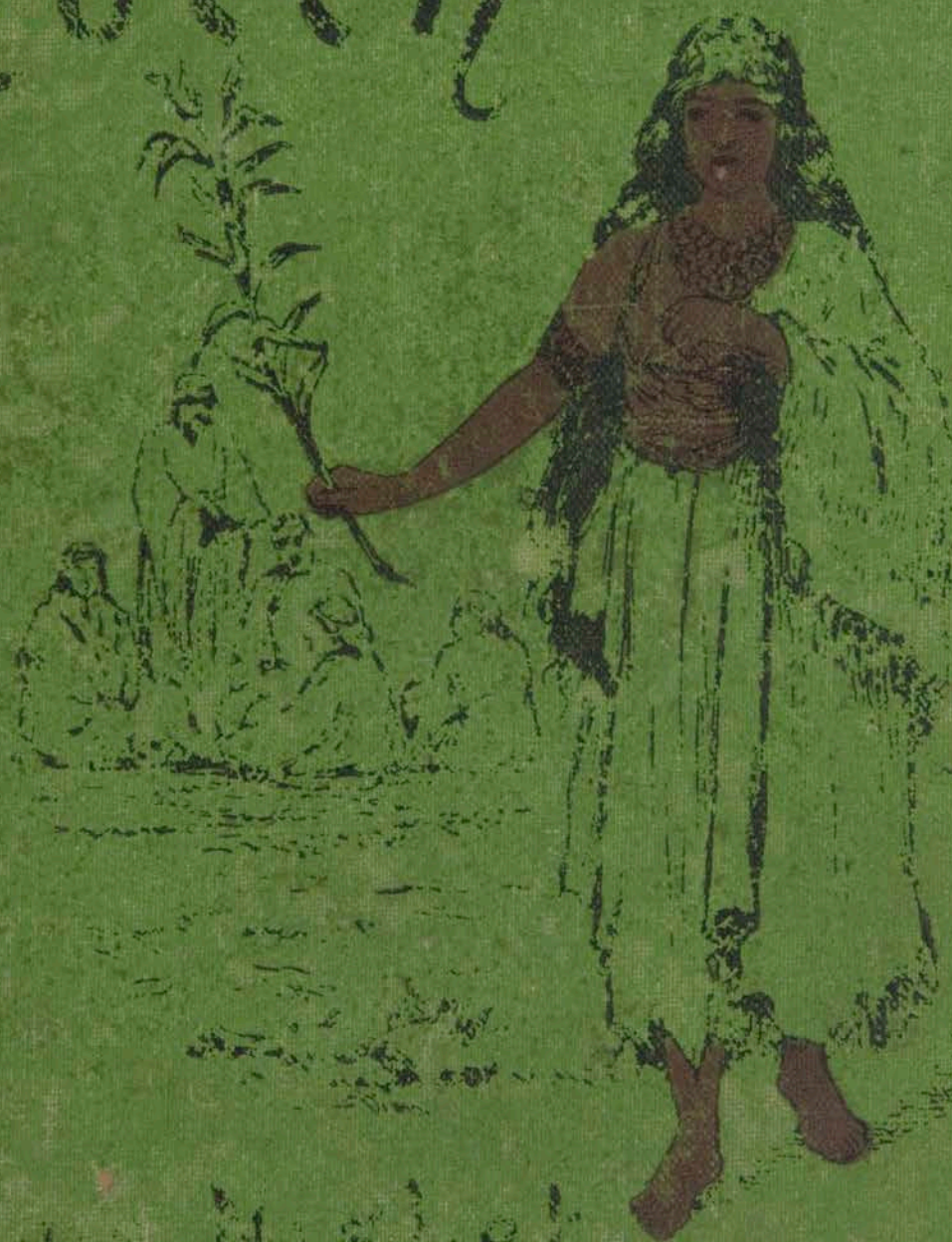


The Savage Queen



Helen Mabel
author of "The Savage Queen"

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THE SAVAGE QUEEN.

THE SAVAGE QUEEN:

*A ROMANCE OF THE NATIVES OF
VAN DIEMAN'S LAND.*

BY

HUME NISBET,

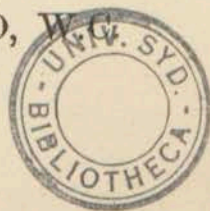
AUTHOR OF

"BAIL UP," "EIGHT BELLS," "ASHES," "THE BLACK DROP,"
"A COLONIAL TRAMP," ETC., ETC.

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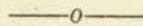
Dedicated
WITH PERMISSION
TO
ANDREW LANG, Esq.,
POET AND CRITIC.

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P R E F A C E.



IN the following Romance I have brought together a few well-known or historical characters of that land of beauty and tears, at the time when Van Dieman's Land was regarded as the Hades, rather than the Garden, of Australia.

The events herein narrated are supposed to occur during the year 1813, although in reality I have had to compress the actions of several years into the one, but that they actually occurred as I have written them may be proved by a glance through the early records of the colony; and, as I had the privilege of knowing many of the same jailors, convicts and flagellators who inspired Marcus Clark to write "His Natural Life," besides the chance of studying the land, with other opportunities, added to a natural taste for diving into the habits of the natives, I trust that my work may

be regarded as realistic, and, to a certain extent, historical.

Mathuna, the Savage Queen, was a real personage, and her tribe once a power in the land; but, alas, as my friend John Ruskin writes, "Our Christianity, with its gunpowder and brandy, has totally swept them all away."

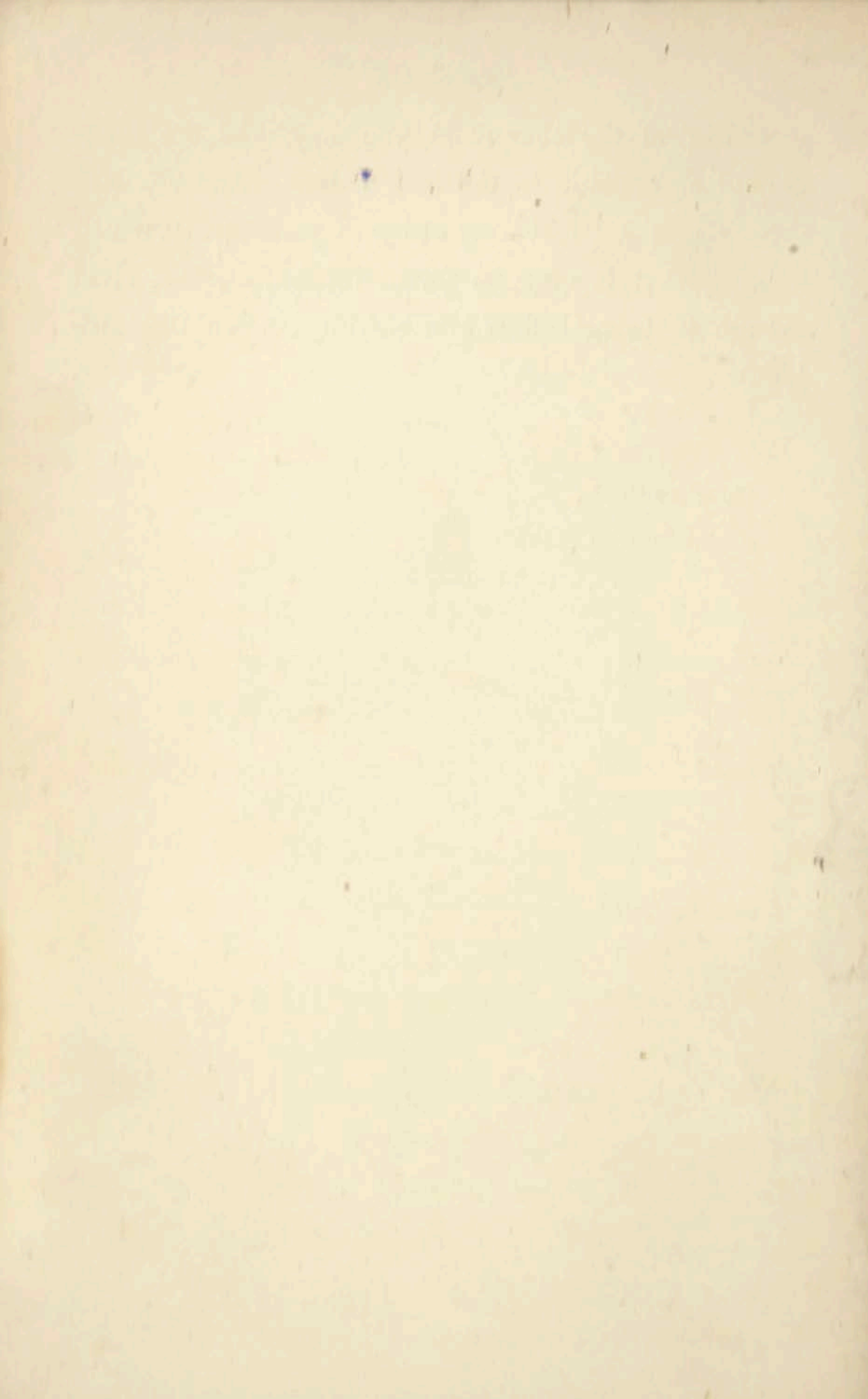
Governor Davey, with his eccentricities, blunders and kindnesses, I trust, has been sketched in faithfully, with some of the men who helped him to *rule* over this purgatory. John Whitehouse, the native Protector, may be recognised under his assumed name, with Michael Howe and Mosquito, the bush-rangers.

Samuel Biddle, the woman-hater, with his love troubles, may not be known to many, nor that "sarpint," Miss O'Callighan; still, that does not matter. Believe me that they have lived, and that it may be my proud privilege to relate at some future date their wedded life.

Miss Lymburner, Captain Wilmott and Wilfred Tregarthen, with Ignatius Taggart, may also be taken for granted as type-shadows which, artistically, I required to finish my picture. The distance, and middle-distance, with descriptions of natural scenery, are rigidly drawn from Nature, so that, along with

a number of the characters, you may take the background as realistic to the last degree. And so, with these remarks, I leave my story to your open verdict, trusting that it may be found interesting and vivid enough to bring before you *old* life in Van Dieman's Land.

HOGARTH CLUB,
34 DOVER STREET,
PICCADILLY.
1891.



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THE SAVAGE QUEEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE CURSE OF THE ALBATROSS.

"DON'T you go a-killing o' that 'ere albertross, young feller, if yer wants ter take an old seaman's advice."

"But why should I not shoot it, if it pleases me to do so?" inquired Mr Wilfred Tregarthen, cabin passenger, as he turned round, with his fowling-piece at the rest, towards where the old ship boatswain, Samuel Biddle, stood.

"'Cos it's onlucky, that's why," replied the gruff old bos'un sullenly.

"Oh, confound luck and superstition!" uttered the gentleman lightly, turning about to watch the bird circling round the bows with large sweeps of its wide wings.

"There is a better reason why you should not shoot that bird, sir, if you will allow me."

It was a quiet voice which uttered the words, and a little commonplace steerage passenger who came forward from the crowd that surrounded the gentleman, Mr Wilfred Tregarthen. Again he paused in his aim, and waited courteously on the explanation, all the while the albatross, unaware of its disputed doom, whirled round and round, every stroke of its wings bringing it more into focus.

"Yes, Mr Whitehouse, and why do you think I should not shoot it?"

"Because you have no right to take a life, be it bird, beast or man, Mr Tregarthen," said John Whitehouse impressively.

"Well, that is a better reason than the boatswain's, Mr Whitehouse, although it does not interest me very greatly."



any man who holds fast to grace to hate the devil and all his sarvants, which be women."

"What a horrid old man you are; take me below, Mr Tregarthen;" and with a shudder Kate Ambrose placed her hand within the arm of Wilfred Tregarthen, and drew him away.

"Ay, go below and think on what I've told ye; it won't be long afore ye find out how true it is," shouted the old man after them as they receded, without shifting from his position. "It's a-coming as fast as it can come, the curse of the albert-ross—a-coming on the wings o' the wind. I warned Peter Wilkins, but he would listen to the sarpint's voice, and never saw land, as I told him he wouldn't, after he had done it. Ugh! I hate 'em all."

"Wake up there, you blasphemous old woman-hater, and pipe up the hands; don't you see there's a gale coming on?"

This from the mate, as he lurched forward and aimed a kick at the boding seer which landed him on his face; then, as he scrambled to his feet, cursing deeply, he recognised his superior, and changed his tone.

"Ay, ay, sir! we're in for a storm; I was just telling 'em about it."

"Well, pipe the hands—all hands on deck; we're too near land to waste time speaking about it."

"Land ho!"

The call came down from the main-top man on the look-out, and brought not only the seamen out of their bunks, but most of the passengers as well.

Land ho! was, without exception, the most interesting sound which these wearied passengers had heard for the past seven months; for, in this year of grace 1813, it was not uncommon for vessels to take eight months between England and Australia.

So upon this gloomy forenoon, with the opaque grey sky in front, and the heavy clouds rising from behind, the passengers who were free crowded the decks, poop and waist, and leaned against the bulwarks, looking eagerly over the bottle-green waves to that portion of the horizon where they expected to see the land appear, visible from the mast-head, but as yet hidden from those on deck; while the Captain and his mates stamped about, yelling their orders, garnished with many startling interjections and adjectives, as was the time-honoured custom in those days, to be translated with many more forceable additions by the piously inclined but awfully profane old

and evil-looking boatswain to the men, who hurried from their bunks, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes with their unwashed hands, or clambered up the shrouds towards the sail-crowded yards.

The *Stirling Castle* was a good old ship, which had made many a voyage to Van Dieman's Land, laden with cargo, convicts and free passengers. Seven months ago she had left London with a consignment of one hundred and fifty male prisoners, fifty female prisoners, forty marines to look after them, matrons, officers and passengers—those in the cabin mostly connected with Government—and a small sprinkling of steerage emigrants, who had received assisted passages, with the promise of land and appointments when they landed. Altogether, the *Stirling Castle* carried about four hundred souls, half who had forfeited all legal right to call their souls their own, and the other half having the right to control the enslaved bodies.

So they had all lodged together in that prison ship, encircled by the unbroken line of waters, passing through the usual incidents of a convict vessel during the long months at sea—mutinies and insubordination suppressed by a few stern examples; fever, which had considerably thinned their ranks; scenes of vice and depravity which it is wise to pass over with discreet silence: enough to say that the crimes which had condemned the hopeless convicts to this floating hell seemed like innocent freaks when compared with the blackness which now besmirched their guilty souls.

In the hold it was unutterable misery; in the steerage, discomfort enough to fill out an after life-time with shuddering repugnance to the sea; even in the cabin, where the favoured resided, it was sufficiently uncomfortable to render that cry of "Land ho!" into the sweetest of music. They were all on deck with the exception of the criminals, who had been battened down below, and who were steaming and fainting as they crowded together, inhaling the stagnant, hot and poisonous atmosphere.

On deck, however, it was cold enough, for they were well to the southward of 43 lat., and in the middle of a Tasmanian winter, so that they were glad enough to cover themselves with what warm clothing they had at their disposal, and stamp about to keep themselves tolerably warm.

The wind was freshening every moment—a cold, damp wind, which seemed to penetrate through the warmest seal-skin mantle and thickest overcoat. As they stood on the poop, none of the passengers looked backwards to the gathering

darkness ; it was going to be a storm, and as the experienced sailors glanced seaward, they knew, from the leisurely method of its approach, that it would be a long and stiff gale, and made their preparations accordingly. They did not share in the general desire of the inexperienced to see the land ; it was too near already, and from the Captain down to Johnny Ducks, they would willingly have put about and run a hundred miles away from it, for they knew what kind of gales these Antarctic gales were which came up from that mysterious southern pole, the giant waves which would soon—too soon—be rolling over that uninterrupted waste of water, and dashing themselves and all within their grasp to pieces against those iron-bound coasts. There are no cliffs so rugged and merciless in the whole globe as are the cliffs which guard that prison island of tears and groans, Van Dieman's Land. But the ignorant passengers were excited, and happily impatient to see the rocks which represented home for the future to them ; the ladies stood with their tresses blowing from their nettings, as if they were eager to hail the land of their adoption, with cheeks rosy and eyes sparkling as they spoke about it and speculated upon it ; the gentlemen, with their cigars and pipes alight, trying to control their feelings under the usual philosophical calm and apathy which men of the world love to affect, as if an earthquake couldn't disturb their serenity, yet with furtive glances to the still unbroken sea-line.

"There it is at last, uncle," cried out Kate Ambrose eagerly, with a clutch at Major Quinton's arm. "I have been the first to sight land, Aunt Sarah !"

"Yes, you generally manage to get the first and best of everything," observed her aunt in an icy tone, at which Kate abruptly dropped her uncle's arm and looked down to the deck awkwardly, but without replying.

Major Quinton, who was in command of the military on board—a tall, grave-looking, distinguished man of about forty-five—flushed a little, as he glanced at his wife reproachfully ; then turned quickly to the Captain standing near, with the usual remark,—

"Whereabouts are we, Captain Carrodus ?"

"That is South West Cape, now showing itself, Major, and I wish it was a good fifty miles farther away."

The Captain spoke in a gloomy, discontented tone as he pointed over to where the land now began to show up from the sea, hazy and dark ; and then he turned to give some fresh orders to his mates.

It was as yet only a faint low-lying blotch upon the slate-coloured sky, stretching away on either side, and diminishing as it receded until it dipped below the sea-line; but towards it the sea-birds were driving in dense clusters, and with hoarse cries from the blackened waste behind.

"You had better get below, ladies, and enjoy dinner while you can," said the second mate, coming forward wrapped in his oil-skins. "The rain will be on presently, and then it will not be so comfortable on deck."

"Is there any danger, Mr Clark?" cried out one of the ladies, a pale-faced young woman of about twenty-five, as she glanced up with a timid look in her rather small dark eyes into the laughing blue eyes of the second mate, and touched with her gloved hand his oil-skin covered arm.

"I hope not, Miss Lymburner, yet we are in for a blow and a wet jacket before night."

"Help me below, I feel so cold and frightened at this darkness."

Saul Clark, the second mate, glanced towards Kate Ambrose expectantly, as this timid young woman clutched his arm. He looked as if he would have liked her to take his other one, but with a demure glance at the handsome Wilfred Tregarthen, Kate laid her hand within his arm, and led off towards the companion way.

"My luck as usual," muttered Saul to himself, as he followed with the timid, slender, and pale-faced governess, who looked so childlike and so trustingly up at his honest Saxon face as they went together.

"I fear I am a great trouble to you, Mr Clark," she observed softly. "I am sure you would rather have taken Miss Ambrose; I am so sorry that I did not notice it in time."

"Not at all; not at all," muttered Saul impatiently.

"Ah, but I know better, and yet she is so fond of Mr Tregarthen, and he is so handsome, isn't he? They make a pretty couple, don't they, Mr Clark?"

"Very; hang the woman with her chatter," he breathed vengefully under his beard.

"Thank you so much, Mr Clark, for your assistance. Ah, what a trampling they are making overhead; are you sure there is no danger? for I am so frightened."

"No danger as yet, at any rate, but I must get back to my duty; there comes the steward, therefore enjoy a good dinner while you can."

He was hurrying away roughly, when the voice of Kate Ambrose arrested him.

"Mr Clark."

"Yes, Miss Ambrose?"

He stopped, with one foot on the companion steps, and looked at her with a hungry glance.

"Are we going to have a storm?"

"Yes, Miss Ambrose."

She came over to where he stood, and, laying her hand on his sleeve, whispered softly,—

"Saul, come down as soon as you can, and take me up to see it, will you?"

"Yes, Miss Am—Kate."

With a fierce clutch at her fingers, he hurried up the steps, while the dark eyes of Jane Lyburner followed his motions sombrely.

CHAPTER II.

LET US DIE TOGETHER.

MISS JANE LYBURNER did not use the correct term when she described Wilfred Tregarthen. He was more than handsome, for in features and shape he was as perfect, and indeed bore a striking resemblance to the Apollo Belvidere. Of medium height, every motion was easy and unconscious grace; few men gifted with his extraordinary attractions could have depended less upon them, for although as careful in his dress as a gentleman by birth and a man of wealth should be, he was not in the slightest degree a dandy; in manner he was courteous and deferential always; kind, or at least suave to all who approached him. He was the only male passenger who had not come out in any official capacity; and his reason for taking this long voyage had been that he had seen all the other portions of the world excepting Australia, and, liking an ocean life better than the tame dissipation of society, took this mode of passing away time as the most agreeable.

With such a perfect face, which might have been created in ancient Greece, it was difficult to fix an age. His eyes were clear and unclouded as summer blue skies, complexion fresh and soft as a young girl's, the short, crisp, Greek-like curls

were bright golden, and as he shaved clean, he would have looked very youthful but for a certain grave sweetness which great experience in the world and amongst men only can give to a man. Both male and female passengers owned that he was the most beautiful object they had ever beheld, and the most utterly unconscious of his own loveliness. He never presumed either upon his wealth or position, but seemed able to extract enjoyment from every one; and yet, in spite of these good qualities, no one on board felt very greatly interested in him.

He owned frankly that, to his knowledge, no woman had as yet loved him, and all through his life he had made no intimate friends; this did not trouble him much, for he had never felt the want of either love or friendship, that is, exclusive friendship; he was contented with his life, with breathing the air and seeing the changes of Nature; he enjoyed the society of men and women, and appeared as perfectly at his ease amongst the convicts and steerage passengers as with his own equals; his digestion was perfect, for he never went to excess—smoking just a little, but never drinking anything stronger than water—not that he disapproved of these luxuries from any principle, but because he did not like wines or spirits, and never did or took anything that he did not like. If an angel or a god had become incarnate, he might have been expected to have gone through life in the same calm, irresponsible way in which Wilfred Tregarthen went. If with the men, he listened to their stories, and laughed as heartily as the others did when the story was a witty one. He amused them also with the kind of smoke-room yarns which men like to hear, but while other fellows told of their own personal experiences, he only told of incidents in which he had taken no part.

“Have you never had any adventures of that sort yourself, Tregarthen?” asked Dundas Pilkington, the lieutenant of marines, one night after listening to him.

“Never,” replied Wilfred calmly.

“Oh, gammon! a splendid fellow like you; why, you could beat us all to sticks if you tried.”

“But I never cared to try, it seemed such a waste of time and energy to me.”

“Dash it! you are too perfect altogether for us ordinary mortals.”

When Nature is exact in her proportions, she is passionless and pitiless.

He formed a beautiful picture as he sat at the table, with the deep shadows of the varnished oak panneling around him,

and the subdued light drifting in from the port-holes, and seeming to concentrate their cold rays about that golden head until they became almost like sunshine. He had this effect of sunshine always with him—a brightness of eye and clearness of complexion which, with the golden yet soft lustre of the hair, carried a bright gleam into the dingiest corner.

Kate Ambrose was also of the blonde order, but with just a little more irregularity of features, less lustre, and more suggestiveness of womanly softness; the eyes, large and grave in repose, were of that warm blue-grey which can lighten up and sparkle with fun or sarcastic humour, or grow humid with emotion, but are more often seen shaded by the long lashes, or looking out earnestly. She had lately lost her widowed mother, and been compelled to accept the protection of her father's sister, Sarah Quinton, and also accompany her to this home.

Major Quinton had accepted the charge of this lovely orphan very willingly, and so would his wife have done had her niece been a little more homely in her appearance. Possessing one of the truest and most loyal of men, Sarah Quinton was the victim of a sateless and reasonless jealousy, which rendered herself and all who came near her miserable. Behind her dark eyes, the demon lay for ever on the watch, like a tiger in a deep jungle, ready to pounce upon unwary looks and words, making the place where it lay and gorged on its unsatisfying food foul with the *débris* of unforgotten feasts. She loved her husband madly, was beautiful enough in herself to keep the love of any man, if she had only been contented with her own charms, or vain enough to believe in her power over her husband; but, as it was, she existed upon devouring flames, watched only her mirror for the signs of an age which did not come so fast as she expected, torturing her husband with her remorseful fits of tenderness, or filling him with fury at her causeless jibes, until the love which he could not help giving her became like a constant notched sword in his heart. On the *Stirling Castle*, this pair were the most wretched couple, who ought to have been the happiest.

Jane Lymburner was her lady-companion, chosen by her because she was the plainest and most lady-like of the applicants who had sought the post. She made a good friend and confidant, and afforded no food for the demon, for the Major held as little converse with her, and disliked her as much as he could dislike any woman.

The other occupants of the cabin are easily described,—

Miss O'Callighan, a maiden of uncertain age, sharp-visaged, and a trifle vigorous, who, having unsuccessfully knocked about the world in search of a husband, had at last bethought herself of Van Dieman's Land as the most likely spot in which to get what she wanted; she had money enough to purchase the desired article, and had reached that time of life when a woman is not very hard to please. As she often confided to her pet poodle, if she could not induce one of the hard-up officers to take her in consideration of her bank account, she might purchase the gratitude of one of the bondmen. However, between her own biting tongue and her disagreeable, pampered poodle, she had, during the voyage, gained for herself the universal dread of the other passengers.

But the coquette of the ship was little Mrs Rose Carrodus, a tiny, fragile-looking woman of about thirty, soft as a white cat; like Jane Lymburner low-voiced and deprecating (these two gentle females, by the way, hated one another as only gentle, low-voiced ladies can hate). All the single men had been through Mrs Rose's little white hands during the voyage, sighed over in the moonlight nights, while her easy and confiding husband kept out of her way; and each of her victims had emerged from her claws more hurt in pocket than in their affections, for she was a most avaricious little flirt, who took sudden fancies to whatever trinkets her admirers chanced to have upon them at the time. She was winding up the voyage with a goodly number of souvenirs, and was fairly well satisfied with the result of her exertions.

Captain Carrodus was very proud of his little wife, and delighted to think of her as such a universal favourite. He did not know, of course, that the men called her the "little shark," neither would he have cared much. Rose showed him her presents, and laughed with him at the givers. She had always been a lucky person at getting gifts, both ashore and afloat; nothing came much amiss to her net, and her husband felt, when he heard her laughing at the other fools, that Rose could look after herself, and therefore was contented and easy in his mind.

It was not a very lively tiffin on this day, for the vessel was beginning to toss about with those sudden thuds which the rising waves gave to its sides, and which generally sent the dishes flying from the table into some one's lap when least expected. Miss O'Callighan asked the steward for potatoes, and received over her and the white poodle, then sitting on her lap, a plate of scalding soup instead, which forced the

little pampered fiend to leap with extra agility from its seat, and its mistress to leave the table with shrill anathemas at the unfortunate servant.

Lieutenant Dundas Pilkington, the white-haired young marine, started grinning at the maiden's mishap, when his untimely mirth was suddenly extinguished by the dish of potatoes which Miss O'Callighan had asked for. This he received full in the face, dish, steward and all, who, clutching wildly to save his balance, brought the retreating soup-drenched virgin along with him and the lieutenant to the floor. The potatoes had been boiled in their jackets when they left his hand, but when the two rose from the deck they were mashed up and transformed into potato-plasters, which stuck to whichever part they had been forced upon.

Miss O'Callighan got the worst of the accident. She was a thin, angular, colourless woman, and had been sailing round the table towards the ladies' quarters with as much dignity as it was possible for a thin angular woman to command when in an exceedingly bad temper, and under the influence of a rolling ship; she descended with a wild shriek, and struggled up from the chaos, speechless—not so much with indignation as from the exploded potato which had jambed up both mouth and eyes; blindly she struggled from the forced embraces of the plebeian steward and callous lieutenant, and aimlessly gropped with outspread hands about, sputtering forth the remains of the vegetable which she had asked for and received in such an unceremonious manner.

Miss Ambrose, however, came to her aid, and led her into her cabin, when the stewardess took her in hand, after which the young lady returned to the table.

Indeed it was a decided failure that tiffin. They could not talk, for overhead the din of trampling sea-boots prevented all chances of hearing one another's voices; they could hardly see each other, for the sky outside was becoming dark with those heavy clouds, and even when the lamps were lit, the beam struggling with the dying day was too uncertain to be able to grasp lights from shadows; they could not eat, for although the food had been brought, yet each dish had become a will-o'-the-wisp, which danced before them and dashed away even as they spread their hands to clutch at it.

Mrs Carrodus and Mrs Quinton caved in the first of the company left, for Mr Pilkington had sneaked out as soon as he could safely call his legs his own. Miss Lymburner, who strove with all her might to remain—for she had heard a little

of the conversation which had passed between Saul Clark and Miss Ambrose, and desired to hear the rest—had to give in and retire; she had great strength of will on ordinary occasions, but even Napoleon became irresolute and limp before the demoniac influence of sea-sickness. So with a pallid face and eyes more sombre than ever, she followed the example of her employer, and of her enemy, Mrs Carrodus.

Was Kate Ambrose sick? No, something in Saul's manner drove that sensation from her heart. There had been storms before during their long voyage, when she had succumbed and been like the other lady passengers, but this storm now coming on seemed out of the ordinary run of storms.

"We are in danger, uncle, are we not, now?" she asked, as she drew near to the Major, who was sitting moodily at the table, holding on to the tray.

"I don't know, Kate; they are making row enough upstairs for a regular shipwreck. It is a dangerous coast, I believe, but the vessel is a good one and well manned. I am going up for a smoke."

"I'll come with you, uncle."

"No, my girl, I'd take you gladly, but it's better not; go with Mr Tregarthen."

"Are you going on deck, Mr Tregarthen?"

"Yes, Miss Ambrose; I'll take you up if you like."

"Thank you."

It was no easy task to fight their way up those heaving companion steps, for the ship now rolled and creaked fearfully, yet Wilfrid Tregarthen managed to keep his charge from butting against the sides, taking the hard knocks himself, and laughing brightly as they came into contact.

"Are you not afraid, Mr Tregarthen?" asked Kate, as they struggled up.

"Not of the wind or the knocking about; what is there to be afraid of?"

"Ah!" The blast caught Kate's hair with a rough clutch as she put her head out of the companion way, and tore it from its coil, switching it over the face of Tregarthen like a silken whip, and winding about the beard of Saul, who stood near them.

"Miss Ambrose, don't venture up, it is too rough here," the mate cried, as he rushed forward and took possession of her shoulders.

"But I want to inhale the ocean breeze, Mr Clark," she exclaimed, pushing up and seizing his arm.

"It will be a hurricane presently, and the decks will be washed with the waves."

"But I'll have you near me, won't I, Saul?" she whispered, with her mouth at his ear.

"Oh, Kate, Kate! do you want me near you?" replied the sailor hoarsely.

"Always, Saul, in fair weather or rough; have I not told you that I love you? Why are you not content?"

"That man, Tregarthen, he is for ever with you, and he is like a god."

"Think of him as a god or what you like, Saul, only don't be jealous of him; you are a man, and I have given you my heart; be jealous of some one like yourself."

They were standing under the lee of the mizzen-mast alone, for Wilfred Tregarthen had left them, and was now speaking to the third mate. They could hardly see each other, for the day had become like night, yet her sweet rich voice reached his heart and vibrated there, and her warm breath passed over his ear.

"Oh, Kate, do you really love a worthless, insanely jealous fellow like me?" he breathed back into the face so close to his.

"I love a worthy man who cannot yet understand what he has got; but tell me, darling, will we get out of this danger?"

"Trust to me, Kate, I'll save you even although the ship goes down."

"Is it so bad as that, Saul? Don't be afraid to tell me. I want to be a sailor's wife, and I must know the worst; tell me, dear."

"Look, dear, we'll never weather that point of land unless by a miracle; we all know it who have been at sea before; the wind is against us—slowly driving us in—in, despite our efforts to keep away."

"Yes, Saul, dear; how long will it be before it comes?"

"Perhaps an hour, perhaps less; the Captain is trying to make up his mind to tell the passengers."

"And the poor convicts?"

"They have gone down to liberate them; in five more minutes they shall all be at liberty."

Saul Clark was holding her tightly to him and pressing against the wind, so that she could not feel its full force. Nothing could be heard, although the men were still trampling and rushing about, while the Captain shouted through his speaking trumpet and the bos'un whistled and blasphemed.

An awful wind, that shrieked and howled through the shrouds, while the great waves rose whitely against the blackened sky and drove them onwards.

