

AN AUSTRALIAN BUSH FIRE

And the Terrible Devastation Which Followed in Its Wake.

Abe Saunders Sees His Earthly Possessions Licked Up by the Flames Only His Family Left.

A blistering heat that drove the fowls, with their beaks gaping, off the burning ground into the shelter of the slab hut. A scorching, withering heat that had made sapless hay of the grass in the paddocks and reddened the foliage of the gums and the stringy barks like the blaze of a bush fire. A heat that had sucked up all moisture and marbled the land with cracks of shrinkage and turned the water holes into mere mud baths, while the distant creek had nothing but its brown flag grass and dry swamp bed to show where the water had run.

About the homestead the few cattle still alive hung with their heads stolidly over the slip rails, refusing, in spite of all driving, to seek again for the sustenance it was impossible to find. The framework of a horse, his head between his legs, and as much in the shade as he could get on the lee side of an old ironbark, stood impassive and motionless. All round the horizon a dirty haze of smoke melted into a yellow veil of fog covering the sky.

Abe Saunders was down at what used to be the creek trying to draw out his last milking cow from the place she had bogged in a vain effort to find water grass.

Abe hauled and strained at the rope, his shirt and trousers clinging to him with sweat. The beast kicked an unplanned feebly, its little strength quite gone, and after two hours' work it was more firmly bogged than ever.

"It's no good," said Abe. "I must get help. I'll go up the gully for old Mason and his tackle. If we lose that cow, what will the children do for milk?"

Wearily he turned to go, when the sound of a "Coo-ee!" turned him sharply about.

"Coo-ee!" he shouted.

A little pause, and again the cry echoed:

"Coo-ee!"

"It's Mary," he said. "What the devil's up?" It was a good three miles to the ridge; but, like a wallaby with the dogs in full cry, he sped over rock and gully back to the homestead. Long before he got there he heard a strange roaring in the air, saw black, belching clouds over the tree tops and felt a fierce rushing furnace breath.

The bush was on fire.

With the energy of fear he dashed along. There was the clearing, with Mary at the house door still shouting at intervals. Even as he came up the red storm was upon them. In mad frenzy he seized the two children, one under each arm, and, shrieking to his wife above the din of the fire to bring the baby, he rushed to the center of the plowed paddocks. There they crouched panting. The children were howling, the baby was crying and Mary was sobbing. The man said nothing. He watched the fire.

Would the house escape? There was 50 feet of spare ground all about it. But the air, so calm a minute ago, was now a roaring hurricane, traveling at racing speed over the ridge. The tea tree scrub melted before it, and the bush trees remained in its rear only as black and burning trunks. The fence had caught; the flames licked it up daintily. The shed with his cart and harness, were and were not while he looked. A piece of burning, stringy bark, whirled by the wind, settled on the shingles of the house. The woman moaned and pressed the child closer to her bosom. The man's face was drawn in agony.

The house was burning, the work of his own hands. How many months of weary sawing and splitting had its shingles and slabs cost him! He thought of it all as he stood there, helpless and half suffocated. In less than a minute the flames were shooting out of the doorways and windows, and a loud report was followed by the fall of a side of the house. It was the explosion of his powder flask, hung on the wall.

Through the open framework they could see the bed, the tables, the chairs all blazing one after another. The spirit of the man revolted.

"Look, Mary!" he cried. "There goes the cradle I made for the kids." And as he spoke the aspect of his face changed. The limit of his suffering had come, and, like an old time victim of the rack, he began to laugh. A hollow laugh, weird and terrible.

"That's a good joke, Mary! The farce is ended—all over in one act! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're mad, Abe," said his wife, shrinking from him with a great dread in her eyes. "Don't laugh like that. It's horrible!"

"Mad, my dear! That's good. Ha, ha, ha! Say I've been mad, the most confounded lunatic in this blasted, blistering country. To slog and belt for ten long years to make a home of our own, to clear land, to fence it, drain it, plant it—and all to make five minutes' bonfire! Yes, I've been mad—stark, staring mad—but now—ha, ha, ha! I was never so sensible in my life!"

"See how the cradle burns, Mary. It was a bit of she oak and worked like a watch. Don't it look pretty now? They might be silk curtains, all those flounces round it! Why don't you laugh, girl? It's a great joke. Look! The roof is falling in! It's as good as fireworks. Hold up the kids; let them laugh. It's all the same price. Ha, ha, ha!"

But the woman replied nothing, frightened, staring at him. The children screamed.

The driving sheet of flame had long gone by. Skirting the plowed ground where they stood, it had left the bare surface an untouched blank in its ghastly funeral trail. Only three stumps, posts and fallen branches smoked and smoldered here and there. The man stood motionless till morning. But the four charred corner posts remained of his home.

"Let's see the play out," he said. "Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

The fire was raging many miles farther onward when Abe Saunders, taking the two children by the hand, led the way down the track to the main road. His wife dragged wearily after him, the baby in her arms, looking back from time to time at the smoking ruin.

The group passed on the road, where the red dust blew in thick, choking clouds that shrouded them from view. But long after they had disappeared there sounded the wail of the children, the moaning of the woman and loud above all the mirthless laughter of a broken hearted man.—Exchange.

Small Salmon Pack.

The shortage of the salmon pack in more southern waters and the unlimited demand have made it possible for Alaska packers to fix their own prices on the pack for 1900, and they have fixed a price somewhat higher than that heretofore prevailing.

