

## A KNOT OF BLUE RIBBON.

In the year 1864 I was manager of the Willoughby branch of the Metropolitan Bank of Sydney, New South Wales. Willoughby is a country town containing some five thousand inhabitants, situated on the river Hunter. It lies in a long valley, through the middle of which the river flows, for the greater part of its course, between low grassy banks. The staff of our branch comprised myself and three others. The accountant and myself lived together in a suite of rooms adjoining the bank premises. We were very good friends, and had everything in the house in common, though we might have lived as much apart as if we had occupied separate houses. Dick Weir was indeed an easy companion to get on with. It was a little time before you came to know him, for he was of a shy and diffident nature, who made friends slowly (but when you did get to be familiar with him you liked him without exactly knowing why. He was not brilliant or specially gifted in any way, though he understood his own business thoroughly and performed its duties well. In personal appearance he was not what you would probably call attractive. He had plain, strongly marked features, and an ungraceful figure, which under no circumstances could be made to do credit to his tailor. He had good, clear, steady, gray eyes. But as nearly always happens when you come to be friends with a man, you soon grew accustomed to Weir's outward appearance; failed to see its homeliness, and liked the man for his simple, genuine and sound-hearted nature. However, this was my case.

Willoughby is a sociable little place, and Weir and myself had a considerable circle of acquaintances in it. The family whose house we most frequently visited was that of Mr. Blaxland. John Blaxland was a retired gentleman of property, a hearty, kindly, hospitable man. His house was pleasantly situated on the bank of the river, and distant about three miles from the town. Mr. Blaxland was a married man with two children, a son and daughter. The latter, at the time of which I write, was in her twentieth year, and one of the prettiest girls in the country side. Ella Blaxland was a little coquettish sometimes and fond of fun, but neither vain nor frivolous.

Weir and I were at Wyandra—such was the name of Mr. Blaxland's place—sometimes as often as twice a week, and we were always sure of a kindly welcome. No one understood better how to entertain their friends than John Blaxland and his wife, and this without seeming to make much effort in so doing.

Ella Blaxland had many admirers, but for a long time no one of these seemed to find favor in her sight. Nothing could ever be detected in her manner whereby you could gather that she regarded one with more friendliness than another. When such signs did appear, as they did at last, it was in favor of a comparative stranger in the district, one who had but lately come amongst us. This was a matter of no small chagrin to some of Ella's old admirers; but certainly the new comer had many of the personal qualities such as frequently recommend a man in ladies' eyes. Leonard Hamerton had established himself as a solicitor in Willoughby. Previous to his coming to the district he had been for a number of years in a well known solicitor's firm in Sydney, and brought with him letters of introduction to most of the better class families in the town. Mr. Hamerton was a tall, well made man, with fine brown hair and eyes and a fresh color. He had a ready, fluent address, helped by a melodious voice; and his manners were perfectly well bred. He possessed accomplishments which were of an eminently useful and effective kind, such as win favor in society. He could sing and perform on the piano with taste and skill, knew whist and most other games at cards thoroughly, played croquet with dexterous grace, and handled a billiard cue in a manner that rather astonished some of our young fellows who thought they knew something in that way. Hamerton was a prudent man. He knew exactly the limits of his own strength, and never attempted anything beyond his range. His country rivals were never successful in tempting him into any of the sports in which they believed themselves to be stronger. He had decided objections to being seen at a disadvantage.

Soon after his arrival in Willoughby, Hamerton became a frequent visitor at Wyandra, and it was not long before his name was mentioned as that of Miss Blaxland's favorite suitor. At first I regarded this as an idle rumor. Other young men had at different times earned this distinction, and each had in turn quietly lost it. But by and by both Dick Weir and myself thought we saw signs that the popular rumor was at last about to be verified. Ella Blaxland seemed to be regarding Leonard Hamerton with a favor greater than that which she extended to others. This was

not very marked; but to us, who were so frequently about the house, it became sufficiently so to be hardly mistakable. I did not like it myself, for no reasons of a personal kind, for I had never looked upon Ella Blaxland in any other light than that of a friend, and my affections were directed elsewhere, but simply because I did not much care for Hamerton. I had reason to believe, though he said little about it, that the sentiments with which I regarded him were shared in a great measure by Dick Weir.