The deck as yet was dry, for the vessel was racing before the waves, and all the efforts of the two men at the wheel seemed unavailing to turn her even one point from the wind; she was rushing straight onwards with bare yards, and paying no attention to her helm.

To those unaccustomed to the sea, it did not appear to be a very extraordinary gale, only the sailors knew the hopelessness of their position. The vessel rode freely, and the waves bore her swiftly onwards.

“Saul, kiss me, and tell me you love me more than all the world.”

“My darling.” Their lips met in a long warm kiss.

“Now, Saul, let us die together.”

CHAPTER III.

“GOOD LUCK, MATES, TO US ALL.”

THERE was not a comfortable spot within or upon the *Stirling Castle* during this rough day. In their berths the ladies rolled and were pitched about incessantly until those poor victims became like helpless logs. In the saloon, the two stewards tumbled amongst the evading dishes, or bowled one another over, but could get no further forward with the clearing up of things. The lamps swung and smoked, the air became stuffy and nauseous with the closed port-holes, the rich velvet couches which lined the walls seemed out of place in the general scullery-like disorder of soiled tablecloth and upset dishes, while the mirrored panels seemed a mockery as they reflected the sickly visages of the two subordinates and the general disorder of scattered knives, forks, spoons and mixed food.

On the poop, those passengers who preferred that quarter to the cabin had little peace, for they were constantly jostled by the sailors who were hurrying about getting ready the life-buoys and the boats. No one had as yet spoken the warning which might have scared them into madness. The Captain

was waiting until the moment became more critical, for they were still some miles from shore, and, until all hopes had passed of rounding those pillar-like cliffs, he delayed alarming his passengers. Major Quinton, with his officers and marines, had gone down below to the convict quarters to talk to the prisoners before liberating them; in another half-hour they would be all free, and in the presence of that mystic liberator, death.

Kate Ambrose and her plebeian lover, Saul Clark, stood together behind the mast, his arms about her, her head upon his breast. He had secured a life-belt round her waist, and could do no more than wait, with a heart beating fast and furiously under that fair head, for never before had she been so bold in her recognition of him; the fear of her aristocratic aunt and uncle had hitherto forced him to conceal his growing love, but now they might soon be all equal, waifs of the ocean.

"You're wanted, Mr Clark," shouted the hoarse voice of Samuel Biddle. "The old man is axing for ye, and I myself may be bold enough to say that this ain't exactly the time for the ship's mate to be a-connudging with a worthless young sarpint."

"Hold your jaw, you old savage, and fetch me a line."

"To tie the viper up, I s'pose," muttered the old bos'un wrathfully, as he staggered away. "Heave her overboard, I would, if I had my will, the female Jonah; there you be, sir, with the line."

"Let me fasten you to this mast, dearest, until I can return. I'll come soon, my darling, and you'll be safer here."

"Must you leave me, Saul?"

"For a moment, only for a moment; be brave, my Kate, I shall not be long away."

"Thank you, Saul; do with me what you think best."

The rain was now driving savagely from the other side of mast as he fastened her to it, with his oilskin round his shoulders, then, with a kiss upon her cold lips he left her, to attend to his duty. As she stood there with her long hair streaming from her, and drenched through, she could see the coast looming out darkly through the mist, with the white surf leaping high in front, great columns of rock shaped like fluted pillars, and the sea-line beyond. The ship was getting nearer the extreme point every moment, with hardly a possibility left to escape it, but yet with a chance that they might do so which made Kate watch the rocks with fascinated horror.

The boatswain passed between her and that awful sight on his way to the main-deck. He glared into her horror-dilated eyes, putting his own face close to hers so that she could feel his tobacco-impregnated breath wafting over her mouth, while his yellow fangs were bared as he snarled,—

“This is all your doing, female Jonah—you brought this storm on to us ; and when we are knocked to bits against these rocks, and the poor souls of the unsaved are washed down to everlasting torment, it’ll be you as murdered ’em ; now, think on it, an’ try to cheat the devil, your father, if ye can by praying while you stand there. Yah ! there’s a lot of souls will roast this blessed night as is shivering with cold at this minute, and all through you, mind that, you young sarpint.”

He snapped his evil, red-lidded eyes at her viciously, and then passed from her side, muttering a string of oaths. Next instant she heard his hoarse voice, from the main deck, yelling awful imprecations at the men.

In the steerage, confusion reigned supreme, for the boatswain had just put his head inside, and informed the inmates that they were all going to be wrecked, drowned and everlastingly doomed, except that there were any soul as yet desirous of salvation ; if so, now was the blooming time for a death-bed repentance ; while as for their blessed bodies, there was no use thinking any longer about them.

Told with his characteristic candour and abruptness, the effect was electrical. Women and men rushed out to the deck, with wild shrieks and howls, their sickness forgotten in the awful horror of a sudden death. Here, with one or two exceptions, they flung their arms about the busy seamen, and held on to them with frantic clutches, retarding all work, and getting, generally, abused for their trouble.

The exceptions to this wild panic were John Whitehouse, carpenter ; Peter Brown, the burly blacksmith ; and a blind man, who had paid his passage out, by name Ignatius Taggart.

John Whitehouse has been already described as an undersized and somewhat insignificant-looking man of about thirty years of age. His face was thin and sallow, and deeply pitted with small-pox, with huge cheekbones, dark eyes, and a shock head of very dark brown hair. On board the ship he had been nicknamed the Missionary, from the fact that he took every opportunity of going amongst the convicts, and speaking to them about religion ; yet, despite his commonplace appearance, insignificant size, and want of education, he was gener-

ally listened to and liked by all classes, the secret of his success being a magnetic influence which he spread about him. The convicts, after a first jeer or two, had come to stop their curses when he was near them, and generally became affected at his words. Whenever he could make an opportunity, he did so, to speak of the subject which appeared to engross his life—religion. His creed was the creed of humanity, his constant text the great brotherhood of man.

He had never married, for he felt himself to be a man with a mission, and believed as much in his destiny as any fatalist could believe. An inner consciousness burned in his deep-set eyes that he was ordained for great things in his Master's service, but what the special service yet was, lay unrevealed in the heart of Time; like Cromwell, he saw visions and dreamt dreams. It had been a voice which had ordered him to leave his native village in Kent, and take passage out in the *Stirling Castle*, and he had followed with implicit trust that voice.

So John Whitehouse, the commonplace-looking, dark-bearded visionary, stood beside his friend, the blacksmith, looking calmly over the stormy ocean to that surf-blotched, iron-bound coast towards which they were bearing down.

"It strikes me, friend John," remarked the burly blacksmith, "that this is the hour that we should be saying our prayers."

"I am praying, brother Peter, for the poor souls that may presently meet their God," answered the little man quietly.

"And what of your own, John?"

"This storm cannot hurt me; yonder rocks will receive me safely. I am in no danger, for my work is not yet commenced."

He always spoke of his work as an ordinary workman might speak of a distant job for which he had been engaged.

"What is this precious work of yours, Missionary Whitehouse?" squeaked the high-pitched voice of the blind man, Ignatius Taggart, from where he sat, with his back against the bulwarks.

"I don't know yet."

"Well, that is odd; you appear to be as much in want of your eyes as I am. What the infernal is that beauty of mine squilling about? I can hear her voice above the rest, and I want to get out of this cold blast."

"You are safest now where you are, Mr Taggart, but I'll fetch your wife for you," replied the blacksmith, setting his

broad back against the fierce blast, and lurching over to where the women were now gathered, screaming and retarding the sailors.

"Come out of that, Hannah;" this to his wife, as he caught hold of her, and drew her from the grudging arms of the boat-swain. "Can't you see that you are hindering the men; and you also, Mrs Taggart, your husband is wanting you."

The two married females transferred their embraces from the seamen to the blacksmith, and let him drag them back to the sheltered bulwarks, still keeping up their shrill chorus of shrieks. The blacksmith's pretty daughter, Polly, stayed where she was, however, tightly holding on to the sleeves of a stalwart young sailor. The father looked for an instant in her direction, as if he meant to take her also; then, thinking that she might as well stay with the man who had been courting her all the voyage out, he left her, with a grim chuckle.

"Oh, we'll all be drowned!" shrieked the two women, as he handed them back.

"We may, and again we mayn't, only raving won't mend matters; be quiet, both of you, and let a man think how best to look after you."

"Oh, husbands is no good in a shipwreck; let us go back to the brave sailors."

"Ain't they, though, Mrs Taggart; perhaps not, but give 'em a chance."

"Oh, mine ain't; he'll want me to look after him as well as myself."

"Then it's your duty to go to him, and do so now—there's your missis for you, Mr Taggart."

"Thank you, Peter Brown; come close to me, beauty."

At the shrill voice of her blind husband, Rebecca Taggart stopped screaming, and put her hand into the long fleshless hand which he extended; then, as it closed like a claw round her wrist, and he drew her savagely down beside him, a new terror seemed to be added to her former horror of death.

"What, did my beautiful Rebecca think she could leave her poor blind husband to be drowned by himself? No, no, my pretty one; we must sink or swim together as we have always done. I have got you, my truant blackbird, and I'll take care to hold you to the last."

Perhaps to this shrill-voiced husband she was all that he described her; for love is blind, and her captor was like love in that respect, yet to ordinary eyes neither of them could boast of many attractions. He was tall, gaunt and fleshless

—extraordinary tall when he stood upright; strangely gaunt as he now sat, with his trousers flapping about his long spider-like legs, and his ghastly face peering forward from that doubled-in, hollow chest; his sightless eyes, like the boiled eyes of a cod, were unshaded by any lashes; his hair fluttered in thin lank strings about his hairless cheeks, and were, as was the straggling tuft upon his sharp chin, of a light-red tint; a long, almost lipless, mouth hung open, and disclosed jagged dirty teeth and white gums; his nose was the most formless appendage that ever went to decorate the human face divine. It was a head like the head of a dead lizard protruding from the neck of a badly-dressed skeleton. If the face was disagreeable to look upon, the voice fell upon the ear with something of the effect of a file against the teeth of a blunt saw, high pitched and grating, with a mocking rasp in it which was irritating in the extreme. People could endure Mr Ignatius Taggart only when he was playing upon his violin.

He was a fairly good musician, with an educated ear as to time and tune, and at sea even his monotonous playing had been a boon to the wearied passengers; at other times he was avoided as much as possible, and left to the companionship of his loving or fearing wife.

Had he gone over the world in search of a companion as opposite in nature to himself, he could not have succeeded better. He was over six feet in height; she was hardly four feet—a woman all head and body, with lower extremities so stunted that it was like a libel on limbs to call them legs. As she crouched now beside him, she appeared to be nearly the same height as when she had waddled across the deck clinging to the arm of the blacksmith. It was a misshapen trunk which terminated in that fiddle-like head, for it had a singular resemblance to the instrument that her husband played upon, and which now rested across his legs; two small black eyes like the holes at the sides of a violin, a short flat nose, a mouth like the centre aperture, a chin which measured two-thirds of the rest of the face, and a complexion dingy as a Cremona which had lost its varnish.

The passengers laughed when Mr Taggart called her his beauty, and when he pretended to be jealous of his prize; while she appeared when near him to be powerless and as if fascinated at his mocking cajoling; he never permitted her to leave his side for long.

He had been led aboard by his dwarf wife, and stated that he was going out for his health, and indifferent as to whether

he found an occupation or not in Tasmania, as he had saved enough money to live upon.

He was one of John Whitehouse's proudest triumphs on board, for at the beginning of the voyage he had been a Roman Catholic; but through the arguments of the visionary he had been converted to the faith of the enthusiast, and was now as rabid against the Pope as he had advocated his supremacy before. Nothing delighted him more than to join the tobacco-chewing Samuel Biddle in his oath-garnished declamations against the Scarlet Woman. Against this apocryphal Woman they both united in swearing fervently, for all John's remonstrances could not cure either of these elect ones of this evil habit of clothing their language with strong adjectives; but as regards their opinions of the fair sex, these two godly warriors differed entirely, the boatswain hating them all as "pizen;" the blind Ignatius adored them, or professed to do so, with such unction as an enormous iguana might have shown over some blue-bottle flies had it been gifted as was Balaam's ass.

"Delicious creatures they are all," he would say, licking his long thin lips, "and my Becky is the fairest of the fair. Ain't you, my beauty? and don't you love me, my darling?" to which the fair one would not reply in words, but would listen with her dingy face growing clay-coloured, and her beady eyes hidden by their saffron lids. She did not speak much at any time, and when she did, it was in a low, wailing whine, like the tones of a sickly child.

"By George! friend John, but it is looking serious now; there go the marines."

At this moment Lieutenant Pilkington shouted out as he was passing,—

"You're wanted below, blacksmith, to take off the irons from the prisoners."

"Yes, sir. They are going to set the convicts free. John, look after my wife till I come back, and may God help us all."

Peter Brown's honest, sunburnt face went deadly white as he spoke, and then hurried after the soldiers, for until now he had not realised to the full their danger. The rocks were a good way ahead, and the seamen, as they passed and repassed, had shown little concern upon their face—sailors seldom do in such a crisis; they went about with stolid faces obeying orders, or growling at one another when a huge sea-boot chanced to tread upon a sensitive toe.

But now, as the blacksmith went forward, he could see that their work for the time was over; they were seeking the store-

house, where the purser now stood with chalky face to serve out their allowance of grog, for they were about to take their parting glass before facing the King of Terrors.

How solidly these sons of the ocean now tramped along the deck, with hardly a blanched face amongst them, the rain dashing upon their oilskins and cheeks, and that tempest wind forcing them to lean towards it. They had laboured as long as they could hope to get past that cruel point, but now they were their own masters.

“Quick, Jinks, with that rum, if you want to serve us all. Curse the white-livered lubber; he is wasting the good liquor, and will cheat us if we don’t help him. Get out of that and say your prayers, you land-lubber; I’ll serve out the grog.”

The sailor lifted his foot and kicked the shivering purser into a corner of the store, where he lay with chattering teeth, while the other calmly dipped the pannikin into the bucket which had been drawn and served out to his companions.

“Here’s good luck, mates, to us all; no use mixing the rum with water now; we’ll have that in plenty afore long.”

“Good luck!”

They lifted their pannikins into the blackened sky for an instant, and then gulped down the contents, wiping their mouths with their wet hands, as sailors do after a drink.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRECK OF THE *STIRLING CASTLE*.

WITH a hoarse yell the convicts rushed out of their unlocked prison doors their own masters, free men at last, at full liberty to do as they liked during the few moments left to them before the vessel struck; free to breathe in the howling blast and feel the cold rain against their fevered skins, after their sixteen hours in that close, dark prison-hell.

Like starving wolves they rushed out, the strongest knocking the weakest aside and tramping over them. Then, with fierce, bloodshot eyes, they glared round them at the cloud-bulged sky above and the thundering surf beyond them. They rushed to the spirit store, driving the sailors to either side, and helping themselves, with loud and awful curses.

"Stave in the hogshead, and let us get at it quick, for we've no time to lose."

The Captain was standing close by watching them, but he did not speak, and no one interfered with their actions. The rest were waiting upon the crash, with white faces and staring eyes.

"Hold on by whatever you can catch, passengers; be ready, lads, with the lines."

The sailors, after their drink, now once more gathered about the Captain and watched, as he was doing, the surf which beat like white-wash against those black walls, every fissure and boulder becoming startlingly distinct as they rushed towards it.

Half broad-side the vessel was drifting on, for the men still held fast to the wheel, so as to break the shock as much as possible, and, as they partly turned her about, the bows were caught by the pursuing waves for the first time, and submerged under the high volumes of water; they had tried the anchors without any other result except to get them lost the instant they touched the bottom.

They were helpless waifs in the clutches of the merciless ocean, and it all depended upon where and how they struck whether one human being would be left to tell the tale. If they were sent butting against those gigantic columns, then farewell to hope. The first crash would break up their vessel like matchwood, the second inflow of the savage waves break every bone of the passengers and crew.

What would it be? The Captain watched, and thought it was useless troubling any further about how their doom came, now that they were doomed. He leaned against the poop-rail, calmly looking over the crowd of life on the main-deck, after that warning to them all to hold on, heedless of all the agonised questions which were poured out at him; silent, yet alert, he stood and waited.

They were not half a mile distant from the shore now, but still in deep water, and the advancing waves were lifting the vessel high in air as they bore her onward. She was riding smoothly enough at present, with somewhat of the same sensation to those watchers as if upon the rapids of a waterfall. Seconds became intensified and prolonged as they waited with bated breath. Now each seam and opening of the rocks could be discerned, and what vicious-looking fangs these were which jutted now and again from the white surf; black points protruding from the white spume like the fins of sharks.

Ah! the first shock had come, knocking half the people over, not from the rocks, but from the rebounding wave, which clashed against and broke down the wave that had borne them onwards so smoothly, knocking the feet from the horrified passengers and convicts, and covering the ship from stem to stern in a yeasty smother of foam as it fell back from the rocks into the trough of the sea, and then the ship lay for a moment passive and shrinking violently, as if the loud shriek of the passengers had been torn from its own horrified heart.

Then the next mighty wave heaved along in its advance, and, slipping under the keel, lifted the doomed vessel upon its crest higher than ever. To those who had managed to keep their feet, it appeared almost as if that wave had lifted them to the level of the cliff-top. Then, as it struck, all on board felt as if an earthquake had taken place, while the wave dissolved under them like a mist-wreath, leaving them perched in mid-air.

It was a terrible smash — which left many of them stretched senseless upon the swamped deck, and yet it was not the annihilation which they had expected, for the recoil wave had saved them from the first mad race, and arrested their progress, while the second wave had caught them up too close to the rocks to do the full amount of damage, which, at a greater distance, it would have done. As it was, it had landed the wreck into the jaws of an immense cavern, above the full rush of the breakers.

“Thank God for this great mercy; we are not so badly off as I expected us to be,” piously exclaimed Captain Carrodus, rushing to the sea-side of the ship, and looking downwards.

“Have we a chance, Captain?” shouted the Major excitedly.

“A hundred chances to one if no bigger wave than the last one can reach us. We are wedged firmly within this cleft. It is a miracle, if ever there was one.”

They had to shout at the full pitch of their voices to hear each other, for the thundering surf below them drowned all other sounds. A dazzling whiteness surrounded them, with dense volumes of smoke-like vapour, while the churned waves leaped up and curled over their bulwarks, and along the black recesses of the cavern, rushing out again like boiling milk to meet the next upward spurts—a buffeting conflict that never ceased.

“Control yourselves, ladies and gentlemen, we are safe

enough now while you remain on board," shouted the Captain through his speaking trumpet. "Carry the women below, and leave the decks clear for us to work. Major Quinton, you had best try to secure your prisoners if you can."

A timely order, if it could be executed. To carry the ladies below was easy enough, as most of them had already fainted, so that they were very soon safely placed in their cabins; then the men returned to give what help they could to the sailors and marines.

"What are you going to do now, Captain?" asked the Major, when they were once more together.

"Run as many lines as we can into the cave, and make the ship fast, so that she may not be washed off this ledge should the waves increase, for this gale may be only commencing."

The convicts had heard the order to Major Quinton for their re-arrest, and now drew themselves together, and advanced towards the poop, where the Captain, marines, sailors and male passengers were assembled. As the convicts approached, Major Quinton gave a short sharp order, "Fix bayonets, marines;" he knew that the rain and late submerging must have soaked their muskets, and rendered shooting impossible.

The metallic clash of the bayonets as they were drawn from their sheaths, and fixed upon the barrels of the muskets, reached the ears of the multitude of desperate and unarmed men, for they paused as the marines once again stood in line at the attention, and held a consultation on the main-deck, while the poop-holders, sadly in the minority, waited upon their decision.

It was a band of ruffianly, cut-throat faces for the most part who clustered together, waving their hands and talking excitedly. As the wind screamed round them, and the surf thundered under them, while the staved-in hull lay motionless except for the tremulous vibration; they hung on the edge of a precipice, just at the jaws of destruction, having already passed through such terrible dangers as might have made them all very lenient towards each other.

So thought John Whitehouse as he left his place by the bulwarks, and fearlessly entered the throng of desperate men and women, offering to act as mediator between them and the representatives of the law. Knowing him as they all did, his offer was at once accepted.

"Tell that blooming Major that we won't go back to

prison ; on that 'ere point we are all agreed, ain't we, Mat Tucker ; ain't we, O'Brien ?”

Ned Quigley, as he spoke, turned his blood-shot eyes first to a little monkey-like young man, and next towards a tall, handsome young convict, who stood apart from the mass. He had appealed to the two extremes in that motley gathering of criminals, the smartest ex-pickpocket and the most enthusiastic patriot. Both men nodded silently, and then Whitehouse went forward alone as ambassador.

“ Well, sir ; what do the prisoners say ?” demanded Major Quinton sternly. “ Will they submit, and return quietly to their prison ?”

“ No, Major Quinton ; and I think that you have no right to ask them to do this. Ten minutes ago you gave them their liberty without conditions when you all expected death ; now that we have escaped that first danger, and God by a special miracle has given them their lives, it is your duty to keep your word, and leave them the liberty which you have already granted to them.”

“ But consider their numbers ; they are four to one of us ; why, they will be our masters in no time if we let them remain unchained.”

“ They are our masters already, Major Quinton, and are in a position to make their own conditions ; therefore, if you will restrain from being the first to shed blood, and permit me to negotiate with them for you, I will undertake that they do no harm.”

The Major and Captain consulted for a moment together, and then the former once more spoke.

“ So be it, Whitehouse ; I resign my command for the present of the convicts to you, and will hold you responsible for their good conduct. Ask them to help the sailors to make the vessel secure.”

John Whitehouse paled for a moment at the heavy responsibility flung at him, and then, with a burning look in his dark eyes, went back to his desperate charges, while the sailors started with their ropes to scramble ashore.

Ned Quigley was the most dangerous criminal on board, a low-browed, large-jawed ruffian of immense prize-fighting proportions, who had come to be regarded as leader amongst the most disreputable ; but if any man had any influence over him at all it was Whitehouse, and so to him he now appealed.

“ Ned Quigley, you have heard what the Major has said ; if you abuse your liberty I shall be punished ; what do you say ?”

The little man folded his arms and looked calmly but steadfastly into the small eyes of the great animal who towered above him ; it was a magnetic glance which he threw upwards, and before which the other shifted and wavered.

"I say, little one, here's my hand on it, and that you need not fear for Ned Quigley, you won't be punished for him ; what do you want us to do—speak it out, and we'll do it."

"Then help to put the ship out of danger."

"Right you are, preacher ; come on, boys, let's get ashore with the ropes."

With work before them into which they could put their hearts without compulsion, the most brutal became orderly and obedient. Over the ship sides they scrambled amongst the white foam, holding on to one another as they struggled through the waves and on to the rough ledges within, to which they fastened the lines and cables. It was no easy task, and one which only the strongest could tackle ; but they went to work cheerily, joining in the seamen's choruses as they hauled along with them, so that in a short time the *Stirling Castle* was attached as securely to the rocks as it was possible for a ship in such a position to be, by the stern, hull, bows and those yards as yet unbroken.

Her upper portions were not much damaged, for the cavern was lofty and wide, so that it held her topmast easily within its arch. It was only her keel which had been smashed in with the blow, but even in this their present safety consisted, as it prevented her tilting over. A single look showed the outside lookers-on that she could never float again, for the sharp rocks had gone right through her bottom planks, and now held her, like a vice, upon their teeth. Unless an extraordinary high wave washed over her, she now lay as safely as if in a dry dock, for the eddies which leaped and sucked about those gaping rents in the sides and bottom were only the spent crests of up-flung breakers, which had wasted the bulk of their strength far below. It was fearsome to hear and to see, with those white arms that never ceased to reach up wildly, as if to drag her down to their deadly embraces, those bottle-green mountains which raced in from the Antarctic regions, and dashed themselves so madly against the rocks below, with that blackened sky, like bulging sails which seemed to be rushing upon them ; that pitiless sleet-mixed rain-power which battered upon their uncovered faces, and the blast each moment increasing in maddened shrieks and howls as from damned spirits, rushing from the south and tearing through that

gloomy vault which swallowed all light and sounds, and gave back only appalling echoes and earthquake-like rumblings. But the Captain knew that only an earthquake in reality could now dislodge them, so he felt satisfied that they were safe.

"Not a man lost ; it is wonderful," he muttered, as he ran about and gave his directions.

That providential wave was the highest that came ashore. Sometimes one larger than the rest would dash in and deluge them with its spray, causing the planks to creak and shake, but without doing any further damage. The passengers had once more recovered their presence of mind, and the stewards could make the cabin presentable ; so they settled down to dinner and comparative comfort, with closed ports, and even mild jests over the coming ashore. The underlayer of cargo would be the only damage likely to be sustained, provided that they could find an outlet from the cavern.

A plentiful supper had been provided and dispensed to the prisoners and steerage passengers, who were now allowed the same privileges, and what was more to their tastes, a liberal allowance of tobacco and rum ; and thanks to the help which John Whitehouse received from the political exiles on board, and the violin of Ignatius Taggart, fairly good order was maintained. Their late escape still weighed upon their spirits, and that raging tempest which prevented them from forgetting, while it lasted, the singular mercy that Heaven had shown to one and all.

John Whitehouse took the occasion as his text, and utilising Taggart's instrument for the hymns, wrought upon their feelings to such an extent that many fell down upon their knees, confessing their horrible sins, and howling for Heaven's pardon. The women particularly wept and moaned freely in their frenzy of remorse.

As I have said, John Whitehouse was far from being an educated man, but if he did not always use the correct word, he was eloquent, and never faltered in his fiery torrent. Oratory is not an acquired gift, and when a speaker has the magnetic power, it does not matter much what he says. John Whitehouse did not pause to consider how best he could reach those degraded hearts. He was in love with them, and plunged into their feelings recklessly, unconsciously playing upon their nerves as Taggart by rule played upon his violin strings, and they responded in the same way ; the most violent and desperate became the most frantic in their remorse.

They had all gone below of their own free will, after remov-

ing the door of their prison ; and what had been a prison the night before became their church upon this night of the storm. John's voice was husky and not over powerful, but it reached every ear, and found an echo in every heart. He had been speaking for a couple of hours to his rough audience, and still held out unwearied as they listened. The tempest roared outside and the waves thundered under their feet, but still the fascination held their eyes to his sallow face, and their ears chained to his words. John Whitehouse was on the eve of a mighty triumph, the complete taming of wild human beasts.

Ignatius Taggart, with his dwarf wife, sat beside him on the ground, touching the strings of his violin gently, and leering with his sightless white eyes and open mouth at the ceiling. Ned Quigley and his two ex-housebreaker mates, Dyan Hopper and Tommy Spears, lay on their backs with their bull heads clasped by their hands, and groaning out responses. Mat Tucker sat up holding his knees, and winking impishly at the oil-lamp ; while the women crouched together and now wept softly, for he was now talking of Love Divine. Even the gentlemanly swindler, George de la Motte, forgot to pose, in his close attention ; the Ludists, James Monkland, and his friend Tyrul O'Bryan, stood with folded arms, appreciative of the wonderful powers of this ignorant visionary.

"Amen ; now, let us pray."

The sermon was finished, and dry-mouthed John Whitehouse clasped his hands and closed his eyes to pray, when an interruption came and banished the angels of peace.

It was from the patriot Monkland. Glancing up the ladder which rose behind the preacher, he no longer saw the black vault of night ; they were once more battened in.

"Boys, we are betrayed and caged in once more."

With a blood-curling yell of hatred, the prisoners leapt to their feet, and the preacher opened his eyes.

CHAPTER V.

THE COURTSHIP OF SAMUEL BIDDLE, THE WOMAN-HATER.

"SOLD ! and by this cursed missionary."

It was Ned Quigley who roared out the words, his face

and thick neck becoming crimson with rage as he clenched his huge fists, and prepared himself for a rush at Whitehouse, who stood calmly waiting upon the attack, after one indignant glance at the barricaded doorway.

“No! no! Ned; give the little man a chance, let him speak for himself.” It was one of the women, by name Bess Martin, who sprang forward and clutched the giant, holding him back—a large-made, fair-haired young woman of about twenty-five.

“Let go, Bess; can’t you see we’re all sold?”

“Yes, Ned, any fool can see that; but not by that bloke there.”

“Didn’t he lure us down here with his preaching?”

“Yes; but he came down with us as well, which would have been very foolish of him if he meant to sell us.”

The force of this reasoning struck them all, and Ned dropped his arms as quickly as he had raised them, saying, with a course laugh, “You’re a plucky little ’un, at any rate, to stand so quietly before those eye-shutters.” He looked at his fists complacently as he spread them out before him.

“Why should I be afraid of the men I have tried to save?”

“Right you are, my hearty! only that your sermon has served us badly this time.”

“Nonsense, Ned; what though we’re caged, when we’re all together?” shouted out Bess, her blue eyes blazing. She had been Ned’s accomplice in the olden times, supplying him and his mates with the ideas they lacked, and felt joyous to be with her man again after the enforced separation of months. Strong, robust and reckless, she had been the torment of the matron during the voyage, and felt now in her element.

“See here, boys; we are only shut in with a few planks between us and liberty, but we are no longer ironed or bound down by any conditions as we were an hour ago. Why, what are you all funking at, when we’ve got our chains to batter down these wooden walls; and see here, the blacksmith has left his hammer.”

She caught up the large hammer and waved it round her tangled head like an Amazon, with her sleeves rolled back and showing her white strong arms.

“Hurrah for bully Bess Martin! we’ll be out in no time, and the ship’s ours.”

“Listen to me, friends—”

“No! no! little man; we’ve heard enough from you for

one night, and I've blubbered enough too for the next month of Sundays. We kept good faith with the skunks for your sake, now let them look out for squalls. Sit down, preacher, and listen now while we arrange our programme. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to vote Ned Quigley as captain of this vessel and chairman over this meeting."

"The mot is right, Ned; take the chair and let's arrange our programme."

"Pals all," began Ned, moving over to where John Whitehouse had stood, and pushing him gently to one side, "I ain't much at the gab, but I can do the captain business, so I vote Bess there into the chair; she's main good at that sort of thing; what say you all?"

"Right you are, captain, let Bess boss this meeting," yelled the voices of the most desperate, while the political lot hung back and waited.

Bess, in no way abashed at her honours, with a bound placed herself at the side of her giant lover, and with one arm flung around his waist, began her duties.

"Brothers and sisters in misfortune, this little man is as white as they make them; he tried to do his level best for both parties, and if he has failed it ain't his fault, nor ours either; so first thing, afore we begin, I ask for three cheers for the missionary, who made us all feel like boys and gals before the devil got us back again."

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

A hoarse cheer burst from their throats, which broke over the din of the tempest, and made the marines outside wonder what was taking place below.

"Now for business; we've all had a jolly feed to-night, both bodies and souls, so let's be happy and get a good sleep while the storm goes on; what we're going to do will be done best by daylight. Now, my advice is to have another tune from the blind fiddler, and then to roost, all those who are not appointed to the watch."

The advice was good, and as the young woman looked cheery and happy at being re-united with her man, the vengeful faces began to lighten considerably.

"Hear me a moment, friends," cried out John Whitehouse, starting up. "There must be some mistake about this."

"Not much blooming mistake about those nailed-in boards is there?" shouted out Mat Tucker mockingly.

"But I am sure that Major Quinton would not break his faith with me. Let me go up and see about it."

"Right you are, master; and if they let you out we'll follow. Go on."

With this permission John darted up the ladder and began hammering upon the door.

"Well, what is it you want?" shouted out the Captain's voice from the outside.

"I want to know your meaning for shutting us in?"

"To keep you safe, of course," answered the voice.

"But you have no right to do this. I am John Whitehouse, and a passenger."

"You have cast in your lot with the prisoners, and must now stay there until we hear from Hobart Town."

"But I have Major Quinton's word as a gentleman that this should not be."

"Major Quinton is under my orders as long as he remains on board, as you all are, and these are my orders at present."

"Come back, preacher," shouted out Bess. "You have got your answer, and now know how gentlemen keep their promises. Wait till to-morrow, and you'll see how we can keep ours."

John Whitehouse returned to his place below, and flung himself down in a dark corner dispirited, to wrestle with his doubting spirit in prayer. He had so nearly succeeded with those lost souls, as he thought, it was bitter to see his efforts wasted and rendered useless by those who ought to have helped him.

"This is a bad look-out, Monkland," observed O'Bryan, as the two sat together apart from the rest.

