

in the same way as he would tell the overseer that the rations were short. He quietly pulled his gun from the loophole, saying: "I've only one more pill to keep our skins whole. We'll have to trust to Doctor."

Mat's dog Doctor was partly a Smithfield and partly a Newfoundland. He had been trained by him to all kind of tricks. Amongst others, he repeatedly took written messages to the station when attached to his collar, and I presumed this was the object Mat had in view when referring to him as capable of procuring relief.

"Mister, d'ye think you kin rite a message in the dark, or by the moonlight, askin' the hands at the Homestead to come this way? No time to lose; I see the darkies dodging round the hut. Bill, knock away the low part of that rotten slab behind your bunk. Here, Doctor!"

The message was scrawled, and fastened to Doctor's collar in little less than a minute, and the noble brute, who seemed to know the danger, stood anxiously trembling till the preparations were completed.

As I before stated, the hut stood close to the stream, and from the rear the bank sloped abruptly towards the water. The American for the first time seemed affected. When the men fell under our shots, there was not the slightest change perceptible in his voice; but the few words he spoke to his dog were broken and singularly soft. I'll be sworn there were tears in the man's eyes. Everything being at last prepared, he spat on the dog's muzzle, held his head close to his cheek for a moment, and then pressed him quickly out of the hole and away down the shelving bank.

We listened anxiously for a time, and then there arose a wild jabbering for a minute; the next instant we detected a yelp of pain.

"My God," said I involuntarily, "the Doctor's speared."

"No, he arn't, darn ye!" snapped Mat. "He's jist touched, an' no more. He'll do it."

"He must be quick, then," said Mr. S—; "the black devils have struck a light somehow, and they're going to burn us out. Look!"

Our eyes were now intently scanning the movements of the savages through the little loopholes, and we saw a flaming brand whizzing through the air, and scattering sparks in all directions. It fell on the stringy bark-roof above our heads. Another and another came, but it did not appear to us that any of them had taken effect.

By this time the black-fellows had gathered courage. Believing that our ammunition was expended, many of them had left cover, and might be seen flitting about like spectres. They had kindled a fire some distance off, and across its glare shadows were constantly falling.

The firebrands were thrown no longer; some fresh mode of attack was preparing. Our suspense continued for a long period (nearly half an hour), during which time not a word was spoken by any of us; our sole dependence was the Doctor; and if help did not soon arrive, it was certain we could find no escape from the demons who were trying to compass our destruction.

"Now, look slick," whispered Mat. "I see their game; they're goin' to give us fits. How's the moon? wall aback of the hut, I guess. Bill, stick your cabbage-tree on a pillow, and hold it at the open window when I tell you. I'll jist go out, and bid them good-evening. Don't bar the door after me, mister, but when I show them my heels, open it. You see we can't spare an ammunition."

While speaking, Mat unbarred the door; he slipped out noiselessly as he concluded the sentence.

Through the slabs he said to me: "D'ye see that divel with the blazin' log? When he gits close to the wattle, open the window, and prop up the pillow. Take care of their spears yourself!"

As soon as the black-fellow came to the point indicated, I opened the long little shutter with some noise, and held up the dummy. In a moment a dozen spears passed through the aperture, and I let the window fall, as though one of us was mortally wounded.

There was a wild shout without. At this time

the black-fellow who carried the log was within a few yards of the hut, and I heard Mat preparing for his move outside. Looking out as quickly as I could, I had just time to see his tall figure emerge beyond the shade, as the butt-end of his gun fell crashing on the unprotected head of the fire-bearer. The door was opened as Mat turned; it required but one or two bounds to take him to the door, but the savages were too quick for him with their spears. He staggered through the entrance, and fell just as he cleared the threshold.

"Caught in the thigh, I guess," he exclaimed, as he slowly recovered himself, and painfully struggled to the window. "Don't mind the spear," he remarked to me as I approached him: "it's better as it is, till help comes."

"If it ever does," thought I.

The American's sortie, I believe, had rather a disastrous effect, for the black-fellows seemed to conclude at once that our ammunition was all expended, and they thronged round the hut without caring to shelter themselves.

In a short time the crackling of flames on the roof put an end to all our doubts. The hut was on fire, and there was nothing left for us but an attempt to dash out and clear the aborigines. I proposed this, but Mr. S— would not try it without Mat, and underneath the blazing roof, with clubbed guns, we grimly awaited the final attack. The American's rifle rested in the loophole where he had first taken up his position.

"There's the worst of them," Mat said, looking along his weapon; "he's coming up with a log to stave the door. He'll never do it," and our last bullet brought down the ringleader.

There was consternation and a hurried consultation. After a lapse of about five minutes, the whole force of the besiegers rushed shrieking on our little garrison. A moment's surge outside, and the door fell back as Mr. S—'s gun swung on the crowding savages with terrific force, felling two of the foremost like oxen. I remember a wild struggle with our guns and fists. Mat and the squatter towered above their opponents like giants, fighting with terrible energy. Two black-fellows had forced me to the ground; one was shortening his grasp of the spear to drive it through my body, when I felt a gush of blood spouting over my face and chest, just as the savage fell on me mortally wounded. Then I remember a hurrah outside, and the crackling of rifles.

