

Gold Hunter's Adventures.

The day was hot and our swags seemed to weigh a hundred pounds before we got through the 12 miles of Black Forest and reached Five Mile Creek, where we halted and refreshed ourselves with a pint of milk apiece. Here we were joined by a couple of run away sailors who, like ourselves, were bound for the Jim Crow Digging, so we trudged along in company, our sailor friends enlivening us with songs and stories, which had a tendency to lighten our loads. Beyond Kyneton, the road to Jim Crow branched off from the Bendigo road, and being a new road cut through the forest and consequently shady, we got along more comfortably, occasionally stopping for a smoke and a bit of rest. Near Jim Crow we came in sight of Mount Franklin, and the signal staff on its summit, erected by the late Sir John Franklin of Arctic fame. Near here is Parker's Station, where there are always a number of Aborigines, who are under the protection of Mr. Parker, who supplies them with food and clothing at the expense of the Government. Some of these natives were dressed, or partially dressed in European costume, but the majority stick to the conventional possum rug, which is conveniently laid aside when they happen to be doing anything with which it interferes, which is not very often. The country here is of a rolling character, with rich looking valleys lying between the ranges, and if it hasn't by this time been turned over by gold mining, has no doubt been converted into grazing stations.

Towards evening we entered the Jim Crow diggings at a place called Wombat Flat, where we were fortunate enough to run across a Mr. A. M. Wills, an American with whom I had some previous acquaintance, and who gave us a shake-down in his store, placing a vacant tent alongside at the disposal of our sailor friends. Next day we took a look round the diggings, and finally decided to try our luck further up the creek or flat, where the sinking was only about 9 or 10 feet deep, and dry. We purchased our mining outfit, and that night bunked in with another American friend, who had formed one of the prospecting party who had been operating in the vicinity of Gisborne. He was keeping a restaurant, or boarding house, and as there was a supper and dance on the programme for that evening, we were invited to join the party, which was composed largely of Americans, their wives and female acquaintances. The male portion of the guests were dressed in the height of fashion, that is, the more aristocratic of them, were decked out in a white "biled shirt" and red silk sash, while those who were minus the "biled shirt," concealed the flannel one under a plaid or tartan jumper, the variegated and bright colors of which would have created envy in the heart of a Cree Indian. A loose flowing black neckerchief operated as an offset to the silk sash. A couple of fiddlers furnished the music, and the earthen floor which had become pretty well hardened by daily application of ashes, made a very good dancing floor, except where the contents of somebody's tea cup or beer tumbler had been deposited, which frequently led to the introduction of a sliding step. The dances being principally polkas and schottisches, a mutual support enabled each couple to keep the perpendicular. At the supper table my next neighbor, not being familiar with the mysteries of the carving fork, succeeded in nearly amputating one of his fingers, and his wife insisted on my handling the piece de resistance. Those familiar with a digger's appetite, will readily understand that my office hadn't much of the sincere about it. Everybody, however, had come for a good time, and they had it. There was just enough of the female element to check any ill nature or ill-natured remarks, amongst those who had acted as though they thought that "the cup which cheers but not inebriates," wasn't exactly the right kind of tipple on such occasions. Take it altogether

we had a very jolly time, and Rose and I got acquainted with some of the digger fraternity whose information enabled us to strike a paying claim the first time. Next morning Rose and I got up at as early an hour as could be expected, and shouldering pick and shovel, wended our way in accordance with the directions furnished us the previous night. Here we met two of our supposable acquaintances, who, after a few minutes chat, pointed to a shaft which had been sunk some four or five feet deep, adjoining their claim, and which they "kalkulated" must be a tolerable location to start on. So at it we went, and by night had bottomed the shaft, striking on a greasy blue clay bottom. We had only time to wash a pan or two of the gravel overlying the clay, but the result was satisfactory, amounting to about a couple of pennyweights of coarse shotty gold. We had pitched our tent, that morning, and as we had to gather boughs for a bed, not having time to rig up stretchers, it was dark before we got our tea made and our mutton chops fried. While we were engaged in satisfying a tolerably sharp appetite, our digger friends came along and sat down for a chat, and a smoke, and finding out that we were Canadians, expressed their intention of "seein' us through." One of them said "Gol darn it, I'm half Kanuck myself. I used to live on Lakko Champlain, an' many's the time I used to boat it into Canada along with the old man." They told us they were making from one to two ounces per day, and as it wasn't a hard place to work, they were going to stick there as long as it held out. They had all the claim they could hold, and if we kept dark about it, they said we might be able to get another claim apiece after we had worked out the present ones. Rose felt quite encouraged by their conversation, and the show of gold we had struck in bottoming the shaft, and next morning was up bright and early, and had the kettle boiling for breakfast. We got to work before our friends did, and I tried to instruct Rose, as well as I could, how to tunnel in from the shaft, without disturbing the gravel which overlaid the bottom, as the gold bearing wash dirt was not more than three or four inches thick. When he had stripped off three or four feet, I would go down into the shaft, and with a light driving pick and fossicking knife, take up the wash dirt. In going over the clay with the knife, looking for pockets, it was amusing to see Rose's eyes stick out, when I occasionally scraped out a nugget as large as a good sized bean, which being firmly imbedded in the clay, stuck as close as if it was hitched onto something larger, and it was only one of its excrescences which we had laid bare. After cleaning up the bottom, I would go off to wash out the gold, while Rose would strip off another section of the drift. The result of our first day's washing was over an ounce and a half of nice coarse gold, worth about thirty dollars.

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Sherbrooke, March 7th, 1885.

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Crown Land Ranger.

Portland, Me., Nov. 16, 1887.

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