

"The shades of night were falling fast, when, sans coats, sans collars, but with our blankets skillfully rolled up like horse-collars, and swung in colonial fashion over our right shoulders and under our left arms (our Jewish friend kindly showed us the way), two unhappy outcasts slunk by back streets out of Melbourne.

CHAPTER II—ON THE ROAD—HE WOULD AND HE WOULDN'T BE A BARBER.

We did not get far that night. A continued course of noctes caenaque deum—exercise limited to "doing the block" in faultless attire, in those unexceptionable tight-fitting habiliments once the envy of every Collins street swell, now the property of a dirty Jew—was not calculated to bring us into good training, and we had made but very few miles out of Melbourne when we were fain to unburden ourselves of our swags, pull off our heavy Cookham boots, and prepare to pass our first night sub Jove. We lay down in a paddock supposed to be grass, but burnt to the color of a ploughed field, and as we had paid for our lodgings before we left, slept let us hope, the sleep of the just; at any rate, Frank did, but my couch was an ant-hill, and their kind attentions, added to the unceasing barking of the dogs at a neighboring farm, forbade all rest to me.

Hot as the night had been, a cold dew just before dawn chilled us to the marrow, and we quickly rolled up our blankets into swags, somewhat "tokening" of the "new chum," and started on the road to Castlemaine. First, however, we counted our possessions, and found in our joint purse the grand total of seven shillings and sixpence, chiefly in fiddler's money. Then we made mutual vows that we would stick to each other through rough, through smooth, and never either of us take a billet unless the boss would take us both together. "Together we sink, together we swim, Jack," said Frank "You, as a new chum will probably have some difficulty in obtaining work. I shall get it easily; but never mind, I'll stick to you through thick and thin." Ah, Frank, old man, how long did your words hold good? I refused a good berth the third day out of Melbourne, to help a mineral-water manufacturer at 15s a week and my "tucker," because he wouldn't take the pair; but by the time we reached Castlemaine it was each for himself with you, and the devil take the hindmost. And now a few words as to my mate. A very good-looking fellow he was, but not nearly so good looking as he thought himself. The son of a clergyman of very good family in one of the home counties, he had been sent out to New Zealand as a cadet on a sheep station, and was going on steadily when his father died, and being of age, he inherited his share of the few thousands the

old parson had laid by for his family. To cut his station even before his letter of credit had arrived, to knock his money down in Melbourne, Sydney, and the "Island," was only colonial; and to do him justice, he did not simply wallow in the mire, like so many of "the old colonial school," but took his run of illegitimate pleasure with all the gentlemanly taste of a refined voluptuary. He had come to the last £100 just before I met him in Melbourne, and had begun to think it was time to pull up. So he inserted the following advertisement in the Argus: "£100 bonus—A gentleman of good birth, position and appearance, will give the above sum to any one who will procure him permanent remunerative employment."

This handsome offer only brought three replies. One was from a company starting to fit out a vessel to get birds' nests from certain islands (for the Chinese, who make soup of them), asking him to go with the vessel as supercargo, and take a sixteenth share in the venture. He was always seasick, and hated the sea, so this was thrown aside.

The second was from a new building society, offering him the secretaryship, if he would take shares to the amount of £100. A friend told him that if the building society got such a windfall as £100 it would infallibly wind up, and where would be the permanent secretary.

The third was from a widow lady, to join her in boiling down mutton. This looked like business, though possibly matrimonial. He called on the lady, and a pretty little widow she was, and when she had seen Frank she was quite ready to enter on a life partnership. So far he would not go—a boiler-down, a tallow merchant, and even a lover he would be, but a husband, not for Joseph!—and so, after several meetings, in which they talked more tender nonsense than business, negotiations were broken off. "If only she had not dropped her h's, I might have come down to Mrs. Shandler," said Frank to me one day, "for she was pretty enough; but fancy being addressed 'Dearest 'ubby, 'ow; I dotes hon you?'"

Finally he had joined me in mining specs, with what results, the reader knows, and now he had no expectations beyond a dreary life of awful dull monotony in the bush as a shepherd or stockman, varied with the annual run down to Melbourne or the nearest town to knock down his check; at least that was his first idea, and very gloomily we tramped along the burning track. We bought a loaf at a little shop on the road, and some strong cheese and this was our daily food all our journey.

At first I carried the bread, he the cheese, in our swags under our blankets close to the sweating skin. What a state our "tucker" was in at sundown! I could eat my bread; but not his cheese. He

swallowed his cheese with a relish, but could not stomach my bread. So, wiser grown, we bought and ate, in future, on the spot, and very hungry we sometimes were before we reached a blissful spot where we could buy, borrow, or, with the rights of an Australian swagger of early days, insist on "tucker."

From some rising ground we looked back on Melbourne. There lay the pleasant city, there the forest of masts beyond, and Hobson's Bay stretching far away into the distance. As Lot's wife might have looked back on the cities of the plains with a hankering after their pleasures—sinful and delightful—so we looked back, and then strode manfully forward under the scorching sun. Onward, onward, onward, day after day, striking off a little ever and again to some farm and asking in vain for work. Lying down at night under some huge gum tree, wakened every morning by the eerie cry of the laughing jackass, as one bird would start into its wild laughter close to us, and another and another would take it up till it faded away with an echo in the far distance. Surely no bird in the universe has such a cry as this. It is like the mocking laughter of Holy Writ; it is as if uncharitably and unhappy spirits were jeering at their fellow sufferers on earth. One evening, more tired and footsore than ever, we drew near Castlemaine. For nearly a mile we had passed rows of wooden shanties on our left, diggings, many of them worked out, on our right, when, after a long silence, my mate broke out with a bright idea,—“Jack, have you noticed, we've passed houses for over a mile, and shop, but not one hair-cutters? I'll start one.”

“But can you cut hair?” said I.

“No,” was the prompt reply, “but I can shave.”

I smiled a sickly smile, but never a word spoke I.

“I'm dead beat,” said Frank; “let us put up at the next shanty; we've got a job or two left.”

We entered a tidy-looking little inn, with the sign of “The Welshman's Home,” and a kindly, homely-looking woman welcomed us.

“Are you Welsh?” said she. “All Welshmen on the swag pay us a visit, and there's a whole colony of Welshmen just round here.”

We could only say that we had not the honor to belong to the land of bards and roasted cheese, but were two swaggers, hardish up, and begged to be allowed to shake down, and we could just pay for our supper. What a kindly soul she was! We asked for water with our bread and cheese, and she gave us a foaming tankard of ale apiece; and Frank was moved to consult her as to his grand project of starting as a hair cutter.

(To be continued.)