

A King in the West

By WILL H. OGILVIE

WHO is he—this King of the West? A squatter or station-owner as a rule; for the most part, though not inevitably, a Scotchman.

All that have travelled through the Bush Land know him. Long before one crosses the unmarked boundary of his kingdom one hears of him. The drovers are speaking of him—"And old Bruce" (or McDougall, or Scott, or McDonald, or Stevenson—quisque regno!) "he let me put my horses in the bend of his horse-paddock good luck to him!" And the teamsters:—"Bruce, he says to me, 'You leave the old leader here till you come through again—plenty of grass here'—he says. He's a white man is Bruce!"

The swagman knows him; he has travelled weary miles through the stations and selections, has passed "Hungry Bob's" and "Scabby Wilson's" with a tightened belt and a smothered curse, but here he is on white man's ground at last! The very gates call "Welcome!" the very trees wave sympathy.

One of the huts at the shearing-shed is given up as a camping place for the travellers, firewood is stacked at the door for them and water tanks are at hand. Up at the store the store-keeper is ready to give them flour and tea and sugar, and even tobacco, for the asking; and to offer payment is to call forth the ready rebuke—"This is Bruce's!"

When the teamster, toiling down through the flood-water on the black-soil flats, pulls into a swamp which he has not sufficient strength to get out of; when at last mud-spattered, baffled and disgusted he unchains his weary horses and rides up to the station for the help that he knows will not be asked in vain—then the King sends down four or eight or more of his strong fat horses, hooks them on to the stranded waggon and drags it out upon the high ground. "Poor beggars," he will say in self-excuse to his more careless neighbours, "they have hard times enough in the swamps, I am glad when I can help them!"

If a coach contractor starts a new line of coaches on the road, he knows that the King will run his horses free of charge in his rich horse-paddock "just to give him a start."

If the Queensland drover, short-handed and in trouble, has lost his horses or some of his stock, he knows that "old Bruce" will lend him a man to help in finding them.

When the neighbouring squatters and station managers are driving through on their long journeys to and from town, they say "Let us push on as far as Bruce's!" for at the palace of the King waits always the regal welcome.

These men, these sunbrowned independent princes who need to bow to no man, are one and all his lieges and many times his guests.

In the country town, the capital of his kingdom, the white man reigns supreme. Members of Parliament, mayors and magistrates may rule in his absence, kings in their petty councils—but the white man of the district is the over-lord, the emperor of them all.

At the Agricultural Show, at every meeting social and political, billiard tournament and church bazaar, at hospital committee, at Race Club meeting, he is always in the chair, if not actually so in the flesh at least in spirit and influence—and everyone recognizes the fact and is glad. For out-back they love their King.

When his old chestnut horse wins upon the township track there is no owner who receives such an ovation as he, not one section of the public only but all men are his friends and all men let him know it as they stand up upon the fences and the rough bush-stands and cheer with all the rough heartiness of western men.

When, in royal person, he drives his own four-in-hand into the show-ring, the four white-faced browns stepping proudly as befits their rank and use, it is a wild roar of delight that goes up from the crowd when



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