A late New York dispatch says: "Representatives of the Alaskan Packers' Association have fixed prices on the 1900 pack of Alaska salmon as follows:

"Horseshoe—A trial brand, \$1.20; and other labels, \$1.12½. Against these figures, however, a concession amounting to 2½ cents per dozen is made on all straight lots of 500 cases or over of one brand which can be shipped immediately, and of which the expense of holding until the arrival of other brands will be spared the association. The buyer is to be given the full benefit of this saving, as all salmon in the quantity named will be billed at \$1.17½ for Horseshoe and \$1.10 for other brands. These figures are based on one dozen one pound cans, showing the price to be between 11 and 12 cents per pound.

"No prices have been named on sockeye, medium red and pink salmon. "Estimates as the probable shortage on the entire coast vary considerably, ranging from 600,000 to 1,000,000 cases below the pack of last year.

"As to the actual shortage figures are, of course, not available, the returns from the various canneries not being complete."

Creek News.

J. Viney, who owns a store at the lower ferry, has purchased the Adams hotel and took possession Tuesday.

Miss Jessie Larson, of 7 Eldorado, has been visiting with friends in Dawson the past few days.

D. H. Gray and family, of 43 above Bonanza, leave for the outside this week. Mr. Gray goes to Fresno, Cal., to resume his old position with the Home Packing Company.

Twenty-seven above Bonanza, one of the N. A. T. claims, was shut down last Monday to give Chief Engineer Wilkinson an opportunity to replace the old lining and cylinder in the big pump by new ones.

H. F. Wright, of 12 above Bonanza, returned from Seattle Tuesday, after an absence of six weeks on important business matters.

Gus Buechler and Jessie Palmer, of 4 Gay gulch, have been drowned out for the second time. They are now running an open cut to the last drift.

J. Scharlich and family, of American gulch, left for San Francisco Tuesday.

C. H. Higgins, who left for Kentucky last week goes there to take charge of a string of horses and a fortune left him by the death of a rich

relative. Mr. Higgins will return in the spring for the body of his brother, George B., who died and was buried at Grand Forks last fall.

Mr. Geo. Huey, of Chechako, had the pleasure of meeting his wife and two children, who came to Dawson from their old home last Monday.

Grand Forks is having a building boom. More buildings are being erected than at any time since '98.

A. Garvie dedicated his immense barn last week by giving a dance on the second floor. From 10 p. m. until morning the building was crowded. Everything was free and everybody had a "hiyoo" time. It was a regular "barn stormer."

The latest novelty on the creeks is the man with the silver horn. The beautiful music emitted from this silver instrument is so entrancing as to draw men and women from every direction to the spot, who buy his wares irrespective of cost. The next in order will be the organ grinder and his monkey.

J. P. Park, of 3 below Bonanza, had an experience with the poundmaster last week which neither will soon forget, especially the latter. J. P. sat in one of the prominent restaurants eating his dinner, with his dogs quietly lying at his feet. Just as he was about to enjoy his "floating island" and "moon-light on the lake," he felt that something was missing. He looked about and lo! his two big dogs were gone. Instinctively he hied himself to the dog pound, and there found his canines making frantic efforts to jump the fence. This so infuriated J. P. that he attempted to break down the gates, but without avail. When the poundmaster appeared upon the scene, J. P. promptly knocked him down, when the watcher of dogs rose to his feet he was treated to a second dose. Then there was a mad rush for the town station. A policeman was met on the way. Each told his story. J. P. accusing the poundmaster of stealing his dogs and the latter showing the big welts on his head, declaring that he should at least be paid for the largest of the lot. The matter was finally adjusted at an "all mixed drinks 50c" resort. J. P. getting his dogs and the dog man a swelled head.

T. H. Potter, of 34 above Bonanza, was in town on business Saturday.

Benson Evans, of Chechako, is in town seeing some of his friends off on the Eldorado.

Frank Rupert, of Chechako, left for Circle City last week.

S. F. Cook and wife, John Quigg and Hugh Todd, all of Chechako, left for the outside Saturday.

The Yukon Gold Fields Co. has sued the road contractors for \$4000 damages for tearing up the flumes and otherwise damaging their property on lower Bonanza.

He Snot to Kill.

An excited individual was observed yesterday rushing from a front street store with a double barreled shotgun in his hands. He was seen to hastily throw two shells into the gun while running towards the bank of the river.

A crowd immediately gathered and followed the excited man, who was evidently bent on murder. When he reached a point near the floating bathhouse, the crowd was horrified to see him take careful aim and pull the trigger. Both barrels were shot simultaneously, the concussion starting others to the scene.

The shooter was then observed, with his smoking gun, to run hurriedly down the street where he disappeared. Upon investigation it was found that a fowl deed had been committed, for out in the water a lonely duck was seen floating in the water with feet extended upwards appealing to heaven for retribution upon the ruthless slayer. The duck was garnered in by a bystander. It was a teal.

Building Continues.

Apparently there is no cessation in the work of putting up new buildings in Dawson and a number are being started every day. The saw-mills are all rushed with orders and are running overtime to supply the demand for building material. All the carpenters in the city are busy at good wages and the prospects are that they will remain busy during the remainder of the working season. Dawson is just now enjoying a season of unprecedented prosperity and activity in the matter of substantial improvement.

H. E. Ridley Married.

Henry E. Ridley, of the law firm of Pattullo and Ridley, telegraphed his partner from Toronto on the 30th of last month that he was to be married to a Miss McDonnell of that city on the 1st inst., and that himself and wife might be expected to arrive in Dawson about the last of the present month.

Mr. Ridley is well known here as a young attorney of ability and a citizen of worth. His many personal friends will be glad to extend a hearty welcome to himself and wife.

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