Granny’s memory with pleasures of the past. A youthful feeling took possession of her. Her eyes shone like stars and her head started to nod. Tilly kicked out in her vicinity again. Granny, half slippered, took the floor, and, catching the sides of her dress, faced Tilly in Irish jig style.

Polly threatened to injure herself somewhere with merriment. She wriggled and shrieked and shrieked and wriggled. Peter dropped his wooden partner on the whatnot and applauded his grandmother. Then he yelled:

“Father! Father! Mother! for the love of me, look here! Ha! ha! ha! ha! hah-h!”

Old John and Mrs. Dashwood, amazed and amused-looking, came to the drawing room door, and gaped.

“Well Ah never!” gasped old John.

Forgetting all about her cramps and sore back, Granny laid to it.

Peter, with no more idea of music than a plough horse, rushed to the piano and banged it violently in the interests of Granny.

“Well, Ah never ded!” gasped old John again.

Little Andy raised himself up, and guffawed. Then he started out to create a part for himself in the play. He placed his head on the carpet and essayed to stand the wrong way up. “Hoh,” he cried when his heels were in the air. Then he lost his bearings, and toppled over, and his legs fouled Granny and made trouble.

“Oh! Oh!” Polly cried, anticipating the catastrophe. The next moment Tilly and Granny and little Andy were all engaged in the “sacks on the mill” act.
Granny, Half Slippered, Took the Floor
Old John and Mrs. Dashwood became alarmed on the aged one's account, and hurried to her assistance.

“Oh, yer 'urtin' me,” Andy squeaked.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Peter laughed, when Granny was put back into her padded chair, “what did you think of the music?”

“Poor Granny!” Polly murmured. Then after a short giggle, “It was a shame!”

“And it was all your fault, you Handy Andy!” Tilly said, scowling upon the grinning culprit.

“Oh, she baint be hurt,” old John assured them. “There be a lot o' kecks in her yet.”

“I never thought she could dance at all,” Tilly laughed.

“Oh, mah word,” replied old John, with pride in his eye. “She wer' a champion in her tahme. Yow should hear th' auld hands what know'd her in her yoong day atalk abaht her. Ah seed her maself oon naht knock oop three well sinkers an' two moosicians. Wert so, Mother?”

Mrs. Dashwood assured her daughters it was so.

“And what did they do with her then, Father?” Peter asked.

“Do?” answered his parent with a puzzled look, “wha, what 'd you do, lad?”

“I'd have put hobbles or a side-line on her. Ha, ha, ha.”

Old John stared indignantly at his flippant son.

“Three partners!” Polly put in. “It must have been a competition, not a dance, Father.”

“Call 'n what yow lahke,” answered old John, “but she doon it.”

There was an interruption. Granny suddenly broke out in a fresh place. Her thin, frail voice piped into song.

“Ha, ha, hah,” came in greeting from Peter.

“Sh-sh-sh-sh,” and old John held up his hand to silence Peter.

Polly tittered irresistibly. Old John silenced her.

Peter discovered that Granny was singing without accompaniment. He sprang to the piano and struck a series of notes tenderly, and threw broad grins over his shoulder in the course of his performance. Then as Granny strained to raise her voice he put in a run of heavy punches that attracted attention.
Alarmed for the safety of the piano Tilly crossed the floor to reason with Peter.

“That be a rare old song o’ her’n,” old John, with beaming face, informed his family.

“Do you want to break it? Peter!” Tilly cried.

“Ah-h, a great auld song!” whispered old John, as Granny entered upon the second verse.

“Peter!” Tilly protested again. “Peter, do you hear?”

“Turn over—quick!” Peter shouted. “I’m a bar behind.”

“You should be, too, you lunatic.” And Tilly levered him by the coat collar.

Peter started to choke.

“S-s-s-stead-y!” he gasped.

Tilly released her grip, and bit him on the neck.

“Yow! mighty!” Peter yelled, jumping to his feet.

“Hoat! hoat!” from old John. “Doan’t mek sooch a nise!”

Peter stood, rubbing his neck, and grinning with pain.

Tilly closed the piano.

All eyes were turned to Granny. She was feebly reaching for some top notes. Polly, anticipating a breakdown, threw her voice in with Granny’s.

Old John, holding one hand above the other, stood prepared to applaud his parent.

Up went Granny’s voice. Up went Peter’s.

“He like a sol-jeer fell!” he yelled.

“Oh loord!” cried old John, and with his hands to his ears, hurried back to the dining-room.
3. **Wheat-Loading Extraordinary**

Miller’s traction engine with threshing plant in tow steamed out of the farm yard. It left behind it, where before had stood a gigantic bin of corn, some eight hundred sacks of the primest grain.

“This ’ll take soome o’ th’ gravy oot on y’, lad,” remarked old John to Peter, as James, with horses and waggon in hand, drew up beside the pile.

Peter eyed the formidable-looking heap of weighty sacks, and grinned a sickly sort of grin. Peter remembered having assisted but a few months before in the loading of six hundred bags of wheat, and knew what the undertaking meant.

“Soome on ’em’s a fair weight,” the parent went on, pressing his fist against one of the sacks—“two oondred an’ forty in most on ’em.”

“It will be no joke putting them on the waggon,” Peter observed, sadly, “and getting them into the barn won’t be any easier. Couldn’t a better way of handling them be invented than by bursting ourselves lifting them?”

“Well,” old John drawled, “th’ heasiest tahme Ah ever hed liftin’ begs wer’ a lot th’ ’ardest, lad!”

“The hardest?” Peter said with a puzzled look. “That’s a contradiction, isn’t it, Father?”

“It haint then, for yer ses Ah never lifted ‘n on at all for a coouple o’ year roonnin’. ” And old John laughed at his son.

“Well, some one else lifted them on for you?” suggested Peter.

“ ’N didn’t,” was the answer.

“Well, I’m blowed if it’s clear to me, Father.”

“It wer’ pretty clear to me then, lad,” said old John, grinning like a school master who has his pupil tied in a knot.

“Well, what the deuce did you get into the bad habit of lift­ing them on again for?” asked Peter.

“ ’Cause it raihned, lad; an’ soome grew. There wer’ a
draht afore. See lad?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Peter. "Oh yes," he said. "Ha, ha, ha! I see, Father."

James backed the waggon into position, and old John, motioning Peter to "grip hands," took the nearest sack, and together they hoisted it into the waggon.

Peter puffed and grunted after the exertion.

"Doan't get 'n winded yet, lad," the parent counselled good humouredly, "there be aiht 'oondered on 'em."

Peter mentally wished the corn to Halifax.

"Nah then!" from old John, and with another grunt or two from Peter, up went No. 2 into the waggon.

"Pshaw! hold on a bit!" James called out, approaching the waggon side with a spare horse and a long rope. "That's a blackfellow's way of loading them."

"A blackfeller's way!" said old John, surprised looking, "there baint be any yother thet Ah knows on."

"Oh yes there is, Father," James answered quietly, "just you lean that slide, there, up against the side of the waggon, and I'll show you."

Looking round, old John's eyes rested on a rough wooden frame that was new to him.

"Yon?" he said, pointing to it. "Ah wer' woonderin' what 'n wer' for!"

"I made it nast night," James muttered, taking hold of the frame; and, while his parent and Peter stood staring in wonder, placed it in a slanting position against the waggon.

Old John shifted his gaze to the draught mare, Nugget, backed up to the opposite side, and started to chuckle.

"A bit o' horse-play, lad?" he asked.


"Horse power! Ha, ha, ha! And Nugget's a mare," from Peter.

"Well, that" (James tugged at the rope) "is horse" (another tug) "laughter. And you ain't even a filly."

"Ho, ho, ho!" mumbled old John, looking at Peter, "thet be one agen thee, lad."

James adjusted the rope, and when he brought the loop over
and “lassooed” a sack with it, Peter’s eyes began to open wide. James’s idea of saving labour suddenly revealed itself to him, and he exclaimed: “I see it! Nugget ‘ll pull them all on, eh?”

“What else would you expect?” James grunted. “You don’t think she’ll pull them all off, do you?” Then after a pause:

“Lead her on, and stop her when I sing out. That’s all you’ve got to do—if you think you can do it.”

“Do it!” Peter answered enthusiastically. “Ha! ha! ha! That’s something like the way to load.” And he went to the mare’s head. Then turning to old John, whose face still manifested doubt in the project:

“Now, why didn’t you invent something like that all these years, Father—eh? Ha! Ha! Ha! James is coming out of his shell a bit!”

“What did’n Ah think on it?” said old John mechanically.

“Now then,” James interrupted, “if you jump up on the waggon, Father, and build the load, I’ll look after this end of the business.”

“Ah-h,” and old John, like an unbeliever, slowly mounted the waggon.

“Right!” James called to Peter.

Peter led Nugget along, and up rolled a sack of corn on the end of the rope.

“Woh!” James called.

Peter “wohed,” then backed the mare as was required of him.

James took the noose, adjusted it once more; called “right” again, and up went another sack.

“What, thet be a fahne idea,” old John called out in approval, “what made ’n thenk o’ it, lad?”

“Well, it was on Peter’s account,” James answered with a grin. “I thought he might hurt himself throwing these bags about. He’s such a tiger for work, you know.”

“Ah-h, he looks lahke ’n,” and old John smiled down upon Peter.

“I believe in making things as light as possible for myself,” Peter chuckled back. “‘Make your head save your back.’ That’s my motto, Father.”
“Thee baint be a peck-pocket, then, lad,” grunted old John as he placed a sack in position.

“Woh!” said Peter to the mare. Then to his parent: “Ain’t a what, Father?” And he looked up at his parent. Peter never liked to miss anything that was said.

“A peck-pocket,” repeated old John.

“Why—how, Father?” curiously.

‘Cause a peck-pocket believes in makin’ things lahter for other people, that’s why.”

Peter laughed in appreciation.

“Very good, Father, very good,” he complimented. “That’s not too bad.”

“Right!” rang out from James.

Peter was slow to respond.

“Oh, don’t be ‘ha ha’n’ there all day!” James shouted, “shake things up, can’t you?”

Peter bustled a bit.

Then as the mare backed into position again he shouted:

“I hope we don’t meet any of them jolly beggars of pick-pockets when we go to the city, Father.”

“Us maht then, lad,” was the answer. “There be plenty on ’em dahn there.”

“Right!” in a peremptory tone of voice from James.

Peter performed his part, then yelled out:

“You won’t catch me carrying money in any of my pockets, Father!”

“Noah,” old John grunted back. Then after handling another sack: “Where’ll thee carry ’n then, lad?”

“Oh, I’ll only keep half-sovereigns,” Peter said, “and carry them in my mouth.”

“A pity you hadn’t a few to carry now,” James put in, as he waited for his brother to move the mare.

“In yow’re math, lad?” old John chuckled, “whah, yow’d swaller ’n. But Ah guess they’d be saife enoof, lad.”

Peter began to laugh.

“Right! Right there!” James called angrily.

Peter attended to his part. James in his irritation omitted to call out “woh” at the critical moment. Peter’s mind was intent on the city pick-pockets, and to stop the mare on his own
account never occurred to him. He seemed to think the excur-
sion to the city had already commenced, and that Nugget and
himself were on their way to the railway station.

"Werp! werp!" old John protested excitedly, as the rolling
sack tilted against his legs with some force, and showed no
inclination to remain on top of the waggon. "Mah'nd! mahn'd!"

"Woh-h! woh-h!" James, seeing what must happen, called
 louder. But it was too late. Nugget got in a stride or two too
many, and hauled the sack and old John along with it right
over the side of the waggon on to the ground. "Look out! Look
out!" James gasped. "Father 'll be killed!" And running round,
he dragged the sack of corn from off his parent's chest.

"Are you hurt, Father?" he asked anxiously.

Old John pulled himself together and laughed.

"Hurt?" he said, "not a bet, lad."

Old John was not a pampered individual. He was a tough
old saw.

"Ha, ha, ha! ha! hah!" chirped Peter, when he saw his parent
dusting chaff and dirt himself. "I couldn't make out where you
were off to, Father, when I saw you coming down head first."

"Well, Ah could, then!" old John replied feelingly, and
dusted himself some more.

"And if you had been minding your work," James said,
condemning Peter, "it couldn't have happened at all."

"Oh, it ain't to be helped, lads!" old John said, exonerating
all concerned, "ahccidents 'll heappen—even in mah family."
And he broke into another laugh.

"That was what you call a dispensation of Providence, eh,
Father?" put in Peter.

"Ah-h," and old John started to climb into the waggon
again. "A despensation o' John Dashwood, Ah thensks," he
added as he reached the top.

"If someone dispensed with him," meaning Peter, "I think
we'd get on a lot better," James remarked cynically, as he took
his place at the slide again.

James's valuation of Peter as a farm-hand was not a high
one.

"Roll 'n up again, lads," the parent commanded cheerfully.
"Abaht four more an' we'll have a load."
They rolled them up again. All day long those sacks of corn rolled on to the waggon, and when evening came the greater part of the eight hundred was safely housed in the barn.
4. An Unappreciated Present

“It woan’t take ‘n long fixin’ th’ rest to-morrow,” old John observed thoughtfully, closing and bolting the heavy barn door that creaked on its rollers, “an’ soon ’s ‘n be carted to th’ railway then we’s go to the city, lads.”

“The city isn’t worrying me much, Father,” James answered indifferently. “I’d sooner put the time in completing my sulky.”

“But ’n moost go, lad,” the parent insisted. “The soolky can keep till ’n comes back.”

“You wouldn’t catch me staying behind, Father,” Peter broke in. “Ha! ha! ha! I wouldn’t stay behind for a hundred sulkies!”

“Noh, thee wouldn’t, lad,” his parent chuckled. “Thee be summit lahke a dug in thet respect, Peter.”

“Ha, ha, ha; ha, hah!” roared Peter. “Yes, like old Tom, Father. He’ll never stay behind, even if he’s told to.”


Then leading the way across the yard he attended to the rugging and feeding of the draught horses, while the sons saw to the wants of the cows and pigs.

It was then getting dark.

“He be agoin’ to grow to a fahne colt,” old John said in admiration of a handsome draught yearling, placing his arms about the hairy quadruped’s neck and fondling it.

“Ah thenk as Ah moit put ’n into th• Show next year.”

“By Jove, yes,” Peter approved with a giggle. “I would, if I were you, Father. Show him in James’s sulky. It’ll be finished in about another year. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Show you in James’s sulky!” his brother growled in disapproval.