It was about two months after Hamerton had come to Willoughby that a little fête was held at Wyandra in honor of Ella's twentieth birthday. It was intentionally a quiet little festival, and those who met to celebrate it were none but the more intimate friends of the family. But we were a very merry and pleasant party. We met early in the afternoon of a lovely day in the end of April, which is the Australian autumn. I remember the day by reason of a slight circumstance of which I alone was witness, a circumstance which was a revelation to me at the time, and which after events recalled to my memory with added significance. During the afternoon the larger portion of our party were engaged in croquet, while some wandered about the garden talking. Ella Blaxland was looking especially bright and charming; gay, animated and happy, as befitted the occasion. She was dressed simply, in some soft, light material, with bits of delicate blue ribbon here and there about her person and a loop of the same interwoven amid her hair. There were other girls present with undeniable claims to beauty, but Ella moved among them like a little princess, though with no air of conscious superiority. Leonard Hamerton was at his best to-day, exerting his utmost powers of pleasing. Sparkling, witty and gay, he infused mirth into all our diversions, and was confessed by some tacitly by others openly to be the life and spirit of our party.

We were just bringing our croquet contest to a close, preparatory to adjourning indoors for tea, when Miss Blaxland discovered that she had lost one of the ribbons with which the sleeves of her dress were fastened at the wrist. Search was made by all of us over the croquet ground, but in vain. It was very strange where the bright knot of ribbon could have hidden itself on that smooth level sward, and we were all sure that Ella had had both her wrist ribbons on when we began our game. Then I suddenly recollected that I had seen Dick Weir, who had not taken part in the game, but had been acting as umpire to us, stoop once while we were playing and pick up something from the ground. I thought at the time that it was something of his own, but now it occurred to me with convincing force that it was nothing else than Ella's ribbon which he had picked up. A minute or two before Ella had missed it Dick had strolled away in the direction of the house. I said nothing, for I was resolved to keep my friend's secret. What I had seen now put things in a new light. 'So,' I thought, 'is that how the land lies?' Poor Dick; I felt sorry for him. If he had any hope of ever winning Ella Blaxland's affections I felt he was doomed to disappointment. But surely he knew this himself by this time.

That evening, as Dick and I rode home together from Wyandra in the moonlight, I said: 'Looks as if it were a settled thing between Ella and Hamerton, don't you think?'

Dick looked round at me, and I saw that his face was somewhat pale, but that might have been the moonlight. 'Do you think it is really settled?' he said. 'Well, we both wish her all happiness, don't we?'

There had always been the most friendly intimacy between Weir and Miss Blaxland, but nothing more. Dick's name had never been one of those even mentioned among the aspirants to Ella's hand, though they had known each other from childhood, both being natives of Willoughby.

It came to be a matter of general belief in Willoughby that Leonard Hamerton was to marry Ella Blaxland, though nothing definite upon this point could be traced back to Wyandra. Meanwhile my liking for Hamerton did not increase, and I could not view him as a worthy husband for Miss Blaxland. The strong friendship I had formed for the pretty, kind hearted girl made me desirous of seeing her marry a man who would be worthy of her, and Hamerton did not impress me with this idea. I felt that this might be in a great measure prejudice, but some of Hamerton's habits of life did not appear specially laudable. Weir and I found him a frequent night visitor of the billiard room of the Willoughby Arms, and this not with the merely innocent object of enjoying a game. He never seemed to care for playing unless for money stakes, and he was always prepared to play as high as his opponents would go. He almost invariably won; and when he did not it struck me that he had

his own reasons for it. In fact, he did much what he liked with such opponents as he met at the Willoughby Arms, though they were slow to see it; and his fine talent for the game no doubt brought him in a comfortable little addition to his income. He employed his knowledge of cards whenever opportunity offered, with the same results.