"Mighty short-sighted policy on the part of the jailors, for, of course, they will be able to break out of this, now that they are no longer manacled, and, by George, it will be hell then when these wolves get loose."

"Of course we must take part with the authorities."

"I suppose so, for the sake of the women; and yet they have acted infamously."

The night passed slowly to those who were watching below and above. Major Quinton, as indignant as John Whitehouse felt, raved about his broken word, which the Captain listened to unmoved.

"I have my wife to think of, and my other passengers, and although to-night they are quiet, to-morrow they would act worse than savages."

"To-morrow, if they are men at all, they will have broken

out, and have us more at their mercy than ever. You have acted foolishly Captain Carrodus, and cowardly as well."

"What do you say, sir?"

"That you are a coward, and I shall report you when we get to Hobart Town."

"We'll see about that when we get there, Major; meantime, I shall trouble you not to interfere with me in the present. Our duty is to keep them in now that we have got them there."

"It is too late to object, since they have discovered our treachery," answered the Major bitterly. "Yet I suppose I must help you to the end."

Morning dawned, grey, cold, and still stormy, but no longer so rough as it had been through the night. The waves were less, and no longer dashed into the cavern; it was low tide, so that the passage was almost dry.

"How are you going to feed the prisoners?" asked the Major, as he appeared on deck with a stern, set face.

"I intend taming them first, Major," replied the Captain grimly. "Leave them for a day or two to think upon it, and then get them out one by one, and march them ashore with fresh irons on their legs. Our present duty is to get there ourselves first."

The Major turned away. He did not know as much about convicts as the Captain did, but he felt that there was no chance of a compromise now that they themselves had broken faith with the criminals. He must sink his own private scruples, and act for the safety of those under his charge.

As soon as there was light enough, some of the seamen went with torches to explore the cave. After two hours they returned with the intelligence that they had found an exit to the cliff top, so that the ladies prepared to land.

"You, perhaps, will take charge of the ladies, Major Quinton, while I remain to look after the prisoners. Some of the men will accompany you with provisions."

This arrangement suited the Major much better than having to face John Whitehouse, so that he willingly agreed to be the leader of the inland party, and, along with Wilfred Tregarthen and Saul Clark, made his preparations.

With the exception of Miss O'Callighan, all the ladies were eager to start and see more of the land. She had paid her passage to Hobart Town, and did not like to be defrauded out of any of her fare.

"No, Captain; I'd rather wait until you get the ship off again."

"Then, my dear Miss O'Callighan, you'll have a long voyage of it, for this ship will have to be taken down by instalments if ever it puts to sea any more."

Next, she was nervous about her belongings, and wished to see them all transported along with her; again she was disappointed, and finally had to yield so far as to accompany the others with her pet poodle Carlo under her arms, the pet raising the echoes of the cave with its ill-natured yelps.

It was a dismal journey after they got round the corner, and had shut out the sea-view from them; round many a turn and over a rough floor leading upwards and gradually narrowing, until, at last, when they once more saw daylight, it appeared in the distance like a long, narrow chimney, with the sky beyond.

A tough climb to those so long unaccustomed to *terra firma*, and, as they approached the exit, the ladies were all more or less exhausted, and glad enough at last to emerge from the darkness into the light. Here they found themselves in the hollow of a ravine, with dense forests of great trees on either side of them running inland, although the hill behind was broken up with rocks, and grassy.

Up this, after a short rest, they all climbed excepting the ancient maiden, who decided to sit still and wait for them; while Samuel Biddle, who was also of the exploring party, sat down near her.

"Why do you not like the ladies, Mr Boatswain?" asked the lady, after ogling that hardy son of Neptune for some little time in silence when they were left alone.

"Because they are sarpints, ma'am—the young ones particularly," he replied sombrely. Mr Biddle had heard of his companion's wealth, and did not speak quite so savagely as he was used to address the fair sex.

"You mean the *very* young ones, I suppose?"

"Yas, like that 'ere young wiper a-going up now, a-showing of her ankles off and beguiling our mate; them's the kind I hates most particularly."

"I don't like that kind much either," remarked Miss O'Callighan, with a sour backward glance at Kate Ambrose, then being assisted up the hill by Saul Clark.

"Don't ye, now, ma'am? We'll, I respect you all the more for that sentiment; a sarpint as don't like another sarpint must be better nor the rest."

"But, good gracious; I'm not a serpent, boatswain!"

"Wall, there be sarpints and sarpints, ma'am; the bo-

constrictor that swallows a pore man up after slavering him over like—wall, ma'am, I don't mind telling you in confidence, our skipper's female—she looks little and innocent, don't she?—but she's got a big swallow for all that. Then again there's the fiery sarpint like what tormented the children of Israel in the wilderness—that Major's woman is one of that kind; and there's the deadly adder that watches slow like, and waits for her bite—that's the sort the governess be; and different sorts, all pizen tooths, whether they be lively or sluggish. Now you, ma'am, wall, I do fancy, somehow, that your tooth's been drawed."

The boatswain was really looking at her with what he thought a pleasant grin, and trying to be complimentary.

"What do you mean, you bold, bad man?"

"No offence, ma'am; only that I don't think as you'd bite a poor mariner quite so wicious as some of them do; you see you've no cause."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Wall, ma'am, they tell me as you have a tidy sum of money by you, which is a werry good cure for snake bites of all sorts—and though they say that you be troubled with your sex's complaint, and would wriggle your tail a good way to get a man to yourself, still, in your case, it's less unnatural than with most of the others; now, without wanting to be impertinent, might I humbly ax the extent of your fortune?"

"It is rather a personal question, Mr Biddle, but I don't mind telling you, as a friend—I have thirty thousand pounds."

"In your own right, ma'am? to do with it as you like?"

"Of course."

"Oh, Lord!" After that exclamation of wonder, honest Samuel sat for a moment, silently looking on the ground, while Miss O'Callighan regarded him expectantly. Then he looked up, and, moistening his lips with his dry tongue, he resumed,—“Now, ma'am, I'm a 'umble man, rather narvous and bashful by nature, but, I hopes, a good Christian—”

"I hope so, Mr Biddle, for I would not like to speak to an atheist."

"Atheist! I hate them as much as I do—well, I won't say what, as my opinions is beginning to change a bit since I sat down here. But I tell you what, supposing a man, a fine seafaring man, healthy as men go, and not too foolishly young, was to ax you sometime to let him help you to take care of that 'ere money, which must be a main trouble for you

to take care of by yourself, what would you say, ma'am, eh?"

Samuel Biddle, the woman-hater, was getting on.

"That depends if he wanted to take care of me as well, Mr Biddle."

"Of course he would fully understand the sacrifice he would have to make."

"Sacrifice, Mr Biddle?"

"Well, ma'am, what I meant to say was that no man reaching years of discretion could expect to have a gold cage without some kind of a beast inside it."

"Oh, you horrid old man."

"I ain't 'orrid, ma'am, and I ain't by no manner too old. Now, look you, supposing a fine man, like myself, for instance, wor to ax you the question straight and plain, certificate, minister's blessing and lawyer's contract on it, what would you say?"

"Oh, Mr Biddle, it is so sudden."

"Don't mind that, I ain't quite axed yet, but supposing I did ax?"

"Oh, Samuel!"

"That's my name, ma'am, and I suppose 'Oh, Samuel!' means yes; but what of the money?"

"All yours when we are married."

"No, ma'am; business is business, and love is love; now, cash is business, and that must be thought on first."

"You are almost mercenary, Samuel, but it will be fairly drawn up before the ceremony. Ah, who would have thought that after a storm I should find a husband."

"Well, the husband is mostly first found, and the storm afterwards, but that don't matter in our case."

"Oh, Samuel!"

"Now, stop that, ma'am, or you'll take away my character. Sit back a bit from a fellow, can't ye? I don't want to let them other sarpints see us connudging together like a pair of young fools."

The boatswain scowled upon her tender advances virtuously, and edged off from her side. It was not exactly the kind of courtship which Miss O'Callighan had imagined in her gushing youth, but, vinegarish as she had grown since those romantic days, still she felt too happy to let what she called his seafaring abruptness ruffle her temper.

"Samuel, I fear that you have had a disappointment in your past."

"That's just where your right, ma'am."

"Call me Agnes, Samuel, for that is my name."

"Hum!—well, when I spliced my first wife—"

"Your first wife, Samuel!"

"Of course, d'ye think I could have known what women was if I hadn't been married thrice, at least?"

"Oh, heavens, and I make the fourth!"

"The fourth—no, by Saul! you'll be the sixth—all a set of liars and deceivers they were too."

"Never mind, Samuel, I'll make up to you for their wickedness—I'll never deceive you."

She smothered a sigh as she spoke, for it was not too pleasant a reflection to think of such a long line of predecessors in that aging heart; still, it was her first chance for many a long year, and she wasn't going to miss it for a little mawkish sentiment.

"I'll take care you don't. I'm too old a fish to be tickled with a tin hook."

"Oh, Samuel, protect me. What is that?"

There was no affectation in her accents now, but real, genuine terror, as she fell back into the boatswain's unwilling arms, and pointed before her.

Samuel peered forward with his scarlet-rimmed eyes in the direction her finger pointed, to see in front of them about forty natives, clad in skins, with helmets of clay on their tangled heads, and long spears in their hands, staring at the strange pair with mute astonishment.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AMAZONIAN QUEEN.

WHEN the party reached the brow of the gully or ravine, a magnificent panorama burst before their eyes; to the north, east, and west rose forest-clad hills, beautifully undulated, and with picturesque outlines. It seemed as they had been transported to the highlands of Scotland or Wales, or, rather, what these countries may have looked like in the times when the ancient Britons hunted for their daily food, and before

the invading galleys of Imperial Rome broke upon the horizon of their stormy waters.

A virgin forest which filled up the spaces between those blue, mist-mantled mountains to the east and the north and the west. Only along the coast line could the eye trace a free passage.

The sun was now trying to force its light through the thick network of clouds which were rolling back, layer behind layer; and, as they stood watching this extended and richly-clothed landscape, the first clot of blue appeared overhead, while a long, straight shaft of silver fell from the clouds, and, striking upon the tree-tops in mid-distance, made a streak of emerald and gold in the midst of the dark masses of bronze-green.

Bigger the clot grew overhead, until it became a deep, wide lake, surrounded by snow-covered shores, while the one shaft of sunlight became scattered into numerous rays which travelled like lightning over the forests. Then the clouds broke up of a sudden, as if shattered into fragments, and the forenoon sun was streaming down upon the world, and revealing all the wonders of torrent, stream and woody glade.

"What a beautiful land we have come to, uncle!" exclaimed Kate in an ecstasy, as she clung to Saul's arm and turned towards her uncle and aunt.

Mrs Quinton was for the moment free from jealousy; she had seen her husband's gloomy brow that morning, and comprehended its cause, feeling wifely sympathy with him in his troubles; besides, she had him all to herself on this day—better in health and spirits with her exercise—and so she turned with a radiant smile upon her dark face towards her enthusiastic niece.

"Yes, Kate; we ought to be happy here if it is all like this."

"It is too fair a land for those who are forced to live in it," observed the Major with a sigh, as he thought upon the men and women whom he had left in the ship.

"Surely they must be better off here than imprisoned in England," said Wilfred Tregarthen; "I cannot think of any one feeling miserable in such a climate and with an atmosphere like this."

"Prison is prison all over the world—worse, perhaps, where liberty seems the sweetest."

"Hallo!" observed Wilfred, looking down the gully, "What is our amiable boatswain discoursing with the delect-

able O'Callaghan about, I wonder? See how his arms are sawing the air!"

"His old subject, I expect—woman-kind," answered Kate viciously. "He is a perfect ogre."

"Perhaps; yet she seems by no means offended with his remarks. By Jove, she is drooping towards him!"

"And he repulses her, as one would naturally expect, the modern Joseph! By George, no, she won't be repulsed; there she is in his arms!"

At this moment the loud shriek with which Miss O'Callaghan announced the presence of the aborigines fell upon their ears, followed by a hoarse bellow from her accepted lover.

"That does not sound like the cooing of love so much as of abject horror; let us get down again and see what it is."

As the party began their descent, the discharge of distant musketry broke faintly through the air, while from the cliffs soared up a perfect crowd of sea-birds.

"That sound comes from the ship," cried out the Major excitedly. "The prisoners have got out and are fighting, as I expected they would. We must get back with all possible haste."

Half-way down, they saw the natives still standing, and knew the reason of the consternation of the betrothed pair.

"Forward, lads; ladies, stay behind till we see if there is any danger."

In a few more minutes the Major and his followers had reached the side of Samuel Biddle and his inamorata, and now stood with only a few yards between them and the tribe. It did not appear as if the natives either meant mischief or were in the slightest degree afraid of either them or their weapons; they stood calmly regarding the white party, evidently filled with curiosity only.

They had their women with them, which with all natives means a peaceful pilgrimage, and, as the Major noticed, they held their spears with the points turned away. A splendid body of tall and well-made savages, with light-brown skins, large soft brown eyes, and pleasant features. Amongst the men the Major observed a tall, magnificently-built woman, clad as the others were in long kangaroo skins, who stood as if she was a person of importance amongst her warriors. The other women kept shyly in the background.

After they had watched each other for a few moments, this woman pointed to a green branch which she held in her hand, and slowly approached them waving it above her head.

She displayed no fear as she came on, but, instead, smiled pleasantly upon the Major, thereby showing a dazzling set of teeth, while her rich brown eyes shot out a warm gleam.

"A friendly welcome to our adopted land," observed the Major, smiling upon her in return. "Bring down the ladies, Mr Clark; they don't intend any harm."

She now stood before them examining them in turn. The Major saluted her by lifting his cap, to which she replied by a gentle bend of her head, muttering some words in a soft, liquid voice,—

"Pleregenana pandorga bungana." *

"Quite well, I thank you; and you?"

She smiled at the Major's reply, and then, looking down as she passed at the horrified pair still sitting on the ground, burst out laughing as if she had seen something comic, and said, as she flicked them both in the faces lightly with her wand,—

"Tackany pebleganna, tackany lowlape wanna." †

"Another darned sarpint," muttered the boatswain hoarsely, as he shivered under her touch.

When she came opposite to Wilfred, however, she stood stock-still and looked him over with wide-open eyes, in which wonder quickly gave place to warm admiration.

"Oh, nicka loina ludowing, loina bungana." ‡

They could not understand the words, but all present could see that they meant wonder and intense admiration. She took his hand and kissed it, placing it afterwards against her cheeks as she murmured, looking at him with fervent eyes,—

"Puggan-neena," (husband).

The action was unmistakable, and as Wilfred laughed gaily and tapped her under the chin carelessly, she evidently took it as consent to her bold offer, for, without further demur, she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Confound the woman," he uttered, as he drew himself from her, "if I don't look out I'll be made a chief, whether I like or not."

"We are witnesses to that declaration of love, Mr Tregarthen," murmured Mrs Carrodus.

"Oh, yes; he can no longer pretend that he never had an affair," answered the Major; "but, by George! I am forgetting the shooting; we must leave these interesting children

* Brother, good king.

† Go home, old man; go home, old woman.

‡ Oh this sun-man, sun-king.

of nature, and go back to our comrades—listen, there they go again, and nearer. They are retreating through the cave, and firing as they come.” The Major and several of the men began to run towards the cave entrance as he spoke, shouting over his shoulder,—“Look after the ladies, Tregarthen and Clark; I must see what is up.”

“I must go also; you stay, Tregarthen. The natives are all right, and we’ll be back in no time,” cried out Saul, as he also ran after the others into the cave entrance and disappeared.

The aboriginals by this time had gathered about the white party and prepared to camp; if they felt any surprise at the sudden exit of the male portion, they did not show it, but moved about, that is, the females moved about, gathering wood and lighting a fire, while the men flung themselves upon their backs.

“They are trusting enough, are they not, Kate?” whispered Mrs Quinton.

“Yes, they have not seen much of white people, I would say,” replied Wilfred, preparing to light his cigar. He had shown no desire to follow the others, and now appeared to have entirely forgotten why they had left.

Meantime the Queen, as she appeared to be, sat beside him watching his every movement with intense attention. She had given a slight side glance at the ladies when they first appeared, after which she seemed to regard them only as the other lubras of her own tribe, as beings beneath her regal notice. But when Wilfred lighted his cigar and puffed out his first mouthful of smoke, a shade of anxiety and terror overspread her handsome face to be succeeded by a look of adoring awe. Here was a god worth loving, and no mistake; beautiful as the sun, who could make fire and swallow it without an effort.

She was a magnificent specimen of womanhood of the Amazonian type, and appeared to be about twenty years of age—possibly she was younger, large-limbed and muscular, with finely-modelled arms, which she displayed with the same unconsciousness that a fashionable lady usually does in a ball-room. Her neck and bust were, however, less lavishly exhibited than our civilisation permits during the evening, for she had wrapped about her shoulders a toga-like garment of dressed skins, made from the native tiger. A soft, light, bronzy complexion, with full ripe lips, snowy teeth, regular features, and large liquid brown eyes, which now gazed meltingly at her white wonder, but looked as if they could flash with fire and fury when roused up. Her tresses were massive and jetty coloured, saving where

she had plastered upon the crown a curious head-gear of clay, sun-baked, and stuffed with feathers, for what had appeared to be helmets in the distance were seen to be fixtures—good protection from the sun-glare, or when in battle to ward off hard knocks, but uncomfortable looking to go to sleep in.

While she watched her hero with amorous looks, he never stirred from his recumbent position or looked at her in return, but slowly puffed at his cigar with a tranquil smile towards the blue sky and racing clouds. He appeared to have forgotten all about her late delicate attentions, as he had forgotten the men who had rushed into the cave. He was happy in his own perfect health and the sunshine about him.

Samuel Biddle, now that his horror for the natives had departed, got up with a harsh oath at his affianced, meant as a timely warning for her to be careful and not take away his character by showing too much attention to him; which done, with an evil glare at the other females, and a muttered wish that they might all be boiled and eaten before his return, sneaked away in the direction of the fighting.

“I wonder what they are doing in the cave. Are you not frightened for your husband, Mrs Carrodus?” asked Kate, as she glanced behind her timorously every now and then, and strained her ears to listen, as Mrs Quinton was doing.

“Oh, no! John can always look after himself; besides, he has made a will in my favour, so that I am all right if anything should happen to him.”

The cream-tinted little woman uttered this assurance with as complete an air of unconsciousness of her own selfishness, as the aboriginal queen now displaying the roundness of her dimpled arms.

Mrs Quinton and Kate looked at her with astonished scorn.

“What would you do if he was to be killed?”

“Bury him, of course; you did not think that I'd preserve him in spirits of wine?”

“No; but he is a kind husband, is he not?”

“The best in the world; he never interferes with me,” remarked the little woman quietly.

“And you love him, do you not?”

“Certainly; a woman always loves the husband who gives her her own way, and lets her do as she likes.”

“And if he was dead, what would you do after you had buried him?”

“Go back to England and try to find another husband as good as he has been to me.”

"Ah?" Mrs Quinton grew silent as she thought upon what she would do if the husband she was so jealous of was killed. Go back to England? No; die on the dead body of the man whom she tortured every day of his life.

"Oh, Reginald, Reginald, come back to me safely, for I cannot live without you!" This she thought, as she turned her lovely dark face back to listen.

Miss Lymburner sat passive, with her pale face bending down, and her crafty eyes fixed on the grass at her feet. She had been unnoticed by either Saul or Kate all the morning, and she was now thinking intently upon them both, weaving a mesh in the recesses of her silent brain how to part these two, and if parted, how she should get the man. For months Miss Lymburner, had watched and waited, without as yet getting much satisfaction; like John Whitehouse, she could not see her way.

"Oh, I wish they would come!" exclaimed Mrs Quinton nervously.

At this moment Samuel Biddle appeared at the cave-mouth, and, waddling across the intervening space, shouted hoarsely,—

"They are coming—leastaways them that's left."

"And my husband?" cried Mrs Quinton, springing up and clasping her hands.

"Oh, he's all right; the fight was over afore he came up to 'em," answered the old man sourly.

Kate Ambrose darted at her enemy a gratified look, for if the Major was too late, so must Saul have been.

"Sarpint!" muttered the betrothed woman-hater; "she's a-fixing on me with her deadly lights for some wickedness or other."

"I suppose my husband is all safe, boatswain? He always is," remarked Mrs Carrodus calmly.

"I can't say, ma'am; it was too dark when I got down to 'em, only I jist fancy from the look I had they wor a-carrying him up here."

"Indeed." Not a muscle of the gentle face moved; the "indeed" sounded as if it had been some outside incident which she had listened to.

"Yas; they wor a-carrying of the skipper—four men—with his head covered up, ma'am; and there he be with the rest of 'em, at least all that's left."

Samuel Biddle pointed backward to the narrow entrance of the cave, with his red-rimmed, glaring eyes fixed upon the pretty pale face of the placid Mrs Carrodus, and as he pointed,

the melancholy procession came forth, headed by the Major and Saul Clark unwounded, but the others a bloody, battered and gashed band. There had been a tragedy on board the *Stirling Castle* that morning.

Four sailors, with their handkerchiefs bound about their heads, carried the inanimate body of their captain, the blood streaming down their cheeks, and staggering as they carried him; after them came some more, followed by a body of the marines, sadly diminished as to number, and all more or less wounded, and finally, John Whitehouse and his friend, the blacksmith, with his wife and daughter, followed by the two political prisoners, O'Bryan and Monkland.

"My husband," cried out Mrs Quinton, flinging herself into the arms of the Major, who appeared unhurt.

"My husband," cried out Mrs Carrodus, tripping lightly over to the body of her husband, where the wearied men had laid him, and kneeling down in a gracefully abandoned way beside him, only taking great care not to touch the blood with her dress.

"Oh, say that he is not dead!"

"No, ma'am, he ain't dead, only not far from it," replied the seamen respectfully, as they sunk down exhausted beside the senseless body of their captain.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE SHIP WAS TAKEN.

It had been a short, sharp conflict, and a speedy verifying of the Major's fears, between the convicts and the Captain's party on board the *Stirling Castle*.

Under the able superintendence of Bess Martin, they had burrowed their way from below, having found not only the blacksmith's hammer, but also his files and chisels; for the honest fellow, in the excitement of the moment, had flung down his tool-bag and forgotten all about it, after his duty had been done.

The severed leg-chains would have been both tools and weapons enough in the hands of these accomplished house-breakers, as the foolish Captain might have known had he

paused to think the matter out. At sea, of course, his strategy might have succeeded, because they had only one way out, and that was by the deck; but on the rocks it was altogether different, so that long before morning dawned, blue-eyed Bess, with her three pals, Ned Quigley, Dyan Hopper and Tommy Spears, had broken their way through the flooring of their prison, entered the lower hold where the cargo was being spoilt by the surging tide, and were ready to lead the rest up to freedom and revenge.

On deck, the seamen and marines kept rigid watch upon the barricaded gangway, from where they expected the attack would be made. Sailors cannot get away from the rut of their ordinary ideas, and to them the *Stirling Castle* was still afloat; while, as for marines, they never indulge in ideas of any kind whatever, but are content to do what they are commanded, and as they were now placed on duty to watch that gangway, they never budged from it, or looked beyond it.

Bess, from her hiding-place amongst the bags, saw, through the rock-torn planks, the tide go down until quite an open door lay before her with, very soon, hardly enough water to wet her ankles. Of course, while she watched, she also heard the Captain utter his sentiments to the Major as to how he intended taming them, and gathered that the Major had not been to blame in the matter.

"I'll go for that bully Captain first," she muttered, as she set her strong white, little teeth together.

She watched the exploring party leave the ship, and waited until they returned with their news. They were going for her party as well as for the Captain, and she wanted to hear the result of their search; then, when she had heard it all, and the order for the Major to take the ladies ashore, she resolved to give them their chance, for the sake of the Major's indignant protest.

"He ain't a bad sort, that Major, and it's as well to have a friend at court if we get copped afterwards."

Bess Martin was a child of the slums—her father a house-breaker, and her mother his accomplice, as she was now to Ned. All her predecessors for generations had been thieves, and violence their legitimate line of life. Strong men as housebreakers have to be, and robust women whom danger had hardened, and who grow up fair and florid as field-workers in the most unwholesome East End dens. True, these men and women don't live much at home; their days and nights are mostly passed prowling about country houses and inhaling

country air, with an occasional retreat at Government expense. Her idea of a man was boldness; of prison, one of the unfortunate casualties which could not always be evaded, and therefore ought to be borne with philosophy. She knew that the people upon whose property she and her kind lived when they could steal it, went to church when they had decided upon their mates, signed papers, and had prayers said over them, but all these habits were out of her world. Amongst her kind, when a woman chose her mate, she would not dream of wasting good money on parsons and certificates when it could be much better utilised in a jolly spree. Her mother, grandmother, and, for all she knew, great-grandmother had not seen the need of such follies; so, when she saw the fellow that suited her fancy, she went to him, worked with him and his pals, and stuck to them as long as she could. If her man was "put in" for a short sentence, she just carried on the business with his "pals" until he came out, keeping his share of the "swag" for him; if he got hanged, or transported for life, she mourned over him as his "pals" did, but without wasting any time. Bill was done for, so Jack, the next strongest, took her and comforted her, as according to the Mosaic law brothers were bound to do. Blue-eyed Bess had seen two of her men safely launched into eternity by Jack Ketch, both going off game and plucky, as bold fellows should who would have good "pals" and sweethearts remember them. Her third, had been sent out to Botany Bay, and now Ned Quigley was her fourth, and as dearly loved as the others had been.

I daresay this sounds very dreadful to young ladies who look forward to marriage as the one great event of their lives, and poor Bess a very depraved young female, but circumstances alter views of morality. Bess was not at all conscious of any wrong-doing in these arrangements of her life, and even had John Whitehouse succeeded in converting her, on this point it is doubtful if he could have convinced her that it was wrong. Sin she had plenty of, the remembrance of which had pricked her sorely while he had been speaking, but not on the marriage question. Her disposition was a merry one, and, as all her friends knew, she was staunch and honest to her ideas of honesty. If any one did her a good turn, she never forgot it, or rested until she had repaid the debt, and *vice versa*.

So, as soon as she discovered that Major Quinton had not willingly broken his word, she forgave him, and held back her companions until he and his party had left the ship and were well into the cavern.

This accomplished, she crawled back to the prison-hold, and taking up a hammer said, "Now, pals, are you ready?"

"Yes, and eager," returned the convicts.

"Then come on, and the ship is ours."

The others seized the chains with which they had been confined during the voyage—dangerous weapons enough in the hands of desperate men—and gathering them up so that they would not clank, followed her through the torn-up planks, and out by the great rents at the rocks. Then separating, they began climbing up the sides and stern, silently as Indians.

Lieutenant Pilkington, with the marines and sailors, were on the main-deck near the hatches as the convicts appeared over the sides and leapt upon the deck and poop. Captain Carrodus had been in his cabin, and was emerging from the companion-way bare-headed, as Bess, with her hammer, landed almost beside him. He had only time to utter a warning cry when she brought it with her full force upon his skull, laying him senseless at her feet; then, with a wild cry of triumph, she rushed from the steps, followed by the others, upon the startled jailors.

One volley from the loaded muskets stretched two or three of the prisoners on the deck, but as they were fired at random, only a few; and then the swarming crowds were at close quarters, the marines with clubbed guns and the convicts swinging their heavy chains about, while the sailors struck out to right and left with their fists.

A short sharp conflict, during which Pilkington went down before he could draw his sword; and then all those who could run fought their way along the deck towards the poop, the convicts clashing them over the faces and heads, and the others running and striking where they could, blood pouring freely in all directions.

One big sailor stooped as he was passing, and, picking up the bleeding captain, let himself over the ship's side by a hanging rope, and made for the cave with his burden. The rest followed his example, so that scarcely five minutes had elapsed before the blood-stained but triumphant Bess Martin and her desperadoes were owners of the ship.

They had no firearms, so that they did not attempt to follow up their advantage, but stood shouting from the decks and waving their chains at the retreating figures.

"Down, mates, down; they intend to give us a parting volley," cried Bess, as she ducked her head as the marines

from the cave reloaded and fired, without, however, doing any damage.

With this farewell, the vanquished turned their feet into the darkness.

After waiting for some time, and watching in case of a return of the enemy, the convicts proceeded to the hatches, and, tearing down the boarding, liberated all those who had not followed them through the hold. Amongst the others came John Whitehouse, Tyrall O'Brien, and James Monkland. As soon as they were all out and on the deck, Bess, with her special friends beside her, addressed them,—

“Look here, mates, you know as well as I do what this morning's work is likely to cost us if we are ever taken again,—a short jump and a long swing. Now, there is time enough for any one here who may not wish to join our fortunes to clear out and make his peace with Government. We'll give you all free passes out of this; only no more re-admission. What say you, pals?”

“What you say, Bess, old gal, that the game we have now to play don't want any chicken-hearts. Let 'em go, all who don't want to stop and take our risks.”

“Missionary, this ain't the crib for you. Take my square tip and go,” cried Bess, turning a kindly glance on the little missionary.

“True; I cannot stay with you and countenance bloodshed,” replied Whitehouse. “Yes, I will go to Hobart Town and act as your friend there. If I get the Governor to overlook this present offence, will you submit to your former sentences?”

“No; we're going to live or die for our own hands now. We know what Government mercy is better than you do, preacher. They pardon us for this to get us into their clutches, and then give us four hundred on the triangle for something else that we've forgotten to speak about, so, when they can catch us, I say, let them hang us right away.”

John Whitehouse said no more, but turned down to the steerage for some of his belongings, from where he shortly afterwards appeared, followed by the blacksmith, with his wife and daughter.

“Tyrall O'Bryan and James Monkland, we can trust you to give the right yarn about this mutiny; go along with the missionary and the blacksmith here.”

“Thank you, Bess; we'll do our best, you may depend!”

"Will you let me go also?" said a quiet-looking girl of about twenty, stepping forward.

"Yes, Marion Carter; I think you are also best out of this; only stay a bit until we find where the matron has hidden herself, and you can both go together. Now, friends, be off and join the others, and when you see them, tell them if they stay until to-morrow, and leave us alone that we'll send up some provisions for them, enough to carry them into town. If they agree to this, tell them to send down half a dozen men, and we'll give them what they need, and tell them also that, as we intend dealing fair with them, they had best act on the square with us here, and that we hope they'll remember our kindness when they reach headquarters."

Bess, like most public characters, liked applause, and she had discretion enough to know the wisdom sometimes of "casting bread upon the waters;" she wanted the present action to read as well as possible in the newspapers.

"Now, be off with you, and give us till to-morrow to get things ready."

The convicts were in great good temper with their easy victory, and inclined to be generous, so that there were no dissentient voices raised or any opposition made to the dismissal of John Whitehouse and his companions. Rapidly they ran over the ship's side, and into the cavern after the others, after promising that, as far as they were concerned, or could influence, the conditions would be agreed to.

The wounded were the next consideration, and they were promptly carried into the state cabin and placed upon the best couches, where Bess and some of the other women went to attend them. Five had been wounded desperately, seven more or less seriously, and fourteen killed outright.

The dead were promptly cast overboard, where they rolled about amongst the surf and rocks below, until the sharks bore them out to sea. Four of these were marines, and the other ten convicts.

The five mortally wounded men gave up the ghost within two hours' time, and were also sent over to the sharks. Amongst the less seriously wounded was Lieutenant Pilkington. Bess took his case under her special charge, and had him restored to his senses before night.

Quickly the rest of the day passed, occupied by the convicts breaking open packages, and changing their felon garbs for the clothes which they found in the passengers', sailors', and seamen's chests. Then, as night once more

gathered round them, they lighted the lamps, and getting the stewards to wait upon them, sat down to enjoy themselves.

"Ladies and gentlemen, drink as much as is good for you, but don't make swine of yourselves; leave a little for a rainy day, for we'll need it where we are going to; also don't forget that our jailors are close at hand."

They called up Taggart for this last evening together, for he was also to leave them in the morning. He played to their hearts' content, and, between tunes, made violent love to the genial Bess, who had the rare quality of being able to swallow an enormous amount of both flattery and rum without losing her head.