“Me?” and Peter laughed more. “You wouldn’t get me in it,” he added, “unless there was a certificate to say it was safe for a man to trust himself in it. Ha! ha! ha! What do you think, Father?”
"For a man," James said, "it would be safe enough—but I don't know about a donkey!"

Peter didn't laugh. He didn't see any occasion to.

"Well, Ah derse'nt thenk Ah could get inte it, from the sahze on 't," the parent put in pleasantly.

Peter saw occasion to laugh now, and he did so vigorously.

"I don't think anyone could get into it. Father," he said. "James must be making it for a go-cart for little Andy. Ha! ha! ha! And he'll harness one of the sheep or old Tom in it for him."

Just then Polly and Tilly, who had been to the township, shopping and consulting the dressmaker there in regard to their outfit for the city, drove into the yard.

James stepped forward and helped his sisters to alight and took charge of the horse.

"My word!" Peter cried, walking round the buggy in a lordly sort of way, "jolly nice time to come home. . . And just look at poor old Whistler, sweating like a fool!"

"Well, we would much rather he sweated like a fool, Peter," Tilly answered, throwing back her veil and displaying a pair of rosy cheeks and an even set of white teeth, "than he should talk like one."

James, who always enjoyed Tilly's little digs at her brother, chuckled as he unbuckled the traces, and looked across to see how he was relishing it. But to Peter it was all water on a duck's back.

"It would look a deal better," he rattled on, "if the pair of you were in the shafts yourselves—tandem fashion. Ha, ha, ha! And old Whistler on the seat. What do you think, Father?"

Old John's eyes twinkled a lot; but he didn't make known his thoughts on the matter.

"Father couldn't be bothered thinking about anything so ridiculous," Tilly retorted, loading herself up with parcels taken from the buggy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" from Peter. "You're right. Anything more ridiculous than you two, no one could imagine."

Tilly, standing with arms encircling the brown paper parcels, frowned contemptuously at him.
“You’re an incorrigible ass, Peter,” she said, then burst out laughing.

Peter calmly lifted an empty pig bucket, greasy and dirty, that he had set on the ground some minutes before, and with a loud “Ha! ha! ha!” stood it on top of Tilly’s parcels.

Tilly flew into a helpless and useless passion. She attempted to kick Peter, and called upon old John to do things to him.

The parent with a broad smile took possession of the greasy bucket and set it down.

“He shouldn’t be allowed to do a thing like that, Father,” Tilly stormed. “That’s nothing funny!”

“Oh, let him alone, and come along, Tilly,” Polly advised. “Mother will be all behind with the tea if we don’t hurry.”

“Yes,” Peter shouted after them, as they hastened through the gate, “hurry up and do something, and let us have our tea. I want mine; and James wants to begin work. He’s been loafing all day. Ha! ha! ha!”

Some porkers, squealing wildly, attracted old John.

“Ded ’n feed all th’ pegs, lad?” he asked, turnin toward the sties.

“Feed them!” Peter answered. “I gave them all the separated milk, and enough boiled corn to do them a year. The more those wretches get the more they want.”

“Thet be th’ way wi’ all pegs,” old John remarked, peering over at a number of pure bred Berkshires.

Then after admiring them for a few moments:

“They be comin’ on, them chaps, lad.”

“Not as fast as they ought,” Peter answered. Peter was in charge of the pig department on the farm, and had the interest of the swine at heart. “I’m going to try old Jimmy Winn’s dodge on some of them, Father,” he added, with a philanthropic smile.

“What be thet, lad?” inquired old John.

“Cut their tails off,” said Peter.

Old John looked curiously at the chief of the pig department, and broke into a rumbling chuckle.

“Cut ’n tails off?” he echoed, “what—to make ’n sharter?”

“To make them grow,” said the other. “And while I think of it,” he continued, “I’ll begin on a couple now.”
Away he trotted to the tool-house; and with a fresh smile on his face, returned carrying a pair of gaping hedgeclippers in his hands, the blades of which repeatedly snapped together like the jaws of a shark closing upon space.

“What! wi’ yon things?” from old John in astonishment.

“Ha! ha! hah!” Peter laughed, slicing more of the atmosphere with the murderous looking implement. “These ought to do the trick, eh, Father?”

“Better take ‘n a knahfe, lad,” the parent advised, producing his own and opening the large blade.

“No fear. This is the very thing—just you watch.” And with the clippers agape Peter leaned across the sty rails. “Watch now!” he urged a second time.

Old John, with a grin, watched.

A half-grown hog wandered up, nosed the clippers inquisitively, then grunted and turned his tail to them. Peter choked back a giggle. His hands trembled. Then “klang” went the blades, and off went that pig with a deafening squeal, and with the clippers dangling and jangling behind it.

“Ha, ha, ha! Blow it!” cried Peter. “They lapped.”

“Ho! ho! ho!” laughed old John. “Thee will have to step in an’ get ‘n back now, lad.”

“Tea, Father! Tea! Come ter tea, Father!” called little Andy, swinging himself to and fro on the garden gate.

“All raht, mah boy,” old John answered back.

“Tea! Tea! Tea, Father!” came from little Andy again.

And leaving Peter in the sties fighting with the squealing swine for possession of the hedge clippers, the parent made his way to the house to tidy himself and prepare to preside over the evening meal.

Mrs. Dashwood, Granny, James, and Tilly filed in and took their places. Polly, with a long white apron over her dress, flew in and out the kitchen with the various dishes.

“We’re all behind tonight, Father,” Mrs. Dashwood said apologetically. “It’s easily known the girls have been out today.”

“All behahnd lahke th’ cow’s tail, moother,” and old John squeezed his bulky form into its chair, and proceeded to rattle the carver on the steel.
Having finished carving he put down the knife and fork and nodded to Granny.

Granny placed a hand over her forehead and prattled off a long and incoherent grace, to which old John and Mrs. Dashwood added a reverent “Amen”.

“Oh dear!” Tilly sighed, “I think Granny repeats the whole of the New Testament. Pass the salt, if you please Father.”

Then with the rattle of cutlery and crockery, mingled with cheerful speech and laughter, the meal went merrily on.

“Whatever is keeping Peter?” Mrs. Dashwood enquired, noting the prolonged absence of the cheerful one from the family board.

Old John thought of the hedge clippers, and raised a chuckle on his own account.

“I heard him going to his room a minute ago, Mother,” Tilly said, “but he’ll be another hour yet. Peter takes as long to tidy himself for tea as it takes some brides to dress for their wedding.”

“I think we’ll be a good while getting ready for ours,” Polly said with a laugh.

“Indeed!” Tilly answered, “speak for yourself, Poll, I don’t intend to be an old maid.”

“He parts his hair in the centre now,” James remarked, reverting to the absent Peter with a grin.

“Ah-h,” said old John, digging deep into the butter, “Ah notice he be adoin’ thet.”

“Yes, and it makes him look quite a ninny,” Tilly added with a laugh. “A man who parts his hair in the centre is a weakness always, I think.”

“It baint be every man as can, mah girl,” and old John, smiling hugely, passed his palm over the smooth surface of his bald crown.

The family laughed merrily.

“What they be alaughin’ on?” Granny innocently asked of Tilly.

“We’re all laughing because Father can’t part his hair in the centre, Granny,” Tilly informed her.

“Swengin’ partners in the centre?” said Granny, and caused a fresh burst of merriment.
“Swinging partners in the centre!” murmured James, with an amused look on his face.

Just then Peter put in an appearance, wearing a new necktie of many colours, and a large smile, and in his hand he carried a dainty looking board box fastened with ribbon.

“I’ll bet none of you can guess what’s in this,” he began, holding up the box to view.

“Oh, some one has sent him a valentine,” Tilly hazarded.

Peter shook his head and grinned.

Every one stared curiously at the box, which he kept well out of reach.

“A box of pocket handkerchiefs from his girl,” said Polly.

“What do you call those things they buy for kiddies?” suggested James, looking at his sire.

“A dummy,” Tilly broke in with a laugh, “and just what he wants.”

“Show me!” Polly cried, making a snatch at the box.

But Peter avoided her.

“Pshaw! he has nothing!” Tilly said, and curiosity threatened to peter out.

“It wasn’t meant for me, anyway,” Peter remarked adroitly.

Their curiosity went up again with a bound.

“Oh, it’s something for me—it was addressed to me and he’s taken it!” Tilly cried in alarm. “It was sent from the school. Give it up, Peter, if it isn’t for you!” and rising from the table made frantic efforts to gain possession of the valuable.

“Ha! ha! ha! You’re pretty near it,” Peter laughed, “but you’re not quite right.”

“It is for me. I know by the way he’s going on,” Tilly insisted in despairing tones. “It’s something from Mary St. Clair. Make him give it up, Father!”

“Guess again, first,” from Peter.

“Ah, do, Peter!” Tilly resorted to tact, “and I’ll never say anything to offend you again. Ah, Peter! you know how I’ve always loved you as a sister? Peter!”

“Isn’t she a hypocrite!” from Polly.

“Just let me peep at the address,” and Tilly lifted her eyes pleadingly to her brother’s.

“Well then, sit down, and you can have it,” Peter consented.
Tilly, smiling triumphantly, sat down again, in a hurry. Peter placed the coveted packet before her, then stood by winking at old John.
Polly made movement to assist her sister in the opening process. But Tilly would have no hands other than her own touch the precious packet. Tilly was a selfish girl where presents were concerned.
“I don’t know the writing,” she said, “but it is sent to me.” Peter winked again.
“Someone be asendin’ of yow summit to wear to the city,” suggested old John roguishly.
“Oh, I hope it is,” and Tilly jerked the lid off. The next moment she dropped it all on the table with a shudder, and gasped:
“Oh, you beast!”
“Ha! ha! ha! Hah! ha! ha! hah!” And Peter danced a war-dance round the table.
Polly looked over Tilly’s shoulder, and cried “Hugh!” Then burst into laughter.
“What be it?” asked old John.
“Just what you thought, Father,” Peter choked. “Something for her to wear to the city. Ha! ha! ha!”
“Show ’n to us,” and old John reached out his hand.
“Throw it out; the horrible thing!” and Tilly shoved away from it as though it would bite her.
Peter dipped in two fingers and lifted the contents of the box.
“He! he! he!” cried little Andy. “A pig’s tail.”
“Take ’n away, lad! take ’n away!” commanded old John, holding up both his hands.
Mrs. Dashwood was horrified.
“Peter,” she cried, “how dare you!”
“A filthy jest—bringing such a thing to the tea table!” Tilly protested, renewing her attack on Peter.
“But you’re going to wear it to the city, ain’t you? Ha! ha! ha!” And Peter dangled the amputated member close to her ear.
Tilly bounced up in a tearing passion.
“Father!” she cried, “do you allow that?”
“Lad!” old John thundered in a voice that meant obedience.
"Well, give me back its coffin," Peter said, grinning as he collected the card board. "I'm going to bury it."

"And I do believe," Tilly broke out again, "he actually cut it off one of the poor little pigs!"

"Did you think I cut it off one of the old roosters? Ha, ha, ha!" and Peter went off cheerfully, to dispose of the trophy.

"Well, next Monda'," said old John, rising from the table, "we'll be amakin' a start for the city."

"Next Monday?" Tilly echoed jubilantly.

"Next Monday?" Polly cried.

"Ah-h, next Monda'." And old John reached for his pipe.
5. The Tail of the Shirt

A bright and cheerful morning. The fruit trees and the hawthorn hedges that ornamented the farm lands were all in bloom. A warm and glorious sunshine lit up the land. The fields of waving wheat breaking and bulging into shot-blade were pictures good for man to see. The great pine trees towering round the snuggling home were asong with birds.

Full charge and control of “Fairfield” for the next month were handed over to William McStay, and all the family were up to their eyes in the final preparations for the trip to the city. The mail train on which they would travel was timed to leave the local station at 3.30 p.m., and it was now getting on for 11 o’clock.

For a week and more Mrs. Dashwood and the girls had been overhauling and organising their wardrobes, and packing boxes and bags and portmanteaux, so that no hitch would happen and no time be lost when the hour for starting arrived. And Tilly, who had had more experience in travelling than the others, was careful to send Maria (her married sister), full instructions to do likewise, and warned her to leave nothing to the last. And Maria sent a message to say that she and baby were ready to start any moment.

Preparations for celebrating a church picnic, or for attending a race meeting, are exciting enough events in the country, but this trip to the city excelled all things in the history of Fairfield. Nothing had ever so disorganised and dislocated the family nerve and general placidity. No matter how saintly, how well bred and brought up, there is no class upon earth so easily and speedily demoralised as the country person when under the spell and influence of “a trip to the city”. But the demoralisation lasts only till their feet touch the floor of the railway carriage, and they feel a grip of the ticket and the carriage
window. Then with a gulp and a gasp the temporary disorder passes away like the evil effects of green lucerne leaving a blown cow when proper remedies are applied.

"Moother!" called old John, showing himself at the door of his bedroom with a flannel shirt in his hand, "Moother!"

Mrs. Dashwood failed to hear him. She was engaged with Polly and Tilly in their private quarters, through the walls of which came peals of laughter, mingled with charges and counter charges, positive statements and blank denials. According to Tilly, Polly had "taken away her hair brush". According to Polly, Tilly had appropriated a box of her hair pins. According to each of them, both these statements were fabrications.

Old John lifted his voice and called "Moother" a tone or two higher.

Peter, with nothing on but his trousers, came out of the bath, and, wishing to reach his room off the verandah by the quickest route, made a bold dash along the corridor. He encountered his parent.

"Helloah!" cried old John, "where be your Moother, lad?"

Peter slowed down.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed. "Ain't you getting ready yet, Father?"

"Not yit," was the answer. "Your Moother wer' to put a pockit insahde this flannel for me to put mah money in, but" (turning the shirt over in his hands), "Ah don't see as she doon it."

"I made a little canvas bag to put mine in," Peter jubilantly informed his parent, then hurried off. At the front door he stopped and looked back.

"By Jove, you better hurry up, Father," he shouted, "it'll soon be getting time."

"Ah-hi!" groaned old John.

Tilly, vigorously using a clothes brush on a garment hung over her arm, came from her room, and at the top of her voice desired to know if "anyone could see Maria coming".

"William sez she'll be acomin' any minet now," old John answered. "But wher' be your Moother?" he added. "There baint be a pockit in this 'ere flannel."

"Mother is coming in a second—as soon as she fixes Granny
up,” Tilly answered. Then, putting aside the clothes brush, she volunteered to attend her parent’s troubles, and inquired what they were.

Once more old John explained.