The winter of 1864 is still remembered in New South Wales as that in which one of the largest floods that the colony has ever been subjected to occurred. The Hunter River district suffered especially, and we in Willoughby did not escape the general destruction. The rain began to fall in Willoughby at noon of one day, and by dusk of the next the river had risen thirty feet. By next morning half the town was submerged, the water completely covering the ground floor of many of the houses. Our bank premises stood comparatively high, but we were obliged to abandon the first floor on the second morning of the flood. Boats were being employed all that day in conveying the inhabitants from the lower parts of the town and the houses immediately contiguous to the river to those situated on more elevated ground farther back from the stream. Of course at such a time all business is at an end. Every one who could be of any service employed himself in manning the boats for the rescue of the flooded out families. Weir and I had been hard at work all day with the boats, and were resting from our exertions in our little sitting room after our six o'clock dinner. We were both tired, and did not propose doing anything more that night unless some urgent demand were made upon us. As we sat smoking in silence, Weir said suddenly: 'By the bye, did it ever occur to you how the Wyandra people may be getting on?'

'No,' I answered; 'it never struck me; but I suppose they are all right; they don't lie very low, and they have the boats.'

'They don't lie very high,' replied Dick, rising to his feet, 'and as to the boats, if they have to take to them, who is to man them? You know Mr. Blaxland never rows, and the two gardeners are poor enough hands at it. There is a good lot of women folk about the place and very few men at this time of the year—none, in fact, except the gardeners and a boy. By Jove! Jack, we should have thought of this before. But there is no time to be lost. We must find a boat and get up to Wyandra to-night. Don't go if you don't feel up to it. I shall easily be able to pick up a crew at the Willoughby Arms.'

'I am quite ready, Dick,' I answered. 'You are right; we should have thought of it before.'

We got four men at the hotel and a boat. Wyandra lay up the river, and in making for it we followed the course of the stream. Had it been in the daytime we might have saved something by taking a cross cut, but there was not sufficient light to make such a course now judicious. It was still raining in torrents. The current of the swollen river was very strong, rendering rowing extremely difficult. We were the best part of an hour in reaching Wyandra. Pulling across what was a day or two ago a smiling garden, we approached the house from the front, and found the ground floor completely submerged. There was an ominous silence about the place, and it was with no slight feelings of misgiving that Weir and I climbed from the boat through the windows of the second floor and entered the house. We found the whole household gathered together in one room: Mr. and Mrs. Blaxland and their daughter, three women domestics, the two men servants and the boy. They were seated with shivering forms around a wood fire, and the whole group presented a pitiable sight. As we entered the room John Blaxland started to his feet, and when he recognized us grasped the hands of both of us with energy.

'My dear boys,' he cried, 'you are just in time; half an hour more and the water will be knee deep in this room! All our fuel is useless too, and we have been half famished with cold.'

'Dear me, Mr. Blaxland,' I said, 'we never imagined you would have been in such a plight; but it was very thoughtless of us. Didn't you think of trying to get away in the boats at first?'

'We put off till it was too late. The two skiffs are such light things, and none of us understood much about the management of boats. We didn't fancy trusting ourselves to them, that is the truth.'

'Well, we must not put off time now, sir,' I said.

Dick had been meanwhile doing his best to reassure Mrs. Blaxland and her daughter, the former of whom was in a state of nervousness, which the poor lady was in vain exerting herself to control. We got together such shawls and wraps as were in the house and still untouched by the water, and putting them about Mrs. Blaxland, Ella and the other three women, made them as comfortable as the circumstances admitted in the stern of the boat. When all the male portion of the party were seated and the rowers had taken their places we found that the boat was already full. One

other person it might hold, but not possibly more. Here was a difficulty we had not contemplated. We had taken the largest boat we could get at Willoughby. What was to be done? Weir was prompt with a remedy. He took me aside a moment.