The staid, stiff matron was found, after a search in one of the fore-cabins. She had been very strict with the female prisoners, and particularly harsh to Bess during the voyage, but although some of the others wanted to heave her overboard amongst the sharks, the female leader would not hear of such an atrocious suggestion.

"No, no, no cruelty this night, girls; let's make the old lady jolly tight and sing us a song—that's my revenge on her."

So they placed Mrs Leach at the top of the table, and, after a hearty supper, gave her as much rum hot as she could take in, after which she got so light-hearted and merry that she not only sang and danced for the companys benefit, but become so maudlinly fond of them that she remarked she felt like their mother, and vowed that she would never leave them.

That night the moon, now passing into his third quarter, rose over an ocean almost calm, and enabled the watchers to keep a sharp lookout at the cave, into the depths of which it shone clearly for half the night. The convicts had passed a boisterous time, but were all too wary to take more than they could carefully carry, so that they lay down to sleep with their wits about them, and the firearms they had taken from the magazine handy in case of a surprise.

A little after daybreak, Samuel Biddle appeared on the rocks with half a dozen sailors behind him, making signals to those on board with his red print-cloth handkerchief. The boatswain had read about flags of truce and ambassadors, and had carefully considered the etiquette of the present proceeding. Not having a white flag, he had tied his handkerchief to a stick, and was now raising and dipping it in a true nautical fashion.

"Ship ahoy, there! mutineers ahoy, there!" shouted out Samuel solemnly.

"You've come for some provisions, have you not?" replied Bess in a brisk, business way, which considerably upset the envoy's sense of propriety.

"Drownd all young females; I ha'n't come here to jabber to the likes of you, as can't understand how things should be conducted. Get out of that, and send me the captain of this 'ere piratical crew."

"I am the chief officer at present, my jolly old weather-cock; so whatever you have got to propose had best be said to me."

"That's right, Bess, old gal," observed Ned, popping up his head. "Look ye, I'm the fighting captain here, and this is the talking captain, so speak up, and tell her what you want."

"God help the poor vessel if that overgrown she-rattlesnake is in command," muttered the boatswain. Then with a preparatory cough he shouted out loud: "Pirates, mutineers, lags and lagesses, the Major has sent me to see if you intend to return to your duty and go under?"

"No!"

"That's settled, then. Now, is the lieutenant alive?"

"Yes, and ready to go along with you when you like."

"I've got a list of articles here as we want; will you give us them?"

"Yes; lay down your muskets and come aboard for what you want," replied Bess, pleasantly. "We won't hurt any of you. When are you going to start for Hobart?"

"As soon as we get back with the articles." Saying which, Samuel Biddle and his men scrambled on board.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FINALE OF CARLO.

CAPTAIN CARRODUS was alive and breathing stertorously when they laid him down on the grass, but he gave no other sign of consciousness. The others, however, beyond a few heavy cuts and bruises, were not dangerously wounded. One of the seamen, who had been several voyages to Van Dieman's

Land, told them that he understood a little of the native language, and offered to act as interpreter.

It was but little that he knew, however, and but for the quickness of the Amazon Queen, whose name he learned was Mathuna, they would not have advanced very far in their intimacy together; yet, after a long and most embarrassing conversation, by the aid of a few broken words and numerous signs, they discovered that this was the remnant of a large western tribe which were banished and driven from their own ground by a rival nation. Her fathers and brothers had been killed, and she was now on her way to ask the protection of the white chief at the white man's city of Hobart Town.

This remnant of her tribe now numbered seventy—forty men and thirty women and children. The year before that they had numbered over five hundred, and possessed large tracts of country; but after a fierce war of extermination, during which several tribes had combined to drive her and her people out of their possessions, she had heard of the power of the white man, and was boldly pushing her way to test it in her own favour.

They did not learn all this from the sailor or at the time, but he was able to let her know that they were also going to Hobart Town, and if she knew the way they would be glad to join her company on the morrow, an offer joyfully accepted by the impulsive Mathuna.

The ladies were pleased to hear that they might hope to get a few of their necessities from the ship, so that they might make a decent appearance in Van Dieman's capital, and during the rest of the day the marines and sailors, aided by the natives, cut down branches and prepared stretchers, so that the ladies might be carried along when tired of walking. Mathuna was greatly surprised that women should be so much considered by the white people; in her eyes they were only to be regarded as beasts of burden, from which fate, her high rank, with the fact that her brothers were dead, alone exempted her.

That night they made their first savage meal of baked kangaroo. Mathuna, as their hostess, had sent her hunters out while the women prepared the feast. Very weird and impressive it was under that moon-lighted sky, to sit beside the great blazing fire and watch the ruddy light play over the dusky skins of the semi-nude figures ranged about. It was a cold night, so that the ladies were all glad to get within the skin tent which the natives had raised for their Queen; she, however, disdain-
ing to

sleep with women of any kind, flung herself as near as she could get to the indifferent Wilfred, and watched him with wistful eyes until her lids drooped, and she lost consciousness.

That night John Whitehouse had a strange dream. He dreamt that an angel had come to him leading an aboriginal child, and said, "John Whitehouse I give this into your charge; protect it." When he awoke up in the morning and saw the dark faces about him, this seemed the answer to his dream; these were his charges, and to protect them the mission he had been so long trying to understand,

I must learn their language first, he thought, so he sought out the sailor and asked him to tell him the meaning of the words as far as he himself knew. Before they were ready to start on the journey he could make himself understood to the natives nearly as much as the sailor. After this he sought out one of the young men and attached him to his service; together they struck up a friendship, and were seldom apart.

By noon Samuel Biddle and his party returned laden with the articles which they required, and bringing along with them the lieutenant, now happily able to walk, the blind fiddler Taggart and his wife, with Mrs Leach, the prison matron, and the young prisoner, Marion Carter. When Mathuna first saw the blind man she started back with a cry of horror as at some evil monster, and could not be persuaded to go near him or his wife. "Peindriga! peindriga, powranna puggana minyenna lowerinna lolna," she cried out loudly.

The sailor laughed, and said that she had called them the bad snake man, and the tiger woman. She evidently was keenly sensitive as to the looks of her friends.

After a hasty lunch, they began their march along the coast, the sailors carrying the still unconscious body of their captain, while his wife followed, flirting with whoever would flirt with her. Pilkington was the easiest victim, and so, under pretence of looking after him, she attached herself to him.

As the Major reached the hill-top and turned to give a farewell look at the cave, he saw three or four of the convicts watching them from its entrance; they had been sent on to ascertain for certain as to their real departure and the route which they had taken. For a second the thought crossed his mind whether he could not re-take them and the vessel with the aid of his new auxiliaries, then he dismissed the temptation from his mind. "No, let the Governor do as he likes about them. They have treated us fairly, let me also give them a chance for liberty."

They went on and made good progress on that first day, the native scouts going ahead and looking out for danger, skirting where they could the edges of the forest, so dense and close even upon their edges that to penetrate for a few yards seemed to be going from day into midnight, so interlacing the branches were, and so thickly clothed.

They had to cross several streams on their way, some of which retarded their progress, while the natives cut down the branches to make rafts, over which they drew those who could not swim themselves. At such times the Major felt how lucky he had been when he joined forces with those useful and obliging children of the forest.

They could not always skirt the forest, for that would have entailed too great a detour; besides, in some cases, they found this course to be impossible; neither could they keep on a straight line, for the country was much broken up. They had steep gullies to descend and precipices to pass over, places which alone they could never have found a way through, but which the natives, with their unerring instinct of woodcraft, found without apparent trouble. Over huge boulders they dropped one by one, clinging to the tendrils which grew so lavishly everywhere, down into dark glens by tortuous unmarked paths, under festoons of beautiful and deliciously perfumed flowers, while hundreds of feet above them they only at rare times caught little broken patches of blue sky. They had heard of the vast circumference and great height of the Van Dieman Land trees, but what they passed surpassed even their wildest guess, and yet they had not seen the greatest of this wonderful timber yet by a very long measurement.

They passed along very cautiously, the scouts keeping a careful look out, for they were now in an enemy's country, and although Mathuna was by no means averse to a battle with fair numbers, yet her present company was too much reduced to risk unequal odds.

The Major was greatly amused at the way in which Mathuna took upon herself the protection of Wilfred Tregarthen, as if he had been some tender and very precious charge that might break in the falling, as well as by the tranquil air of passive tolerance with which that young man endured her assiduous attentions. The fact was, Wilfred would have greatly preferred being left to rough it with the other fellows, for he was by no means effeminate, but after a few weak attempts on his part to repulse her gently, and finding it utterly impossible to do so without positive rudeness, he

gracefully resigned himself to be treated as some delicate piece of porcelain. This was one of his secrets of going through life without contracting wrinkles or crows'-feet upon that perfectly chiselled face. He could always adapt himself to whatever company he was amongst without feeling in the slightest degree annoyed by chaff, discomfort or control.

If there was a rock to climb over, Mathuna mounted it first, then stretched out her hand and drew him up; if a cliff had to be descended, she was ready to receive him in her beautiful arms; she made him lean upon her going down the hill, put her arm about his waist to help him to ascend. She would have carried him over the shallow streams, only that he resisted this, much to her wondering disappointment, but over the deep streams, while she swam herself she forced him to use the raft. Her eyes flashed at times with fierce anger when she saw the ladies carried in the litters while she walked with the other men. She was haughty enough to her warriors and contemptuous enough to the members of her own sex, but she gloried in showing, by a hundred tender tokens, every hour of the day, that he, Wilfred, was the absolute monarch over all, and that she felt delighted at being his slave.

They had a great deal of trouble with Miss O'Callighan, who was constantly grumbling at the discomforts of the way, trying all sorts of dodges to get the woman-hater to her side, and losing her precious poodle, Carlo. Mathuna looked at it several times with a dark and brooding eye, as if she was meditating its speedy decease. Samuel snarled at it, because the dog, with the natural instinct of a pampered favourite, smelt a rival, and tried to snap at him at every opportunity, so that no one felt surprised at the frequency of its getting lost, or when they found it lying at the foot of a cliff now and again, waking the echoes of the forest with its shrill and ear-piercing yelpings. Samuel could not get at it openly, but often he managed by an adroit kick, while directing his fair one's eyes in another direction, to send Carlo flying down some dark and uncertain precipice.

"It is the devil that dog," muttered Samuel, "for it won't kill nohow."

Whether it was the devil or not, Carlo seemed likely to play the very mischief in the camp by betraying them to the enemy, and this all felt as they trudged along. Several times had the Major, in response to the angry glance of Mathuna's eyes, given the order for its death, but at the agonised shrieks of its fond mistress, and Mathuna's frantic pantomimic signals

for silence, he had to countermand the order and let it have a respite.

One forenoon, as they were slowly and cautiously wending their way through a bush-covered hill—they were now crossing a ridge of high table-land, with great mountains rising on their left, four and five thousand feet in air, with their crests snow-covered and glistening in the sunlight, while beneath them yawned deep chasms, down which roared and foamed great waterfalls. Where they were treading, the ridge gradually narrowed, until it became a mere pathway over two precipices. Along the top of this wall-like path they would have to walk for about five hundred yards, exposed clear to the view of anyone concealed in the valley beyond. They had climbed up this giddy pathway, if path it could be called, where no track could be perceived; and when just about to descend into the valley through a deep pass or gorge, closed in on both sides by stupendous cliffs, and through which they could see a far way off the open country, with a great river or estuary beyond, glimmering like an azure shield under the deep blue sky; when one of the scouts rushed up with a spear dangling behind him, and sticking fast in his thigh. After a few excited words with his Queen, the sailor interpreter explained that a numerous tribe were coming up the valley, and that one of their scouts had discovered him and wounded him.

“And you?” asked his mistress with fierce energy.

“Kill him.”

“Good; where are the other watchers?”

“Still watching and hiding,” replied the man.

They had reached the entrance to the pass only in time to escape observation, and so, instead of being watched, they could now become the watchers.

With a quick eloquent flash of her speaking eyes, first at the Major, and next at Miss O’Callighan’s first love—if it isn’t sacrilege to mention first and second when speaking about that experienced warrior in Cupid’s army, Mr Samuel Biddle, and a silky-haired, over-fed, white and vicious-tempered poodle—Mathuna gave a few quick orders to her warriors and the women, who at once melted like ghosts into the shadow of the underwood.

“Miss O’Callighan,” whispered the Major sibilantly in her ear, “gag and smother that pet of yours if you like; but if it utters a single squeak from now till these savages are past us, I’ll pitch you and it straight at them, d’ye hear?”

"Holy Virgin, yes, Major, only don't press my poor arms so tight, or else I must squeak out myself," murmured the old maid with an hysterical gurgle, upon which the Major released her, saying to Samuel Biddle,—

"Boatswain, I give into your charge this young lady and her dog. If a syllable comes from either of you until the enemy is past, you'll all be roast meat to-night. Disappear and lie low."

"Terragomna, loina-loyetea," * whispered Mathuna softly, drawing Wilfred away with her.

"Marines, sailors, quick, seek cover, arms ready to the word," abruptly spoke the Major, as he drew his women-folk from the path, and plunged into the shelter of the trees and branches. In another moment the shady pass appeared completely without human interest—a pass where nature reigned supreme.

What a hush hung over this glen; the distant thunder of the foaming torrent, a blue thread in the distance as it dropped over the purple cliff and disappeared between the mighty forest giants, over which the cool breeze wafted and shook the pendulous upper leaves just a little. A general mingling of perfumes floated up; the ozone from that distant ocean estuary, with the delicate aroma of white blossoms of the climate, and pine-like flavour of the eucalyptus. At one spot spread the snow balls of the *Gaultheria hispida*, at another the showy blaze of the gorgeous scarlet *Waratah*, the king of flowers, and with that golden land fringing the azure sheet of water beyond, over which the sun rays poured, shaded here by the frowning tree-crowned precipices.

Silence in the sheltered pass excepting for the hum of insects and the liquid music of distant falling water.

As the anxious eyes peer through the coverts down to the entrance of that pass, many hearts beat and throb with expectancy and dread, waiting for the moment when the first dark head will break upon the clearly defined line.

Now they are coming—one, two, three forerunners, who bend down and run fast.

Dusky savages who are watching keenly the footways, and reckoning, as they run with heads bent forward and eyes downcast, the days or weeks when those last travellers passed over this way.

Ha! they stop at a drop of fresh blood, the blood which has dropped from the scout of Queen Mathuna as he ran up

* Come, sun-love.

the pass, then picking up the scent, on they run like blood-hounds, with noses downward pressed.

They are close to where the silent watchers lie. Whirr! whirr!! whirr!!! the three scouts clutch at the grass, and pluck out a handful as they roll over in their death agony as the spears strike through their hearts. Then the long bronze arms are outstretched from the thicket, and the scouts are drawn under cover.

The main army now appear in a compact mass, looking neither to the right or left, but rushing up, for they know the dangerous ground they are in, and want to be out of it as quickly as possible. Seven hundred men, naked, and carrying only their spears, waddies, and shields; they are returning home from a distant raid.

The Major watches them anxiously as they rush on and come nearer. Splendid savages they are, and not too particular as to their track. Somehow he fancies that they will rush past, and he hopes that they may, even while he fingers his revolver.

Nearer they rush without a pause, when suddenly the air is broken by a series of short, sharp yelps. The demon poodle has succeeded in getting his white snout free from the boatswain's iron fist, and is barking with all the force of his vicious lungs.

A quick thud on the ground as the seven hundred men stop dead in the middle of the pass, while the next instant the Major sees a little snowball fly right from the bushes into the midst of the front rank, who prod at it with their spears. One final sharp yelp, and Carlo has finished his career.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONFLICT.

THE moment had gone past either for any further concealment or considerations of pity or timidity. That little white fiend Carlo had betrayed their presence to these savages on the war-trail, and the long-suffering boatswain had not been quick enough with his horny hand over the thin-lipped mouth

of his fair attendant to prevent the piercing shriek which burst from her in response to the dying yelp of her favourite.

As Miss O'Callighan's loud screech blent with the broken yelp of Carlo and the deep-toned anathema of the woman-hater, Mathuna gave the word of command to her warriors, and before the shriek had passed into an echo, the Major from his cover saw a shower of spears launched at the foemen, and several of them biting the dust. Then he issued his command, "Fire," in a loud, stern tone, and the rocks above them rang, and carried away in a thousand repetitions amongst the rents and crevices the startling sound of musketry, while the glen near them became filled with white mist which hid for a moment the compact force.

But although they could not see what had happened, they could hear from the horrified yells, quickly receding, that a panic had taken possession of the tribe at the unaccustomed sound, and that they were in full retreat.

Yes, as the smoke rolled up they were to be seen flying down the pass at their full speed to gain the open, while Mathuna and her men had leapt into view and were preparing to follow.

Two more volleys the men managed to send after that retreating mass. In those days, before Waterloo was fought, loading was slow work; now, with the breech-loaders or Winchesters, they might have cut off the greater portion of that army before they had been able to accomplish that dangerous half mile of defile.

"Forward all," shouted the Major, following the example set him by Mathuna and her men, and springing to his feet he set off at a run.

Mathuna, in the hour of peace, was mild-faced, lamb-like and modest in her attire, but in the hour of carnage all these qualities were forgotten. She had snatched a shield and large waddy from the hands of her body-servant as she sprung to her feet; and now, as she ran forward, outstripping her swiftest warriors in her present speed, she loosened and flung from her her tiger-skin upper cloak and kangaroo lower skirt, leaving herself only a short petticoat-like covering of wild cat-skin, which clung closely round her waist, and fell only to about the middle of her legs—her arms, upper portion of her body, and lower limbs being entirely bare.

Her fighting men also disrobed as they ran after her until they were in the same condition as the enemy in front, and the dead bodies over which they trampled.

Down the glen natives, marines and sailors bounded, too much excited to think upon the unequal odds in front of them, and leaving the women, white and native, to follow or wait for their return. With wild shouts and yells they ran, while those retreating never looked back, but kept on with their hands clasping their ears to shut out the unknown thunder of those deadly muskets.

Mathuna never paused when she emerged into the sunshine, but kept on at full speed until she had reached the rear rank now half-way down the hill; then, with the fury of a maniac, the others saw her arms rise and fall as she brought her waddy down again and again on the heads of the unfortunates. As she struck and ran, they fell down like thistles on either side of her track, and lined the pathway of those coming behind.

It was a steep, grass-covered hill they were rushing down pell-mell, with a stretch of level land at the foot, terminating in that broad sea-inlet which cut off their escape to the north, but about a couple of miles to the left of them the forest again began. This was the point towards which the natives were running, so that, as they circled round, the white party had a fair opportunity of picking them off with their guns without hurting their allies.

The Major, with his knowledge of war, felt sorry to leave his vantage ground; he would have preferred keeping within and holding this pass without exposing themselves in the open. Now, however, since he had been drawn out by the impetuosity of the natives, and saw their intention, he called a halt about half-way down the hill, at a point where he could command a good general view, within shooting distance, and gave his orders.

"Load and fire as quickly as you can, men, at the vanguard. Keep them from entering the forest if you are able. The smoke will conceal our numbers."

To the natives running, with the enemies to which they were accustomed to behind them, and that unknown force mowing down their men in front, it seemed as if they were surrounded on all sides, and their terror reached the stage of desperation when even the most timid will turn about and fight; so, having gained the level ground, they faced round upon Mathuna, after receiving a few rounds from above, and sought to defend themselves.

The Major from his position watched the two bodies meet and clash together, Mathuna's tall figure still conspicuous as

she hewed her way about, leaving a clear circle around her. It was no longer safe to fire indiscriminately, so he gave orders to stop firing and prepare to charge.

Then the marines fixed bayonets, while the seamen clutched their cutlasses in one hand, and their pistols in the other, and waited impatiently upon the orders of their leader.

“Forward by the forest side; give the outsiders one more volley as you charge, and be at them under cover of the smoke.”

With a ringing cheer, they all rushed down the hill till within fifty yards, when they paused for a moment, and belched out their deadly flames; then on they raced, firing their pistols in the faces of the astonished natives, and next moment were piercing through the ranks of naked bodies.

The Major caught a glimpse of Mathuna at the other side as he slashed to right and left with his sword after emptying his pistols. She was fighting her way to a gigantic warrior who appeared to be the chief, her white teeth gleaming through her parted lips, and her brown eyes blazing, and the Major tried to get at him before her.

Now the pair had met, and, with a joint shout of savage exultation, were raining blows with their waddies at each other; both had shields, and warded off the blows with equal skill.

“What a demon to fight Mathuna is,” remarked a cool voice at the Major’s back, and, as he glanced behind him, he saw Wilfred Tregarthen, armed with a native shield and waddy, swinging it about easily as he wheeled round, warding off the blows, calm as ever, and seemingly satisfied with the exertion of taking care of himself, as he followed in the tracks of the Major.

“Good fun this, eh, Major—halloa, Mathuna has gone under.”

Mathuna had heard the cool voice, and glanced aside at her precious idol to see if he was safe, and by doing so had received her first blow on her head; staggering back a pace or two, she tripped over a dead body, and fell heavily to the ground.

“Ha!” The Major rushed forward and plunged his reeking sword into the back of the giant as he had raised his weapon to finish up the duel. With a yell, the brawny savage dropped his waddy, and, flinging up his arms, fell face forward upon Mathuna.

The battle was over, and only a few stragglers from the

seven hundred were now flying along the valley in the direction of the forest, with Mathuna's men after them, spearing them as they ran. The Major and Tregarthen put out their hands and drew the dead savage from Mathuna, and raised her up to her feet.

As they lifted her, she opened her dark eyes and fixed them for a moment dreamily upon Tregarthen's smooth, fresh face; then, with a flash of delight and a low, glad cry, she started once more active, and fiercely caught him to her bosom.

"Loina-loyetea, loina-loyetea!" she cried wildly, as she hugged him in her naked arms, regardless of the blood which was pouring down her cheeks—her own blood—and staining his clothes, much to his consternation.

Then she remembered the laughing onlookers, and apparently her own *dishabille*, for, suddenly releasing him, she turned quickly and ran as fast as she could up the hill-side and into the shadow of the glen.

"Pooh! that's the worst of these impulsive natures; she has made a nice mess of me," remarked Wilfred, as he looked ruefully upon the stains she had left.

"Let us get back to the ladies," said the Major abruptly, as he wiped his sword and returned it to its scabbard. This cool Apollo irritated him in moments like this; besides, he felt hot and tired with his late exertions.

Beyond a few slight flesh wounds and some waddy bruises, they had not lost any of their own party, and of Mathuna's men very few compared with the enormous slaughter of the enemy. They covered the field in detached groups until it resembled a hop-field after the pickers had left it, hundreds of brown bodies scattered about everywhere.

On reaching the mouth of the glen, they once more saw Mathuna descending along with the women and children, who were carrying the packages, and beside whom the ladies walked. Mathuna had found a stream and removed all traces of the conflict from her person, and was again the mild-faced queen, clothed modestly in her fur robes, with a bandage of gum leaves mingling with the feathers of her cracked clay helmet like a victorious wreath.

She blushed slightly as she looked towards the blood-stained Tregarthen, and for a little while kept from his side, but not for long. With a happy effort she cast away all remembrance of her indiscretion; and by the time they had finished their mid-day meal, and were ready to start again upon their jour-

ney, she had recovered her confidence, and once more appropriated him to herself.

The afternoon was well advanced before the last of the men-hunters returned, and they were all ready to go on again; and, as the sailor-interpreter gathered, the natives wished to bury their dead, the Major decided to move along the shores of the bay for a mile or so out of sight of the battle-field, and there camp for the night. So they started once more on the march down the hill, and into the shelter of the forest, which at this part reached nearly down to the beach.

As they passed the scene of the fight, a party of the natives went over and picked out the bodies of their own kindred. They did not attempt to molest or in any way mutilate their enemies, but contented themselves with gathering together the spears and bringing them away also.

The Major walked along in a very silent mood. He was not at all satisfied with this indiscriminate slaughter, now that the excitement was over, and inclined to take a very harsh tone towards Miss O'Callighan, who had been the original cause of it. He felt that he had not given them a single opportunity of proving their intentions, and that, for all he knew, they might be friends of the Government.

John Whitehouse was filled with horror when he saw the field. He had stayed behind with the women, and considered himself a traitor to the charge which his dream-visitor had given him.

"Oh, Lord, give me power to prevent such scenes in the future. Pardon me for my share in this present blood-shedding," he muttered, turning away his eyes from the ghastly scene, and walking by himself with bent head.

But it had taken place so suddenly that it was not an easy matter to see how it could have been prevented. They were all rather silent and gloomy as they laid down their burdens and prepared to camp.

After the fires were lit and the supper despatched, the natives set about gathering grass and dry wood, which they placed in different piles at some distance from each other, and a good way from the camp. This done, they arranged the corpses by bending the legs back against the thighs, and the forearms to the shoulders, binding them firmly in this fashion with twisted grass ropes.

The Major and his party watched these proceedings with much interest. They could see from the preparations that the natives did not intend to bury their dead, as they

dug no ground, but that they intended evidently to cremate them.

When the funeral piles were raised high enough, they placed upon the logs large quantities of dry wood and bark, covering the top with a layer of dry grass. Upon these piles they placed the bodies, afterwards arching them over with more grass, bark and dry wood.

It was late before they had finished their task, in which all assisted, men, women and children; and when it was ready, amid a very solemn silence, Mathuna set the example by seizing a firebrand from the camp fire, the others following with more firebrands, and all in unison lighting the piles.

The fires were soon blazing and the forest illuminated with the ruddy glare, after which the natives all retired, keeping the same silence, and lay down with their backs turned, and their faces covered by their cloaks.

Next morning they rose early, and going over to the piles, now all consumed except the logs, they carefully scraped the ashes together, covering them up with grass, and placing the remaining logs upon them; they were now ready to resume the journey.

There had been no lamentings over the dead bodies, and when John Whitehouse asked his native friend—who, by the way, was the firebrand carrier, for it was considered unlucky to let their fire go out entirely—why they did not mourn, he merely shrugged his shoulders and replied: “What was the use? native burn, then go to Murduna,” *i.e.*, the stars.

“Did they believe in spirits?”

“Yes; there was Ria warrawah noilé, the evil spirit, who ate up bodies that were not burnt, and so got possession of their souls; and 'Ngune, the fire spirit, who carried them up to the stars with the flames, where they were re-formed and lived for ever; that was all he knew about it.”

This native held a post of very grave responsibility with the tribe. He was expected to keep the fire burning all through the night, and carry from it a lighted firebrand all day for the next night's fire, for with that firebrand he held the fate of his whole tribe; if it had gone out, it was the certain sign of their extermination. John Whitehouse, when he learnt this, understood the constant gravity and anxiety of his friend. It was the most honourable post, next to that of the chief's, and by far the most wearing on the nerves.

The Captain had not recovered consciousness since that blow on board his vessel. He still breathed stertorously, and

lay on the stretchers like a log while the sailors bore him along. For his sake, the Major was eager to hurry onward, so that he might have a qualified doctor to look after him; for, from the signs, he could tell that the brain had been injured in some way, and they had no one with them skilled enough to assist him.

His wife, Mrs Carrodus, did not trouble herself greatly about him; she was too much wrapped up in herself even to pretend any concern, and, like Miss O'Callighan, did not at all enjoy the discomforts of this journey. That lady had found the remains of her Carlo before she left the pass, and bore it along with her with the other dead. She was very bitter with the boatswain for his share in her bereavement, for she had seen him throw the betrayer to the enemy, and felt insulted as well as broken-hearted at his brutal method of stopping her mouth. However, after a sulky hour or two, she weighed the matter up in her mind, and came to the wise conclusion that a living man, even although considerably past the meridian of life, was better than a dead dog any day, so she forgave him, on condition that he would give her pet a more respectable burial than the natives were giving to their dead.

This the boatswain promised faithfully to do; and as the poor creature's feelings were too much upset to accompany him or witness the rites, Samuel took the carcass from her hands, and going for a walk past the blazing pyres, chucked it upon the nearest one as he returned, so that the ashes of poor Carlo were also raked in the next morning, and his little spirit transported to the stars by 'Ngune. It is to be hoped that he did not take that "bark" along with him which had done so much damage below.

CHAPTER X

HOBART TOWN, 1813.

ON the afternoon of the eighth day, they reached the end of their journey, and beheld the baby city of Hobart Town stretching below them.

A stiff climb that last one had been before the town and river burst upon their sight—a climb through a forest of

mighty eucalyptus trees without a track, although they were getting so close to the capital—over a crest which lay like a field freshly ploughed—a field where a Titan's plough had furrowed over, turning up great boulders.

When they reached the crest and overlooked the bay, what a magnificent view burst upon their eyes—of landscape, water and sea! The white owners were not as yet much *en evidence*, as only the markings-out of a future city lay before them, with a few rough huts and tents scattered about.

Yes, there was one massive building standing apart and conspicuous, with high walls round it and numerous outhouses straggling about at odd corners; it was the barracks and prison.

However, the natural aspect of the place was quite fascinating enough to make up for any shortcomings of man and his works. A perfect bay, with picturesquely indented coast line and promontories running out, and giving rich promise of lovely coves and inlets—the Derwent River poured its flood into the bay, and could be seen flowing along broadly and serenely until it became like a silver line, and gradually lost in the distance amongst the blue ranges.

The sight of the houses and marked-out streets fell pleasantly upon the eyes of the wanderers from their elevated position, so that, after a brief rest, they all hastened to make the descent—getting glimpses now and again, between the tree-trunks, of the town as they advanced nearer.

Now they hear the clanking of pickaxes and hammers, and shortly afterwards passed a quarry where a gang of chained prisoners in grey, and grey and yellow uniform, were excavating stones. The convicts looked up with heavy scowls as the party passed, while the Major enquired his direction to the Government residence. The officer in command introduced himself, and asked the news from England in return for his information. It was a miserable hole, Hobart Town, he told the Major, and that Governor Davey would be very glad to see them.

Then they went on, passing other chain-gangs, who were taking it as easy as their overseers would let them, at different portions of the road. The discipline seemed to be lax enough, the Major thought to himself, as he watched the different groups of prisoners and jailors loafing about and trying to kill time.

At last, after passing several miserable huts which appeared to be inhabited, they approached the quarter where the

Governor resided. Half-a-dozen wooden shanties, with a few military tents outside, and beside which a gathering of men and women were assembled, the men in their shirt sleeves, drinking rum and smoking well-blackened pipes, and the women attired in all sorts of cast-off dresses. As the Major led his party inside the enclosure unchallenged, a young officer rose and came forward, with his coat thrown open for ease, and saluted them.

"Governor Davey I want to see?" asked the Major.

"He is there," replied the young man, pointing to a group of men, in the centre of which sat a red-faced, clean-shaved, jolly, but most undignified-looking man, holding a glass in one hand and a long clay pipe in the other, and laughing at some merry jest which one of the company had been making.

Major Quinton certainly did not expect a salute of cannon to welcome him, yet, nevertheless, with his English ideas of military strictness and etiquette, this free and easy method of holding Government levees struck him as being a little strange, and he began to look about him curiously, while his figure stiffened unconsciously as he strode forward to the company now regarding him and his party with unmitigated astonishment.

Governor Colonel Davey, as he cast his eyes upon the Major, dropped his glass and pipe in his wonderment, then, after a wild stare out to the bay, as if in expectation of seeing a strange vessel there, sprang to his feet with a loud oath.

"Why, where in the devil's name have you dropped from, and who are you, sir?"

"Major Quinton, of the —, your Excellency, and I have come from England," replied the Major, saluting, and smiling in spite of himself at the consternation displayed around him as he reversed his answers.

"From England!" gasped the Governor, gazing round him blankly, and as he saw no mode of conveyance on the water, he turned his eyes skyward; it also was clear of any extraordinary phenomenon.

"I am all abroad, sir; how in the name of mischief did you get over?"

"By the ordinary ocean track."

"And your ship?"

"The *Stirling Castle*."

"Ah! we do expect her with provisions. Sadly wanted at the present time, Major, I can tell you. Where is she now?"

"We were wrecked about a hundred miles from here, on

the south coast, nine days ago, and have been forced to walk overland."

"Ah, now I understand you, sir; and I beg your pardon for my lack of courtesy. These are your passengers and crew, I suppose? Hallo! natives also."

"Yes, your Excellency; we fell in with a tribe who have acted as our guides."