“Oh, dear me!” Tilly winced. “I heard her say yesterday she was going to do that! And look at the time it is now! Oh, give it to me, Father, and let me see what I can do! It’s just terrible the way everything has been left to the last moment after all that was said.”

“Well, Ah wants it put on so thet Ah won’t lose any money out on’t,” old John stipulated as he handed over the garment.

Tilly almost snapped the shirt from him, and hurriedly went to the machine with it.

“And Ah wants a couple o’ departments med in ’t lahke,” old John added.

Tilly frowned, and looked confused.

“You want a division made in it, Father—a stitch put through the centre of the pocket?” she said.

“Ah-h; lahke a cartridge belt,” and old John withdrew to his room to continue his toilet.

“I’m blest if I know now how he means!” Tilly mumbled irritably. Then after fumbling the garment impatiently, started the machine full speed ahead.

Meanwhile trouble overtook Peter, and from the depths of his distant bedchamber he began yelling for first aid. And when Peter began to yell for anything he made no mistake about it. He subsidised his voice by attacking the wall with a heavy piece of scrap-iron. Eventually tiring of all this he flung open the door of his room and rushed into the dining room and discovered Tilly.

“Is every one deaf in this house?” he demanded.

Tilly ignored him. Peter was nothing to Tilly just then.

“Where’s my new suit gone?” he shouted.

Mrs. Dashwood, with Granny done up like a rainbow and hobbling after her, appeared on the scene.

“Your suit is in your drawers, Peter,” she informed him.

“It’s not, Mother,” he answered, with tears of distress in his eyes.

Apprehensive of some blunder, Mrs. Dashwood hastened away to make investigations.
Peter followed at her heels.

"Isn't Maria coming yet, Tilly?" Polly called from the secret depths of her quarters. But Tilly had no ear for her sister, either. Tilly was studying the position of that pocket.

Mrs. Dashwood returned, after having placed Peter in possession of his suit.

"What are you doing, girl?" she asked, addressing Tilly.

"Oh, you get ready, Mother!" Tilly answered. "We forgot to put a pocket in this shirt for Father."

Mrs. Dashwood was taken by surprise.

"But I put it in," she said, confidently—and proceeded to examine the shirt.

"No, it's not there!" Tilly assured her.

"Curious!" Mrs. Dashwood murmured.

"It doesn't matter; it's nearly done now. Run away, Mother, and hurry, do! We'll be late, as sure as anything."

Mrs. Dashwood still puzzled her head over the pocket, while Tilly rose and tossed the shirt through the door to her Father.

Peter rushed in again.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he roared. "What game is this? Who the deuce put a pocket inside my shirt?"

"Ah! there you are!" Mrs. Dashwood said with a sigh of satisfaction. "I knew I had put a pocket in somewhere."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Not a bad joke, Mother," Peter went on, "to put it upside down! So as the money would go down a fellow's leg, eh?"

Mrs. Dashwood was sure it couldn't be upside down.

"Oh well, never mind; run away, Mother," Tilly urged, and Mrs. Dashwood was about to turn away when old John's voice, starting to rumble, rose to loud laughter.

"What's up with you, Father?" Peter called through the wall. "Is yours put on upside down, too! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Tilly looked at her mother and turned crimson and became bewildered looking.

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" and old John showed himself at the room door with the flannel in his hand again.

"Noh, it ain't oopsahd down, lad," he said, "but it be on the tail o' it. Hoh, Hoh, Hoh!"

"Ha, Ha! Hah, Hah, Hah!" Peter yelled, stamping about. Hah, Hah, Hah! You don't mean it, Father?"
“Doan’t mean it? Look ’n at it,” and old John held up the long end of the garment.

“Ha, Ha, Hah!” Peter went off again, while Tilly, casting one withering look at the fatal work of art, fled.

“Oh, dear me!” Mrs. Dashwood moaned, “everything does seem to go wrong.”

“By Jove, they’ll never pick that pocket on you. Father,” Peter cried, hastening away again.

“Nevers you mahn’d it, Moother,” old John said quietly, “may be it’ll do better thet way than t’other.”

“Well, I can’t do anything to it now, John,” and Mrs. Dashwood went off to prepare herself for the trip.

“I think I can see Maria coming,” Polly was heard to call out, and Tilly answered:

“Oh, at last; and it’s nearly time!”

“Do ’em say th’ train be comin’?” Granny, having caught some of Polly’s announcement, asked.

“No, it’s Maria,” Tilly informed her.

“Maguire?” repeated Granny. “Is Tom Maguire going in the train, too?”

Peter interrupted. A brilliant idea had occurred to him, and he rushed in to impart it to old John.

“Do you know what you should do, Father?” he shouted.

“Ah dersent want ennerthin’ more to do just now, lad,” came the answer. “If Ah gits this ’ere stood boottoned (a grunt) Ah’ll do well enoof for one day.”

“I mean about that pocket in your shirt,” and Peter began to giggle.

“Ah-h, oh-h, thet. What abaht ’n, lad?”

“Well, if I were you I’d tie the sleeves around my waist, and wear the tail at my neck.” And Peter broke into a loud laugh at the lovely vision his words conveyed to him.

“Ah-h, an’ be awearin’ th’ pocket oopsahde down,” old John called back. “Thet want be any use, lad.”

At this stage Maria, gorgeously dressed, and perspiring and carrying the baby in her arms, arrived.

“Oh,” she gasped, “it’s fearful warm!”

Peter greeted her with clamour and noise sufficient to arrest a swarm of bees; and the baby, taking fright at him, and start-
ing to yell its lungs out, announced its arrival to the whole household.

"There's Maria!" Tilly called.

"Maria's come!" Mrs. Dashwood shouted. And old John, poking out his head, hailed her with:

"Hello, Maria. You be ahead on us. Have you got all your traps aready?"

"Yes; but I've forgotten my basket," Maria answered excitedly. "And baby has lost one of his little shoes somewhere on the road. And I don't know what on earth to do about it."

"Ah-h," thoughtfully from old John.

Granny hobbled in and embraced the bellowing infant and frightened it more.

"I forgot my basket, Granny, and don't know what to do about it!" Maria moaned, appealing to the aged one.

"Oh yes, dear, Ah'm goin' too," Granny answered with a smile that disclosed her gums.

"We be all agoin', mah girl."

Mrs. Dashwood called loudly to Maria to come to her room. Maria, hugging her squawking progeny to silence it, hastened thither, all the while repeating her woes of the absent basket.

"There you are—I thought she would!" Tilly called to Polly.

"Maria has forgotten her basket!"

But Polly exercised discretion, while old John, arrayed in shining black suit with a heavy gold chain stretched across his great stomach, strutted into the dining room and surveyed himself in a self-satisfied sort of way. A big man was old John, and done up and posing as he was now, looked all over a prosperous alderman.

Granny in a motherly way looked him up and down, then took him in charge, and tugged at the sleeves and tails of his coat to coax them into position. Then taking out her pocket handkerchief she proceeded to dust him all over.

"Ah reckons as thet'll abaat do, Granny," and old John moved round the room in further contemplation of himself.

"An' Ah thenk Ah ought to look lahke as Ah coomed aht o' th' stable when Ah gets dahm there. They waint know I from the Governor."
Little Andy, buried deep in a new suit, and gazing down in admiration of his polished boots, strolled along and applied to his parent for "a shillin'".

"A shillin'," and from his trouser-pocket old John produced a large leather purse, bulged out like a clothes bag, and started fumbling the contents.

"Ah don't thenk as Ah has a shillin' for you, with aht Ah gives you haf-a-crahn."

"No, you promised me a shillin'," Andy protested, "an' you'll have to give it to me, see?"

And Andy seized his father round both knees as if to imprison him till he paid the debt.

"When we gets to the station, then, mah boy," old John promised, "Ah'll get you one." And he returned the huge purse to his breast pocket.
6. The Trials of Travel

Peter, dressed like a shop window, in a loud check suit, a cunning-looking tweed hat—the only one of its kind in the land—a high-coloured collar, a variegated necktie, and carrying a spanking new leather bag in each hand, skipped breezily into the room.

For a moment old John's breath threatened to leave him. He stared long and hard at his artistic-looking son. Peter paraded the room as if for inspection. Old John started to smile. Peter, lifting his voice in song to an excruciating key, bellowed:

"And I'm off to-o-o-o Philadelphia in th' mor-nin'."

"Well," said old John, "if Ah wouldn't ha' thought you was just come back from Heaven."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! How do you like me, Father?" Peter answered, placing the bags on the table, and hooking his thumbs into his vest coat. "They won't take me for a Johnny from the wire fence. How do you think I'll strike them, Father?"

"Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" old John laughed. "You'll strahke strips off 'em, lad—strahke it off lahke lightning."

"By Joves, then, Father," Peter rejoined enthusiastically, "you don't look too bad yourself. You'd pass for a king in those clothes."

"Ah-h," drawled the parent.

James, carelessly dressed in a common tweed suit, and wearing a soft felt hat, sauntered in in search of luggage to convey to the buggies standing in the yard. His eyes rested on Peter, and he stopped abruptly, and stared.

Peter met his brother's look of amazement with a "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Old John, looking at James, said:

"Don't 'n know him, lad? Did 'n think he wer' th' Dook o' York?"

James burst into merriment, and turning on his heel retreated
down the corridor. The next moment he was heard calling to the girls.

“What is it, James?” Tilly answered. “We’ll be ready now in a moment.”

“For heaven’s sake,” James said, “just go and look in at the dining room.”

Neither Tilly nor Polly could resist curiosity. Clad in their sombre travelling dresses they hurried to the dining room and looked in curiously and expectantly. For a second or two they experienced disappointment, for their eyes only rested on the forms of Granny and old John. When, however, the gorgeous and smiling figure of Peter standing rigid and erect took shape to them they simultaneously shrieked, and fled.

“They be alaughin’ at you, lad,” old John remarked with a grin at Peter.

“Those who laugh last, Father, laugh longest,” Peter said. “Wait till we get to the city, and see who’ll be laughed at then—not me. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and the baby assembled in the dining room and dumped a consignment of small luggage on the table.

“Did anyone go for Maria’s basket?” Mrs. Dashwood asked.

But Maria, herself, stifled a reply.

“Oh my, Peter!” she exclaimed on beholding her brother. Then she started to laugh.

“Well I’m blowed if I know what you all see wrong about me to laugh at,” Peter protested. “Ain’t I decent? Ain’t I respectable looking?” And once more he stepped out round the room on a gallant parade.

“Ah don’t know what there’s wrong abaht you, lad,” old John remarked cheerfully, “but Ah’m hanged if Ah can stop smiling at yow all th’ sem.”

“Really,” Maria said advisedly, “you don’t show a bit of taste, Peter! Not a bit.”

“Don’t show a bit of taste?” Peter echoed. Then turning to his parent: “There’s a good joke there somewhere, Father, but I’m blest if I can get it off my tongue.”

Peter scratched his head and pondered.

Old John supplied the joke.
“Well, Ah sooppose,” he drawled, “thet yer baint old enoof to taste, lad.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! that’s it,” Peter yelled. “You take the bun, Father, you do.”

“And you don’t take anything,” the parent added with a beaming smile.

“I don’t?” and Peter looked perplexed.

This latest effort of his parent’s was too subtle for him.

“Well,” explained old John, “if yow don’t taste any yow don’t take any, do yow?”

Peter went off into a loud shriek.

“By crikey, Father!” he cried, “if there’s any one down in the city who can make better jokes than you, they’ll be pretty good at it.”

James, who had returned quietly to the room, started to grin.

“If there’s a better joke there than himself,” he remarked slyly to Maria, “I’ll be very much surprised.”

Maria, casting another amused look at Peter, blushed for his sake, and replied:

“Did you ever?”

“No I never,” James answered, and taking possession of some bags went off to the buggies with them.

“Well now, let me see,” mused old John, thoughtfully. “There’s noothin’ else, Ah don’t think. William and the boy knows what to do abaht the mares. Honest Jim, he’ll coome rahnd on Moonda’. King William on Toosda’ followin’, an’ thet horse o’ McFalty’s on Wednesda’. Ah spoke wi’ them this mornin’, so they knows all abaht thet lot.”

“How did you manage about your pocket, Father?” Peter inquired. “I’ve a small bag sewn round me, here” (tapping himself about the kidneys). “There’s six sovereigns there, and the cove who gets them out without me knowing all about it will be a pretty smart chap.”

“Ah-h,” old John answered, with regret in his voice, “thet’s one thing should ’a’ been looked to! But Ah’ll menage, Ah sooppose!”

William appeared, and announced that everything was ready and advised them all to get a move on.
There was fresh excitement then, and a great hurry-flurry. Polly and Tilly with their hats in their hands paid final visits to the mirror.

Maria’s baby broke out in a new place, and with such violence that its mother was compelled to claim a minute while she sat to search the infant’s undergarments for the presence of a pin that she was “sure was sticking in it”.

Granny put up a hue and cry about the loss of one of her woollen “mits” that all the while was in her pocket, and started the others off on a wild goose chase.

Old John was unable to put his hand on his hard felt “nail can” hat, and another expedition set out in search of it.

“Now then for the city,” Peter cried, lifting his hand and adjusting his quaint little hat.

“Oh, wait just a minute!” Polly exclaimed excitedly. “What on earth did I do with my umbrella?”

They turned the place upside down in search of the umbrella, and eventually discovered that Granny was nursing it all the while.

“Don’t forget my shillin’, Father,” Andy reminded his parent.

“Ah-h. I doan’t thenk as Ah’ll be allowed to,” said old John.

“Now look after Gran’mother, some of you,” Mrs. Dashwood advised, pulling on her gloves. “And what about the keys?”

Polly said all the keys were on the dresser where William could get them.

“Be yow all ready now?” in a loud voice from old John.

Everyone was silent.

“Then coome on,” and old John, leading the way, marched out.

Out in the sun Polly and Tilly tittered, and said: “Just look at Peter!”

Then they clamoured and climbed into the four wheeler. James opened and closed the big white gate. The whip cracked and away they rolled to the railway station.

A sharp twenty minutes’ drive past McFlaherty’s farm, around Catherton’s corner, and they reached the station.

The bulk of the luggage, which had preceded them on
Smith's waggon, occupied a whole end of the platform, and the station master and his porter were busily engaged disfiguring it all with labels.

The station master raised his cap to the ladies, all of whom smiled graciously upon him, and passed pleasant remarks to old John on his appearance, and expressed envy at his freedom and prospects of a good time in the city.

"Ah-h; Ah be agoin' to enjy meself, Johnson," old John assured him. "It be the first trip we've ataken, an' we're agoin' to do it in stahle."