'There is only one thing to do, Jack,' he said; 'I must stay behind.'

'Not while I go,' I replied.

'Now, Jack,' said my companion, 'listen to reason. It is simply a matter of necessity. Both of us cannot go and one of us must. You must, for you are the best steerer, and it will need all your skill in getting safely back with that heavily laden boat. I know you would do what I am doing, but you see I must be the one that stays behind in this case. The lives of all in that boat depend upon your going.'

I saw the force of what he said. It was imperative that I should go, and it seemed impossible that Dick should go too.

'Well, Dick,' I said, 'I see it must be so. Heaven grant that we may be able to come back for you in time. You will have to take to the roof, I expect; but if you can manage to hold out against the cold all will be well; I shall get some fresh men at the hotel.'

'All right, old fellow,' said Dick, hurrying me into the boat; 'don't fear. Just give me your tobacco pouch, will you? You have got the brandy flask, I think, but perhaps you will need it for some of the women.'

'No, no,' I said, handing him the flask; 'you will want it a great deal more than any of them.' I took my seat in the stern of the boat.

'O, Mr. Weir!' cried Miss Blaxland from her place, 'can you not go with us? Surely we can make room for one more.'

'No, no, Miss Blaxland,' replied Weir. 'The boat is already fuller than is safe. I shall be all right till Jack returns. Push off, men.'

The boat lurched forward into the sea of waters. The current of the river was now with us, and our progress was more rapid than it had previously been. But our course was more dangerous, from the turbulent violence with which the current was flowing and from the heavily laden condition of the boat. Steering was extremely difficult, and it was only with the greatest effort that I could keep the head of the boat straight. For that night at least the only place in which my living freight could be accommodated was at the bank, and as soon as I had seen Mr. and Mrs. Blaxland, Ella and the rest as comfortably provided for as possible I set off again in the boat for the Willoughby Arms. Of my four rowers, one consented to return with me; the other three declared themselves unable for the work. At the hotel, by offering a sufficient money inducement, I was enabled to obtain three other men.

Back over the dark eddying flood we made our way. The rain was falling, if possible, in heavier torrents and the night had grown thicker. Stormy masses of cloudy swept slowly across the heavens, looking as though they might at any moment descend. It was with a heart beating with anxiety that I approached the house at Wyandra. The water had risen high above the windows of the second floor and was level with the roof. I knew that Dick must have been driven from the interior of the house long since. In a stooping position I groped my way in the rain and the darkness along the sloping shingle roof. For some time I was unable to discover any sign of Weir; I called his name, but there was no answer. A dread came upon me that he had been overcome by exhaustion and swept away by the remorseless waters. At last I stumbled against something lying at my feet. I stooped and found Weir lying with his back against one of the chimneys of the house. I lifted him in my arms, and made my way as fast as possible to the boat. Dick was quite insensible and very cold. I wrapped him in a large rug which I had brought with me and which had kept tolerably dry in the locker of the boat, gave him some brandy and began chafing his hands. For some minutes he showed no signs of returning animation, and I thought all was over with him. But in a little his lips moved nervously, his eyes opened and closed, and he seemed to go off again as it were in a swoon. Reassured, however, that he was still alive, I bade the men push off and placed the rigid form of my friend at the bottom of the boat, where I could watch him as I steered. Again we were in the current of the river; the night had grown darker, and I could see no farther than half a dozen yards beyond the boat's head. The current was rushing at headlong speed, and with a deafening roar like the crash of a water fall. The men were using their oars more to steady the boat than to propel her, while we were borne along with an uneasy motion on the swollen waters. Every few moments a dark object drifted past us—now a dead horse or cow, now a barrel, a ladder or a hen coop, waifs from many a ruined homestead. From time to time I bent over Weir and applied the spirit flask to his lips. It was all that I could do, for I had to give my undivided attention to the work of steering. When we reached the town the men

were all but exhausted. Like the rest they had been working with the boats all day. One of the three doctors in Willoughby lived close to the bank, and I bade the men stop at his house. When he heard my story the doctor accompanied me home.

