

surrounding each hole was a heap of the brick-coloured earth that had been thrown out; hardly a particle of anything green was to be seen. The hills on either side had been completely denuded of trees, and the stunted grass was parched by a scorching sun. The innumerable sun-baked heaps, the gum-tree stumps, the deserted pits, the ruins of a few wretched bark huts, half a dozen broken windlasses, and the silence that prevailed where there were so many evidences that but a short time before there had been heard the busy hum of thousands, all conspired to give an air of desolation to the valley, and to cast a gloom over our spirits which we vainly endeavoured to shake off. We occasionally turned aside from the road and looked with less of curiosity than of dismay into the pits which seemed to us to be bottomless; and when at last we reached our camping ground near Pickford's store, on Friar's Creek, about ninety miles from Melbourne, we concluded, as we pitched our tent and boiled our tea, that we would be much better at home again; to sink one of *those* holes seemed entirely out of the question. A good night's rest, however, had a wonderful effect upon us, so that when next morning we opened the tent door and let in the bright sunshine of an Australian summer's day, a good deal of the gloomy feeling disappeared; and though desolation was still a marked feature of the scene, (for these were deserted diggings, and their best days were long past) yet even the few tents and huts in sight on the hill sides, and a dozen or so of miners standing by rude creaking windlasses, and raising "washing stuff" from the pits of mysterious depth, cheered us greatly and made us determine to go to work at once; but in the first place we were obliged to procure licenses, without which we were liable to a fine for being on the diggings. And so, as I have duly recorded in my journal,—“Feb. 7., H. and C. have gone to the Commissioner's for licenses. We saw the mounted police scouring the country this morning in search of unlicensed diggers and feared they would visit us, as they passed quite close.” My “mates” found their way to the office in a neighbouring gully, and soon returned with the required documents, which were good for a month only, and cost thirty shillings each.

The gold license, (a crumpled specimen bearing marks of having been carried in a digger's pocket for some time, is by me as I write) ran as follows: “No. 73. The bearer L., having paid the sum of one pound ten shillings on account of the general revenue of the colony, I hereby license him to mine or dig for gold, or exercise and carry on any other trade or calling on such Crown Lands within the Colony of Victoria, as shall be assigned to him for these purposes by any one duly authorized in that behalf. This license to be in force until and during the month of February

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