"I don't blame you," the station master said. "I would too, if I were in your shoes."

Then turning with a grin to Peter:

"Peter looks as if he is going to have a good time, Mr. Dashwood?"

With a "Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter spun round three times on one heel.

"Ah-h," said old John with a smile, "Peter thinks he be agoin' to take th' city bah storm."

"I don't know about taking the city by storm," the cheerful station master answered, "but he might take some of the city girls by storm."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" and Peter made several revolutions on his other heel.

"He maht take them be th' harm," old John suggested wickedly, and both joined in a laugh at Peter.

Then the station master, glancing towards the ladies to see they were not within hearing, placed his mouth close to old John's ear and said something confidential.

"Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" old John burst. "Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" And a number of bystanders, residents of the district, who were there for the mail or to consign goods and one thing and another, were forced to join in the joke, though they hadn't the least idea what it was about.

"I wonder what on earth Father is laughing at?" Polly asked with an amused look on her face.

"I wonder!" Mrs. Dashwood smiling across at the cheerful red face of her husband.

"Goodness only knows what it is," Tilly put in. "Father and
"Peter Thinks He Be Agoin' to Take th' City bah Storm"
Mr. Johnson are always joking about something or other."

"Ah doan't thnk as he would go thet far," roared old John when he recovered his breath.

"Then he's a lot different to what his father was at his age, I bet," the station master replied, and old John broke into another loud "Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!" in which the bystanders joined heartily.

Then, with a parting "Ha! Ha! Hah!" the station master turned and entered his office.

"Look 'ere, Johnson," old John called after him. "Ah'll have you dismissed at headquarters, when Ah gets to th' city."

Meanwhile Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and the girls were busy swapping and changing and arranging the smaller items of luggage. Polly required a certain bag taken into the carriage, and Tilly a particular box, while Mrs. Dashwood and Maria expressed grave doubts as to the safety of a trunk in the van.

"Wherever did that come from?" Tilly exclaimed, observing the porter in the act of gumming a label to a tea tin. "That isn't ours."

The porter was thrown in doubt. "I thought it belonged to this lot," he said, looking from one to the other.

"Oh, that's mine," Maria said, coming forward and claiming the curiosity. "I have the baby's things in that." And more than the suggestion of a blush came into Maria's face.

Tilly glanced meaningly at Polly, then looked away and turned up her nose. Tilly was not in favour of travelling to the city in company with a tea tin.

"There were plenty of spare bags at the house, Maria, if we had known," Polly ventured quietly.

The baby broke into a whine again, and irritated Maria.

"Oh, it's grand enough for me," she snapped, shaking the infant up and down. "I've had to use a lot worse before—and so have other people!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Dashwood said conciliatingly, "it doesn't matter!"

"Put it in with Peter," the porter suggested impudently. "He looks like a 'commercial,' and they'll think he's travelling for tea."

Polly and Tilly at first blushed at this suggestion; then they
broke into a giggle and walked up the platform.

“All travelling first, Mr. Dashwood?” the station master inquired, as he procured the tickets.

“Ah-h, all first,” old John answered, taking out his purse.

“What about Peter?” and the official smiled significantly.

“Peter?” answered old John, turning and eyeing the magnificently dressed one, “Ah-h. But yow haven’t ennerthin’ better ’n first, have yow, Johnson?”

“Not here,” the other answered, prodding the tickets into the date stamp. “But I dare say we could get the Governor’s carriage if we wired right away.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter went off. “I’d look as well in it as old thing-a-me-bob the Lieutenant Governor.”

“You’d look a jolly sight better, if you ask me,” and the station master broke into a chuckle.

“He’d look better in the dog-box,” James drawled, gazing out an empty standing in the railway yard.

Just then the mail whistled, and a scramble set in.

“That’s her,” the station master cried, and rushed out.

Old John and James and Peter snapped up articles of luggage. William kissed Maria and the baby and said “good-bye” to the others. The train drew up to the platform, and one after the other the family crowded noisily into it, much to the annoyance and discomfiture of two commercials, who lay full stretch on the seats. The station master banged the door after them, then stood on the carriage step and wished them all a good time and a safe return. Old John and James waved to those on the platform. The train whistled, puffed, strained, and went off.
7. **On the Train**

The train in full motion tore along on her course, rattling and roaring over bridges and culverts. Calico tents, camps, navvies' homes, mountains, and timber land were flung one upon another, and at every gate and every siding a whirlpool of dust and dead leaves rose in her wake.

"By Jove, this is all right, eh, Father?" Peter, standing with a firm grip of the carriage window, shouted joyfully.

Mrs. Dashwood began to exhibit symptoms of fear.

"I hope nothing goes wrong!" she cried nervously.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled. "Mother thinks we'll go off the line!"

"It maht then," said old John, smiling blandly in the corner that he had appropriated to himself. "It waint be th' first tahme she went off on this lahne."

"Oh, Father, how could it!" from Polly.

"Of course it could go off!" Mrs. Dashwood assured her daughters, her eyes widening with increased alarm.

"Well, if she does," James remarked philosophically, "there won't be many of us left to tell the tale."

"Oh, Oh," came from Mrs. Dashwood in gasps, as the train made a bit of a lurch.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" from Peter.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed old John. "Doan't be frahtent fer a train, Elahser! Look theer at Granny—she dersent mahn'd 'n."

Granny, contentedly munching biscuits, and gazing out on a vast stretch of rich plain land, that lay in view, looked as though she had been reared in a train.

At that moment the carriage rocked violently as she swung round a curve, and only old John and James seemed to have been prepared for it. The others thought they had reached the end of the world, and that their time had come. Several short
screams escaped the women, and they clutched at each other for support and salvation.

Peter, who lost all his balance, was thrown sideways into old John’s lap.

“Oh dear! Oh dear!” Mrs. Dashwood moaned on realising that all was yet well, “I thought we were gone!”

The girls and Maria, recovering, laughed hysterically at their own foolishness.

Peter gathered himself together, and with a forced “Ha! Ha! Ha!” courageously took his place at the window again.

“By Jove!” he cried, “it’s great sport trying to hang on here.”

The two commercials who had exiled themselves and their belongings to the furthermost part of the carriage lay quietly smiling at all the fuss and fears of their travelling companions. Occasionally they lifted a magazine and appeared to be deeply engrossed in its contents. But they were frauds and shams, those commercials. They read not a line. They used the magazines as barricades, behind which they closely observed the actions of Polly and Tilly and the rest—but more especially Polly and Tilly. At intervals they would say things to each other and smile.

“They haven’t seen many trains, Monty?” one said.

“The old man has seen some ‘brass,’ though,” the other answered.

“How do you like the fair one?” (meaning Tilly) the former remarked further.

“Good style, isn’t she?” was the answer. They both pretended to read some more.

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Look, Father! Look at the coves drawing wood with a team of goats!” Peter broke out in a burst of ecstasy.

“Oh, look!” the girls echoed, and Mrs. Dashwood gripped Andy by the leg to prevent him falling through the window in his eagerness to get a full view of the curiosity.

“See the goats, Granny?” Maria cried, nudging the old lady hard in the ribs.

“A boat, is it?” said Granny. “Ah wer’ in a boat one tahme, an’ it turned raht over an’——”
Granny's irrelevant discourse was cut short by the excitable Peter.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he yelled. "Did you see the whiskers on the leader, Father? As long as an old man's."

"Ah thinks he wer' a ol' man, thet cove," the parent replied, "be th' look on him."

"Are they good pullers?" Peter questioned. Peter was travelling now, and bent on gathering useful information.

"Good pullers?" said old John, raising his voice to make himself heard, "soometahmes they be an' soometahmes they baint."

"Oh, they always pull," James vouchsafed for Peter's information, "if they're put in a good paddock."

Peter stared wonderingly at James, and asked:

"Why in a good paddock?"

"Well," James drawled with a grin, "if there is good grass in it."

Peter saw the joke, and laughed hard.

"What wer' that?" inquired old John, curiously.

"James says they'll pull grass, Father," Peter shouted.

"Ah-h, they will thet," said the parent, "an' they gets their owners pulled soomtahmes."

Peter's restless eye discovered a new curiosity.

"Look at this though," he called. "Look here! I'm jiggered. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The others looked hurriedly, and saw the humble homestead of a struggling selector scattered about. Three lanky youths in charge of a lean, dreary looking horse fastened in some way to a fork-stick on which a water cask was being conveyed in the direction of the home. One of the youths was pulling the quadruped along by the rein; another was astride it wielding a big stick on its ribs; the third was engaged in the dual capacity of conductor and driver. He balanced the cask with one hand and threw stones and things at the animal with the other.

"Poor things!" Mrs. Dashwood said, feelingly.

"An irrigation plant!" James drawled.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter exploded. "Look at the bloke on the moke's back—look at him, Father! Look at him."
Tilly was beginning to feel ashamed of Peter. Tilly felt that the eyes of those commercials were upon them, and she was inclined to be sensitive.

"Peter, don't be such a silly!" she said. "Do you want everyone to be laughing at you?"

Polly and Maria glanced round, and discovered the two strangers half strangling themselves with suppressed mirth.

"I declare," they said, "those men are laughing at us!"

"No wonder!" Tilly snapped indignantly. "The way he's going on would make a fool of anyone!"

But Peter didn’t hear his sister's reprimand. His mind was all on the water carriers.

"Ha! Ha!" he started again, but suddenly checked himself. Then like a crack of lightning he went off

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! It's capsized! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

There was another rush for window space. Even the placid commercials sat up and looked out.

"Surely it baint!" said old John, sharing a window with James for a glimpse of the catastrophe.

"Poor people! what a shame!" murmured Mrs. Dashwood.

But the train plunging into a deep cutting excluded everything but memories of that selection scene from view.

"That's farming under difficulties for you, if you like!" James with a sympathetic shake of the head, remarked as he settled again in his seat.

"Ah doan't know if it be farmin', lad," old John answered. "But Ah knows thet Ah'd sooner go to gaol than go on th' land thet way."

"Do you think there's any excuse for that sort of thing nowadays?" James asked.

"Well," the parent replied thoughtfully, "not fer ridin' th' horse, Ah don't expect. Theer be a lot o' bad menagement abaht that lot, no daht, but there'll alez be people faghtin' up hill, lad, as long as they go on th' land wi' no capital. It takes a heap o' money—more'n people think—to take oop land an' make headway. Ah knows what it means. Ah've been through it all, an' so have your Moother. A lot on 'em think so long as they get hold on th' land theey're raht, whereas most tahmes theey're all wrong."

"Well, people struggling like those we just passed," James
Pulling the Quadruped along by the Rein
suggested, "would be much better off working on wages?"

"Far an' away better off," the parent said. "They'd have no worry, for one thing, an' they'd have a shellin' or two to spend soomtahmes."

After a silence.

"I see where the Minister for Lands said the other day," James remarked, "that he knew of cases where men went on the land with only half-a-crown in their pocket, and became well off."

"He sez soome queer things, do the Minister for Lands," old John replied, "soome very queer things! But what you never do hear on 'im sayin', lad, is that his own father spent oondreds o' pahns sendin' him away to be edercated fer a barrister, an' that arter all his edercation he couldn't mak' a livin' at it. He wer' a fail'e!"

"So I believe!" James said, "and Judge Smith with scarcely any schooling made his way from the carpenter's shop to the Bench."

"Ah-h, an' theey're you have it," explained the parent. "Thet wer' just th' difference atween he an' Judge Smith; an' so wi' men on the land. But fer all thet it dersent stand at all, lad, an' Judge Smith, Ah knows, would tell the same, thet the surest way to reach the Bench baint be bah neglectin' school, or startin' from a carpenter's shop!"

The roar of the locomotive now made it almost impossible to hear their own voices.

"I can't hear!" James shouted, leaning over towards his parent.

Old John leaned over, too, and bellowed out something which sounded like a gramophone in distress.

"Just so," James answered speculatively.

"Only a fool," was all James caught next.

"Yes," he ventured, nodding his head in approval, but of what he hadn't the slightest idea.

Old John gesticulated vehemently, and his eloquence seemed to increase under the disadvantages of the noise.

"... land ... No... how could he ... seasons ... slightest chance ... all th' sem," fell from him in distorted fragments.

"I dare say," James shouted.
Seeming satisfied with the impression his words were making, old John, using his large, leathery finger to emphasise his discourse, proceeded vigorously:

"... forty bushels ... could ... dry seasons ... horses ... settlement ... do y' th'enk?"

Then pausing, he seemed to expect a reply.

"Oh, I think you're right," James replied with a grin.

Old John shook his head in a dissatisfied sort of way, and wagging his finger more, repeated the observation:

"... dairying ... no man ... land ... close settlement ... could anyone ... twenty years," he said.

"Oh, no doubt," James yelled, with another grin.

"What?" old John roared.

James desired to end the joke, and tapped himself on the ear and shook his head.

But old John was a persistent old man, and never liked to give in—not even to the noise of a train.

"... ploughed land ... miles and miles ... their fault ... a great country ... people ... naht follows day ... millions ... 'twill that."

"Do you think so?" James yelled, taking up the joke again.

"What!" old John howled.

"Millions of people," James said.

"Certainly—why not?" roared the parent.

Just then everything was thrown into darkness, and the noise increased twofold. Sharp, nervous screams came from the women, and they huddled into each other for protection, and from Peter came a loud "Ha! Ha! Ha!" They were passing through a tunnel, but it seemed as though they were passing into eternity. Just as suddenly the light rushed in again, as the tunnel came to an end, and heavy sighs of relief fell from Mrs. Dashwood and Maria. The deafening noise had ended too, and once more they could converse freely.

Peter leaned out and stared back in astonishment at the mouth of that tunnel, while Polly and Tilly desired to know the name of it.

Maria said she "had heard what it was called, but couldn't think of the name of it."

"Ah-h dersent know at all," old John candidly admitted, and
supposed that it "went bah soome name or other."

One of the commercials who had moved into a seat that brought him nearer the family, and was evincing a deeper interest in passing objects, supplied the information:

"That's the Royal tunnel," he said, addressing old John.
Polly and Tilly stole sly glances at the sample hawker.
"Ah-h, it be the Royal tunnel," echoed old John, for the information of his daughters.
"Oh, the Royal tunnel," they murmured together.
"Yes, that's it," Maria exclaimed, giving the baby a shake up, "the Royal. I remember the name now."
"Really, Maria!" Tilly said with a mischievous smile.
Maria went crimson. She nearly went off the handle, too; but the baby starting to cry saved the situation.
"It's the longest tunnel in the State," the commercial further acquainted old John.
"It's the longest tunnel there be," old John promptly informed his relations without acknowledging his source of distorted information.
"Nearly a mile long," the other commercial, who had shifted nearer too, called out.
"Just fancy—nearly a mile long!" Mrs. Dashwood said, addressing her daughters. "It didn't seem half that."
"Tunnels are not what they seem, Mother," Tilly answered, playfully parodying some of the "Psalm of Life".
Both commercials shifted their eyes to Tilly, and one more learned than the other said egotistically: "And the grave is not its goal."