"That was a good back-handed blow, boss," said Mat faintly; "I guess the cook's got another squeak. D'ye hear that? Hooryay! Knowned the Doctor I'd do it. Darn ye for a cuss!" said he with renewed energy; "take that," and I heard the dull sound of another blow, and a low moan of pain as the station-hands rushed in.

Mat was terribly gashed, but not mortally wounded. Not so Mr. S—; he fainted as Mat spoke his few words of praise.

We were all conveyed to the home station. Mr. S— was buried before the week was out. Mat soon recovered; he is now one of the wealthiest men in the colony. I—well, I have a large scar across my breast.

THE MISTLETOE.

ITS HISTORY AND MYSTERY.

THE mistletoe—an emblem of friendship and social happiness—is employed at Christmas time to announce to all whom it may concern that animosities are at an end, and that peace and goodwill with all the world are to usher in the new year. The custom of "kissing under the mistletoe" is very ancient, and is founded on the legend of Balder, and Phæbus Apollo of Scandinavian mythology.

The tale says that Balder once dreamt a dream, a dreadful dream. He dreamt that he was going to die, and was so frightened, that he started from his bed, mounted the swiftest cloud-steed, and rode full gallop to his mother. His mother's name was Friga, the Venus of Valhalla, very beautiful, and brimfull of the milk of love.

When Friga heard the dream, she was no less

alarmed than her son, and instantly told her husband, the great god Odin, the Jovo of northern deities. What was to be done? Odin evidently thought that the dream of gods did not rise from indigestion, but were sent by the Fates, as hints and warnings of what were going to weave in the web of destiny. So Odin issued his royal ukase, or proclamation, commanding "everything that springs from fire, air, earth, and water," to appear without delay before His Serene Majesty of Valhalla.

Every tree and river, every stone and star, every beast and bird, the air that stirs up the gales, the clouds that launch forth lightning, the fire that burns, the sea that wrecks, and all the host of heaven obeyed the summons. The mighty Odin sat on his cloud-throne, under the shade of the mighty ash, the branches of which, as every one knows, cover the whole universe. The River of Wisdom and the River of Foreknowledge flowed at his feet, and on his shoulders sat the raven and the dove to whisper in his ear, whenever his godship halted in knowledge. It was an awful moment, and no doubt every living thing trembled as the king of gods commanded the assembly, on pain of his immortal vengeance, to do no harm to a single hair of his well-beloved son Balder. Loke was there, the spirit of wickedness, whose was the empire of the earth; and old blind Höder the God of Death and Darkness. They heard the injunction, and dared not disobey; but Loke, who hated Balder, cast upon him a most malignant eye, and resolved to evade the injunction if it could possibly be done.

It seems that a cart and horses can be driven through a divine Act of Parliament as well as through a human one, for Loke soon found a flaw in Odin's prohibition. The mistletoe springs not "from fire, nor yet from air, nor yet from earth, nor yet from water;" it is a parasite, and grows on the oak or apple-tree, but its roots never touched the earth; so the mistletoe was not called to the "storting," and knew nothing of the injunction.

The envious Loke, having ripped from an old oak a branch of the epiphyte, carried it to his cave, and cut into an arrow. He dried it hard in the fire of Hate, and dipped it with the poison of his own spittle; then going to the blind god, asked him to make a trial of his new weapon.

Höder, all unsuspecting as he was, felt the new "quarrel," and Loke, placing him so as to face his enemy, told him to set it to his bow-string. He drew the bow as only gods can draw, and shot. Twang! went the string, and whiz! went the arrow, swifter than thought; it struck the Peace God, who instantly fell dead on the pavement of Valhalla. The blackness of darkness now covered the whole world. Peace was killed by the God of War and Death. Peace was killed through the instigation of Wickedness. Peace in heaven was no more. Peace would be seen on earth no more. Balder was dead, and Loke had outwitted Odin.

Friga was inconsolable; the gods and goddesses moved about Valhalla like Niobe, all tears; the trees wept gall, the stars in their courses wept; heaven and earth would have been drowned in tears, if Balder could not have been restored to life. But with the gods nothing is impossible, and the spirit of vitality was breathed once more into his nostrils.

The mistletoe was now given in charge to Friga, and was never to pass from her power "till it touched the earth—the empire of Loke." No wonder, then, the Druids gathered it so carefully; and you will readily see why it is suspended on our ceilings, to place it beyond the region of Loke—the enemy of love and goodwill.

Odin now made a decree that a bunch of mistletoe should be hung in Valhalla, and that whenever any of the gods or goddesses passed under it, a deity of the opposite sex should give the kiss of peace, and this is how the custom of kissing under the mistletoe had its origin.

This pretty fable is an allegory. At the fall of the year Balder dies—that is, the beauty of vegetation dies—and the sun goes downward to the lower regions of the world. Loke, the Spirit of Wickedness, induced Höder, the God of Death, to kill the year. All Nature mourns the loss; but the gods revive the sun in the year, the sun is