

How long it lasted, I do not believe that there was one of us could tell. The troopers had come down in force, attracted by the maddened run-away horse of their comrade, broken away from our party at the first brush in which he had been shot down. They gave no quarter and got none. But they had all the advantage of their enemies' surprise, and of their own preparation, and the issue was never for one moment doubtful. Only when the field had been fairly won, there were other wounded men lying there, and Death itself had paid a second ghastly visit to the scene of the ambushade.

By and bye came the lull of complete victory, and we were unbound to render thanks for our liberation. The captain had, with the majority of his followers, saved his neck for the nonce, but not without a sharp struggle. He had been badly cut over the head with a sabre, and his bridle arm hung limp and useless, as he managed to gallop free into the open. There was, of course, a hot pursuit, but an ineffectual one; for the horses of our friends were jaded, and incapable of pressing the fugitives, who rode, as they well knew, for life and death,—the freedom of the bush or the Bathurst gaol.

With some men, at least, the perceptive faculties become confused in the presence of strong excitement and imminent peril. In my case it was not until I came, the last of all the prisoners, to be unbound, that I recognized the hand that cut the cords.

It was Fred Lockyer's!

Through the whole memorable day, this had been the incident most amazing of all. And those who read this feeble and imperfect narration of the adventure, will not wonder if he who essays to write it had no words in which to greet the startling rescue presented in such startling fashion.

Lockyer, looking gravely into my fascinated eyes, was the first to break the bewildering silence. "I am glad, Mr. Haywood," he said, "to have been of the party who have saved you. It was the merest chance that I and my friends"—two other civilians who had accompanied him, and were then busily attending to the wounded, and covering those for whom all other ministry was unavailing—"happened to fall in with the troopers just before we met the horse, that brought us down in time. His own blood and his empty saddle let us know that there was something wrong close by, and he fell of his own accord into line, and made the guide to where we found you, just in time. I owe you a return for much kindness, and I am glad to have begun to pay it back, even by instalments."

Still I could not answer intelligibly. There was something that choked utterance, beyond a few incoherent murmurs; and then I was standing alone, and still stupefied, while the line of march was being