Tilly looked away and smiled.
The commercials nudged each other.
James was curious to know who the contractors were that constructed the line, and interrogated the commercials. They stared. It was out of their line.
"Contractors?" they said, with puzzled airs, "goodness knows."
"Wilks, I suppose it would be?" James suggested, turning to his parent.
"Ah-h, Ah think it would be," old John answered.
The commercial men eyed James curiously. They seemed to
regard him as a waste of time. But James paid no further attention to them, and they took up their magazines and continued reading between the lines.

Polly and Tilly, however, would occasionally steal glances at the backs of the magazines, and then whisper things to each other and titter.

"Tilly!" Mrs. Dashwood said sharply, "what is the matter with you?"

"I'm amused at Granny, Mother," Tilly answered diplomatically.

Mrs. Dashwood turned and saw Granny with her head well back against the cushion, and her mouth open in deep slumber.

"Poor Granny!" she said, "is tired out!" And taking a lace handkerchief from her pocket placed it over the aged one's face to keep the flies from disturbing her. And, with her long, lean hands hanging lifelessly beside her, Granny looked like a corpse laid out in a chair.
8. Sandwiches and Commercials

"Ah cud do wi’ a bit o’ a snack," old John said after a long silence, and glared at the portmanteaux.

"By Jove, so could I, Father," Peter put in, "I’m as hungry as a wolf."

"We brought plenty with us," Mrs. Dashwood said, "if we can find the bag it’s in."

"We’ll soon fahnd it, Elahser!" and old John proceeded to drag the luggage about.

Tilly and Polly came to his assistance, and in a few moments all kinds of eatables were being handed round.

Old John displayed rare confidence in the sandwiches, and ate six and seven at a time.

"Look at Father!" Peter guffawed, stuffing a whole scone into his own mouth.

"Don’t look at Father; look at yourself!" Tilly advised, and Peter, unable to control his visible faculties, broke out and lost the greater part of his scone. But what was Peter’s loss was Maria’s gain.

"Peter!" she cried indignantly, and jumped up to rid her lap of Peter’s lunch.

Peter laughed some more, and tried another scone.

The compartment looked like a Sunday school treat on circuit.

"Ask those gentlemen," Mrs. Dashwood whispered to Tilly, "if they would have something to eat."

"No, Mother," Polly replied with bashful countenance, "you ask them yourself."

Mrs. Dashwood then called upon Tilly.

Tilly was not so bashful as Polly. Tilly made no bones about inviting the two strangers to break a crust.

"Would you gentlemen," she said, in clear, firm tones, "care to have a sandwich?"

Those commercials were nearly stunned. It was more than
they expected. They coloured to the roots of their hair. But recovering quickly they smiled most ingratiatingly and said “they would, very much”.

Tilly handed them some sandwiches, and they smiled again, and thanked her several times.

“Would you lahke soome ’ome-made beer?” old John inquired of the commercials, holding up a couple of bottles for them to examine.

They shook their heads, and said “they would rather the sandwiches”.

“Yow can have boath, yow know!” persisted old John.

They shook their heads again and smiled.

“By crikey, I’ll have a drink of that, Father,” and Peter, staggering under the motion of the train, made his way to the basket of hop-beer and lifted a bottle to his head.

“Just look at him! . . . Peter!” Tilly protested. “There are plenty of glasses there!”

But Peter wasn’t to be deterred. With his head tilted back, and the neck of the bottle half-way down his throat, he rolled the whites of his eyes about and glared at her like a thirsty poddy. Then with a gasp like an engine letting off steam, he put down the empty bottle.

“How do ’n go, lad?” old John asked, spilling out a glass for himself.

“Not too good, Father,” Peter replied, with a malevolent grin at Tilly, who was responsible for the brew. “A bit soapy. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

“You drank plenty of it, then,” Polly put in.

“I was dead thirsty. Ha! Ha! Ha!” and Peter started on the sandwiches.

“He’s very unkind, miss,” one of the commercials ventured, with a winning smile at Polly.

Polly blushed, but made no reply.

“I suppose he did’nt leave much in the bottle?” the other commercial remarked, smiling at Tilly.

“I wonder he left the bottle,” Tilly remarked shortly.

Both commercials laughed in an obliging, condescending sort of way.

Peter looked up, and stared hard at them. Peter had scarcely
noticed their presence before. Visions came to him of "spielers" and card sharpers, and he remembered things he had heard about "well-dressed travellers". Peter's suspicions were roused. He was alert and upon his guard. He wished to warn his parent, and frowned and made facial contortions at old John. But old John failed to take the hint. Peter leaned over and squeezed his knee. Old John stared at his son. Peter significantly touched the part of himself where his sovereign belt lay concealed from the eyes of the world, at the same time glancing knowingly in the direction of the strangers. Old John understood. He started to think, and bestowed a searching gaze on the commercial travellers. He thought harder. He leaned back, and with half-closed eyes carefully studied the actions of the suspects for quite a while. His vigilance was soon rewarded. He observed them exchange knowing looks and smiles under cover of the periodicals they were pretending to read. Old John wanted no more. He was convinced they were wolves in sheep's clothing. He leaned forward, and in a series of whispers and nods communicated the discovery to his wife and Maria. They in turn passed the word to the others.

"Isn't it terrible to think they are allowed to go about like that?" Mrs. Dashwood said, with a look of great apprehension.

Old John placed a finger to his lips, to caution her to be discreet.

Peter spread himself over James and spluttered the intelligence into his ear, and told him to watch his pockets.

James said "Rats!" and shoved Peter from him.

Old John with a significant look at Mrs. Dashwood drew his coat tight across his chest and buttoned it up. Then collecting the bags and baskets that had been opened for the purpose of providing the luncheon, secured them all, and placed them under his eye.

Mrs. Dashwood nudged Polly and Tilly to sit close to her, and for the remainder of the journey the two commercials were under a shadow.

After passing through mile upon mile of smouldering, smoking waste lands over which a fierce bush fire had obviously been raging for many days, after flying past Mullangangerina, and Niccoloconjooorooroo, and Bibleback, and Howe, and
many other strange places, large suburban residences with luxuriant gardens and white paling fences about them began to show up. A succession of small shops took shape; pedestrians and motors and bikes began to come along in numbers, and the ascending spires of lofty churches elevated on hills, and volumes of black smoke curling into the sky could be seen from the windows.

Through the last cutting the train rushed, then the great city in all its age, in all its youth, in all its glory, in all its grime, in all its grandeur and in all its dirt and dust burst full before our country friends.

Excitement! There was excitement! None of them could remain still a minute longer. Not even Granny, who woke up and wished to know where she was, and how long she had been asleep. They were all in a flurry.

The train stopped. Peter tried to open the door, and discovered it was locked.

“We're locked in!” Polly cried with alarm.

“Locked in?” echoed old John.

“By Jove we are, Father!” Peter cried.

Old John tried the door; then he put all his strength to it, and nearly shoved the train down.

“You don't get out for a while,” one of the commercials called out.

“Who wer' it locked the door?” old John demanded suspiciously of him.

All the family turned their eyes on the sample men.

“That's what they've been up to!” Peter muttered in an undertone.

“Well, Ah'll see abaht it,” old John said threateningly.

The commercial men smiled, and began collecting their belongings.

The door flew open and a railway porter bounced in.

“Tickets please!” he cried, sharply.

“Tickets,” Polly and Tilly repeated, looking to old John.

“Thet door wer' locked,” old John said, addressing the porter.

“It's not locked now,” was the short answer. “Got your tickets?”
“Ah-h,” and old John started fumbling in his pockets.

“You don’t get out till she draws into the platform,” the official volunteered, noticing Peter’s eagerness to alight.

Old John searched the pockets of his coat and vest without success, then proceeded calmly to dig down into the recesses of his trousers.

“What th’ dooce did Ah do wi’ ’n now?” he murmured.

“I saw you get them from Mr. Johnson, Father,” Peter remarked.

The others regarded old John with anxious eyes.
The porter regarded him as an outrage.

“Can’t you find them?” he said, impatiently.

“Oh put ’n somewheres,” answered old John, screwing and twisting his body about to fit his big hands into his pockets.

“You surely can’t have lost them, Father?” Mrs. Dashwood murmured with increased anxiety.

“Oh-h, Ah baint ha’ lost ’n,” old John answered with characteristic confidence. “Ah’ve got ’n somewheres.”

“Sure they ain’t in this pocket, Father?” Peter suggested, taking a grip of his parent’s black coat and starting to go through him.

“You haven’t got them, Mother?” Tilly suggested, looking at Mrs. Dashwood.

Mrs. Dashwood shook her head, and said she hadn’t even seen them.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter cried, “what’s this?” and he held up a tooth brush that he extracted from the coat pocket.

“Thet baint be ’n,” said old John.

“Don’t be playing the fool, Peter!” Tilly said, looking disgustedly at her brother.

The official lost patience.

“I can’t wait on you all night,” he snapped. “I’ll come back after I collect the next carriage.” And out he darted, banging and locking the door after him.

The family gathered anxiously about old John, all endeavouring to assist him in the search for the tickets by asking him useless questions about them.

“Oh-h, Ah hed them,” old John assured first one and then the other. “Ah hed them raht enoof.”
The Porter Regarded Him as an Outrage
He took out his ponderous leather purse.

"Just keep a eye on they chaps," he mumbled cautiously.

Peter, straightening himself up, stood sentry over the commercial gentlemen, while his parent emptied the contents of that purse on to the cushions and examined them; but without success.

Peter broke into a laugh. Tilly promptly rebuked him.

"There is nothing to laugh at, Peter!" she said warmly.

"I was going to ask Father a question," Peter answered with a chuckle.

"What wer' it, lad?" said the parent, stuffing a roll of bank notes back into his purse.

"Do you think," Peter asked, "was there any chance of you putting them in that pocket Tilly sewed on your shirt, Father?"

"Idiot!" Tilly hissed at Peter.

Old John's hand suddenly went out in the locality of that pocket.

"But thet wer' oopsahde down," he mumbled, as he became conscious of the absurdity of searching in that quarter.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter laughed, "did you see him going to fell if they were in it!"

The porter bounced into the carriage again.

"Have you found them?" he asked, with a stern look in his eye.

"Well, if Ah hed Ah'd give 'n to you," old John answered, with a huge smile.

"Are you sure you had them?" was the porter's next question.

"Well, Ah'm sure Ah paid for them," said old John, commencing to search himself all over again.

"Of course Father had them!" Tilly chipped in. "Do you think he would try to travel without tickets," and added: "The insolence of office!"

"Well, if you like to put it that way, Miss," the official retorted with a nasty leer, "what's he been doing if he hasn't got them—what have you all been doing?"

Mrs. Dashwood and Maria and James all started up in the same breath to defend old John and the family honour. But that porter had been entangled in arguments of the kind before.
“Oh, look here,” he snapped, cutting them short, “I’m not here to barney with you. If you haven’t got your tickets, Mister, you must pay again. Where did you get in?”

“Pay again?” Mrs. Dashwood gasped.

Pay twice?” from Maria.

“Don’t you, Father!” Tilly advised. “Let them send and ask Mr. Johnson if he issued them!”

“Oh-h,” suggested old John, “you ask Johnson abaht ’n. He’ll tell ’e.”

“Ah-h,” the porter jerked out, and opening the door commanded them to follow him to the magnate’s office.

They seized their luggage, and like Brown’s cows followed him. Some of them looked solemn, some looked convicted of bigamy; some looked amused.

Tilly and Polly hid their faces with things they were carrying, and tittered.

“Goodness gracious me!” Tilly said, “what on earth do people think of us!”

The great platform along which they trailed was thronged with people, some of them scrambling and jostling for possession of luggage; some rushing up and down peering into railway carriages; some hugging long lost brothers and sisters, and a great number staring curiously at the cortège that trooped at the heels of that swaggering railway man.

Hotel porters and boarding house touts thrust their advertising cards into old John’s hand, and into the hands of every member of the family, and shouted the virtues of their respective establishments into their ears. The crowded shelves of the open book-stalls with their glaring flaring placards inviting people to purchase the “newest wonder” in the literary line arrested the wondering gaze of our mutual friends. But the porter was in a hurry, and they were not permitted to linger and look.

They were approaching the door of the S.M.’s office. Old John suddenly stopped.

“Ah-h, hold on,” he said with a smile.

Old John seemed to have remembered something.
“Have you found them, Father?” the family cried, with joyful expectation in their eyes.

Old John took a tobacco pouch from his pocket, out of which he slowly extracted the missing tickets.

“That be 'n,” he said, handing them to the porter.

“A very stupid place to put tickets!” the porter remarked disappointedly, as he handed back the return halves.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed Peter, “you got them, eh, Father?”

“Oh, Ah knew Ah hed 'n somewheres,” said old John. And they turned and departed.
9. **A Swell Hotel**

To one of the large hotels of the great metropolis old John Dashwood conducted his family. And as they mounted the stone steps leading to the door—a wide, open door of iron bars that reminded one of the gates to a gaol yard, and entered the capacious hall quite a new world revealed itself to them. There were porters in uniforms and brass buttons running here and there; departing visitors and fresh arrivals crowding round the manager's office; "casuals" passing in and out the private bar; newspaper reporters, advertising canvassers, and bailiffs were loitering about watching their chance to button-hole someone.

Small clusters of people—swell people—highly respectable looking folk, were assembled about the premises discoursing in the sweetest and jolliest of English. "Reallay!" and "How verry funnay!" would slide off their tongues at becoming intervals. And one was heard to say in quite a loud voice:

"Oh, ah, Lady Brownsmith, you, ah, heven't met mai cousin just arraived from England by the Wypanga—Miss, ah, De Largie-Jones, Laday Brownsmith."

Hesitating, and huddling together on the wire mat our friends stood for a moment or two and wonderingly surveyed the new surroundings.

A gorgeous hat, resembling a basket of flowers, that adorned the head of a young lady in white attracted Peter's notice. Peter had a rare eye for art and beauty.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" he broke out. "Ha! Ha! There's a funny hat, Father!"