"To be sure: to be sure. A fine race, Major, they are when well treated. And I see you have ladies with you. Hey, scoundrels, my coat and vest." This latter remark he addressed to some convicts, who were lounging about like pampered and spoilt servants.

"You will excuse me, I trust, Major Quinton, for this unceremonious manner of greeting your arrival and welcoming you to Van Dieman's Land, but we did not expect strangers, and, as our provisions have run short to-day, we were trying to make the best of a bad job with a pipe and a glass of grog. But come, introduce your company, white and black, and tell me your adventures."

Hurriedly bustling about, the Governor had them all soon seated round him, while he listened with keen interest to the account which the Major gave him of their adventures.

"Thank God the ship hasn't gone down. We may be able to get some provisions out of her, if the mutineers have left any, for, to tell you the plain truth, you have brought us desperately bad news, and we are all on extremely short commons: a little kangaroo when we can catch it, and seaweed for vegetables."

"Carlton," he shouted out to his orderly, "go down at once and give instant orders for a couple of the smacks to put to sea after the *Stirling Castle*, and see that a party are chosen out to go overland after those escaped prisoners. Mosquito and a few of these natives will guide you to the place."

They had a couple of doctors on the spot, who at once gave orders for the Captain to be taken to the prison hospital, and went with the latter to attend to his wound.

"I bid you a hearty welcome to Hobart Town, ladies and gentlemen, and only wish that I could treat you more hospitably. We have a few hogsheads of rum still left, and some tobacco, and we are living in hopes that our hunters may be successful in bringing us some supper."

"We have some provisions with us, Colonel Davey."

"Then you are thrice welcome. Captain Wilmott, give orders for the cooks to be up and doing. Yes, Mrs Quinton it's a sad confession to have to make, but we have been living

on seaweed and fish, with an occasional roast of kangaroo beef for the past four weeks; that is, the epicures and upper ten in Hobart Town have been doing so, while as for these poor fellows, the prisoners, the Lord only knows how they have existed during that period."

The Governor dashed his hand across his eyes as he made this miserable confession of absolute want, for, if he had at times failed in his duty towards those under his charge, and lowered the dignity of his office by his freedom and careless disregard of form and ceremony, no one could accuse him of want of feeling for the misery about him, and no representative of the king ever ruled over Van Dieman's Land who was better liked, both by his officers and the prisoners under his charge. While he had a meal or a cask of spirits, his motto was, share and share alike.

He did not at all exaggerate matters when he spoke of the state of their general larder, for they had to depend entirely on provisions from Sydney and the convict vessels, and as the former colony at the time was not in a very flourishing condition, and the ships were often delayed or wrecked, their supply was most uncertain and precarious. It took a stout heart and steady head to look after the two thousand human beings, free and captive, and keep anything like discipline at all up. Morality was in the most lax condition. They had not a single clergyman or preacher of any denomination whatever. Sunday was kept as a general day of drinking and debauchery, in which overseers, jailers and officers joined impartially with the prisoners who could afford to join with them.

The most desperate and dangerous lot were locked up and kept constantly in heavy irons, but as the prison could not accommodate a quarter of the number of convicts, they were allowed to roam about at night, male and female, treated alike, without any sort of shelter, and to commit depredations as they felt inclined. No sort of marriage rite was observed, but depravity of the vilest description was openly conducted in the daylight without remark. The Government officials were no better than the criminals; indeed, in many instances, they were the most lawless and depraved, using the female prisoners as they liked. It was a state of the lowest slavery, atrocity and absolute tyranny, without one redeeming feature.

Bushrangers roamed over the country in formidable gangs, and even came openly into the town to spend the money which they had stolen from their victims. They gave them a short shrift, however, when they could catch them singly. On

Hunter's Island, the site of the "Old Wharf," the gibbets were erected, and Major Quinton, from where they sat, counted thirteen bodies hanging. They had been strung up that morning, the Governor informed him, and a fresh batch was waiting to meet their doom on the following morning. One of these thirteen was a female.

"We have to bury them before sundown; that is, we carry them out to sea and sink them. We dare not bury them on shore when provisions run short."

"Why?" asked the Major uneasily.

"Such questions are indelicate in Hobart Town," replied the Governor significantly.

Mrs Davey and her daughter found quarters for the ladies that evening, but to do so the gentlemen had to turn out and sleep in the open.

"We'll get some fresh huts run up for your accommodation in a few days," their host remarked; "meanwhile, you must take the will for the deed."

It was *sans ceremonie* everywhere, from the most important personage to the least, so that no one could complain.

Just before the meagre supper was announced, the doctors came in and said that they had successfully trepanned Captain Carrodus, and that he had every chance of recovery, so they spent a pleasant enough evening, Ignatius Taggart playing for their amusement. Colonel Davey declared that he was indeed an acquisition to the colony, and before they broke up, being more than three parts drunk, solemnly offered him a Government post as Crown musician. Taggart was in a fair way to become an important personage.

Mr Samuel Biddle was, however, considerably upset when he discovered that there were no lawyers in the land as yet, while Miss O'Callighan was the more concerned to hear that there were no clergymen. It seemed that the hopes of this affectionate pair were likely to be indefinitely postponed, for she declared that she would not trust any man living without the blessing of the Church, and he swore roundly that he would never put himself in the coils of any "sarpint" until he knew for certain that the fangs were "drawed" by the law. So they each parted for the night in a very dissatisfied state of mind.

Mathuna and her tribe camped outside the Governor's enclosure, after he had assured her of his protection; and while they all made their beds in the softest possible corners they could find, they were not very much better off here in the capital than they had been in the bush. A little worse off,

the Major thought, as he listened to the distant yellings of the drunken warders, or the screaming of some unfortunate female who was being molested.

It was a wild night after the calm and freshness of the bush, and horrible to lie and listen to those drunken, hoarse blasphemies, or the shrill cries of murder. Mathuna, in spite of the Governor's assurance of protection, redoubled her sentries, and kept her fires blazing.

Tregarthen, who had been glad to escape from her attentions, had taken up his quarters with some of the officers, and Mathuna could not sleep for thinking about him. She wanted to be as near to him as possible; and was revolving in her mind how she could learn the language of the white man, so that she might be able to tell him how much she loved him. She was the owner of her tribe, and the daughter of a long line of native kings; and so she felt no doubt as to their equality. And she had chosen him to be her husband, and only thought that, because of their mutual inability to understand one another, he did not know his good fortune.

"I will get this white king of the slaves to teach me how to speak to my love, and then he will know that I love him, and I will make him all my own."

Poor Mathuna; she had never wished for anything without getting it amongst her own people. And as for enemies, her father had taught her how to fight for what she wanted and how to take it.

As she was lying on her rug, her goddess-like limbs spread out, and her people about her, the loud shouting of the night prowlers caught her attention, and she wondered why the white king could not control his slaves better than he did. A slight feeling of contempt began to gather in her mind for the easy Governor who got drunk with his men, and did not keep up his dignity. Her people were all asleep or watching, and she had only to raise her voice to have them ready at her command.

Just at this point of her reflections she heard a wild scream close behind her, and, bounding to her feet, with her waddy clutched ready, she saw a woman struggling in the arms of a couple of prison-clad men. It was the new comer, Marion Carter, who had been *considerately* turned adrift to the tender mercy of the night wolves, and this was their welcome.

As Mathuna looked, Marion managed to extricate herself from their clutches, and, rushing over to the savage, got behind her, while the drunken wretches followed.

"Hallo, Bill, here's a finer piece than the last—a — native. Let's take her down to the boys in town."

"Panoiné' (dog), cried out the outraged Amazon, as the poor wretch laid his audacious clutches on her dusky shoulders; and while she spoke she brought her huge waddy down upon him, scattering his brains out, and sending him without a moan to the ground.

The other marauder did not wait after he saw his companion's fate, but ran off to inform his "pals" about the native who had killed his chum.

Shortly afterwards the Governor was roused up from his heavy slumbers to interfere in a riot. Mathuna and her warriors were fighting for their lives with a set of desperadoes bent on running amuck, and getting hold of the tigerish beauty.

Fortunately the convicts had no firearms, so that the natives were able to hold their own. By the time the soldiers had been called out, Mathuna and her warriors had considerably diminished the number of their enforced charges. A few shots from the muskets of the military, and the rioters retired, leaving them once more in peace.

"Do you often have this sort of interruption to your sleep in Hobart Town?" asked the Major.

"Now and again, when new chums come ashore," replied the Governor, coolly rubbing his sleepy eyes, and once more retiring.

"Pleasant quarters for my wife and niece," muttered the Major, as he sought the vicinity of the hut where his wife and Miss Ambrose were sleeping, and where he found Saul Clark already established in front as sentinel.

Amongst those who had rushed up at the sound of the fighting was Tyral O'Bryan, who, when he noticed Marion, cried out,—

"Are you quite safe, miss?"

"I think so, for the present," gasped the poor girl, her face still rigid with fear.

"Well, lie down, I'll look after you to-night," he replied, flinging himself down near to her.

So the first night in Hobart Town passes by, and the young convict, Marion Carter, lay by the side of Mathuna.

CHAPTER XI.

MATHUNA LEARNS ENGLISH.

“How much you give me, govener, for these dam bush-rangers if I find ’em for you?”

It was three months after the events related in our last chapter had occurred, and things were a little more prosperous-looking in the youthful town. Several ships had arrived laden with prisoners, grain and other provisions, and were now lying at anchor in the bay, being unloaded by the eager and half-famished prisoners. Out in the offing a huge war frigate lay, while on shore her crew were spending their holiday as sailors generally do.

During these three past months, the tribe of Mathuna and Mosquito, the New South Wales aboriginal tracker, with the assistance of John Whitehouse, had been doing good service to the State, without receiving either recognition or much of thanks for their work.

They had followed the tracks of the convict mutineers of the *Stirling Castle*, and had succeeded, after fearful trials and difficulties, in bringing them all back to Hobart Town, with the exception of the four leaders—Bess Martin, Ned Quigley, Tommy Spears, and Dyan Hopper, who were still at large, and doing considerable damage in the outlying districts where some of the adventurous colonists had already begun to cultivate land.

The last batch of starved-out and dejected mutineers had been taken into the prison barracks the night before, and now Mosquito, with his dusky friends, had sought an interview with the prison secretary before starting out again on their perilous journey.

“How much?” replied the official; “why, plenty ’bacca, plenty grub, plenty rum—when we have them, Mosquito.”

“Grub and ’bacca very good, plenty of rum a sight better—all good ’nough for ignorant natives like these are, but not plenty good ’nough for Mosquito, govener. Me big man as yourself in my own country; me civilised man, and know how much I am worth as well as most white fellows; me work for Govener Davey long time now, and for Govener Collins also, and no see the colour of one dam bad shilling. That no good, you know, for man like Mosquito to go on with no longer.”

"Ah, you want money, do you, for your services?"

"Yes, gov'ner; like yourself or any other white fellow expect," replied Mosquito calmly.

"And what if I don't give you any?"

"Then me no work any longer for King George; me go back to Sydney; me work dam well, all same as bushrangers for Mosquito."

"Ah, that is your idea, is it?" replied the clerk, losing his temper at what he considered the other's impudence. "Hey, you two fellows, take Mosquito down to the prison yard and give him six dozen on the triangle, and then turn him into the common cell with the men he has brought in; that ought to bring him to his senses before to-morrow."

Six dozen with the cat was a very lenient punishment in those early days of conviction, where the sentence was not unfrequently as many hundreds for even a less offence than disrespect to the Government officials. The turning of Mosquito into the general yard, where some of the worst of the felons were kept at nights, was much more severe in his case, seeing that he had been the means of tracking many of them down and bringing them back again to the justice which they had broken from.

Mosquito was a native of New South Wales, who had been brought over to Hobart Town on account of his extraordinary courage and skill at tracking criminals. He had the instinct and ferocity of a bloodhound, with the strength and cunning of a tiger.

His office in Van Dieman's Land was by no manner of means a sinecure, as he often had the length and breadth of the land to traverse in search of an escaped bushranger or murderer, and great personal risks to encounter before the criminal was secured, so that it was not at all an unreasonable request on his part to ask for a wage, like any white man would have done. He was hated and insulted constantly by the felons for his unrequited office of informer whenever he appeared in public, and only tolerated by the officials, although perhaps the style in which he couched his request for a wage in the future, and arrears paid up, might not have been exactly according to propriety.

The official who at the present sentenced him to the lash was only a late importation from Sydney by the name of Snodgrass. He had been in the habit in that colony of riding rough-shod over the *inferior* population, his motto being, "Give a black fellow money and you ruin him." Perhaps he

was right with the majority of savages, but in Mosquito's case he had made a mistake.

Mr Snodgrass was disgusted with the laxity of Colonel Davey's rule, and had already begun to make himself felt by his severity towards the prisoners. The triangles in the prison yard, which had seldom been filled during the past nine months since the landing of the Governor, were now, since the coming of Mr Snodgrass, almost hourly occupied; and the flagellators, who had been long out of practice, were getting their hands in, and could once more cut and scar the back of a victim scientifically.

Mosquito was a tall and muscular man of about thirty-two, sullen, ferocious and sensitive to insult, and, in spite of his long association with the white people, as much a savage as when first he had been discovered in his native scrub.

It took six powerful convicts to carry him to the whipping-yard and fasten him up to the triangle, but when once they got him there, and the flagellators started upon their sickening work, he neither struggled or cried out, but bore his punishment without a groan. He only turned his dark, bloodshot eyes from side to side and watched the last man who had struck without seeming to feel the lashes.

There was a large audience to look on at the punishment of this hated black fellow—grinning enemies, who had been brought back by his efforts, with the men of Mathuna's tribe, who had been his companions for the last three months. The natives looked on with staring wonderment at this novel reward for past services, and shuddered as the blows fell upon that naked back.

It was unfortunate for Mosquito that his genial patron, Colonel Davey, was on that day absent from Hobart Town. Having a plentiful supply of food and spirits and visitors, he had invited them all to one of the outlying stations for a grand picnic, a custom of his when provisions were plentiful, so that the town was nearly empty, as all who could get away with the jovial Governor, officials with their wives, overseers and the favoured prisoners, male and female, the crews of the different ships then lying at anchor, with all the disreputable loafers who had tickets-of-leave. Mr Snodgrass knew well that they would not return while the day lasted, and only then in a state of uproarious conviviality.

The whippers laid on with a will, giving Mosquito his full allowance, every cut bringing away a strip of skin. When they were finished, the flagellated back was like a raw beefsteak.

It was a terrible night for the black tracker in the yard amongst the human wolves who had him delivered over to their clutches, and when morning dawned, and the Governor woke up from his debauch, and went his round of inspection, it was with no small indignation that he heard about the punishment.

“Confound it, Mr Snodgrass, you had no right to whip Mosquito. He deserves his wages more than any of us, and to shut him up with these ruffians was atrocious on your part. Send him to me at once, if they have not killed him, and he'll have wages even although I have to go without myself for the next six months.”

Mosquito was brought out of that hell more dead than alive, but he did not ask again for wages, nor would he see the Governor. He crawled over to the camp of Mathuna, and lay with his brown friends all the day, while they doctored his back and other wounds.

That night fell dark and drizzling with rain, so that the inhabitants retired early to bed. On the next morning, George de la Motte, the gentleman pickpocket, who had been allotted to Mr Snodgrass as a servant, found the body of that rigid disciplinarian with his throat cut from ear to ear, and mutilated in a horrible manner; later on the two flagellators were also discovered laying on the main road in the same way treated, and with their backs gashed about to the bone. Mosquito had taken his revenge and was off to the bush, but no longer in behalf of King George the Third.

John Whitehouse was greatly troubled over these atrocities and the escape of Mosquito, for during the past three months they had travelled and worked nearly constantly together. The black tracker had proved a useful friend to him in the furtherance of his self-appointed mission, teaching him the native language, and introducing him to many of the inland tribes. He was now able to converse freely with them, and had already established a friendly relation with them, and by his magnetic influence had laid many of the settlers under great obligation to him by explaining away fancied wrongs and preventing bloodshed.

When the Europeans first landed in Van Dieman's Land, they had been heartily welcomed by the aborigines, and treated with every possible kindness, and it had taken many years of ill-usage on the part of the white man before they were roused up to hostility.

Ten years had passed since the first consignment of prisoners

and overseers had taken possession of the land, and now the cruelties practised on the too trusting natives by these ruthless men were producing a harvest of retaliation and bloodshed. What this now extinct race were before the year 1803 may be gathered from the accounts left of them by the early explorers. Both Labillardière and Peron speak of them with enthusiasm and affectionate respect; the men brave and generous, with physiognomies exhibiting neither austerity nor ferocity, but having eyes bright and sparkling, and looks expressive of benevolence only. The women pretty, robust and lively, many of them really beautiful, great talkers, without reserve or affectation, yet particularly modest and virtuous.

In the year 1813 they had changed this disposition entirely; no longer trusting and open, but developing great cunning and ferocity, retiring to their wilds as the whites advanced, and treating them as avowed enemies, at the same time taking along with them the vices which their debased masters had bequeathed to them, and improving upon the lessons of cruelty which the settlers had taught them. The first blood had been shed by the whites.

Of those who had come to the town as Mathuna and her tribe had come, many stayed on, sinking daily from savage independence to bestiality. They were quick to learn, as Peron had described them on his first visit, and very soon lost all traces of their original characteristics. Van Dieman's Land has often been described as the pandemonium of the world, into which England emptied her dregs. Those male and female white-skinned beasts were the teachers and ruthless destroyers of the innocent and the inoffensive brown-skins. How could either innocence or nobility exist in such a state of society?

John Whitehouse saw what the finale of this evil drama would be—the degradation and extermination of the entire race.

In his eyes, the carelessness of the jovial Governor was a spectacle to fill him with horror. The hourly scenes of vicious debauchery drove the power of prayer almost from his heart. His ears were filled with blasphemy, his eyes encountered nothing but vileness unutterable. He had attempted upon his first arrival to rouse them up a little to a sense of their degradation, but his efforts were in vain; the horrors quenched his enthusiasm, and took all the magnetism from him.

So he had followed Mosquito and the natives into the forest, so pure and sacred when compared with that modern

Gomorrah. In the forest the angels of God once more visited his dreams and awoke his enthusiasm. He learnt the language and habits of the natives, who could be influenced by his magnetism, and knew now that they were the brothers whom God had given into his charge.

He had two grave blemishes which made him unfitted to cope with or influence these gentlemanly debauchees, who were the rulers of the land, and those vice-hardened criminals, who were the slaves. He was a bigot in his ideas of salvation, therefore intolerant of sin ; also, he had no sense of humour—he was too intense and earnest in his devotion to the cause for which he lived. Governor Davey and his guests listened to his open-air meetings, and laughed at the mistakes which his lack of education made him constantly commit. They could never be touched by a divine message delivered to them in such ungrammatical English. Many of the most depraved of the criminals also were as highly educated as the rulers—some of them more so—and these were the leaders of the commoner class, and they were impossible to get at, so poor John gave up his attempt at converting Hobart Town.

He laid his plans before the Governor, and met his entire approval. He would go amongst the tribes, gather them all together, and place them where they might no longer be outraged and contaminated. The Governor and his counsellors saw the policy of these plans as soon as they were laid before them, for the black question had begun to trouble them all very seriously,—what to do with the hostile natives, so that the settlers might be able to live and cultivate their ground? Therefore, without pausing, he was at once enrolled as a servant of the Crown under the novel title of Native Protector, a small salary allowed him out of the Treasury, and an island given to him off the mainland, where the natives could be transported when he could persuade them to leave their native wilds, and a royal grant given to him to roam about and act as he thought best for the furtherance of his scheme. John had won his point. The souls and bodies of the natives were given officially into his hands, and all he had to do was to risk his own life amongst them, and begin his perilous enterprise. Davey had no great hope in his ultimate success, but felt greatly comforted that one more responsibility in this vexing conundrum of a colony was shifted from his incapable shoulders.

John, now that he had won his point, would have taken his departure at once, for he had decided to go alone, but for

one reason which kept him chained anxiously and forebodingly to the God-forgotten city. That reason was Mathuna.

Three months had wrought a great alteration in this beautiful and splendid savage maiden Queen.

Like John with the native language, she had determined to learn English, and, woman-like, when she is determined, she had succeeded. Mosquito had been her first instructor. It was not the purest or most refined English which she had gained from this associate of Sydney convicts, still it was a start in the right direction.

She began by asking him questions as to the names of things and terms used by people to express love, and Mosquito enlightened her to the best of his limited ability.

Then she sought out Wilfred Tregarthen, and repeated in tender accents the words she had learnt parrot-like.

"Me talkee you English now—listen." She felt that she must have made some mistake when she saw the disgusted look with which her lately-acquired accomplishment was received by the object of her affections, and resolved to discard her teacher Mosquito.

"I don't quite approve of that kind of English, Mathuna," replied Wilfred gravely.

"Then *you* teach me the rest."

So it was arranged between them, and Wilfred Tregarthen amused himself by teaching the forest maiden, his mother tongue, with the purest university pronunciation.

CHAPTER XII.

MATHUNA BECOMES A FINE LADY.

THREE months had gone by, and Mathuna had discarded her kangaroo skin robes, and taken to the wearing of stays and boots, with the other sundries which go to make up a civilised lady's wardrobe.

Government accommodation was not very extensive, as we have already hinted, still, before many days had passed over, the Governor managed to have a few extra wood huts raised up for the use of the new-comers, and, after a little consultation, Mathuna was placed under the charge of Mrs Quinton

and Kate Ambrose, and allowed a spare room in their bungalow.

She was no longer disdainful of her own sex; for, with a little smattering of education, she began to feel her own deplorable ignorance, or rather what she considered to be her ignorance, and felt very humble and self-contemptuous.

The gentlemen, from Governor Davey down to the youngest subaltern, made much of *la belle sauvage*, and treated her in much the same affectionate style that they would have done with a fine St Bernard dog. As long as she remained with her own people, and wore her own costume, she represented a power, and was treated with a certain amount of deference; but when she retired from her own people, and abandoned their ways of living, with one fell stroke she cut dignity from her, and became like the tame dog of the settlement.

John Whitehouse saw all this with anguish, and tried to warn her of her danger, but love had made her blind and obstinate, and she only laughed at him, or got angry, and ran away from him when he persisted.

The men and women of her tribe suffered also by this daily contact with the white people: they were employed by the Government as hunters and trackers, and paid for their work in meat and drink. While Mathuna was learning the language and habits of her lady friends, her men and women were equally busy acquiring the habits and morality of the vilest criminals. They no longer kept strict guard over their camp, or attended to their camp fires. The keeper of the firebrand had wantonly allowed it to go out, laughing at his former anxiety as an exploded superstition. Now the convicts and the natives were the best of friends with each other, and at nights used to drink and shout, where before silence had been rigidly observed in the native camp.

Papers were drawn up, and the distant land, which the forefathers of Mathuna had owned, were put up by Government for sale to private selectors; she had parted with the whole of her wide territories for the costumes she now considered indispensable to her new position in life, as the adopted daughter of Major and Mrs Quinton. Mary Carter, the young convict whom she had protected on the first night of her coming into the town, now had been allotted to her as her maid—a fortunate position for the girl, as she was now safely housed at nights. Jane Lymburner also was appointed to instruct her in deportment and general behaviour, and became a perfect nightmare to the poor ex-queen.

"You ought not to do that, Mathuna," she would remark severely, a hundred times each day, while the pupil fumed inwardly at the restraint, but bore it all patiently for the sake of the man she was vainly trying to live up to.

For the first two or three weeks, Wilfred Tregarthen took great pleasure in teaching Mathuna how to speak correctly, for he found his *rôle* as instructor a very easy one. Mathuna treasured up each word as it fell from his lips, and practised it over until she could pronounce it with the correct accent. It was good fun to watch her mind expanding, and he felt pleased at the novelty of seeing her in civilised costume. Mrs Quinton and Kate directed her taste as to colour and fashion, so that, as far as outward appearance went, she was not allowed to put on any article too outrageous.

Her greatest troubles at first were with the boots, stays and chairs; still, with sublime feminine heroism, she endured the tortures of bracing in that well-developed waist into whalebone, and the crushing of the well-made foot into leather, and also strove her hardest to appear comfortable upon the unaccustomed elevation of chairs and couches.

Tregarthen did not care a whit for all the chaff and laughter which the barrack loungers indulged in over his dusky conquest, and she was too much engrossed with him, and as yet too unsophisticated to attempt to hide her feelings, until he became wearied with her. She followed him about everywhere, carrying his bag for him when he went out shooting on the hills, and chattering to him with the freedom of a happy child.

And he was easy, cool and pleasantly indifferent to all her advances, teaching her everything that he could think about during their long walks together, except the one subject which was burning at her heart, and which she hungered for him to speak to her about.

She hated Jane Lymburner for the contemptuous manner in which that quiet governess corrected her on every occasion.

"What do young ladies say when they want a husband, Jane?" she had inquired at that gentle person.

"They are not supposed to give expression to feelings so outrageous, Mathuna."

"Do young ladies never want husbands, then, Jane?"

"Oh, I dare say some of them do, only they would be ashamed to let any one know that they had such ideas; it would be most improper."

"Ah!" Mathuna had learnt the meaning of that awful

word impropriety, which met her at every turn of the way.

"What do they do then?"

"They wait until the gentleman asks them first."

"But the wrong gentleman may ask them?"

"Yes, that often happens, and then they can always say 'No' to him, and so send him about his business."

"But if the right one cannot understand that he is wanted to speak, is there no other way, without being improper, of making him understand what he ought to do?"

"No other way, only by waiting patiently and showing a partiality for him."

"That is what I want to know; how does a young lady show a partiality?"

"Oh, by lots of ways—making eyes at him, looking at him tenderly when no one else is watching, and dropping your eyes shyly, and blushing when he looks at you, being cold to him sometimes when he is careless."

"Yes, yes; but if you cannot feel cold; if your heart is burning and throbbing for him all the time?"

"Never let him know that too quickly—flirt with other men and make him jealous, that is sometimes a very good way. Watch him as closely as you like, but don't let him notice that you are doing so."

"Ah, yes; now I begin to understand," said Mathuna thoughtfully. "Do as you do towards Saul Clark, only you see it is different with me and Wilfred, for he has no one else, and so he will be able to notice me oftener than Saul notices you when you are watching him and Kate."

"What do you mean, woman?" cried Jane, turning crimson, while her small black eyes sparkled with a sudden fury.

"That you love him as I do Wilfred, and that we are both unfortunate in our love. Will it come to us, do you think, if we wait long enough?"

"Perhaps; most things come to people who can wait long enough," replied Jane Lymburner solemnly, as she recovered herself. "Only don't utter thoughts like these to anyone else—no young lady would."

The governess knew that this was the surest method of silencing the tongue of Mathuna, who longed, next to her love, to become a proper young lady.

Mrs Quinton and Kate next took her in hand, and told Mathuna that she ought not to go out so much with Wilfred;

that she ought to divide her attentions with the other gentlemen, and avoid him as much as possible.

Poor Mathuna liked Mrs Quinton and her niece, for they were always considerate to her shortcomings, and therefore listened with more respect to their advice than she did to that of the governess.

"Then to be a young lady I must learn to be deceitful?"

"We call it being discreet and modest," observed Mrs Quinton. "You see, my dear Mathuna, that you do not know yet whether Mr Tregarthen likes you enough to care to offer marriage to you."

"Don't say that, Mrs Quinton," cried out the half-civilised savage, clutching at her dress near her heart, as if she had been wounded. "He must want me to marry him because I want him to marry me; don't you see how it is?"

"Yes, my poor darling, anyone can see how much you love him."

"Yet he cannot see it," wailed the unfortunate Queen.

"All the more reason why you must hide the secret from him of all men."

"What shall I do?"

"Laugh as if you were quite happy, but not with him; refuse him next time he asks you to go for a walk with him, and go with some one else instead. Do not take any more lessons from him, and—and leave him alone."

Tregarthen felt greatly relieved when, next time he carelessly asked Mathuna to come for a walk, she refused with downcast eyes. He strolled away whistling quite cheerfully, without looking back, while she, trembling with agony, stretched out her arms wildly towards his retreating figure, and would have rushed after him if Kate had not held her back and dragged her inside; there she spent the afternoon weeping furiously. It was a hard and heart-breaking training this of hers, and to act as a young lady should do a more difficult task than she had reckoned upon.

She then tried the next lesson in discretion, that is, flirting with some of the other fellows, and with them she had no cause to complain that they could not understand her, for they were all ardent enough in their attentions, and eager to get her by herself and express their admiration. She could see that they were much more free with her than they appeared to be with Kate Ambrose or the other ladies, but she was not yet educated enough in the wily ways of civilised

intrigue to know that each look or word was an insult to her, and that they only regarded her as fair game.

"I wish that Wilfred would be as nice, and say as pretty words as Captain Wilmott does when we are alone," she observed to Kate one day when they were together.

"What does he say?" asked Kate anxiously.

"That I am like an evening star, where he would like to live for ever; that I am a goddess, and that he worships me, and that if I would only come and stay with him that he would make me for ever happy."

"And how did you reply, Mathuna?"

"Oh, I laughed at him. He looked so funny with his ugly little eyes glaring like a wild cat's in the moonlight upon me, and shaking as if he was afraid of me."

"Yes, that was the best thing you could have done," replied Kate, with a sigh of relief.

"Was it proper?" asked Mathuna simply, pleased that she had at length done something that deserved approval.

"Quite proper," answered Kate.

"Now, that is strange, for I thought I must have done wrong to laugh at him, for he grew quite scarlet in the face, and muttered 'damnation.'"

"Hush, Mathuna! Don't repeat these naughty words, even although we must all listen to them sometimes."

"Then he smoothed his face with his hand and coughed a little, and, after twirling his moustache, observed that 'it was a beautiful night,' so we walked on until we came to a shady part, where he asked me to sit down beside him.

"Did you sit down, Mathuna?"

"Of course; you told me to divide my attentions, you know, and be agreeable to the other gentlemen, so, as the poor fellow seemed to be tired, I sat beside him to let him rest. Just then you and Saul Clark came along in the moonlight, both looking as happy as I feel when Wilfred is with me, only you were better treated, for I saw him kiss you once or twice."

"You and Captain Wilmott saw this?"

"Of course; why not? Jane Lymburner saw it also, for she was following you both, and watching you as a snake watches a little bird."

"Ah, and what did Captain Wilmott say?"

He waited until you and Saul had got out of hearing, trembling as he leaned against me, and, pressing my hand as

hard as he could, then he reached up his mouth and whispered hoarsely,—

“See how happy yonder couple are; will you not make me as happy?”

“Yes,” said Kate, with a flash in her eyes; “and you, Mathuna?”

“He put one arm round my neck, and tried to draw down my face to his, looking at me again with burning eyes, but, instead of laughing this time, I felt angry and knocked him down. Was that also proper, Kate?”

“Under the circumstances, highly proper,” replied Kate, with great energy.

“He rolled away into the moonlight, and then rose, and calling me ‘a confounded heartless tartar and vixen,’ hurried away, holding his handkerchief to his face.”

“That accounts for Captain Wilmott’s black eye,” remarked Kate, laughing. “He accused one of the prisoners for it this morning, and had the poor fellow flogged.”

“Did he do that, the dingo?” exclaimed Mathuna. “I’ll knock him down again for it next time I see him.”

“No, Mathuna, you must not do that; indeed, you must never allude to it any more. Treat him before people just the same as ever, only do not take any more moonlight walks with him alone.”

“Oh, I am not afraid of him, nor of any one, and besides, I struck him, so that I am not angry with him now.”

“But, Mathuna, I saw you come in last night, and it was Wilfred Tregarthen who brought you back.”

“Ah, yes,” said poor Mathuna, with a heavy sigh. “I met him just after the Captain had ran away, and I’m afraid that I forgot altogether about what a young lady should do, for I asked him to come for a walk with me.”

“Ah, that was not at all improper, seeing that you are such old friends; and he went, of course?”