We laid Dick in his bed. Besides the doctor and myself, Mr. and Mrs. Blaxland and their daughter were the only others in the room.

With anxious faces we bent over the bed as the doctor proceeded to examine the still insensible form of Weir. He laid open Dick's coat and placed his hand on his heart. As he did so something fell out from between the folds. It was a small knot of blue ribbon. I picked it up and handed it to Ella Blaxland. As she took it, her face, that had been pale before, changed to crimson; a strange look came into her eyes, and she turned hastily from the bedside and seated herself by the fire. She too recognized the ribbon.

A few moments' examination satisfied the doctor that Dick was still alive, and we proceeded to apply such remedies for his restoration as were within our power. These proved more quickly successful than I had hoped for, and soon we had the satisfaction of seeing Dick slowly returning to consciousness. Before the doctor left he had fallen into a sound sleep.

When he awoke next morning Dick was completely himself again. When the doctor called and saw him he pronounced that no grave results had ensued from the previous night's exposure.

On the day succeeding that of the events above narrated the rain ceased, and the waters receded from the earth almost as quickly as they had risen. But what a scene of desolation they left behind! Far as the eye could reach, the land, that a few days before had been green and smiling, lay a dreary waste of wilderness—farms and homesteads, gardens, orchards and vineyards stripped bare by the cruel waters and left a shapeless ruin. But on these things it is not my intention here to dwell. It was some time before the pleasant homestead at Wyandra regained its old shape and beauty; but the Australian soil and climate have quick recuperative powers, and Mr. Blaxland's property was restored to its former appearance with a rapidity that would have astonished a stranger in the country.

Leonard Hamerton did not marry Ella Blaxland. It turned out that there had never been any mention of an engagement, either on the part of themselves or Ella's parents—though I have reason to think that Miss Blaxland at one time was very favorably inclined to Hamerton. But circumstances occurred to change her feelings completely in this respect. Shortly after the great flood Hamerton disappeared suddenly from Willoughby. After his departure stories got about very little to his credit, chiefly relating to pecuniary matters. There was a good deal of mystery about the whole affair; and it was thought that the young man's friends in Sydney had used their influence to hush the matter up. Enough, however, got abroad to render Hamerton's further stay in Willoughby impossible.

The place in Ella Blaxland's regard that had been supposed by everybody to have been occupied by Hamerton was quietly taken by one of a very different stamp, Dick Weir. Everybody was surprised when it came to be known that Weir was to marry Miss Blaxland. The very last person that any one would have thought of! The small world of Willoughby was not behind the scenes, and perhaps its surprise was not very wonderful in this case. Dick did not at once strike you as the kind of man likely to carry off the prettiest girl in a country side.

### No Hope.

Penitent Printer—I have been such a terrible sinner that I fear there is no salvation for me.

Minister—Cheer up, my friend. There is hope for even the vilest.

Printer—But I have been such a great sinner. I have worked on Sunday papers putting in type accounts of prize fights, murders and all manner of crime, thus to spread its influence all over the land.

Minister—But there is still hope for you if you truly repent.

Printer—I'm glad to hear you say so. I have often put your sermons in type and thought how full of love they were, and—

Minister—Are you the fiend who when I wrote of "Pale martyrs in their shrouds of fire" made it read, "Pale martyrs with their shirts on fire?"

Printer—I am afraid I am. I—

Minister—Then I am happy to say that I do not believe the hereafter holds any hope for you.—Newark Town Talk.

### It Made Her Unhappy.

Astonished mother—What means this? You say you have accepted Mr. Sumpure, and yet you have assured me over and over again that every time he called you were unhappy.

Smart daughter—I was unhappy because he didn't propose.

Death is a wonderful mimic. He can take anybody off.