Both Tilly and Polly tugged at Peter's coat tails to silence him into timely and respectable behaviour, while James hissed into his ear: "Hold your tongue, you idiot!" Peter for once in a way obeyed James.

Several hopeful looking porters approached old John, and scraped and bowed to him like performing fleas in a show and called him "Sir". Hotel porters are the most humble and most
obligeing animals in the world when the prospect of a tip or several tips is sticking out.

"Ah'm on th' hoont for house room," old John began, with a smile. "Can yow put oop all this lot?" turning to his numerous charge, who were backing him up closely.

The hopeful looking porters grinned, and one said:

"It's a big order, Sir, come over to the office," and across the stone square he strode in the lead, as if he were winning all out in a walking match. The other made a raid on the luggage and threatened to burst himself in several places in his haste to remove it somewhere, and earn something unusual.

"Four double rooms," murmured the clerk, "26, 27, 28, and 33, fifth floor," and handing old John a receipt for the deposit money, and a batch of keys with metal labels dangling to them like the brass plate round the neck of King Billy, he turned to attend to the next one.

"What am Ah to do wi' this lot?" old John enquired, eyeing the hotel lumber curiously.

"They're the keys to your rooms," the clerk said. "Always when you go out," he added advisedly, "leave them here." Then over his shoulder to the porter: "26, 27, 28, and 33, fifth floor, Smith."

Smith understood.

"Your luggage has all gone up, Sir", Smith said, turning to old John. "This way, Sir."

Next moment the family were being hustled and jammed into the lift. For all any of them knew to the contrary it might have been a solitary cell they were being relegated to. They stared at the padded walls, at the floor, at the electric appliances, and at each other.

"Where the deuce are we off to now?" Peter asked with a chuckle. Polly and Tilly laughed nervously. Mrs. Dashwood seemed to apprehend a sudden drop into eternity. She held Granny and little Andy close to her, and cautioned them to remain still until it was all over.

"Ah-h!" old John grunted, with a serious stare in his eye. "Ah-h."

"I think they're put us into a branding crush," James remarked with a quiet grin.
“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter laughed in an uncertain sort of way. “If they start to brand me I’ll kick the side out of it.”

And electric bell went off with a sudden “th-r-r-r” right in old John’s ear.

Old John started up as if he had been hit with lightning, and turned his head to locate the mystery. The women shuddered and thought of jumping out. The man in charge smiled. “Th-r-r-r” the bell went again. Old John involuntarily started once more, and Peter laughed freely, and said: “Look out, Father!” “Th-r-r-r” went the bell a third time, and the girls and Maria becoming used to it started to enjoy the joke.

“Ah thinks we be in a musical box!” said old John with a smile.

“A hurdy-gurdy, Ha! Ha!” Peter put in.

“I wish it would soon go!” Mrs. Dashwood murmured anxiously.

A tall lady, handicapped with jewellery and accompanied by a fat, red-faced, perspiring man squeezed their way in. The red-faced man removed his hat—a tall silk one—and glared at old John and James and Peter, who kept theirs on, as though they had done him serious injury at some time or other.

The man in charge closed the door with a rattle, touched a button, and up glided the lift. The peculiar motion took our friends completely by surprise. They staggered and rocked about, and would have toppled over if they could. But they were packed together like sardines. Mrs. Dashwood gave a short scream.

“The bottom might fall out of it!” Peter cried, holding on to James in genuine alarm.

“Might fall out of you!” James hissed, shoving him off.

“She rises lahke a kahte,” old John said in admiration of the ride he was having. But it was a short ride. The lift stopped with a soft jerk, the door flew open, and there on a level with their feet was the fifth floor, while rooms 26, 27, and 28 were staring them in the face.

“Fifth floor, Sir,” the lift man said, looking at old John.

“Ah-h,” contemplatively, “ah-h! this be it,” and stepping out on to the gorgeous carpet that graced the broad corridor, was hurriedly followed by Peter, James, Mrs. Dashwood,
Granny, little Andy, Polly, and Tilly. Peter and James, when they found their footing, turned round again to learn more about the mysteries of that lift. But in an instant she had gone, and nothing was left but a closed door for them to gaze at.

“I thought I heard some one sing out as it went up,” James said indifferently.

“So did I!” Peter answered. “I thought I heard ‘Mother!’”

The approached the door and peeped through the bars of it down into the depths of the well.

“That’s a wonderful bit of work!” James mused, “wonderful!” James was interested in mechanic and inventions.

“If the door was left open sometime,” Peter answered, “and a fellow fell down there he wouldn’t think it very wonderful.”

Just then the lift descending dropped suddenly in front of them and emptied out Maria and the baby.

Peter and James jumped back and stared. They could scarcely believe their eyes.

A burst of grief escaped Maria, and she proceeded to charge all and sundry with conspiring to delude and get rid of her society.

“If I’m not wanted,” she howled, “why don’t they say so and let me go back!”

James was confounded.

“Heavens!” he said, “didn’t you get out with the rest of us?”

“How-could-I?” Maria sobbed, “wh-wh-when none of you w-w-waited.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter yelled, bounding to the others, who were studiously comparing the numbers on the doors with the key labels. “Father! Mother! Ha! Ha! Ha! Maria’s been lost already!”

They all turned, and in a glance took in the situation.

“Dear me!” Mrs. Dashwood exclaimed, hurrying to sympathise with the distressed one, “I just missed you and was going to ask where you were, child.”

“I don’t think it troubled any one much where I was”, Maria blubbered. “We might have been killed for all the rest of you cared.”

Old John and Polly and Tilly stared in astonishment. They couldn’t understand the exact cause of Maria’s woes.
A Burst of Grief Escaped Maria
“She was carried on”, James explained. “They took her to the top, and brought her back again.”

“Well, I’m sure that’s nothing to be very sore about!” Tilly said with a laugh. “She got a longer ride than the rest of us, that was all.”

Maria broke out into hysterics. “You needn’t say anything”, she railed at Tilly. “You needn’t think you’re thought so very grand, my lady, and if you want to know, I heard that man and lady in the lift say that you were all a lot of country bumpkins down to spend the pig money!”

Old John’s eyes and mouth opened steadily. Peter yelled “Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!” and danced about with a bag in his hand.

“By Jove,” he said, “that’s one against you, Father.”

James and his mother took Maria in hand, and had just succeeded in calming her when a maid in a white apron and a white cap and a beautiful smile came skipping along looking for employment. She examined the keys and pointed out the rooms corresponding. Old John, with Mrs. Dashwood and little Andy, took possession of No. 26; Granny and Maria were given 27; Polly and Tilly 28; and James and Peter 33, which was located around the corner. The maid also showed them the way to the lavatories, and told them were to find the drawing-room and the writing-room, and gave Polly and Tilly a lot of useful information regarding the theatres and places to visit, finally announcing that dinner would be ready on the ground floor in about twenty minutes. She hurried away to attend the wants of other new arrivals.
10. The First Dinner

Dinner was ready. The electric light was in full blaze when the Dashwood family, headed by old John, sauntered in. And such a dining-room! It was all chairs and tables, and serviettes, and looked large enough to accommodate the whole city. Male and female attendants, laden with dishes of roast turkey and roast duck and fowl, and ice creams and wine bottles, and heaven only knows what, floated in and out, and round about the tables, never colliding once with each other, never falling over a table. They had no sense of the ludicrous at all, had those waiters and waitresses—humorous situations were only wasted on them! They were a dull, useless asset to the institution; a calamity to mankind.

For the first few minutes it seemed as though the declining birth-rate, or something, was seriously affecting the population of the hotel, and old John, looking round at the "heads", started to wonder aloud if "this wer' all thet coomes for dinner?" when the curtains were drawn aside and quite a cohort of superior people trooped in and settled round the tables like a flock of native companions gathering round a spread on the grass. What an effect their entrance made on the atmosphere! Napoleon in his bad old court days couldn't have commanded anything more stylish or imposing. The low cut dresses, the long sweeping skirt tails, the hair combs and powder and paint of the ladies were things to go to bed and dream about; while the broad immaculate shirt fronts, the glittering diamonds and the little Johnny coats that distinguished the gentlemen were chattels that any common person with a spark of patriotism in his soul would willingly give up the life of his best girl to possess. But the way they talked! Ah, we mustn't forget the way they talked—their lovely speech—their silvery-toned tongues. No one would ever think of cutting those tongues out. But there were others to arrive. In the rear came an assortment of quietly dressed people of all callings and kinds. They put
on no frill—they just dropped into seats and adjusted themselves wherever they could. Two demure old maids who looked like twins planted themselves beside James and Peter, and entered into a lively conversation with themselves about the writings of George Eliot.

"Oh, I think she's simply dee-vine," one said, with tremendous emphasis on the "vine," and giving her nose a screw that nearly lost it to her.

"Dee-light-ful," said the other.

"Did you ever read her definition of MAN?" asked the first one.

"Nevah," replied the other with a sparkling eye and wonderful smile, "but I'm sure it would be delicious—just."

"It's awfully funny—awfully." (Tilly nudged Polly and both began to smile.) "She says that man can see through a barn door, and that is why he can see so little on this side of it."

They both laughed merrily, and the second old girl shaking her head said:

"Oh, isn't that just beautiful!"

"But what did Bartle say in reply to that?" Tilly audaciously chipped in across the table.

The two old maids lifted their eyes and stared across the cruet at her, and one of them said:

"I beg your pardon?"

Polly felt shocked at Tilly's audacity, and nudged her to be silent. But Tilly had an impulsive nature; besides she generally knew what she was talking about.

"Bartle's reply to that was", Tilly went on, "that a woman was a match for a man—such a match as the horsefly is to the horse."

"Oh!" the old maids murmured disappointedly, and one threw up her eye-brows and added: "How heroic of you!"

A hard-faced, weather-beaten old sea captain strolled in and dropped down unceremoniously beside old John, and glared round at every one.

Peter drew James's attention to a pudgy, rotund swell with a large nose and bloated face seated between two extravagantly decorated females about half his own age, and started to laugh.
James promptly silenced him.

"They're devilish slow in this place!" growled the sour old sea captain, addressing old John.

"Ah've jest been athinkin' so, too," answered old John.

"Here you!" the man of the sea said hoarsely, seizing a seedling of a waiter by the flying coat-tails and making a prisoner of him, "when are you going to haul something ashore here?"

"Oh! why! hain't yer bein' attended to, S'?" squeaked the waiter.

"Not a darn wait," was the answer, "nor anyone here so far as I can see. One of your kidney has taken the orders. So just you slip along, sonny, and be as slick as a polished gun barrel, and shake 'em up!" And the captain released his prisoner.

Peter and Polly and Tilly burst out laughing.

"This establishment wouldn't make a living for one in London or New York," the captain said, addressing old John again.

"Ah-h," replied old John, "Ah never wer' in them places."

"What! never in London or New York?" and the captain looked astonished.

Old John shook his head in the affirmative.

"Why, where have you been all your life, then?"

"Well, Ah coome from Fairfield," answered old John.

"Fairfield? What's that?" asked the captain, "a flag station?"

Old John wasn't sure of the other's meaning.

"A flag station! Ha! Ha!" Peter guffawed.

"Fairfield is a farming district," Tilly said, coming to the rescue.

"Ah-h, farmin'," old John repeated.

"Oh, I tumble," the captain grunted, running his eye over the family. "What do you grow there—pumpkins?"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Pumpkins!" Peter exploded loudly, and attracted everyone's attention.

"No, bumpkins," Tilly said, with an amused smile at Maria.

"We grows them too," old John answered good naturedly, "but we goes in for wheat mostly."

"How much wheat do you grow in a year?" was the captain's next query.

"Abaht 15,000 begs some years," said old John.

"About as much as I stick in my hold then, some trips!" and
"Here You!" the Man of the Sea Said Hoarsely
the man of the sea looked away indifferently. Then, as the waiter appeared and placed a plate of oyster soup before him: "What th' devil's this?"

"Hoyster soup, S'."

"Where have you put th' darned oysters?" (taking out a pair of spectacles and placing them on his nose) "where th' devil are they? Eh?"

The waiter smiled and hurried away. Another appeared, supported by a second, armed with the order for the Dashwood family, and next moment old John and the rest of them were busily engaged supping soup, sampling roast duck, turkey, and all the rest, and studying the menu in turn for further variety.

An hour went by pleasantly.

There was a loud rhythmical swish of silks and satins, and a contingent of the "best" people rose from their tables and passed out.

The old man of the sea looked up and studied them as they moved along.

"You would never suspect," he growled, "that those fine birds might have the silver spoons they've just been using stuck in their stockings!"

There was a general laugh, in which the two old maids joined, and one of them remarked:

"It's quite true—they do; and it's mostly done by those who are frequent visitors to Government House."

"It's a wonder they doan't stop 'n," suggested old John.

"Yo! Ho! Ho!" laughed the captain. "Who's goin' to bell the cat? Ho! Ho! Ho! It would make a fine scene. It 'd beat the theatre. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

The two old maids blushed, and looked away. Tilly and Polly and Maria smiled.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled, "they'd have to search them."

"And then they'd beat you," said the captain.

"Yow seems to know all abaht 'n," old John remarked with a broad smile.

The captain looked at him with one eye closed for several seconds, then said:

"Know them as I do the Coral Sea; but darn me if I know which wants watching the closest."
Tilly and Polly and James and Peter having finished dinner talked of going to the theatre. Mrs. Dashwood asked Maria if she would like to go too, and offered to take charge of the baby for her. Maria, after looking at the infant slumbering in her arms a number of times and thinking hard over the matter, finally decided to wait until the next evening. Tilly nudged Polly hard by way of communicating her feelings of joy at Maria’s decision, and they all rose from the table and went out, leaving the captain and the two old maids to stare at each other.
Polly and Tilly, with "clouds" over their heads and fans in their hands, joined James and Peter on the ground floor of the hotel. James inquired of the hall porters the way to the theatre.

"Are you going to His Majesty's?" the head porter asked.

James wasn't quite sure.

"Don't go there; he might kick us out. Ha! Ha!" from Peter.

The porter grinned at Peter, and said advisedly to James:

"'In Australia' is on at His Majesty's, and it's splendid, I believe, Sir. Take any of those trams," (pointing to the flaring head lights that were moving off one by one), "they'll drop you right at the door. Corner o' Walker and Rum Streets."

James thanked him, and led the way out. They had just reached the bottom of the steps when old John's voice rang out behind them.

"Hauld on, Ah'm acomin' weth yow," he cried, dragging his nail-can hat over his ears as he hurried along.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Here's Father coming!" Peter yelled delightfully. "I knew he couldn't stay behind."