“Yes, he offered me his arm and took me away out of the moonlight, and into the woods where the shadows fell black along the grasses, but he did not tremble as Captain Wilmott had done: it was I that trembled, and felt as if the trees were all dancing, and the moon gleams, which had been white before, became golden as they kissed his face. We rested together once for a long time, but I had to lean against him, for I grew faint with the longing to forget propriety and take him into my arms. He gave me his hand to hold; it was so cool, and mine were so hot, and he talked about nature;

told me that the stars were worlds just like this world, with people like ourselves in them, and no ghosts, as my people believed; but *he* did not call me an evening star, or say that he would like me to stay with him. He told me what the gods and goddesses were, for I asked him about them, but he did not tell me that I was one, but talked on cool and quiet, like a stream rippling over rocks, while I listened with my eyes shut and my heart whirling and boiling like the water in the basin of a great waterfall."

"Poor Mathuna."

"Ah! he leaned against the trunk of a hard gum-tree, and me beside him eager to hold him, and he smoked his cigar calmly, while I burnt and glowed at the sound of his voice, as it was doing with his kisses. See, I have the cigar that he kissed so often. I picked it up after he had finished it, while he only laughed, and told me not to add smoking to my other accomplishments. I tried to think of all that I ought to do as a young lady, yet I wondered that he did not ask me for a kiss also, as all the other young gentlemen do when they get me alone."

"Mathuna, you must never go out with any man alone until he has asked you to marry him, and you can answer yes."

"Not with Wilfred?" asked Mathuna aghast.

"Oh, I make an exception in his case. If he had you all to himself in the bush without making love to you, or asking you to kiss him, I think there can be no danger to you with him, at least no more harm than has already happened to you through him. Good night, Mathuna; you are a very good and proper young lady."

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS O'CALLIGHAN RESOLVES TO GIVE A HOUSE-WARMING.

HONEST Samuel Biddle was not flourishing any more in his courtship with Miss O'Callighan than was the unfortunate ex-Queen Mathuna.

Miss O'Callighan, as the possessor of £30,000, was a person to be considered by the leaders of a colony where funds very

often ran low ; and as she had openly avowed her intention of speculating in land, the Governor did all in his power to make her as comfortable as he could.

He made the convicts run her up a six-roomed cottage, with some outhouses, only asking her in return to extend her hospitality to Captain and Mrs Carrodus ; and as the wealthy maiden required servants, he sent her over a couple of the best conducted female convicts, and after the death of Mr Snodgrass, his valet, George de la Motte, to act as general manservant and protector.

Now, Gentleman George was a most ingratiating young fellow of about twenty-five, slenderly built, and *debonnaire* in his behaviour, in every respect quite the opposite to Samuel Biddle. His eyes were full and languishing in their expression ; his lips smiling, and revealing when they parted a dazzling set of teeth ; his complexion was refined, with a commanding nose and firm chin, and graceful long-fingered hands, while he carried himself so daintily that even his badly-made prison greys appeared to sit jauntily upon him.

Samuel Biddle, in view of his prolonged stay in Van Dieman's Land, had applied for and obtained a post as overseer in the prison. Hearing of his antipathy to the fair sex, the Governor had placed him in charge of the female ward, where, like the most desperate of the male prisoners, the very black sheep amongst the females were kept, so that he had plenty of opportunities for studying the "sarpints" in their most venomous form.

Samuel was kept pretty close to his duties, as seldom an hour passed of the day or night that he and his assistants were not called upon to quell some riot or other. The viragos kept him lively with his cat-o'-nine-tails, and he would have really enjoyed his work if it had not been for the thought of that young "feller" who stayed in the house of his ancient charmer.

Samuel was jealous, and, what was worse, he appeared to have grounds for his jealousy. George de la Motte had learnt the worldly position of his mistress, and was now exerting all the powers of his fascination to cut out the elderly ex-boat-swain, now chief warder of the penitentiary.

There were a few other single gentlemen amongst the officials who were also smelling after that sum of money, and ready to dismiss their temporary housekeepers as soon as they were quite sure that it wasn't all a myth on her part.

George de la Motte had no such narrow fears or compunc-

tions. He had already married and ran away from two heiresses, whose small fortunes he had spent before his conviction, and was now again quite prepared to offer his heart and hand on the off-chance of even a little money and his ticket-of-leave, which, through his wife's influence, he would have a good prospect of securing.

Now, Warder Biddle, seeing how things were shaping at Kilkenny Cottage, as Miss O'Callighan had her cottage christened, became more morose than he had been before, and was fast relapsing into his former state of railing against the "sarpints" who had embittered his past life, and in many ways playing into the hands of his rivals by his neglect of his *inamorata*. He moodily stayed away from her on many an occasion when he might have been there paying his court, spending the hours outside her gate glaring like a boding spectre upon the lamp-lighted window; and as he watched the shadows against the blind—now it would be the graceful George with his tray passing languidly, or the more burly proportions of the marine doctor, or the mop head of Inspector Grindsell bending forward for a moment.

These were maddening moments in the life of the truly wretched old man, as he stood outside in the dark instead of going inside, as he might easily have done. He stood outside and worked himself into a white fury, muttering to himself the while, as he watched the shadows and speculated on the scenes enacted inside,—

"Thar she sits, the 'eartless sarpint, with her blooming headpiece on, the red turban, I'll swear, in honour of the millingtry, a-winding of her coils round the 'earts of that big-headed Grindsell and the fat doctor, and leaving me a-starving outside in the cold. Ha, ha! don't I know the whole biling of them, and how they come to swill into her brandy; ay, there goes the slim, long-fingered pickpocket, carrying in the punch-bowl, all a-steaming hot—ugh!"

The sight of the punch-bowl generally proved too much for Samuel. As its goodly shadow passed over the blind, he would either retire and bury his sorrows in some drinking shanty, from whence he would stagger back to the prison in a dazed condition; or, if his funds could not run to a solitary night's debauch, he would gulp down his evil passions, and stamp fiercely up to the front door, and demand admittance in his most aggressive voice.

He was not socially inclined at any time, and behaved like a surly brute when he was admitted, lurching in without a

"good evening" to one of the company, but helping himself freely to the refreshments.

"You are late to-night again, Samuel; I never expected you to come."

Now that Miss O'Callighan had become in a manner popular, and saw the prospect of other strings to her bow, she had lost her servility, and did not extend to her admirer the welcome he had formerly received.

"Yas, I am late, and I suppose it would not have mattered had I been later," he snarled, with a glare round the company, as he passed over to the table and helped himself to what was there.

"That's your own business, I hope," retorted the fair one, with a toss of her scarlet turban. "George, bring in my fan."

"Yes, madame, presently," replied George de la Motte, in his richest and softest tones, as he glided over to her side, and bowed before her with the deferential grace of a lord to a duchess in the ball-room.

"You may stay and fan me, George." And then George would bend over her and flutter the fan gently like a true expert.

"Yas; stay, George, and fan your lady, so long as there be no spoons or forks about to lift." Samuel always grew ferociously sarcastic after his second glass. "And no pockets to pick—eh, George, not much in the pockets here present?"

George always smiled gently on the old man's wit, but made no retort. He was in a land where servants were forced to be respectful.

"Yah! a fine company of hungry leeches you have to-night, ma'am; you won't be allowed to die of old age while the Doctor hangs about so close to your tail—ha, ha! And, George, you won't be able to cut her throat with the sodger and the inspector looking so close after you; it's always best to be on the safe side, ain't it?"

"Confound your impudence, what d'ye mean, sir?" bawled out the three rivals, with their faces purple.

"Nothink, gentlemen, to them that it don't apply to; only that the sarpint may sting ye all yet, that's all."

"Mr Biddle, if you can't be more polite, I think you had better go," retorted the hostess loftily.

"Yas, I'll go; only, Agnes, the time may come when you may require the sarvices of Samuel Biddle, as you have before." Saying which, the victim of jealousy would gulp down his third

tumbler and stride out, slamming the door violently behind him. On such occasions the female prisoners generally received a midnight visit of inspection from the enraged warder.

It was a great consolation to Samuel that he had the power of turning to these "sarpints" when in an extra bad temper, and they seldom disappointed him, or left him without some excuse for abusing them; for they were composed from the very vilest scum of all the colonial prisons—women in sex only, who had long since lost all sense of shame or humanity. They were locked up at night in separate cages, and bore the semblance of wild beasts rather than human beings, so that, whenever Samuel wanted to see fun, he would turn two of them into one cage, and watch them fight each other until they rolled on the floor, gnawing and biting at one another like rabid dogs. Then he would take his cat out and lash them into submission. These were the kind of "sarpints" which Samuel ruled over with a rod of iron—foul animals, who could not be tamed except by the whip.

And the strange part about it was that they liked this ogreish warder better than any who had been over them before. "He's a man," they would snarl admiringly, after they had howled and shrieked themselves hoarse, with the most blood-curdling blasphemy. "No humbug about him."

Miss O'Callighan, now that she had got her house into order, determined upon having a proper house-warming, and for the purpose sent out the polite George with the invitations which he had composed and written out for her.

Miss O'Callighan was a very different person from the day when she had thought a ship's boatswain good enough to be a husband. She had blossomed into quite a gay leader of society, and as she was generous with her refreshments, she had a great many callers during the day.

Mrs Carrodus also helped to keep her house lively, and attract the men to it for a little while with her gentle coquetry, and although she did not keep her admirers very long, still others came on, and for a little time served her purpose. Her husband, the Captain, was now able to be about, although suffering from a defective memory. He could not remember the name of the vessel in which he had sailed, or what had become of her; and now they were only waiting upon a homeward-bound ship to return home to England.

Miss O'Callighan and Mrs Carrodus did not get along very well, and George had a difficult part to play in his living with the two ladies to keep from offending either, which might

have got him sent back to the chain-gang, or sentenced to the lash.

The fate of a consigned servant in the convict days was unfortunate in the extreme. If he had a reasonable master or mistress, his lot was good enough, although he had no rights, and no option or chance of complaining against tyranny. If he behaved insolently, or was accused of doing so, the master had only to send him with a note to the prison for him to be tied up to the triangles and lashed, and afterwards sent to labour with the chain-gangs in the quarries.

George de la Motte was wise in his generation, and had managed hitherto to sail his bark smoothly amongst the rocks of these daily disputes and keep his place. Much more fortunate than the servant maids, who had been twice changed within the month. He languished upon each of the ladies when he had them apart, and when they were together, became modesty impersonified.

Mrs Carrodus he kept his friend by finding admirers for her, and as he had a fertile imagination, he daily managed to concoct a pretty story of some conversation he had overheard where her charms were the theme. He was discreet, and lied as plausibly as a well-trained lady's-maid.

To keep Miss O'Callighan was a much less fatiguing task, and no one wearied so much as himself for the homeward bound ship to come, so that he might have his mistress all to himself. She was cross, peevish, and full of crotchets and vanities, but she was about the most gullable person he had ever passed through his skilful hands.

Before he had been with her for an hour she had asked for his history, and why he had been exiled, to which he replied, modestly,—

“Madame, I am an unfortunate, and what I am about to relate to you must be under the strictest seal of confidence.”

“Yes, George, you may depend upon my discretion as safely as if you were telling it to the priest in the confessional.”

“I will trust you, madame,” he replied, with a downward glance and a twinkle in his dark eyes.

“My mother, who shall be nameless, was a lady of very high rank, and my father is King George the Third of England.”

“Good heavens, George; then you are of royal blood, but illegitimate, I suppose?”

“Ah, madame.” George smiled a bitter smile, as he replied gently, “If my mother had been less rigid in her ideas

of virtue and morality, I should not have had the honour of being in Van Dieman's Land and your service. My sainted mother, madame, was the daughter of a Roman Catholic Duke, and one of the most lovely women of the Court, when the young Prince of Wales, then unmarried, fell violently in love with her, and persecuted her for a return to his affection.

"Knowing as you do, from your experience of royal customs, that the Prince could not take his queen from any but a German and a Protestant family, she resisted him as long as she could, and only at last, when worn out with his importunity, consented to marry him privately, in her own and his church. They were married, and I am the fruit of that secret marriage—the unhappy, unfortunate issue."

"Then you are the eldest son of our blessed King, and the brother of the Prince of Wales. Indeed, you ought to be our future king," cried his mistress, entirely ignorant of his age, and that of the mature regent, who at the time might well have been his father.

"Which is the sole cause of my banishment. From my birth upwards, I have been persecuted by the cruel emissaries of my unnatural royal sire, who, fearing a faction would rise in my favour to support my rights, resolved to banish me to this far-off corner of the globe."

"Dear me, how very romantic, George; and all the while I thought you had been transported for picking pockets."

"It is romantic, madame." And George bowed with a grace which his *royal elder brother* might have imitated.

Miss O'Callighan pulled out her purse, and, taking out a guinea piece, compared the King's head on it with the noble, sad face before her.

"Now that I examine the gold piece, I do see the resemblance, George, to you, and your august father—the same receding forehead and full eyes, the same prominent nose and cut-away chin, with the air of distinction over both faces. Take it and examine it for yourself. Don't you see it?"

"They do say that there is a striking likeness, madame, although it is not often that I have the opportunity of comparing the features of my father with my own," replied George sadly, once more bowing and holding out the guinea-piece for her to take from him.

"Nay; keep it, George, as a token of my respect for you, and in remembrance of the King."

"I thank you, madame, from the bottom of my soul, and

will for ever wear it next to my heart, in remembrance of the generous and beauteous donor."

George put the coin into his pocket and glided out of the room to the kitchen to attend to his duties.

"Well, George, how have you got along with the missis?" whispered one of the servants, a tall, good-looking girl of about nineteen, one of the mutineers of the *Stirling Castle*.

"Bully, Winny; she swallowed my cocktail like sugar. Look, and ketch!"

George produced his keepsake, and making it spin into the air, the girl caught it dexterously before it fell.

"Hallo, a quid! Did you hook it while she was listening?"

"No, Winny; that game won't do in Hobart Town. I have a better one on. The old 'un herself, she gave it to me as a keepsake."

"What a fellow you are for getting round women, George!" cried the girl admiringly.

"Slip down to Nat Taggart, the blind fiddler, and get small change for it; we'll have a spree there to-night."

"George, come here," called out his mistress in an indulgent voice.

"Coming, madam," replied George in melodious tones as he left the kitchen, with a wink at the servant-maid.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT AT "THE BLACK SWAN."

DOWN by what was afterwards known as Sandy Bay, and to where, out of consideration for the feelings of the ladies, the gibbets had been lately removed from Hunter's Island, as it stood farther from the settlement, the blind fiddler, Ignatius Taggart, had raised a shanty for the accommodation of visitors; and, getting a license to sell spirits and tobacco from the Governor, he had started in business as a hotel-keeper.

His dwarf wife attended on customers in the bar, while he amused them with his violin and acted as master of ceremonies at the free-and-easies which were held each evening.

By reason of these gibbets and the constant supply of

ghastly fruit which dangled from them, the spot was avoided by the sensitive and the refined, and was therefore all the more patronised by the disreputable, so that the landlord drove a brisk trade.

It was a lonesome and evil-odoured place, by reason of these putrid tributes to military justice which swung there in their creaking chains; for, now that the Government stores were once more replenished, there was no longer any necessity for taking the bodies down each night, as had been done during the famine, so that they were left, according to the good old-fashioned custom, to pollute the air and disgust spectators.

Ignatius, or, as he was called by his customers, Nat Taggart, had wisely fixed upon this site for the business he meant to work up. His house stood upon piles driven into the sand, with the front-door facing the land side and road, and the back-door within a few feet of the water at high tide; when it was an extra tide or rough, the waves dashed under the house and up against the piles.

At this time in the settlement, business was conducted upon easy lines. The Government store was the only depot where provisions and material of every description could be obtained, and the terms were made exceedingly easy for settlers; promissory notes, made payable in three years either in money or kind, were willingly accepted, so that Nat did not require to put his hand into his pocket at all, either for the building of his house or for the stocking of it. He had three good years before him to make his fortune in, and he resolved that he would neglect no opportunity of doing it.

John Whitehouse was disappointed in his convert when he learnt his resolve to open and keep a rum-shop, and departed from his blind shipmate sadly when he saw that further remonstrances were futile to turn him from the evil of his ways. The blind man was cajoling, and full of scriptural quotations, to prove that a man could both be a publican and a saint at the same time, so that John, who could not tolerate half measures at any time, gave him up and left him in pained disgust.

Being situated in a lonely and isolated position, this house became a favourite resort with the unsheltered convicts, ticket-of-leave men, women and assigned servants, when they could get out on leave; also all those that were musically inclined. Each evening Nat held a free and easy in one of the back sheds, which he had put up for his regular customers,

for those who had no other place of shelter on wet nights. After the free and easy, those sheds were utilised as sleeping quarters by those who desired the luxury of sleeping under a roof.

As Nat had received indulgence himself from the Government depot, so he became easy with his customers, allowing them credit, or rather taking pledges from them in lieu of ready cash; in plainer terms, he became their "fence"; and it was to carry out this happy idea that he had chosen his present isolated position so close to the water. Here boats could land close up to his back door on a dark night, and the sailors from the ships do a little bit of quiet trade, and get good bargains from the landlord of "The Black Swan," as well as hear a good song, or enjoy a brisk dance with some of the women.

So every night the dead men outside swung and danced before the ocean breeze, while their rusty chains rattled as if keeping time to the scraping of the violin inside, while the depraved and reckless customers sang, and danced, and shouted boisterously, without let or hindrance, as the deformed landlady and her assigned servants moved about to administer to their thirsty demands, chalking up their debts until they could pay them in cash or kind.

Nat Taggart was the convicts' friend and repository of most of their secrets. Whenever any of them ran up too high a score, he would take such a one aside and chaff him in his grotesque, jocular way about his want of pluck.

"Charley, my dear boy, don't you think it's about time you were looking about you again for something to plant against that chalk of yours? It's getting about as high as—as Jobson, who now dangles up there. Listen to the old chap dancing. He don't care now whether I play for him or not, he can do his fling without music. He got lazy and let his account grow too big, and then, thinking to wipe it off all at once, got reckless, and was found out. Take my advice, dear boy, and find something easy soon. Small jobs are much safer than big ones; and short bills make long friends."

While Nat spoke in his high-pitched voice, he would pinch the arm of his debtor playfully, peering at him with his white eyeballs as he pointed out, with his long skinny finger, in the direction of the creaking gibbets. That playful hint was generally quite enough for the terrified "Charley," who would go out into the darkness with a business air. If he returned, Nat and he generally held another confab, the result of which

was that Mrs Taggart showed him a clean slate under his name. If, however, he did not come back soon to join the singers and dancers inside, his body would very shortly be keeping time to Taggart's music from the outside; for most of the dead men who swung outside had been unable to pay their debts at the Black Swan; for when they would not, or could not, square up, the landlord, who knew all their secrets, got his reckoning from the Government by informing upon them.

Taggart made no secret of his treachery. In a small community like this, it would have been impossible for him to conceal his negotiations with the officials; but that made little difference with his customers. He was a free man, therefore one of their masters, whose word was quite sufficient to hang them at any time; and each of them would have sold him as cheerfully as he did them if they had been in his position; but as they were situated, they could neither complain or get any benefit by treason; and there was no one else in Hobart Town who would have any dealings with them, or to whom they could take their stolen goods, therefore they all took the loss of a companion philosophically, and enjoyed their own hour, like the flies.

"I hear, George, that you have got a comfortable billet with the old spinster," observed Taggart that night, as he sat in the bar and heard the voice of George de la Motte, who had just come in with his servant companion Winifred.

"Tolerably comfortable, Nat," replied George carelessly, as he ordered drinks all round, including the landlord and landlady. "Why don't you drink, mother? you look as if you required it."

"Ah! my beauty keeps her tippie, and saves it up till she gets to bed; don't you, my ducky?"

The dwarf did not reply to her husband's soft words, but went on serving out the other orders with a pallid face.

"That was a pretty keepsake you sent down, George, this morning. I expect there is a deal more where it came from, eh?"

"I don't know, Nat; but from what I hear the old lady has left her fortune at home in old England. She does all her shopping on the three years' system."

"Like enough, George, like enough. Well, you are a smart young man, George, and I shall always be glad to accommodate you and all our shipmates who are like you. I say, come here a moment, I've got some news for you."

George came close to the violinist, who caught him by the arm and whispered in his ear,—

"They have come back from the bush."

"Who have?"

"Bess and her gang."

"Good God, Nat! and where are they?"

"Upstairs, in the bedroom; they want to see you and some of the mates they can trust."

"What are they going to do? Cave in and give themselves up?"

"Not likely; they want to get away with as many of the boys as they can get to join them; will you?"

"I don't know about it. You see I'm quite comfortable where I am, and it's likely to lead to better things, so I don't want to throw away a good chance; but I'd like to see them for all that."

"Right you are; only wait a bit till some of the others come in; we'll have a corroboree after the house is closed."

Customers now began to drop in—male and female servants, who had got leave of absence for the night; convicts who had been working on the roads or unloading the ships, and who, being fairly well behaved, were turned off at nights, after work was over, to provide for themselves, until six o'clock the next morning, when they were expected again upon parade; overseers and soldiers, with the women whom they had hired out as housekeepers, and who were forced to fawn upon and please their brutal owners; a few of the higher officials lounged in to pass the evening.

It was a primitive state of society, and divided into two grades, masters and slaves. The masters lounged into the concert room, and occupied the best seats, kicking the male and female slaves out of their road with scant ceremony. The slaves smirked, smiled, and made jokes for their masters, vying with each other in their fawning servility; poor wretches who were glad to be taken notice of in any way.

"Strike up, fiddler, and let's have some music."

"All right, Captain," replied Nat, as he made his way to his chair at the end of the shed, and began to tune his instrument.

"I say, Wilmott, how did you get on last night with Mathuna?"

"Not at all; a regular stick. I am thinking of applying to the Governor for her maid."

"He won't let you have her, Wilmott," replied one of the

officers. "I tried for her myself, and he refused me. He said that he wanted to keep one good woman as a sample prisoner to show off."

"Well, what do you bet that I don't have the sample in my hut, as housekeeper, before the week is out?" asked Wilmott languidly.

"Fifty pounds," replied the other promptly.

"Done you are, my boy." The two gentlemen pulled out their pocket-books, and entered the bet.

This conversation was held in a loud enough tone to be heard all over the room. As they were speaking, several of the best-looking women came forward and surrounded the officers.

"See here, gents, don't pass over present company; if you want to change your housekeepers, give us a trial."

"We'll see about it by-and-by, if the next batch don't arrive soon. Meantime, clear out. Hallo! Winny, give us a jig."

Winny was by no means backward in exhibiting her accomplishments, pleased to be distinguished by the notice of her masters; thus, while she stood up to dance, the others kept back, leaving a clear space, so that Captain Wilmott and his friends could get the best view.

She was a well-trained dancer, having come from a London professional company, and, therefore, able to throw in suggestive variations. At home, in her days of liberty, she might be pert and cheeky; but those days were past, and now she had to consider the danger of offending that portion of her audience who had the power of sending her to the penitentiary for a false slip—which hampered the *abandon* a good deal.

She danced well, however, wearing all the while a look of anxiety in her dilated eyes; and when they encored, she did it again several times, until Wilmott, growing wearied, ordered her harshly to stop, and some one else to sing a song.

It was like what one would expect a serf performance to be—plenty of exertion and forced merriment, and little enough of enthusiasm.

At length the gentlemen, having seen and drunk sufficiently, went out, leaving the convicts to themselves. A little pause ensued until the masters had got beyond earshot, then the prisoners shook off their depression of fear, and, calling for more drink, struck up merrily; they could smoke, drink and enjoy their partners at last.

They flung care to the winds, and for the next hour or

two yelled loudly as they rushed about like boys and girls released from school, perhaps not quite so innocently, but with as much boisterous enjoyment, and resolved to take as much out of their hour as they could.

It was a dingy light, for the whale oil had to be economised, and so long as they could see where their own glasses stood, there were none of them too fond of the light. The floor was composed of the sea sand, with coarse split logs for walls, strong enough slabs lashed together with green tendrils, through which the salt sea air wafted, and helped to clear the clouds of tobacco smoke—for the time had not yet come when a convict risked heavy punishment if found with tobacco upon him.

The ceiling was low, and sloping upwards to the centre, and as they reeled about in their drunken attempts to dance, with that gaunt, lizard-headed ogre at the far end leering upon them with those white sightless eyeballs and open mouth, a spectator might well have fancied it to have been some orgie of infernal devotees celebrating the worship of their hideous god.

Crime-hardened faces and crop heads, with thin scarlet ears out-spread, and their badly-made, Government-stamped grey clothes; short-haired women dressed in the same shapeless monotony of colour and coarse material, some of them young and pretty, many of them old and sodden, all of them bearing the indelible stamp of vice and shamelessness.

George was sitting gracefully upon one of the benches, watching the airy and fantastic motions of his companion, Winifred, who, more than half tipsy, had cast all fear from her, and was now executing some of her wildest flings and high kicks, to the infinite enjoyment of all near her who were not too *far gone* to keep their eyes open, when he saw the door pushed to the wall and several figures enter.

Two strangers entered first, dressed like sailors—one of immense size and of vast proportions, and his companion broad, and of medium height.

The tall sailor was swarthy as a half-caste, with long black beard and wild-looking hair, and deep-set glowing eyes which seemed to blaze out from each side of the large hooked nose, and the shorter one was red and freckled.

They pushed their way through the crowd without looking behind them, and went straight up to the landlord, whom they accosted with loud voices as if he had been an old friend, and had expected them.

"Well, Taggart, here we are up to date. Ain't it about time the fun was finished now, and we got to business?"

"Not just yet, landlord," shouted out the revellers. "Give us another tune first, and then we'll go."

"I say, new chums," cried out one of the girls, staggering over to them with flushed cheeks and dancing eyes, "don't you know colonial customs? Ain't you going to stand a 'shout' round for the good of the house?"

"We ain't such new chums in this yere settlement as we may look," answered the tall man harshly, putting his great arm round her waist, and drawing her towards him as he spoke; "still, we don't mind standing our hand when a good-looking hussey asks for it. Here, missis, fetch us a couple of gallons of your best Jamaica."

"Them's the right sort of boys," yelled out the drunken mob wildly, as they closed round the sailors.

George glanced again at the doorway to see who were next coming, and started to his feet with a cry of recognition.

"Lord bless me! Bess Martin, Ned, Dyan, and Tommy! I was just coming up to see you. How are you all?"

"Bully, George, my boy," cried Bess, taking him into her arms and kissing him heartily. "We got sick of hiding up in the dark, and hearing all the fun going on below, so have come down for our whacks."

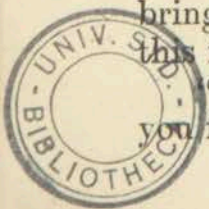
CHAPTER XV.

AT THE FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE.

THE invitations which were issued from Kilkenny Cottage, and carried round by the princely man-servant George, were almost universally accepted. A spree was always gladly welcomed at Hobart Town, and it was considered important enough for the Governor to wait upon the giver personally in order to discuss with her as to ways and means.

"Welcome to Kilkenny Cottage, your Excellency. George, bring refreshments; and what will your Excellency take upon this fine morning?"

"If it's all the same to you, Miss O'Callighan, I'll trouble you for a glass of rum and milk."



Rum being the only spirit to be had at Hobart Town, Miss O'Callighan's hospitable question was almost a superfluous one. Still the Colonel, by introducing the milk, rang a certain change upon the monotony.

"George, tell Winny to milk the goat, and you had better help her to catch it," ordered the lady loftily, to which George replied, in respectful tones, "Yes, madam," and disappeared.

"I hear, Miss O'Callighan, that you have been good enough to invite the entire free population of Hobart Town to your approaching feast, and that they have all accepted the invitation."

"That is so; and I trust that your Excellency will also condescend, and bring Mrs and Miss Davey with you."

"That goes without saying, Miss O'Callighan. I never refuse an offer of this kind," replied the Governor, smiling.

"Oh, thank you. I could not have believed that I was so well liked, if I hadn't been convinced of it by the hearty manner in which my invitations have been received."

"Oh, they do think a lot of you to-day; but what is troubling me at present is where you are going to put us all. True, I might have the prison cleared out for the night, and re-whitewashed. What do you say to that idea?"

"The prison, your Excellency! Why, I would die of fright to have my house-warming there; it would never do, it would be so unlucky," she cried, throwing up her hands in horror at the thought.

"Well, I didn't suppose you ladies would like the notion. Then what do you say to making a picnic of it, and let us all sit outside?"

"*A fête champêtre!*" cried out the lady, in an ecstasy which Mrs Carrodus echoed. "The very thing. Where shall we hold it?"

"I would suggest a very good place along the Derwent, about five miles from here," observed Governor Davey.

"Then let us decide upon it at once."

So this important matter was decided about gravely, and the Governor returned with his suite, and officially announced that the day of Miss O'Callighan's *fête champêtre* would be observed as a general holiday throughout the settlement, and all the prisoners, excepting the most desperate, were to be allowed full liberty to do as they liked, one pound of fresh meat and half a pint of rum to be served out to each of the soldiers and constables.

It was one of the events into which the Governor always

threw his heart, and became energetic over. A vessel having arrived the day before from Sydney, with a couple of cows on board, and half a score of sheep, he sent over to Kilkenny Cottage, with his compliments, one of the cows and five of the sheep, putting them down to Government expenses, and next packed off a squad of convicts, under the charge of a party of soldiers, to clear the ground and erect large tents.

Then, after the Governor, all the other residents of the town and the surrounding districts vied with each other in sending presents, so that, when the day of the feast arrived, Miss O'Callighan found that she had very little to do with her own great feast, excepting the issuing of the invitation cards and the honour of the affair.

Mathuna gathered her scattered tribe together, and sent them out to the forest to hunt, and down to the sea to fish.

Then a grand cooking took place after the slaughtering of the cattle and poultry, in which all the ladies and their assigned servants were employed, as well as the stewards and professional cooks from the vessels in the harbour. Waggons laden with cooked and other stores dragged along the rough tracks all the night before, filling up the ground until it looked like the camp of an army.

And it was something like an army who came to enjoy themselves on that day. The captains and crews of the vessels, the soldiers, constables and overseers, the ladies and gentlemen, followed by whole gangs of unchained prisoners, who came to assist and finish up the remains after the free people were satisfied. Hobart Town looked completely deserted.

Miss O'Callighan was a proud and a happy woman as she looked over her battlefield. She was pleased to think herself such a favourite with the fashionable lot, and proud to be waited upon so assiduously by that royal exile George.

They were all at her feet—the Governor and his suite, the Doctor, who, by reason of his rank, kept nearest to her during the day, the gallant Sergeant and burly Inspector. She could see them eyeing her respectfully in the distance; and what pleased her most of all was to think that the man to whom she had prematurely pledged her maiden word was not amongst those who were present.

Yes, Samuel Biddle, as warder over the penitentiary, had been ordered to stay behind on duty, so that she need have no fear of him coming to mar her pleasant day.

I feel sorry to have to record it, but Miss Agnes O'Callighan, in the day of her popularity, had begun to repent her

hasty promise made in the forest, and in a moment when she feared that she had outlived her chances.

She saw now the importance which her reputed wealth gave her in the eyes of those needy adventurers, and how easy it seemed to her to be able to secure a husband. The Doctor was a fine, portly man, the Sergeant imposing and full-breasted, and the Inspector masterly and domineering, and, as she knew, beyond their salaries, which they seldom received, excepting in promissory notes, neither of them were worth a shilling of their own.

* What was Samuel Biddle that she should hesitate to throw him over when she could get the others if she liked; he was as much after her money as the others were, and not half so good looking.

And yet she paused, and shivered with a curious terror, whenever she contemplated this treason to her plighted troth, while a vision came before her of the ex-boatwain's fiery and basilisk eyes; they seemed to glare into and shrivel up her timid soul, suggesting all sorts of horrible punishments for her infidelity; they had fascinated her into a species of infatuated terror which she shrunk to break from.

Again, these rivals of his had not spoken out definitely on the subject. They came often to see her, and drank her spirits freely enough, but they hung back hesitatingly, as if they would rather wait until she had transferred her money to some colonial bank. England was such a long distance away, and the unsettled condition of America and France made their faith in home banks a little dubious.

Biddle had been willing to take the risk as soon as she had convinced him that the money was there, and at her own disposal, and the knowledge of even a disagreeable bird in the hand being worth three uncertain gay songsters in the bush weighed upon her.