The porters standing with folded arms in the door-way chuckled to themselves at the lopsided manner that old John descended the steps.

"Yower Moother and Maria say they doaned want I," he said in explanation, "so Ah'm coomin' along wi' yow."

Polly said she was glad he had decided to join them.

"We're all going to His Majesty's Theatre, Father," Tilly remarked cheerfully. "A play called 'In Australia', such a good one, I believe, is to be on tonight."

"Oh-h," said old John, walking along between his two daughters, "but we be in Australia, baint us?"

"Ai, in Australia, Father," Peter said, "where all the convicts used to pull in teams instead of horses."

"Sh, Peter!" Polly laughed. "In the cities, you know, you should only talk about convicts in whispers."
“I believe this is a great play, though,” James remarked as they neared the tram. And Peter, striking himself where his money bag was buckled about his body, said with a chuckle:

“It’s there yet, Father, have you got yours?”

“Oh, Ah’ve got ’n,” the parent answered. “No ’n has arobbed me yet, lad.”

“The worst of mine is,” Peter went on, “I can’t get at it without taking off my clothes. You’ll have to pay for me at the theatre, Father!”

“Just what we thought!” Tilly exclaimed indignantly. “Now, don’t you, Father; let him do it himself.”

“He’ll sponge on everyone all the time he’s here,” James informed his parent, “and carry home every shilling he’s got on him. He’s as mean as a money lender.”

“Be thet so, lad?” old John asked good-humouredly of Peter. “Ha! Ha! Ha!” was Peter’s answer. “Ha! Ha! Ha! That’s just what James would do himself.”

They squeezed their way into a crowded tram, and next moment were propelled through the bright and crowded streets. Old John and James and Polly and Tilly found seats together, but Peter was relegated to the end of the carriage, where he was compelled to take his ride standing up.

The ticket collector passed along. James paid for four, purposely leaving Peter to finance his own fare. Peter shook his head and laughed at the collector. James nudged his sisters and they smiled in the direction of Peter.

“I haven’t any money,” Peter said quite loud, and attracted the attention of the passengers.

The collector took out his note book and pencil, and said:

“Your name and address, please!”

“That’s my Father,” Peter answered, pointing to old John, “he’ll pay for me.”

“Oh-h, ah-h,” said old John, fumbling for his purse, when the collector made the demand, “he have lots o’ money, lots o’ it, but he keeps it all here, yow know,” and he tapped himself on the ribs.

The collector smiled and said: “Afraid of getting robbed, I suppose.”

“Soomit lahke thet,” and old John handed out a coin.
Some passengers who overheard old John's explanation turned their eyes on Peter and smiled, and one of them said in a loud voice: "He's from the country, I'll lay a quid."

Polly and Tilly nudged each other, and gazed down on the floor of the tram.

"Yow'd win thet bet," old John called out to the man. "He's a coontry man raht enoof, an' Ah should know, 'cause Ah'm his father."

"You're as like each other," the man said, "as two green flats."

While some of the passengers laughed and others smiled, the tram stopped before the theatre and our friends stepped out.

The usual crowd of all sorts that frequent the theatres were assembled about the doors.

A band of ill-clad, ready-witted city urchins gathered round old John.

"Pay us in, Mister!" they implored pathetically of him.

Old John didn't quite understand.

"What wer' it, lads?" he inquired, bending down his ear to them.

The boys were in sad distress.

"Oh! I ain't had a bit ter eat all day, Mister!" one said. Another pleaded for a "sprat." Some more pressed their appeal to be "paid in." Old John's heart went out to the youthful impostors. He gave one a shilling and caused a riot. The recipient was immediately set upon and plundered by a number of his companions. Old John proceeded to form himself into a board of conciliation.

"Nah then, melads," he said, "Ah gin it to this yun; let 'n have it."

They let him have it, and he disappeared in the crowd like a wallaby flying through scrub.

"Well, pay us in, too, Mister," the others whined about old John again, and his heart was touched once more.

"Come along, they're all going in, Father!" Tilly cried anxiously. "We won't get a seat if we don't hurry."

Someone connected with the play-house made a raid on the street arabs, and they fled in all directions, calling him names as they bounded off.
A Band of Ill-clad City Urchins Gathered round Old John
“Five of us,” said old John in answer to the man at the ticket office. The official handed out the tickets and the change with a loud bang, and old John and his party entered the theatre.

It was a “big” night, and a big house. The immense building was almost filled in every quarter, and still they were coming. The galleries were in a state of pandemonium. The “gods” were whistling and howling lustily for the curtain. The dress circle was ablaze with jewellery, bare skin, frizzled hair, and genteel people.

Old John from his place in the stalls glared all about for several seconds.

“Well, Ah never!” he murmured in admiration.

“What a lot of faces,” Polly gasped.

Tilly, who had been to a smaller theatre twice before, tried to impress the others with her indifference to the scene by remaining silent.

But Peter was puzzled.

“I’m blowed if I can see where they act,” he said. “Can you, Father?”

“Oh we’re just a lookin’,” his parent answered.

The orchestra opened. The music had a visible effect on Polly and Tilly. They couldn’t keep still. They seemed to be itching to rise and dance to it.

“Blow that,” Peter protested, “I want to see them act!”

Peter was not a musician.
The curtain rose. The house applauded. Peter and Polly and Tilly strained their necks to get a full view of the opening scene. The home of a poor selector was disclosed. A burning lamp stood on the table. Beneath the open window stood a bucket of water. Through the window glared a bush fire that was raging outside. The old selector (Tom Broggs by the programme) was seated at the fireplace, sad and despondent-looking.

“Oh, isn’t it real!” Polly gasped.
“‘A selection!” Tilly answered.

The selector’s wife (Mrs. Broggs—Miss Vida Delback, the programme announced) entered with a pair of men’s pants that wanted repairing, hanging over her arm, and gazed silently about the scant shelving in search of something.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter broke out, and was promptly suppressed by Tilly and James.

“I had a needle to-day, somewhere,” Mrs. Broggs said in a clear voice, “whatever on earth could I have done with it?”

She went on ransacking the shelving.

“That’s just lahke what ye’er Moother would do,” old John whispered hoarsely to his family.

The great audience watched Mrs. Broggs with intense silence. She looked round, and discovering the old selector (her husband) seated gloomily at the fire place, approached him and placed a hand lightly on his shoulder.

“Ah, don’t brood over it so much, Father!” she said in touching tones. “I know it’s very hard and disheartening after all your years of work and waiting, to see the fences and crops burnt like that. But you did all you could to fight it, and the boys and the two girls are still doing their best with it! Thank God you were able to save the house, so don’t take it to heart any more, Father. It will surely come right in the end—everything does, if you notice.”
Then looking round and assuming a cheerful tone: "Besides, we haven't heard from the storekeeper yet about the corn. You never can tell what it might fetch, or how well off we shall be yet. Do you know, I've been for days watching for the mailman to bring a letter, and something tells me there's one not far off."

"Oh, isn't she good!" Tilly said to Polly.

Without raising his head selector Broggs dragged a letter from his pocket and handed it to his wife.

"The mailman came when I was fighting the fire, Ellen," he said in a rough, sorrowful voice.

Mrs. Broggs took the letter and read aloud for the benefit of the audience: "Twelve pounds your maize brought. I have accordingly credited your account with this amount, which now leaves a balance of £3 owing." A heavy sigh came from Mrs. Broggs, and letting fall the letter she sank in a lifeless sort of way beside her husband and hid her face in her hands.

"Poor thing!" Polly murmured.

"Isn't it like a lot of cases!" Tilly said sadly.

"Go on the land, young man!" a voice in the gallery called out, and the great audience began to laugh in spite of itself.

Here a quaint-looking selection boy whom the programme set forth as "Sam, youngest son of old Broggs," limped on in an indifferent sort of way.

The audience greeted his arrival with merriment, and Peter cried:

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ain't he like Ted Tomkins?"

"Like the boy at Myrtles," Polly said, smiling.

"That's the cove I meant," Peter yelled. "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Take it easy, old chap," a man sitting behind said to Peter, "take it easy."

Same Broggs stared through the window at the alleged fire and stuttered:

"Oh-hoh. They're all kuk-kuk-comin' in ergain from it. They kuk-kuk-couldn't best it. Oh-hah! L-L-L-L-L-Look at her bub-bub-burnin' th' stock-yard. Gee winks, th'-that 'd be th' place tut-to coo-coo-cook bread, mum."

"Cook bread! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter roared. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh crikey."
"Shut up!" the man behind Peter said, and James growled a warning to behave himself into Peter's ear.

Old Broggs rose from his despondency and position, and struggling with his emotion, said to Sam:

"What was that you said, my boy?"

Mrs. Broggs also rose and made an effort to put a cheerful face on things.

"Hoh g-g-gee winkie," Sam answered, "where'll y-y-you milk th' kuk-kuk-cows now, Father?"

Some of the audience thought it necessary to laugh, and some regarded the moment as premature. Those who thought it premature cried "Silence!"

Peter was one of those who thought it necessary to laugh.

Other members of the selector's family trooped on. They were Dan Broggs and Dave Broggs, and were accompanied by an ancient and asthmatic uncle. Each of them carried the charred fragments of the green boughs they had used to belt the fire with. Their entrance was the signal for loud applause and mirth, and Peter, at the top of his voice, cried:

"Oh, crikey, Father, ain't that old bloke like Christie Slater?"

The new characters threw down their worn-out boughs, and sighed "Christopher" and "Laws!" in the same breath. Then in turn they dipped into the water bucket and drank like camels.

"I could drink a river dry," Dave Broggs drawled.

"I could drink one blooming well full," Dan Broggs declared.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Peter yelled at this. "That was good, Father, he could drink it full."

"Shut up and give the cove on the stage a chance," growled the man sitting behind Peter.

James dug Peter hard in the ribs. But Peter had no feeling. His eyes and mind were all on the performance.

"Do you know, my dress caught fire again, Mother," Sarah Broggs said, displaying the charred parts of her garment as she walked about the stage.

Mrs. Broggs threw up her hands as though about to collapse, and exclaimed:
"Oh, my goodness! my gracious, child, you might have met with your death!"

"My word, Sarah got into a tight place, Mother," said Dan Broggs, "and it took me all my time to put her out. I was the only one of the crowd near her."

"Oh dear, oh dear, children!" and Mrs. Broggs showed further symptoms of going off. As an after-thought, however, she suddenly rallied and asked in a surprised voice:

"But where was you sister?"

"Who, Kate, Mother?" and Sarah Broggs grinned and made faces that stirred the risible faculties of the audience again. "Why, she was with Jim Mackenzie, of course, he was giving us a hand, you know, or—er—giving Kate his hand." She grimaced again and disturbed the peaceful atmosphere of the audience once more.

"Oh, she's simply splendid!" Tilly affirmed. And Peter laughed and rolled about in his seat until the man behind him touched him on the shoulder and said: "Be careful, old chap."

"But you're sure you're not burnt, my girl?" Mrs. Broggs went on with much concern.

"Oh, you couldn't burn me, Mother," Sarah Broggs answered.

"No, you couldn't, Mother," Dan Broggs added, helping himself to another drink. "She's too green to burn."

And the laughter that greeted Dan's observation was something to remember. It nearly proved fatal to Peter. "Did you hear that, Father?" he yelled to old John, "'She was too green to burn.' Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Hah-h-h! Oh Laws!"

"Say mate," said the individual at Peter's back, "I'd like to syndicate that smile of yours."

Tilly and James overheard the rude observation, and they both glanced sideways at Peter, and laughed on their own account.

"But poor Uncle," Sarah Broggs ran on, directing sympathy to her dilapidated relative, "did get a nasty burn! Such an ugly scar!" (placing her hand lightly upon the scarecrow's shirt collar she proceeded to show the wound). "A burning limb fell on him, and a red hot coal slid right down his neck." (The Uncle crouched and flinched from the touch of her
hand.) “Just look at it!” (Uncle let off a yell which made those on the stage and those off it roar with merriment.)

“I don’t see”, the wreck cried, “what yer’ve got ter laugh at!”

The audience laughed more.

Dan and Dave Broggs apologised to their relative for making light of his trouble.

The old Uncle, growling to himself, lifted the bucket to his head, and started drinking like a horse.

“Look out, old chap,” a gruff voice in the audience called out, “or you’ll be kicking the bucket soon.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” cried Peter.

“Hoh! Hoh! Hoh!” roared old John, and added: “An’ he looks as if he’ll kick th’ boocket raht enoof.”

The Uncle set the bucket on the floor, wrong end up, and calmly seating himself on it, proceeded to feel his sore neck.

Peter almost lost control of himself. “Father,” he shouted, “ain’t he a funny beggar!”

“It must be very painful to you, I’m sure, Uncle,” Mrs. Broggs said sympathetically. “Won’t you let me put something on it—a little sweet oil?”

“Oil’s no use to it,” old selector Broggs put in, addressing his distressed brother, “you puts a fistful of flour on it—that’ll bring th’ heat out of it in no time” (turning to Mrs. Braggs). “Get me a pinch o’ flour, Mother, I’ll put it on for him.”

Mrs. Broggs shook her head sorrowfully, and said:

“There isn’t a bit in th’ house, Father—till some comes!”

Some of the audience murmured: “Poor things!”

“If there were,” the Uncle growled in protest, “I wouldn’t let him put it on. I’d want chloroform first.”

“Good man,” shouted some one in the pit, and again the great audience were provoked into merriment.

“Now run away, dear, and change your dress,” the mother said to Sarah Broggs. Then remarking the absence of the other daughter, she asked: “But where is your sister?”

“Out talking to Jim Mackenzie, of course,” Sarah Broggs replied. “They’ll be in directly, Mother.”

“A fat lot of p-p-puttin’ out th’ fire they d-d-did,” Sam
Broggs said. "I knows how they' do it, hangin' r-r-round each other's n-n-necks."

Mrs. Broggs here called the precocious Sam to order, and Sarah Broggs reminded him that he knew far too much for a little boy.

Sam made faces at them which pleased the audience.

"Well, anyhow, Mother," the old selector interposed in dramatic tones, "sweetheartin' in this way ain't th' right thing for a gal o' mine. Outside ain't no place for it. It weren't th' way them things wer' done in my time."

"Oh, they'll be in in a moment, Father," Mrs. Broggs answered conciliatingly. "There's no need to be angry—Jim is a decent young man."

"That's all right enough," roared the selector, "he might be a decent young man. But he's on'y flesh an' blood like any one else, and this outside business ain't the right thing—leastaways it ain't in my eyes."