Another little secret troubled her virgin heart as it fluttered there—her royal servant man. He was possessed of youth, beauty, and grace, and he had shown her in every possible way in which a modest youth, in his subordinate and captive position could show towards one so far above him in everything excepting birth, that he loved her, and for herself alone. Yes; she was as sure of that fact as she hoped she was of salvation. He was in her power completely, to do with as she pleased already, and with a word she felt that she could bind him to her for ever, both as a slave and an obedient husband, for this was the advantage of a free woman

marrying a convict husband. He must be obedient and respectful always to his wife, for she never lost her hold over his liberty. He was her assigned servant, married or otherwise.

Would she say the word, and become the wife of a king's son? True, it would serve to lower her in the social scale as far as the colonies were concerned, and for his sake she would have to stay in her adopted land, for poor George was a "lifer." All these matters required serious consideration, and Miss O'Callighan was cogitating it over as she watched the *unconscious* object moving about his duties, ever and anon turning towards his mistress, his respectful, melancholy glances, as if to anticipate her slightest wish. She had never been adored like this before. No; not even in the gushing days of her teens, when she used to attend the Castle balls and levees in Dublin.

It was a splendid day for a picnic, brilliant sunshine which lit up the forest and the broad silver river Derwent, like a warm summer day at home. The company were all enjoying themselves, without troubling her for much attention, pairing off into couples those who were young, while the married people were enjoying themselves in their own way, eating, drinking and smoking — drinking and smoking particularly.

Outside the ring, the pacific convicts and friendly blacks were gathered. The Governor had ordered a hogshead of rum to be opened for their consumption, and he now looked more like a jovial patriarch in the middle of a large family than the military ruler of a penal settlement.

The ship had arrived from Sydney which was to carry Captain and Mrs Carrodus home, and while the Captain kept beside the Governor and his staff, his little wife had taken off the first mate of the home-bound vessel to the forest to gather flowers. She had only been introduced to him, but did not waste any time.

Mathuna was happy, for she had Wilfred all to herself, and he was almost affectionate towards her on this day. He had not informed anyone of his intention to leave Van Dieman's Land in the vessel then preparing to sail for Sydney; he hated all things disagreeable, and partings were generally unpleasant, so that he just meant to announce his intention and say good-bye to all his friends at the same time. Poor Mathuna; she was looking forward to the moonlight that night, and feeding her hungry heart that he would say something before he took her home.

Jane Lymburner felt a little more satisfied also on this day, for she had succeeded in causing an estrangement between the two lovers, Saul Clark and Kate Ambrose, and now, to punish him, that young lady had gone off for a walk with one of the officers, while he lay moodily on the grass at the water edge, gazing skyward and smoking his cigar. Jane glided down to his side, and spoke gently and sympathetically to him, but without touching upon the painful subject. She was an adroit woman, and knew exactly what to say under such circumstances, for she had often before succeeded, by her sympathy, in raising the inborn devil in the breast of Mrs Quinton against her husband. It is a gift which only the pale-faced, patient-looking and soft-voiced women possess to perfection. Saul listened to her at first impatiently, next with morbid attention, and finally with savage gratitude, as her soft voice fell within his ears like gentle melody. Men like sympathetic women always, but never so much as when they imagine some other woman to be heartless towards them.

A night or two before this she had interested Mrs Quinton, and suggestively shown her mistress the danger of Saul staying much longer in Hobart Town, and repeating some gossip which she *was supposed* to have overheard, with what she had seen herself.

Major Quinton, urged on by his wife, had spoken seriously to Saul about the damage he was doing to his niece, as well as himself, by staying on and neglecting his profession, so that the young man had resolved to take the first ship in want of an officer. Again Jane had gained the ear of Kate, and informed her that Saul had announced his intention of going away, because he was tired of the dull life.

Saul had gone to his lover the night before, thinking to tell her of his intention, and hoping to hear her persuade him to stay; but Kate, believing now the words of the sweet-voiced governess, heard him coldly as he stammered out his story, and replied, that she thought he had been foolish to neglect his prospects so long.

It was a very slight misunderstanding to cause a quarrel, but lovers' quarrels generally have very small causes, and they had parted, mutually indignant with each other; and later on, Jane once more acted the part of comforter to Kate. She had just returned from a walk, and unwittingly told Kate that she had passed Saul, with two or three of the officers, laughing gaily, and saying that he was glad he had got out of it so easily. It was a lie, of course, for Saul, instead of laughing,

had gone straight into the bush and spent the night there in misery.

She was now busily gaining the gratitude of Saul by suggesting that his lover had grown weary of him, and that he had stayed too long dangling after her. He was under the impression that Jane Lymburner liked Kate more than any other person in the world, and that her only surprise was that she had not tired of him sooner. Saul felt by turns filled with fury and soothed by this gentle comforter, who let him know intentionally what a difference it would have made in her life, and how differently she would have acted, had the heart which Kate trifled with only been hers to guard and comfort. Once she let her hand rest for a moment upon his. How soft and cool and comforting that hand was. Visions of lonely nights at sea after this darted through his mind, with the heartless Kate married to some one else, and this gentle dove wasting her days and nights on this savage land, thinking upon and weeping in secret for what might have been.

"Do you care to walk, Miss Lymburner?" he asked springing up to his feet all at once.

"If you like," answered this pale-faced, self-sacrificing woman, taking his arm and leading him in the direction that she knew Kate had taken.

"You have not had a very happy life," he observed, as they went on.

"Not very," she replied, with a catch like a sob in her low voice. They were out of sight of the picnic party by this time, and walking under the forest trees, she clinging to his arm with the kind of clasp which makes a young man feel so strong and so protecting to the fragile creature at his side. "I was left to fight for myself early the battle of life. My father died poor, and left me for my portion only the accomplishments which he had been able to give me during his life. I had no friends and no relations who would help me then."

"Poor girl." His great brown hand was fondling hers as they walked slowly along. Her eyes were downcast, yet through her thin lashes she saw some figures in the distance, and led him that way.

"I was then nineteen. I am now twenty-three, and for three years I had a very hard fight. I went to London, that vast wilderness, where one may live all their lives and never find a friend or companion. It looks a gay place to you sailors when you come on shore for a holiday with plenty of money in

your pockets to spend. Ah, it is very different to the man or woman, the woman particularly, who comes up to earn a living. Then the hard stony streets wear the soles from the uppers, and the people you meet are like animated stone statues, against whom one may beat themselves vainly without response."

"Have you had all that to bear?"

"Yes, Mr Clark," replied Jane, with a straight look at his pitying face, and a backward throw of her head, while the thin lips quivered. "For three years I endured all that, I, a lady born, with all the instincts of a lady, toiling the hard streets in search of bread only; keeping myself honest, as became my father's daughter; sometimes starving. But why should I tell you all this, when you have your own sorrows to think about?"

"Tell me, Jane; that is your name, I think?"

"Yes; call me Jane."

"It does me good to hear your story; tell me the whole of it."

"I thought it would do you good, and make you brave to bear your own troubles, or I would not have told you. And now there is little to tell. God was good to me at last, and I got a chance to come out to this country with people who have been kind to me, and to whom I am grateful."

"And you never had a lover to comfort you?"

"Until I came on board the *Stirling Castle* I had no leisure to think, and when I had time to think I found that it was too late. Mr Clark—Saul, forgive me; say that you forgive me?"

Again she threw back her head and looked at him, with her small black eyes swimming in tears, and her thin lips tremulous with emotion.

"Poor girl, poor girl," again said Saul, unable in his brotherly pity to help stooping down and kissing those tremulous lips.

With a quick movement she hid her head on his breast and looked aside, while Saul held her in his foolish arms without ever looking up.

If he had looked toward where she was looking, he would have seen Kate Ambrose hurrying her companion along after a scornful glance in his direction. When they once more resumed their walk, they were alone in the forest, and Jane Lymburner appeared to be particularly happy.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FOREST TABLEAU.

AN incident occurred at the picnic which disturbed some of the ladies present very much, although in Hobart Town it was nothing unusual.

Mathuna's maid, the girl Marion Carter, had been discovered stealing, and was promptly sent back to the penitentiary, under the charge of two constables.

One of the convicts had seen her stealing from the person of the blind fiddler a guinea-piece, which he had placed in his vest pocket before setting out from Sandy Point. Another of the prisoners gave evidence that she had offered it to him, and asked him to get it changed for her, not half an hour previously.

Governor Davey had her called before him and searched by one of the female warders, who produced the coin after a search; it had been hidden in her breast.

Marion protested that the woman had taken it out of her own pocket, and that she had not been near the blind man at all; but, as Colonel Davey remarked, these prisoners are all alike—great liars and incurable thieves—so he ordered her to be sent off to prison at once.

While the investigation was going on, Captain Wilmott looked calmly at the accused woman, smoking his pipe all the while.

"I say, Wilmott, that's hardly fair for our bet," whispered the young officer who had wagered with him at the "Black Swan." "How did you manage it?"

"I didn't manage it at all," replied the aristocratic captain, with a sneer. "But I mean to take advantage of this lucky accident all the same."

"It is a lucky *accident*, and no mistake," replied the other, with an emphasis on the word. "Confound the sharper; I believe he has dodged me," he muttered aside.

Marion Carter had been transported for stealing. She was a farmer's daughter, and respectably brought up in a little country village; and when she was about seventeen got a situation in the squire's family at the Hall as housemaid. Now, this squire had a favourite son, who had played with Marion as a boy, and when he saw her again when he had grown up, fell in love with her; and, being an unsophisticated

young man, he courted her as if she had been a young lady, and told his father that he would marry her, whether he liked it or not. This squire was a magistrate, and a violent whig. He believed very strongly in the rights of the people and the equality of man, but he drew the line at his heir marrying his housemaid. He raved furiously at his son, and threatened to disinherit him ; but it was all of no avail—the son was resolved.

What the old squire and magistrate might have had to endure from the obstinacy of his son it is hard to say, only for a lucky *accident*, which relieved him of his trouble. A silver fork was found in the housemaid's box, for which crime she was sentenced to transportation for life. The squire used his influence against his audacious housemaid, and his son was left disconsolate. So Marion Carter came out to Van Dieman's Land, silent and heart-broken. The liberal-professing squire had saved his dignity at the expense of a large family of shame-covered peasants and two ruined lives—for his son went to the dogs shortly after Marion was sent to Van Dieman's Land. A wonderful maw for swallowing lives has this hungry vampire "Social Dignity," who is always sitting spectre-fashion in some empty chair at respectable feasts, and making the dinner miserable.

Mathuna was absent from the scene at the time of Marion's arrest, so that there was no one to interfere in her behalf. Mrs Quinton was just making up her mind to do so, as during the months the girl had been with them they had all found her well-behaved and honest, but, at the moment that she was ready to do this act of justice, the Major unfortunately chose to come over and ask her to intercede for the poor girl.

"I feel certain that this is some concocted plot, and that Marion is innocent," he observed ; and then he could have bitten out his tongue with vexation as he saw the demon leap up into his wife's dark eyes.

"Oh, you *are* quite certain of that, Major Quinton? I suppose you have studied *Marion* closely since she has been under your roof, to make so sure of her honesty." She flung out the words mockingly at him, all her kind impulses strangled by the devil in possession.

"Don't be foolish, Sarah."

"Foolish! Do you think that I would lower myself by feeling anything except contempt for such a creature? No, sir. If you are so positive about her innocence in this instance, go and remonstrate for her yourself, but don't think to make me your cat's-paw."

"Sarah, for God's sake control yourself; don't spoil this pleasant day. Be generous—be just," remonstrated the husband, trembling with the anger he was trying so hard to control.

"You do the generous yourself, hypocrite. I lean more to Colonel Davey's decision as justice in this case. Be quick, can't you, and go to your *Innocent*, or you will be too late. See, they are leading the pretty dear away."

Mrs Quinton sank back exhausted with her passion, and pointed scornfully with her lovely forefinger in the direction of Marion Carter, who was going passively from the camp between the two warders. She had given one quick glance round for her mistress, Mathuna, but finding that neither she nor Kate were longer within sight, and that Mrs Quinton made no movement to help her, she gave up the attempt to vindicate herself any further; it was even more useless in this land than it had been in her own country.

Major Quinton ground his teeth savagely, and strode back to the Governor without looking at his wife. His mouth was chained now, and he could do nothing except damage by speaking. After he had left her, Mrs Quinton sat staring on the grass, with her hands and features working convulsively, trying to think out the incidents of the past three months, and recall words or glances, which might have escaped her at the time, between her husband and this servant, harking back to times when the Major had been absent at nights, and she had not seen Marion about. "I must have a talk with Jane to-night; she may have seen something between them that I have not," this poor self-tortured victim muttered. "Jane is always honest and trustworthy in such matters, and can see things which I fail to notice; she will put me right if I am wrong in my suspicions."

Jane Lymburner could assuredly see things when no one else would have thought about looking, and seldom came without some food for the hungry demon. It pleased her to watch it gnawing the bare bone which she contrived to raise for it, not so much for the malice which was in her as for the influence she gained over her poor mistress thereby.

Outside the camp, but close enough for the Governor and his staff to hear, the most talented amongst the prisoners were singing choruses and songs for their amusement, Nat Taggart accompanying the voices with his violin. He had been glad to get back his guinea again, and put it carefully away this time. The gentlemen were discussing that great

topic of the day, Napoleon, the Upstart of Europe. The important news of his final retreat from Moscow had only just reached them. The battle which terminated that disastrous and awful retreat from Russia had been already fought and lost, but the news had not yet reached them of Leipzig, and so they were speculating, while they drank their rum, upon what had already taken place, the overthrow of the Corsican.

"Will you take a walk with me, Miss O'Callighan?" asked the Doctor, leaving the military group and approaching the object of his affection, thinking that he had neglected her too long, as he saw his two rivals seated on either side of her. George de la Motte was near, but none of them ever gave a thought about him; he was too much of a cypher, in their estimation, for free men to consider.

"I would not go walking too far, my dear Miss O'Callighan; that demon Mosquito has been committing some desperate outrages upon the country lately."

"Miss O'Callighan need have no fear for her safety while she is under my protection, Mr Grindsell," replied the Doctor, loftily, as he stooped and presented his arm.

"Well, she'll be all the safer if I come also, in case of accident," said the Inspector, offering his other arm, which the lady also accepted.

"If you are going for a walk I may as well keep guard behind," cried out the Sergeant, starting up and preparing to follow.

"I am sure to be safe now, I think," simpered the lady, as she looked at her three admirers. "George, you had better follow with my fan."

"Yes, madam," answered the obedient man-servant, with his courtly bow, as he picked up his mistress' fan and handkerchief. "Your handkerchief, madam."

"Thank you, George; you are always thoughtful."

"It is my duty and pleasure. Besides, madam, had I not better bring your umbrella? The sun is hot to-day, and the rays hurtful to delicate complexions such as yours."

"Thank you, George; do, please."

"Miss O'Callighan, you'll ruin that servant of yours if you allow him such liberties," said the Doctor, with a heavy scowl at the retreating footman. "Remember that you are not in England."

"Oh, George never presumes," answered Miss O'Callighan softly.

"Let me know if he does, and I'll get him twelve dozen

and a turn on the roads to take the impudence out of him," continued the Doctor. "What say you, Grindsell?"

"You are quite right, Doctor. Nothing like letting them know that we are their masters, body and soul; our worthy Governor is by far too lenient."

"I'd say he was," broke in the Sergeant from behind. "You should have been here during the rule of our late Governor Collins; he stood no confounded fine airs or nonsense of that sort, I can tell you. Here, prisoner, carry my gun and sword."

George, who had returned with the umbrella, took the articles mentioned from the Sergeant in silence. He was once more the passive slave, who had no right to open his mouth.

A little thrill of indignation darted through Miss O'Callaghan's breast at this treatment of her *prince*, and she was only held from remonstrating by the eloquent warning expressed in George's glance towards her. It seemed to say, "Don't take my part now, or I shall be torn from your side," and that fear kept her quiet.

Still, although she did not directly allude to it in words, she punished them by being extra snappish and disagreeable, so that the rivals were at last reduced to speaking to each other across her or over her head to the Sergeant behind, while she took every opportunity of contradicting them.

George did not again intrude, but walked modestly behind, keeping his eyes upon the company in front of him, and listening to the contest of tongues.

They had taken the roughly-indented bullock-track which led back towards Hobart Town as being by far the least risky, and kept well within the beaten track for fear of losing their way. The Doctor would have liked to have had the walk with the lady alone, for, as it had been the general opinion of the officers that the audacious career of Bonaparte was now nearly at an end, he naturally concluded that home affairs would be getting more settled, and that it might be safe now to commit himself by a declaration. If all went right, they could both return as man and wife, and live in England very comfortably.

But on this afternoon walk he found no opportunity of getting in a significant word; and once, when he attempted to cover her skinny hand with his podgy one, the irate maiden snatched it away altogether, and, to his chagrin, before he could recover it, the watchful Sergeant had glided between her

and him, taking adroitly his vacant post, and leaving him to drop behind for the rest of the walk.

The Doctor snorted and puffed with indignation, scowling at George darkly as he turned to catch a furtive smile on that young man's face: but finding nothing but well-bred inanity expressed upon these well-trained features, he abruptly added his hat and coat to the load George was already bearing, and strutted along, with all the ease and dignity he could muster, in his shirt sleeves.

"Dear me, how fatiguing walking is in Van Dieman's Land!" snappishly said Miss O'Callighan. "I must have a rest. George, find me a comfortable log to sit upon."

"I see one over yonder which I think will just suit you, madame."

George pointed over to a fallen trunk a little way from the road, and, running over to it, began beating about the grass beside it to drive any snake away which might be lurking there. This done to his satisfaction, he waited upon them to take possession.

"My fan, George."

"Allow me, Miss O'Callighan," cried the gallant Sergeant, taking the fan from the hands of George, and beginning clumsily to open it.

"Dear me, Sergeant, you are awkward. Why, you will break my fan if you do it that way. George, open the fan and—" She was about to add "use it," but again she caught George's imploring look, and said instead, "Yes, Sergeant, that is better. Now, you may fan me if you like, only don't hit my nose."

The Inspector, not to be out-done, seized the gingham, and, unfolding it, held it over her head, blanking out the Doctor, who was standing behind, entirely.

"George, I hope you did not forget my reticule?"

"No, madame, it is here," replied George, humbly.

"Then find my smelling-salts for me," said the lady affectedly.

At the command the medical man saw his chance. Rushing round from his position behind the umbrella, he snatched the reticule from the hands of George, and opening it, produced the scent-bottle.

"This is within my department as your medical adviser, my dear lady. Permit me."

He flopped down on his knees upon the damp grass, and, uncorking the phial, held it up tenderly to the expanded nostrils of the maiden to inhale.

An affecting tableaux it made, with the lofty forest trees behind and around them, and the setting sun throwing red shafts upon the upper branches and boles of the gums until they stood out from the dark leafage like glowing embers; the huge ferns grew lavishly amongst the undergrowth, and spread their tracery about in all directions, while the lady proudly sat, like a cool spot, in her white muslin, upon that grey log, with her obsequious court around her; the black-vested and white-sleeved Physician upon his knees grovelling, the red-coated Sergeant gently waving the fan, while the blue-garbed Inspector held aloft the umbrella.

A pretty idyllic picture it was; at least George evidently thought so as he stood a little away from it, leaning against a tree, and holding in his arms the Sergeant's gun and sword, with the Doctor's hat and coat, for he looked on with melancholy and respectful admiration.

As he looked on, his quick ear caught the sounds of feet crushing through the deadwood; and as he turned his head languidly, he beheld ex-boatwain Biddle limping slowly along the road, with his leg bandaged and his face scratched and torn as if he had been rolled amongst a large bed of prickly pears.

They were all so much engaged that he almost reached their side before he was seen by the *dramatis personæ* of the tableaux. Here he paused and leaned upon the stick which he carried, eyeing them for a moment with sardonic hatred; then, bursting into a loud and devilish laugh, which the forest echoed, he cried harshly,—

“Ha, ha! my pretty turtle doves, so this is whar ye do your billing, is it?”

“Samuel Biddle!” shrieked out Miss O’Callighan, starting up in her fright, and knocking the Doctor over, still holding her smelling salts, on to his back, where he lay helplessly staring at the tree-tops, with the small patches of deepening blue above him, while the Sergeant and the Constable, with their fan and umbrella, struck up positions as if to ward off an attack.

“Samuel Biddle!”

“Sarpint and wiper! deluded asses! as goes shoving yere noses into other people’s thistles! Cuss you, cuss you all!”

“Don’t go off that way, Samuel.”

“Yah! you old sarpint! Don’t you think you’re a-going to pitch your cast-off skin over me. I see through it all now; I know you now, you deceitful wiper, as can change yourself

as easy as a young diamond snake in his first year, and I say again, cuss you!"

With which anathema he planted his stick with a vicious prod into the ground, and hobbled away towards the camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WOMAN WAITING.

FOR the next few minutes, Miss O'Callighan and her two admirers stood watching the retreating form of the ex-boat-swain in speechless silence, while the composed George sauntered over and lifted up the prostrate Doctor, after which he brushed his back and assisted him into his coat and hat; then, picking up the gun and sword again, he crossed over to the tree, and once more leaned against it.

Not until Samuel had rounded the corner and become lost to view did any of them utter a word, then, with a start, the Inspector recovered himself.

"Dash it, Sergeant, what right has that fellow to be here at all to-day; wasn't he on duty when you left?"

"He was, Grindsell, and deserves to be court-martialed for deserting his post."

"And he will, too. Here, prisoner, run after that man Biddle and tell him to come back at once."

"Yes, sir," and with these words George ran quickly along the bush track, carrying along with him the gun and sword.

"Don't you think, gentlemen, that we had all better go back now to the camp? See, it is getting quite dark; and there is the moon, I declare—a full moon!" and Miss O'Callighan pointed up to where, through an opening in the wood, the tarnished-faced moon looked down upon them from a pearly ocean of atmosphere.

It would soon be dark, or at least lighted only by the pallid beams of the moon; already the scarlet glow had disappeared from the limbs and branches of the gum-trees, and they were becoming merged into the shadows; while, from the earth, a blue haze began to creep upwards and bury details near the ground. The musquitos, also, were beginning to

troop out for their nightly serenade, and the bats and flying foxes to flutter and flap from tree to tree.

"Yes, I think we had," replied the Inspector, shaking himself and closing the umbrella with a clash, while the others moved from the log to the middle of the track.

"Stand and deliver!"

The words came through the gloom huskily, and made them all bring up with a start.

"George! oh, George! where are you?" shrieked out Miss O'Callighan shrilly—neglecting, in this moment of peril, the gallant heroes at her side, and thinking only upon the youthful prince.

"Coming, madam," cried out the distant voice of George.

The gallant heroes were not exactly at her side as she shrieked out for George; for, as soon as they heard the ominous words they had fallen upon their faces in the middle of the road, as with one impulse. They had been a longer time in Van Dieman's Land than she had, and knew from experience that the kind of men who had uttered this salutation were not likely to do so unless they had sufficient force at their command to enforce it, so that complete submission was the only policy to adopt under the circumstances, if they hoped to escape with their lives.

"Lie down and be quiet, Miss O'Callighan, as we are doing," muttered the Doctor at her feet.

"Yes, you had better lie down," said the same husky voice, and as she tremblingly obeyed, she saw four figures come over from the mist and surround the prostrate officials.

"You are one of the doctors of the settlement, ain't you?" asked the same voice.

"Yes," replied the doctor.

"Unarmed?"

"Yes."

"Tie and gag that bloke, boys; we may need a doctor; and who are you?"

"Sergeant Black."

"You?"

"Inspector Grindsell."

"Have we got anything special again Sergeant Black and Inspector Grindsell, mates?"

"No; nothing particular," answered the other bushrangers.

"And a cussed lucky job it is for you both that there isn't. What's your name, ma'am?"

"Miss O'Callighan of Kilkenn Cottage, late of—"

"I know," roughly interrupted the head bushranger, "a countrywoman of my own, the heiress. Well, you will also be useful to us, and we'll have plenty of time to hear all about your ancestors and home estates by-and-by. Fasten them all up, and gag them."

"Oh, where is George?" moaned out poor Miss O'Callighan.

"Oh, you're expecting George, are you?" replied the man with a harsh laugh. "Well, be quiet, and we'll bring him to you. Go and fetch George to the good lady, and we'll wait here until you come back."

In a couple of minutes a single musket shot rang out of the forest, and shortly afterwards two of the bushrangers appeared with George de la Motte a bound prisoner.

"They were too much for me, madame; did you hear that shot?"

Miss O'Callighan nodded with a grateful feeling in her heart for her brave young man.

"That was the Sergeant's musket. I shot at them and missed," replied George dejectedly.

"Hold your jaw, young fellow, and come along with us. Fetch the Doctor and the lady; leave the other two where they are."

"Sir, liberate my poor mistress, and take me as a prisoner instead," cried the faithful young servant, falling upon his knees before the leader, and putting up his bound hands in an imploring attitude.

"Gag the precious fool," said the leader harshly, after a gurgle in his throat as if he was trying to smother a burst of laughter. "Ease the Sergeant and Inspector of anything useful they have on them, and come on."

Two of the bushrangers stooped over the captives, and searched them carefully, after doing which they rose to their feet with savage oaths.

"Not a blooming stiver on the pair of them, Captain."

"I didn't expect there would be. Leave them, and let us slide."

With a rough clutch at their three captives, the bushrangers tramped off through the forest towards the river. Crushing along, regardless of the undergrowth, they dragged them on, Miss O'Callighan leaving shreds of her muslin dress on every bush, so that by the time they reached the banks, she appeared like a scarecrow, with only fluttering rags hanging to her attenuated limbs.

Here they saw an empty boat lying, into which the bush-

rangers forced them, and then leaving one of the gang on guard, the others strode away in the direction of the camp.

Wilfred Tregarthen very quickly became wearied of this primitive feasting ground, where gorging down roughly-dressed beef, mutton and pork was the principal business, and drinking rum the main relaxation of the day, so that Mathuna very soon had her wish gratified to have him alone with her in the silent forest.

Slinging his fowling-piece over his back, he got out his fishing-tackle, and with his rod in his hand, and an inviting nod in her direction, he set off through the forest in order to strike the river at a quiet part where they would not likely be disturbed by any of the revellers.

Wilfred was dressed in an easy-fitting suit of rough grey flannel, with a broad-rimmed beaver of the same colour, which made him look cool, and added to his dazzling freshness. Mathuna wore a dark, tight-fitting material, which set off her magnificent figure to good advantage, although concealing her great strength. She was taller than Wilfred, and stepped out easily alongside of him. They had both ridden over from Hobart Town, an accomplishment which Wilfred had taught her; and, which, with her fearless tastes it was natural she would soon acquire. She was now reckoned to be the most daring rider in the settlement.

A dark beaver, with drooping black feathers, rested upon her jetty thick curly hair, and imparted animation to her rich brown eyes. Her long riding skirt she had now tucked up within her waist-belt, from which also gleamed a little dagger with ivory handle, chased with silver, Wilfred's gift to her, and which she was very proud of.

Her style of beauty lost considerably under this metamorphosis of costume. True, she strode out as proudly as ever, now that she had grown accustomed to the high boots, and the same lithe grace was there; but her bronzy complexion seemed to lose its clear richness with the dark setting, and as if it required furs near it to make it complete and characteristic.

Through the forest they both passed like two hunter friends, Wilfred treating her more like a good comrade than as a woman. She was no more to him now than she had been the first hour that he saw her, but he enjoyed her company more than he did any one he had ever been associated with before, for he had moulded her mind until, as far as an impulsive warm heart could imitate a cold, unemotional heart, she

reflected his own tastes in all the little details of life. As she had never seen him drink anything stronger than water, she did the same; what other things he liked, she acquired the taste for, even the occasional cigar, which was a rare event, however, with either of them *as yet*.

Wilfred hummed a tune as they left the camp, and as soon as they had got beyond hearing of the others, he broke out into a song. A clear, rich voice he had, which rang up amongst the lofty gums like the high notes of an organ, thrilling her through and through as she listened to it enraptured. They did not speak much to one another as they went along. He had no need to exert himself in any way to please his companion; to be with him was quite enough for her.

"Give me your gun, Wilfred; is it loaded?"

"Yes, Mathuna," he replied, unslinging his gun and handing it to her, along with the powder and shot flask and case of caps. These she clasped round her neck by the belt, allowing the flask to dangle at her waist. Now she looked a little more characteristic, more like a modern Diana.

Very soon they got into the heart of this virgin forest, and out of the range of "*blazed*" trees and waggon-tracks, wading through banks of ferns and pushing aside clustering tendrils. There was no danger of Mathuna being tired, and Wilfred had seldom experienced the sensation.

The tall, majestic, dusky-skinned woman, and the golden-haired, *beautiful* man—a case of Adam and Eve reversed; she so hot, he so cool; she so impetuous, and he so composed.

"Look, Wilfred, at that diamond snake; I can hit him, I think."

"Try it," replied Wilfred, stopping to watch her and the reptile, which was gliding round the trunk of a big fern tree. Swiftly the gun was up at her shoulder and the trigger pulled.

"I knew it," she exclaimed exultantly, as she brought down her gun and proceeded to re-load it, while the snake lay wriggling on the ground helpless, but vicious.

"A very good shot, Mathuna."

Mathuna flushed up with pleasure at his praise, and then, the gun again loaded, she followed in his track, leaving the writhing reptile behind.

It seemed to her as if the glorious figure before her was destined to be her king and leader all the days of her life, some day to be nearer and more to her; and when that hour arrived, she knew that her life would be complete, and that she would

be supremely happy. She had watched him closely all through these months, and felt that he liked her better, and was more perfectly at ease with her, than with any one else, and that at any time he would rather be with her than beside any other man or woman, and she was satisfied upon that point. That he was careless and unemotional, she could not grumble at; so at least she whispered to her hungry heart, that she ought not to expect a perfect god to feel the weaknesses of men. It had never entered into her imagination that the time would come when, instead of being her husband, he would go away and leave her and her native land behind. Mrs Quinton and Kate had both tried their hardest to make her see this future possibility, without success. On that point she was as dense as if she had never learnt a word of English.

Wilfred Tregarthen walked along singing and happy, and never gave her a warmer thought than he bestowed upon the pine, wattle and gum trees around him. He was perfect, and in unison with perfect nature. She also made up a part of the general harmony which kept him happy; outside of her own woods she would become a discord; therefore, when he left the forests and her, it would be because he was wearied of and finished with them both. Then he would enter into the next change of scene and people with a heart free to enjoy them while they could satisfy it.

Of how little importance this natural woman was to this natural man, and how much he had become to her.

He never thought for a moment of what she would do with the education he had given her after he had left her. He was neither malicious or cruel from intention. We all fix our own standards of morality and expectations from our own power to feel and understand them. If we can love deeply ourselves, we expect to be loved to the height and depth of our own love; but if we have no depth ourselves of affection, it is impossible to understand the strength of a great love, and for this no one ought to be blamed.

God is love, and only according to the size of our own souls can we measure and comprehend the greatness and power of God.

Wilfred Tregarthen had never felt the emotions of love or friendship; possibly they had both been bestowed upon him often before, without his being able to know it, for, as he had no love, neither had he a trace of vanity in his extraordinary formation. Why should people love him more than he loved them? As far as he had seen in husbands and wives, they

had not chosen each other for their faces or forms, but for some other quality which, having never felt, he could not comprehend. True, he had seen men look melancholy and women weep when he parted from them; his mother and sisters were of that kind; he was not, that was all.

He would go away from Mathuna, and she would possibly lament, as his mother and sisters had done, but she would get over it, as he supposed they must have also, and then all would go on as before. He had told the Major that he meant to bank enough money before he left, in Mathuna's name, so that she need never come to want, which to him seemed to be the only horrible thing for either man or woman to have to contemplate—the lack of money or the lack of health. Mathuna, like himself, had plenty of health. He intended, as a token of the pleasure she had given him by her company, to give her enough of the other to make her happy, as he was. He had done her no wrong; never spoken love to her; treated her with the same respect he would have treated his sister; raised her from the grade of an ignorant savage to be a civilised woman. As a savage, he would not have thought it at all necessary to have left her any money, but being now, through his direct influence and teaching, become a civilised woman, it was only right of him, who had plenty, to give to this sister a fair share before *he left her*.