The audience were in a frivolous mood, and enjoyed the old selector's ideas of the wrong way to conduct a courtship.

Dan Broggs and Dave and Sarah and the asthmatic Uncle withdrew, while old selector Broggs moved to the open window and gazed out into the night.

"Years o' work gone in a day!" he moaned.

Mrs. Broggs showed great concern for the mind of her husband.

"Don't worry any more about it, Father!" she pleaded. "Remember we have got our health and our strength left, and what we did before we can do again!"

The old selector turned and took his wife's hand.

"That's right spoken, Ellen," he said. "You were always a brave woman. We have our health, and we have our strength—and we have fought fires before, and floods, and droughts, and debts, and enemies, and what we have done before we can do again—and will do."

A great cheer came from the audience. Old John squeezed a tear from his eye and whispered to Polly: "Ah moost breng your Moother an' Granny to see this!"

There was loud knocking on the door of the selection home, and a burly, sandy-bearded Scotchman named McClure,
ON AN AUSTRALIAN FARM

arrayed in shabby, tattered kilts, and accompanied by his wife, a thin, spare woman, entered, to the surprise of old Broggs and Mrs. Broggs. They all greeted each other, and old Broggs offered them a seat.

"We canna sit," McClure said, "we're baith sair wi' hurry. Hae ye seen a' that's put in th' paper aboot yoursel'?

Old Broggs stared and said he hadn't seen the paper for a month.

"It's richt prood o' ye we are," McClure proceeded, while his wife smiled and nodded her endorsement. "We're prood o' ye, Meester Tam Broggs, Justice o' th' Peace."

"What, me?" old Broggs gasped.

"My Tom?" cried Mrs. Broggs.

"Ay, an' gi' us ye're haun'," said McClure. "I congraitulate baith o' ye."

They all shook, while the audience howled and laughed.

"Well, I can hardly believe it," said old Broggs, excitedly. The burly Scot produced a newspaper as evidence.

"Old Johnson, the member, must have done that," the selector said, thinking hard.

"Ay!" replied McClure, "seein' that you've always been against him with your family votes why would he no'?

"By Jove!" gasped old Broggs.

"An' o' course ye'll ha' tae gi' him your support from now till the day o' judgment; ye canna help yoursel'," McClure went on.

"That's the way they get all the democrats to go over," a voice from the gallery yelled, and the audience burst into laughter, cheers, and hoots.

"Ye'll be spoke aboot an' mentioned a' ower the country." Mrs. McClure assured them.

"Just like Bobby Burns," added McClure.

"Who's he?" innocently inquired old Broggs.

"What mon!" cried McClure, "hae ye never heerd tell o' Bobby Burns? Do ye no ken his poems an' sangs?"

Old Broggs shook his head.

Here Dan Broggs, who with Dave Broggs and Sarah Broggs and the battered Uncle had returned to the stage with their faces washed, spoke and said:
"I think I heard tell of that cove somewhere when you come to mention his name."
"Ye think ye deed!" said McClure satirically, and once more the audience took a leading part.
"He was a great boxer!" Dave Broggs affirmed.
"May th' Lord forgiv' ye," snapped McClure, and the gods yelled and whistled their delight.
In the middle of the pandemonium an undersized stockheaded Irishman whom the programme said was "Mr. Dooley, a neighbour", bounced on, and throwing his hat on the floor said, addressing Broggs:
"Be th' powers above an' below, an' beneath, Oi congratulates yez—a Justice o' th' Pace! But it's meself phwat's prouder of yez nor if yez wer' me own brather. An', an' pwhat 'll it be worth to yez in gold?"
Broggs grinned and said he didn't think it would be worth anything.
"Do yez tell me that it won't?" said Dooley disappointedly.
"It's an honorary poseetion, mon," McClure explained for Dooley's benefit.
"An honorary possition?" Dooley repeated with an air of perplexity.
"Ye dinna understaun' becaise ye hae no sense o' honour yoursel', Dooley," said McClure.
"See that now," remarked Dooley, with a side wink at the audience.
"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" came from Peter, and the man behind touched him on the shoulder and said:
"What's he paying you for smiling at his jokes?"
Tilly nudged James, and they both glanced back at the man. The play rattled on.
"Well, if they give me anything I'll take it, you may depend," old Broggs assured Dooley.
"An' they'll give it," Dooley answered, "they'll give it; an' sure if they don't yez can give thim six moonsths."
A fresh contingent of neighbours rushed in, including a large German girl with a feeble voice. She was named Miss Holstein. She bowed to Mrs. Broggs and said:
"Mother told me to tell you she was so sorry she couldn't come herself. She's got to make a poultice for father's foot. But she's very pleased about it, and hopes you won't get too proud to come and see her like you always used to."

The audience didn't applaud Miss Holstein. They "meowed" like a thousand lost cats instead.

"So she wud be pleased, I'm sure of that, peoor woman," Dooley said, sidling towards Miss Holstein and making eyes at her. "The same as all of us here are pleased," and after a pause he added, "And might I be after askin' pwhat is the matter wid your father's fut?"

The house was nearly brought down.

"Oh Laws, Father," Peter cried, regaining his breath, "I am enjoying meself."

"He hurt it," answered Miss Holstein.

"Oh, he did," Dooley said, edging closer to her, "an'—an'—did it hurt him?"

Miss Holstein stared curiously at Dooley while the audience yelled again.

Dooley proposed they have a dance in honour of the occasion, and the others echoed enthusiastically, "A dance! A dance!"

The orchestra struck up a Scottish air, and McClure stepped forward and danced the Highland Fling.

The audience seemed pleased when he stopped and bowed.

"'Tis a shtrange thing," said Dooley, "that a Scotchman he can niver dance nor foight wid his trousers on."

The audience saw the joke and cheered Dooley.

"Oh, bless me, Father," Peter gasped, "ain't he a funny dog!"

The music changed, and all hands on the stage joined in a wild and prolonged country dance. And how they did dance! Tilly and Polly clutched at each other in their excitement.

Old Broggs swung Mrs. Broggs; McClure swung Mrs. McClure; and Dooley was swung by Miss Holstein. It was grand to watch them.

"That's soomit lahke dancin'," old John said.

In the middle of it Mrs. Broggs swooned away, and hung,
lifeless-looking, in the arms of old Broggs who called out excitedly:

"Some water! quick! some water!"

Next moment Dooley swooned, and hung like a corpse in the arms of Miss Holstein.

Miss Holstein screamed and gazed into the face of her partner.

The audience enjoyed the situation.

"Whisky! Quick! Some whisky!" Dooley shouted. And the curtain dropped, and rose again and dropped.

"Mah word," old John said, when all the cheering ceased, "Ah moost bring yower Moother to see this."
13. A Ramble Round Town

“Well, what's it to be?” asked old John, as the family con­gregated on the steps of the hotel soon after breakfast, “a trip to the bay in a boat or up tahn somewhere?”

Tilly said she was dying to see the ocean. Polly shuddered and said she had no inclination to be drowned, she would rather be killed in a train or with an axe. Maria thought there was time enough to see the sea, and longed to visit the great emporium that advertised the cheap drapery. Peter suggested a visit to the museum.

“Ah-h,” murmured old John, “the mooseum's a place Ah would lahke to see mahself.”

“Oh, for goodness sake don't let Peter go there,” Tilly advised, “they'll want to keep him.”

“Well, if they saw all the sausages Father had this morning,” Peter answered, “they'd sooner keep me than him.”

“Indeed yes,” Polly agreed, “fancy three plates of them!”

“Ah-h,” reflected old John, “them wer' good sausages—Ah never hed better.”

“Well, let us go somewhere—we don’t want to stand here all day like grass trees,” Tilly urged impatiently.

The family moved off in double file. They sauntered slowly from one street to another, dodging out of the way of the scurrying city pedestrians, gazing up at the giddy heights of the massive stone buildings opposite; peering at the goods displayed in the glass windows, and drawing each other's attention to street oddities and the queer looking folk of the city.

An aged and humble looking mendicant seated near a wall, his open hand extended in piteous appeal like a church plate, and around whose neck dangled a placard conveying in printed letters the pathetic information that the wearer was “stone blind,” attracted their attention.

“A blind man! oh dear!” the women gasped, and pausing, read the lines on the placard with the sanctity of feeling that
people peruse the inscription on a tomb stone. With large tears in her eyes Mrs. Dashwood fumbled her pocket, and taking out a half crown, placed it gently in the open hand of the sightless one. The hand didn’t close on it. It didn’t move. It just remained open waiting for more, and if anything the mendicant seemed to grow blinder. Maria produced a silver coin and dropped it in.

“I think everyone should give in a case like that,” she said, as if apologising to her conscience. Maria was not famous for her benevolence. Polly and Tilly followed suit. But even then the hand remained open. Then mendicant believed in the “open door” policy.

“Oh, well,” remarked old John, digging down deep into his trouser pocket, “Ah sooppose Ah can spare a little.”

“Give him something for me, too, Father,” Peter suggested cheerfully. Peter always believed in giving quickly when the gift was from his parents’ purse.

“Here’s half a suovereign for yer,” said old John, dropping the gold piece on top of the silver.

“God bless you, Sir!” murmured the blind man, closing his hand like a vice and stuffing the money into his pocket.

Meanwhile James, who was a keen observer, had been thinking hard.

“That’s old Jimmy the Gambler, surely?” he said, with an amused smile.

At the sound of the name the blind man gave an impulsive start, and opened one of his eyes.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” Peter yelled, “it’s old Jimmy.”

“Well, well,” commenced old John slowly.

“Damn it!” hissed the “blind” one, “don’t stand there starin’ then, when yer know me—d’yer want ter bring th’ police on a cove?”

“Well, Ah’m be derned!” said old John, “if this ain’t some-thin! Look ’e here, Jimmy” (raising his voice in indignation), “Ah wish to th’ Lord yer was blahnd!”

But James, who had all the laugh on his side, said: “Come on, leave him, Father; he did good work for us once, you know.”
"That's Old Jimmy the Gambler, Surely?"
Then looking back, grinning and smiling at the impostor, the family strolled on.

They turned a congested corner, and entered the main street. Old John, with Mrs. Dashwood and little Andy, took the lead; Granny and Maria and the baby came next; behind them Polly and Tilly, and bringing up the rear were James and Peter.

Drifting along the crowded thoroughfare staggered an individual in a long ragged coat, a dinted hard hat, torn boots, and a damaged eye. He steered to starboard and steadied up when he encountered our country friends, and eyed them with his good eye. He hiccuped twice, then in a cracked voice cried: "Halt! who (hic) goes there!" Polly and Tilly tittered and scurried to the side of their parent for safety. Old John stopped and stared at the commanding figure.

"Friends or (hic) foes?" demanded the queer one.

People passing turned in their haste and smiled feebly. They seemed familiar with the scene.

"Well, friends Ah hope," answered old John good-naturedly.

"Friends, eh—friends to what?" yelled the ragged one, raising his hand in dramatic gesture, "to torture and tyranny, or friends to the devil?"

"Come away, Father!" and Mrs. Dashwood tugged nervously at her husband's arm.

Peter laughed.

"Scoffer!" yelled the stranger.

Here a policeman came up, and with a scowl waved him on.

"Constable!" began the queer individual, "I could take you and——"

"Well, take that," and the Law delivered him a place kick with its large foot.

The man took it where his pants hung slack, and staggered off in a hurry.

Our friends all started to laugh, and old John, turning to the Law, asked it a leading question.

"He's a damn nuisance; if that's any inferrmation to yez," the constable snapped, and marched on.

Old John and James and Peter disposed themselves outside the door of the Great Emporium studying the traffic and the
"I'm George", Drawled the Pigeon-toed Man
faces in the street while the others, lured away by the “cheap bargains”, went in to make purchases.

A good half hour passed; then Maria, in a state of perspiration, appeared on the pavement dancing her bellowing offspring about to silence it.

“It wants something,” said old John. “Give it th’ bottle.”

“Oh, I gave it to her in there,” Maria whined, “but she wouldn’t take it!”

Then to the infant: “Oh, there! there! there! It’s home I ought to take you!”

After a while the baby cried itself out and became calm, and Maria, taking courage again, beat back into the crowded emporium.

Five minutes later she appeared on the pavement again, shaking the squealing youngster about harder than ever.

“Did mother (oh, you must be good, baby!) and the others come out?” she asked.

“We ain’t seen ’em, girl,” old John answered.

“I’m sure I don’t know where they have got to, then!” moaned Maria. “And this baby! Oh, I’m sure it’s no pleasure.”

She turned into the emporium again and disappeared.

“Ha! Ha! Ha!” laughed Peter.

“Poor Maria be in a bit of a fix!” murmured old John.

Another half hour, longer than the last, went by.

“Oh, blow this sort of thing!” growled James. And Peter wanted to know “what the deuce they were up to.”

“Buyin’ all th’ shop, Ah think, lad,” answered the parent.

Just then the absent ones all issued empty handed from the emporium, and all looked worried and disappointed—all but Polly, who was smiling behind her handkerchief.

“Well, I wouldn’t have come out without buying an article, anyway!” Tilly was saying upbraidingly.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter, it was hard to decide among such a lot of things,” conciliatingly from Mrs. Dashwood.

“Indeed, if Tilly had a baby to look after all the time,” Maria snapped, “she wouldn’t have bought anything either.”

“Well,” said old John in greeting them, “you must a’ bought a big lot?”
Polly and Tilly with a side look at Maria tittered, and the family falling into line again, proceeded along the street.

"What crowds of people!" Mrs. Dashwood would gasp at intervals. "Just look at them! Dear me!"

"And amongst them all," Tilly would add, "we don't know a single soul!"

Suddenly old John stretched out his hands, and with a shout of joy impeded the progress of a short-legged pigeon-toed man with a large corporation, a tall hat, and an eye glass.

"Tom Draggon!" exclaimed old John, showing signs of embracing the fat gentleman; but instantly he hesitated as if a doubt had crossed his mind.

"Oh, Father's found some one," Polly cried, and the whole family turned and stared at the "friend."

"Waal, no, I'm not the dragon," drawled the pigeon-toed man, blinking at old John, "but I'm George."

"Ah-h," replied old John, apologetically, "h'm, Ah would a swore yow was Tom Draggon."

"No, don't swear, never do that," the fat man said, squeezing past, "it's dangerous habit when the police are about," and he pointed with his chubby thumb to a young policeman standing near.

Old John turned to the Law.

"Who wer'thet?" he asked, pointing to the fat figure.

The policeman smiled and said "George Reid."