All day they wandered by the banks of the river—he fishing, and she sitting beside him and watching him, overlooking stretches of the river, wide and far-spreading, as they ascended high banks and saw it rolling along in its picturesque diversity of woodland, plain, and mountain, resting beside still pools, with the rocky banks reflected; he intent only on his sport, and she wearying and waiting for the hours which were never to open for her.

Wondering, as she lay back on banks of waving sedges or tufted grasses, with her brown eyes humid with vain wishes, how he could look on the water's face instead of hers. So she lay, watching his beautiful, pure face, as it bent over the scaly, wriggling fish in his hand, while above them both the drooping branches rustled softly and whispered amorous secrets to each other—the eucalyptus leaves, which touched each other softly, like lovers kissing. Would he never look round and see that a woman was waiting to be kissed, as the leaves were kissing together?

The sun was setting as they left the river and turned their footsteps towards the camp; the sun on one side of them

gilding the surface until it glowed and shone like a broad golden band, and the moon on the other side, fair but lustreless, against a warm tinted sky.

They scrambled up the cliffs, holding on, and helping themselves up, by the sturdy shrubs which grew from the crevices and ledges, and had just reached the top, when they were confronted by a figure that started up, wild-looking and black, with bloodshot eyes.

Mosquito, the black tracker, bushranger and murderer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

“MATHUNA, me watch here for you. Bail you go near that white-fellow camp this night. A'mighty row go on there by-am-by, you bet.”

Mosquito, as he spoke the words of warning, never looked at Tregarthen. He knew the feelings which Mathuna felt for him, and that made this man sacred in his eyes for her sake; but he had come to warn the dark woman, not the man. He was done with the white fellow for ever, and already was learning to forget their accursed tongue.

“Why should we not go back, Mosquito?” asked Mathuna, as she stood before him, and eyed him steadily.

“Bully big fight go on. Mosquito and five hundred fighting men from there. Bushrangers in the bush; bushrangers on the road; bushrangers on the river. All up to-night; and only waiting for the Government gang to be drunk. You only wait, and then you will see no soldiers left; no police; no Governor in Hobart Town; only the lags and the black fellows after to-night.”

“Where are your men, Mosquito?” asked Mathuna, in a hushed, soft voice, stealing over to him, until her hands were resting upon his shoulders.

“Two mile up river. They are waiting for me. I only came down to warn you first, then I go back and bring them. You will help us, won't you, Mathuna, with your warriors?”

“Yes, Mosquito,” answered Mathuna, with a dark smile.

"Have you not got any of them with you now, who can come back with me?"

"No, Mathuna; me come all by myself. But you wait here, and no go back—you and the yellow hair; he all right while you want him. Me come back very quick with all my men."

"How long will you take to reach them, Mosquito?" asked Mathuna in a quiet voice.

"Half an hour at most."

"Can you not cooey, and bring them without going?"

"No fear; no cooey loud 'nough to reach two mile off, with all them trees between," replied Mosquito.

"Then die!" hissed Mathuna in a fierce whisper; and, clutching Mosquito by the shoulders with a sudden grasp of iron, before he was aware of her intention, she had dragged him to the top of the cliff and flung him over with all the force of her strong arms.

"Quick, Wilfred; we have no time to lose; let us get back to the camp. Let us run with all our speed, if we would be in time to save our friends."

Wilfred Tregarthen had all the brute courage of an Englishman, if he had none of his softer emotions. Therefore, without looking back to learn the fate of Mosquito, he pitched aside his fishing-rod, and hurried after Mathuna, now already leading the way.

"Hold a moment." Mathuna's blood was up, and her skirts were impeding her actions. Drawing her dagger, she cut at the upper portion, and with a sudden wrench tore it completely away, pitching it behind her as she bounded on in her short petticoats. Now they have clasped hands, so as not to lose each other in the dark, for it was already almost dark in the bush, although still light enough in the open. Onwards they plunged, through the ferns below and the fern trees above, into streams and pools, which they had been able to avoid during the day. Mathuna's boots prevented her from being able to feel her way with the accuracy that she might have done had she been barefooted.

"Wait again, Wilfred. I must take off my boots and stockings."

Wilfred was very glad of the rest, for they had been going at a terrific pace. Now he leaned pantingly against a tree, while she sat down at his feet and tried to loosen the wet laces.

"Ah!" She has given it up, and once more pulled out

her dagger, making both laces fly asunder with a double slash, and the boots are sent spinning.

"Let me help you," said Wilfred, stooping down and catching hold of the wet and obstinate stocking, which would cling to the shapely limb in spite of all her efforts to tug it off.

"There, that's all right; now come along," said Wilfred, as he threw the hose to one side, and aided her to rise.

"Wilfred, I cannot breathe; I must cut again. How can your women fight or run tied in like this?"

"They are not supposed either to run or fight. But cut off what you like, Mathuna, and let us start."

Another slash or two of the dagger, and Mathuna has left behind her her jacket and stays, and is once more in good fighting condition, if not quite in such fashionable attire as when she set forth on her walk.

Forward! They fall into no more pools. Through brake and jungle, through the supple jack and the clematis, the subtle perfume of which they cannot smell; straight on the half-nude nymph guides her lover, without making any more mistakes, her thick tresses blowing back from her young, bare head, for the spanking beaver, with its ostrich feathers, has gone by the board, as well as the other articles which help to transform a woman into a fine lady.

She is a woman once more, and a savage woman at that, filled with the intensity of a noble purpose to reach that camp in time to save the lives of these careless drunkards, with their unconscious women.

The fires are flashing between the trees; now they can hear the shouting of the revellers, as yet unmingled with shrieks of terror. They are still in good time.

Into the final clearing the hand-clasping pair rush, with the pale moon shining brightly above their heads, and the bright camp-fires blazing in front of their eyes.

Past the outside ring of convicts, now nearly as drunk as their masters, Wilfred and Mathuna rush, scattering them to right and left, and straight on to where Governor Davey and his merry staff are lying, toasting each other with His Majesty George the Third's health in flowing bumpers.

And as they appeared from the one side of the forest, the limping figure of Samuel Biddle could be seen passing the fires, and painfully toiling his weary way towards the same point of attraction, only Samuel is nearly upon them.

Governor Davey and his suite had just reached that fine hearty stage in their cups when, like Voltaire's benevolent

hero, this world is the best of all possible worlds. They had finished up Napoleon, "the Corsican upstart," early in the afternoon; his day was over, and his star had set. They had also passed out of the stage of morbid regret that brave fellows like themselves should be cooped up in a penal settlement, with all that glory and hard knocks being reaped by the more fortunate fellows out in the Peninsula.

They were now well into the maudlin stage, when the weakest joke would cause them to roll on the ground with uproarious laughter, or the flimsiest sentiment force the tears from their eyes in copious floods.

Samuel Biddle having walked leisurely, and saved his breath, had the first opportunity of speaking to this drunken set of reputable men.

"Well—my—man, and what do you want?" hiccupped the Governor; as he reclined upon the dew-covered grass, and strove vainly to look straight at the ex-boatwain.

"Your Excellency, I don't want much now in this pizined world—" began the warder, when his listener interrupted him.

"Poisoned world. What the deuce do you mean, my good man, by these words? Don't you know that this earth was created for the special benefit of mankind—for you as well as for us—and that the Lord said, 'It was very good'? How dare you utter such blasphemies as these in my hearing? Give him six dozen—no, I mean a glass of strong grog, and let's have no more grumbling over the glorious works of creation."

"Thank your Excellency for that same order, which will be acceptable after what I have endured this blessed day; but I have somewhat else to speak to you about."

"Out with it quick, then; but tell us first what you have been doing to that picturesque countenance of thine?"

"It is the handiwork of the she-devils and flaming sarpints as were put under my charge, your Excellency. They tore the clothes off my back, and the flesh nearly from my bones afore I could get out of their clutches."

"Hold a moment, your Excellency," observed the Major, who was the only sober free man of the company. "Permit me to question this man."

"Go ahead, Major, for he appears to have been already drinking heavily, and uttering meaningless nonsense, as far as I can understand," replied the Governor thickly, turning round to take up his glass again.

"You were on duty at the female ward to-day?"

"I wor, Major."

"Then, why have you deserted your post?"

"'Cos the post deserted me, sir. There have been a mutiny in Hobart Town this day, and the prisoners are all outside."

"A mutiny?"

"Yes, Major. Ned Quigley and his gang have appeared, and broken into the jail, and both male and female prisoners have been let out, and, after robbing the Government stores, they were rioting and wrecking the whole town when I got away."

At this moment Mathuna and Wilfred rushed up to them pantingly.

"What is it? Where have you come from?" cried the Major.

"Quick; close in, and get back to Hobart Town; the bushrangers and natives are out in force."

Then Mathuna gathered her breath, and told what she had done and heard; and as the Major listened, looking round him over the drunken faces, he felt, with a depressed heart, how small a dependence he could place upon any of these warriors for help.

"Your Excellency, we must get back at once, before they have time to surround us."

"Who surround us, Major?" retorted the Governor sleepily.

"The bushrangers, escaped convicts and natives. Will you permit me to give orders to strike the camp?"

"It is early enough yet. However, if you see a state necessity for doing so, then, my dear fellow, take the leadership; only, don't bother me any more to-night."

"Thanks, your Excellency. Now, Wilfred, I can only depend upon a few reasonable men. You hunt the sober ones out, while I give orders to harness the waggons. Mathuna, call together your natives."

It said much for the goodness of human nature, even when exhibited in its least favourable condition, that no sooner did the holiday-making convicts hear of the danger threatening the Governor and his party, than they at once promptly placed themselves at the disposal of Major Quinton, and showed an alacrity all the more commendable in those that displayed it.

Possibly many present had experience enough to know how this disturbance would end eventually, and, looking forward to their tickets-of-leave, they exerted themselves, and persuaded the others that this was a good chance for distinguishing themselves, and showing their devotion towards their masters. Perhaps this was the principal inducement for this adherence to the Government party rather than their own

kind; but, whatever were their reasons, the results were good enough to satisfy the Major that they would not betray the trust which he determined to put in their hands.

He looked round, and selected the soberest of the overseers, constables and soldiers, as well as outsiders. There were not many, however, in a condition steady enough to enable them to hold and aim a gun, still, some were, and to these he gave posts.

Then he gathered the convicts together, and selected his guard from them, promising them special good marks according to the way they behaved themselves upon that night-march home. He gave them the muskets of the men who were too *far gone* to use them for themselves, with ammunition enough to serve. It seemed a desperate thing to do, giving weapons to convicts to fight against their own kind, but the Major knew that they were all in a very desperate fix, and must depend upon the doubtful fidelity of these men, or else be cut off to a man, for the principal men were thoroughly incapable of helping, and most of the soldiery and sailors were equally helpless.

Mathuna also had considerable difficulty in enforcing her commands upon her tribe; nor, indeed, until she had torn away the few remaining shreds of civilisation, and borrowed an underskirt of skins from one of her women, and a shield and waddy from one of her warriors, were they disposed to regard her as their queen. Then, however, when she did appear before them, with her arms bare, and only the short kilt of skins upon her, and when her golden voice rang out her commands, and the fierce native words fell upon their ears from those scarlet lips, while she stood up before them, with her eyes flashing and her white teeth gleaming savagely, then they recognised once more their queen; and, shaking from them the drink stupor, they responded to her call with passionate war shouts. Mathuna in her tight-fitting riding habit that morning did not impress her now degenerate people any more than Mathuna in her ragged petticoats; it was the savage chieftainess, in her kangaroo robes, with her shield and waddy, that they alone recognised and honoured.

Poor Mathuna, she had not looked so well for the past few months as she did to-night, when she stood at the head of her tribe waiting for the order to march, with the fire and moon-light lighting up her handsome figure and barbaric costume; and so Wilfred Tregarthen thought as he paused before her with a message from the Major; and yet she flushed with

shame that he should see her thus again, for the waiting had cooled her excitement.

"Mathuna, have you sent out scouts?"

"Yes, Wilfred, I expect them back shortly; only tell them to hasten into the waggons, and prepare to move, for we cannot be long left unmolested."

"That's all right, child. You look splendid now. Will you let me march with you; and, if there is any fighting to do, fight alongside of your people? I'd like to use the waddy once more."

"Come if you would like it, Wilfred; only pray don't laugh at me."

There was a tearful appeal in the girl's voice as she shrank as far into the shadow as she could get, as if she had been caught masquerading, and felt ashamed of her disguise.

"Laugh at you, Mathuna, because you have returned to your native costume? How could you think that I could do such a ridiculous thing, when I am all admiration."

"Do you admire me, then, Wilfred?"

"Of course I do—immensely; and so will some of the others when they see you fighting, if it comes to that. You are not a young woman to joke with on such occasions, as I have seen."

She flushed hotly beneath his clear blue eyes, still feeling the new-born shame of her nakedness, yet trembling with delight to think that he was pleased with her. Then she said softly, with tender, timid eyes turned towards his,—

"Yes, Wilfred, I can defend those that I love better than most young ladies, I think. You will see when the time comes."

At this moment four natives stole up to her side and delivered their messages hastily to her in the native tongue.

"Wilfred, they are coming. Run over to Major Quinton and tell him to hurry on the waggons. There is less danger in front than behind and on each side. I will stay here until they get past me, and follow with my men. You come back quickly; and bring with you guns and pistols for me as well as yourself. Run! run! and come back to me soon."

CHAPTER XIX.

MATHUNA TURNS HER BACK TO THE ENEMY.

THE homeward march now began. Major Quinton, with the men he could depend upon, put the ladies into the covered waggons, and the incapable of the party into the open carts. The Governor and his staff occupied the foremost waggon, where they lay slumbering peacefully, and well packed together, so that there was not much danger of them catching cold. The lower grades, soldiers, sailors, constables and convicts, they tumbled in indiscriminately, and regardless of their muttered oaths, while all who could stagger were allowed to walk.

It was a large company, and looked like an army on the retreat carrying their wounded; the waggons and carts, with their living freight, jolting along in the middle of the track, with the guards in front and on either side.

They left the fires burning, and the provisions behind, thinking that these would likely delay the hungry natives and bushrangers for a time, and let the retreating party get into more open ground. They would be able to fight better upon the made roads than within the uncertain forest, where every tree might hide an enemy.

Night had now fallen completely, so that they had only the light of the moon to guide them at such rare times as it could pierce between the close-woven branches and leaves, or as they crossed a partly-cleared space, where it fell broadly and whitely, with intense black shadows all round.

They did not like either the silver streaks which occasionally crossed their path nor those open spaces which were so chastely lighted up, and hurried over them as quickly as possible, for the ebony frames to those silver etchings were too ominously suggestive of ambush parties.

Major Quinton, at the head of a small party of convicts, led the vanguard, all armed and as silent as possible, although, from one of the carts, sometimes a voice rose in a snatch of a song or another uttering an oath when some of their companions tumbled against them. In the waggons where the ladies crouched there was no noise; they were all too terrified even to speak to each other.

None had as yet missed Miss O'Callighan, which, however, was not to be wondered at, as they had all set off in

such a hurry that they could not be quite sure as yet as to who were there or who may have gone on before them.

The men divided themselves into two lines along the sides of the waggons, ready to close up at the point of attack, while Mathuna and her aboriginals brought up the rear, Wilfred walking along beside the Forest Queen.

The bushrangers had reckoned upon taking them by surprise, and at a later hour, when they would have been all overcome. Governor Davey's habits were known, and they were aware that, according to former occasions, his "spree" would only be commencing, and that, left to himself, he would never think of breaking up the party before midnight. Samuel Biddle's miraculous escape from the viragoes to whom he had been given over was due to the singular sentiment his ugliness and harshness had caused to spring up in some of the degraded hearts. They had maul-hauled him freely enough after their liberation, and, after they had enjoyed an hour or two of this sport, had recklessly permitted him to crawl away into the bush, as thoughtless women will; but it was the timely warning of Mosquito to Mathuna which had saved the party.

There were vicious eyes watching them as they moved away from the camp—disappointed eyes and gnashing teeth to see them escape so easily through this premature departure and the delay of the auxiliaries—and blood-stained hands grasping loaded guns and pistols; but it was too soon for the attack yet, so they could only curse under their shaggy beards and wait for the coming of their companions. It would have been such an easy job for them to have taken and massacred the Government men if they had not been warned.

"Who had betrayed them?" each man asked in his own mind, as he glided from tree to tree. This attack had been planned for some days—on the night, at Taggart's, when George de la Motte met Bess Martin and her party—to wait until the picnic party had left, then to break open the prison and liberate the prisoners.

It had been managed so far successfully, as Samuel Biddle described to the Major as they walked along; done so quietly and so adroitly that the warders found themselves prisoners before they knew what had taken place.

No blood had been shed as yet; the convicts always tried to avoid this in their raids as long as possible, for they never could tell how the fortunes of war might go, and they liked to leave a loop-hole for escape from the final penalty while under this good-natured Governor.

Samuel, while lying resting after his rough treatment, had watched the convicts from his cover break open and rob the store-house, but they had done it methodically, so that the watchers left on the vessels might not suspect anything amiss.

As he heard the recital, the Major thought that, but for Mosquito's appearance upon the scene, there would have been little to apprehend from the others; but, if Mosquito was at the head of five hundred hostile natives, the case was different.

"Hallo! what is that?" cried out the Major, as they came to the spot where the Sergeant and Inspector still lay gagged and bound, with the moonlight striking upon them. "A soldier and a constable, or rather their bodies!"

A muffled groan came from one of the gags, as Samuel Biddle hobbled over and looked at them.

"My cursed rivals," he muttered.

"Untie them, warder," called out the Major, who could see that they were still alive.

Samuel drew out his clasp-knife, and opening it, with a murderous glare in his lashless eyes, bent over the unfortunates, and made two reckless, vicious slashes at the cords which bound them. They were free, and could take the gags out of their mouths for themselves.

Then they told their story, exaggerating the number of men who had attacked them, and who carried away Miss O'Callighan, the Doctor, and George, from four to forty, but they could not see in what direction they had gone. As he heard their tale, the Major looked serious.

"Forty men, did you say, Sergeant?"

"Fully forty, sir, if not more. It was just getting dark, that we were not able to see the entire gang."

"Were they all white men?"

"I should say so, sir; at least, the most of them spoke English plain enough," replied the Sergeant promptly.

"The Hobart Town prisoners, I suppose?"

"No, sir; they were all strangers to me, and I know most of the canaries. None of that lot was with them."

They called the very desperate prisoners "canaries," from the yellow portions of their clothes, which served to denote the difference between the dangerous and the ordinary prisoners, who wore plain prison grey.

Forty stranger bushrangers and about seventy escaped "canaries," to say nothing about the female devils who were now added to their company, with those five hundred natives

behind. It was a serious piece of news for the Major to hear, as he reckoned up the number of his own capables.

"Fall in, and let us push along. We must not be taken amongst the trees, if we can help it."

Steadily they marched on for some time, the drivers whipping up their horses, which had been all harnessed to the waggons, the slow bullocks having been left behind with the provisions. They had long ago lost sight of the fires, and the forest was quite still, excepting for the noises which they made themselves.

They were now about two and a half miles from the settlement, and the trees were beginning to grow thinner. In a little while they would be well into the open and on the brow of the hill, and able to command the country right down to Hobart Town.

At this moment, one of the convicts ran forward to the Major with the information from Mathuna that the hostile natives were approaching, and trying to surround them.

"Push on, and hold yourselves in readiness to fight," shouted the Major, breaking into a sharp run for the open ground, the rest following him as fast as they were able. They could now hear that the fighting had begun in the rear, as after two or three shots were fired, the blood-curdling yells of the savages could be heard ringing through the forest, mingled with the hoarse shrieks of women, and distant shouting of men on all sides.

Onward they all rushed, dragging the horses with them. They had now reached a part where the road had been partly made level, and before them the moonlight poured out brightly upon the clearing. Another few moments, and they would be able to see their enemies, even if they could not repulse them. The carts were jolting fearfully, and disturbing the sleepers within them, although the ladies still kept quiet and horror-stricken.

Now they have reached the brow of the hill, and stand on it, looking over the town and harbour beyond.

"Halt, and form round the waggons," shouts out the Major, in a loud voice; and quickly the convicts draw the carts together and surround it.

One of the convicts unharnesses a horse, and offers to ride down to the harbour for help from the ships. He is a brave fellow to offer to ride those two miles of uncertainty, and the Major glances at him approvingly.

"Yes; go, and report to me to-morrow, if we escape," he

answers ; and, with a bound, the prisoner is upon the horse, and off down the road at break-neck pace.

Mathuna and her warriors have not yet broken from the forest, and the fight is still going on there in the dark—a battle which the Major cannot assist in, but which he waits the issue of with horrible anxiety, watching keenly the country for new enemies.

There the friendly natives come at last, in full retreat ; Mathuna, unlike herself, leading the retreat, with her fighting men guarding behind her, covering her as she runs.

Mathuna, carrying the body of her adored lover, and never looking behind as she speeds onwards.

Now the enemy appear, in full chase ; and as they show themselves, the Major gives the order to fire, which the armed prisoners obey promptly, making the hostile natives pause and fall back again into the shadows, and giving Mathuna time to reach up to them.

Wilfred Tregarthen is lying supinely within her strong arms, with the moonlight streaming over his beautiful Greek face, with the shut eyes.

“Oh, my darling ! Oh, Loina Bungana,” cried Mathuna, her face ashy, and her eyes outstarting, as she lays him down on the sward, and bends over him, relapsing into her native tongue, as she wrings her hands in her utter grief, and covers the adored face with frantic kisses.

“What is the matter ?” exclaims Governor Davey, while he raises himself up in the cart, as the other boon companions are doing, and rubs his eyes.

“We are attacked, gentlemen, and are fighting for our lives,” replied the Major sternly. “If you are able to lend us a hand we shall be thankful.”

“Able !—I would think we were ;” and in a moment the cart is empty, as the sobered men leap to the ground, and shake the stupor from them. “Where are they, Major ?”

“In the woods yonder, your Excellency. We have repulsed them for the present.”

“Good ; are your muskets loaded, men ?” asked the Governor, looking steadily over his men.

“Yes, your Excellency.”

“Then prepare to fire once more ; front rank kneel, and be ready ; those behind reserve fire ; steady, boys, steady—now, fire.”

Another volley belched into the woods, followed by wild

yells. The Governor was awake now, and ready for his duty.

"That will keep them quiet for a little. What are they?"

"Natives and escaped criminals, who have broken from Hobart to-day."

The Major briefly narrated the story which Samuel Biddle had told him. On its conclusion, the Governor exclaimed,—

"The graceless scoundrels! after all my kindness to them; but they don't appear to have any muskets amongst them."

"No; I expect that the armed bushrangers have not yet joined them, and that we have only the jail rabble to face, along with the natives."

"Then we can easily keep that lot at bay. Are the ladies safe?"

"Quite safe, your Excellency."

The Major had forgotten all about the abduction of poor Miss O'Callighan. Although she had been their hostess, she was of less importance in the eyes of her company than her innocent vanity could have supposed.

"You have sent down to the town, I trust, Major?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Then I vote that we pack off our women-folk under an escort, and hold the heights until they get home. They will meet the sailors coming up, and I don't fancy that any of the bushrangers are likely to be so close to town."

While the Major went over to reassure the ladies, the Governor picked out the escort, and gave his commands to Captain Wilmott. He was an energetic man when roused up to action, and too old a toper not to be able to shake from him the effects of a debauch, especially after the sleep which he had indulged in.

"Wilmott, twenty men will be quite sufficient for you to take with you, as the road is clear and in good condition from here into town. See that the ladies are all safely conveyed into my house, and look after them there until our return. I mean to punish those blackguards before we leave them."

As the Governor spoke, from the ships in the harbour sprang up a shower of signal-lights, proving that the messenger had reached them safely, and that they were now prepared to come to the rescue.

They could see the River Derwent rolling in the distance and emptying itself into the harbour, but it was upon their right as they faced the forest, while the moon was hanging

above them to the left, so that the river was in deep shadow, with a light mist floating about its banks ; therefore they failed to perceive the boats, which were swiftly being rowed upon its broad breast, and the distance was too great for any of the party to hear the sound of the oars.

Mathuna was crushed and demoralised as she kneeled before the body of her sun-god, broken down with grief. All her courage had evaporated, and she might as well have been one of her own female slaves. Two of the prisoners came over to lift him into one of the empty carts, for the other inmates were all sober enough by this time, and standing in the ranks waiting for orders.

But she would not let them touch her treasure. With a fierce tenderness she raised him up herself when she comprehended what they were going to do, and bore him to the cart ; and, getting in herself, held him within her arms, a silent picture of hopeless woe.

Then the two waggons rumbled off with the escort alongside of them, and the natives following the last one, which held their dethroned queen and her white lover, trailing their spears behind them, and hanging their heads.

It was the first time since she had governed over them that Mathuna had turned her back upon an enemy, and their superstitious dread of extermination pressed heavily at their hearts. They had allowed their firebrand to go out, and their Queen had chosen a white face to be her husband.

CHAPTER XX.

JANE LYMBURNER IS REWARDED FOR HER PATIENCE.

THE sun was already high in the heavens before Governor Davey and his company returned to Hobart Town.

The attack of the natives and criminals had been a failure, and they could not stand before the muskets of the military, so they had retreated into the bush and up the country, infuriated against the armed bushrangers for leaving them in the lurch at this critical moment : these gentry having slipped quietly away during the time their allies were advancing.

Governor Davey was not very successful in his pursuit.

He caught a few wounded stragglers and brought them back with him, but the main bulk of the natives, with the escaped prison-birds, had managed to get away, taking along with them most of the provisions left at the camp.

When he and his followers arrived at the settlement, they found a new surprise waiting for them. The vessel which had been almost ready to put to sea for England had left her moorings, and was now missing, under cover of the night mist; and while her crew had been marching to the aid of the Governor, a party of the outlaws must have boarded her and taken her away.

Whither? This was the important question which had now to be discussed by the captains and officers of the other vessels, so that they might arrange for a chase after her.

The *Storm Bird*, which was the name of the missing vessel, was well provisioned, and need not call at any port for months.

"Depend upon it, they will strive to reach South America, and if they have any sailors with them, they may do it easily with the trade winds," observed one of the captains.

"Unless they have premeditated their piracy, and arranged with the others to decoy us away from the town while they were getting the ship out, in which case they will most likely hug the coast to pick up their accomplices before starting on their voyage," said another; and to the second speaker's opinion the rest of the council were inclined to lean as the most likely.

It was decided, at length, that the war-sloop and the merchantman, nearly ready to sail for Sydney, would prepare to follow the *Storm Bird* to sea and give chase. According to the wind then prevailing, it was impossible for the *Storm Bird* to have sailed westward, as the wind was blowing south-east; they had either gone straight off towards New Zealand, or, what was most likely, were now tacking up towards the north.

One of the native prisoners was brought into the council, and examined as to his tribe. He was found to belong to Oyster Bay, the most hostile of the coast tribes.

"Depend upon it, gentlemen," said the Governor, "those natives will go straight home, after their disappointment, and take the bushrangers with them. If you set off, and sail at once, you will most likely find the ship at Oyster Bay, if they are not wrecked before they get up that length. It has been a planned-out affair, from which only the natives have been left out."

Colonel Davey organised a party to follow the tracks of those who had taken to the bush, while the two vessels were to sail round the coast, the meeting point, Oyster Bay. A code of signals and lights having been arranged between the ships and the land party, they all separated, and prepared themselves for the work in hand.

Wilfred Tregarthen was not dead, although very seriously wounded. He was the only white man who had suffered in the late engagement. He now lay in Major Quinton's cottage, for Mathuna had carried him straight to her own room, where, with a couple of her old women, she was treating him by the natives' mode of curing. The remaining doctor of the settlement having examined him, decided that he could not be in better hands, and left him to their charge. Mathuna had him now all to herself, for she had spread some kangaroo skins by the side of the bed where he lay, determined not to leave him for a moment until he was better. When she heard that the Governor wanted a few of her followers to go with the search party, she gave orders to one of the old women who now attended her, and concerned herself no longer about the outside world; the aboriginals whom she had deputed to attend upon the Governor's wishes obeyed without a murmur.

John Whitehouse went with the trackers, and as he was a man upon whose discretion Colonel Davey could depend, he was appointed to be their leader. Amongst his officers were Samuel Biddle, who had asked leave to accompany them. Sergeant Black, and Inspector Grindsell, twenty-five soldiers, a gang of the most trustworthy road-making prisoners, two of the Oyster Bay captives, whom John had specially asked for, and ten of Mathuna's best fighting men; so, each man carrying a knapsack of provisions, and well armed with muskets and a plentiful supply of ammunition, after a night's rest, set out the next morning, while the two vessels were lifting their anchors in the harbour.

Saul Clark and one or two of the sailors from the *Stirling Castle* offered their services for the merchantman.

Kate Ambrose decidedly refused to see Saul Clark before he left. She was too proud and too deeply humiliated by the scene she had witnessed in the forest to reproach her aunt's companion with her perfidy, and like all proud, high-spirited natures when outraged, retired within herself haughtily, and by so doing, played directly into her rival's hands. When she heard that Saul Clark was waiting to say good-bye, she gave Jane Lymburner a small packet, and asked her, with a scornful

glance, to give it to Mr Clark, and bid him good-bye for her, as she felt too much fatigued to see him at present.

Jane took the packet quietly, and went out to see Saul, quite regardless of that fine, high-bred look of contempt. It was exactly going on as she could have wished, and she felt too much overjoyed to be resentful.

"I am sorry, Saul, that Miss Ambrose will not see you. Let me walk with you a little way, and I'll explain."

Saul mechanically gave her his arm, and walked on, dazed and filled with anger with the girl he loved, while feeling grateful for the consideration of this gentle pitying friend; and as they passed through the street together, Jane clinging lovingly to his arm, Kate watched the pair from her window with burning eyes, her heart too indignant as yet to feel anything excepting wrath.

"Base, common scoundrel," she murmured, as she looked out at them from behind the muslin curtain of her bedroom window. "To think that I should have wasted a thought upon such a man. She is more fitted for him than I could ever become, and will not feel the dragging down as I would have felt it. Let him go; I will not see him again, and must try to forget that I ever knew him."

She went over to her basin, and pouring some water into it, bathed her set face and hot eyelids, after which she lay down upon her bed and tried to compose herself.

Jane Lymburner led Saul down to the sea-shore, and, choosing a quiet spot, sat down to comfort him there. She gave him the packet quietly, with a pathetic look at his working features and clouded eyes, and waited for him to open it.

When he did so, and saw the few trinkets and notes which he had given to Kate during their three months' courtship, he uttered a savage oath, tearing the notes up into a thousand bits, and casting them from him into the sea. The trinkets sank at once, but the little bits of paper danced about like white butterflies before the wind, scattering wildly in all directions, and finally settling upon the waves, where they tossed and floated about, now coming towards him, and then being drawn backwards by the tide. He looked at them all the while, after that outburst, with his teeth meeting in his lower lip, and his brows drawn heavily over his moody eyes.

Jane Lymburner watched him quietly and furtively while he sat thus. She was in no haste to speak or break the spell. When he grew tired of his own thoughts, he would turn to her

and speak, then she could manage him. Patience is a virtue which deserves to be rewarded, and Jane had this virtue very strongly implanted in her, if no other, and she felt that she was about to be rewarded for her long waiting.

By-and-by the young sailor turned round and saw her gazing with mournful eyes upon the distant horizon; a tear-drop hung to the eyelid nearest him, and as he turned round to look, it fell against the thin pale cheek, and rolled unheeded down it. She seemed to be unconscious that he was watching her; she was thinking so intently upon his disappointment.

So he had caused this gentle, sorrow-laden heart another pang. She could feel, even in the midst of her own dreary troubles, for his. Yes; he felt dreary and hopeless enough as he sat there, eating his heart out because a heartless flirt had amused herself with him and cast him aside, while this other heart had borne all her hopeless love for him so bravely while she had thought him happy with another, and now wept, like a pitying angel, that he should suffer a single thrill of what was her daily lot.

"Forgive me, Jane, for treating you like this."

"Forgive you, Saul?" She started, and turned towards him with brimming eyes. "How can you think of me at such a moment?"

"Then you have seen that all is over between Kate and me?"

"Oh, Saul!" Jane shut her eyes close, while the gushing tears pressed themselves through the lids and flowed down her face. Then she swayed gently backwards as if she was going to faint; at least Saul thought so, with a sudden remorse, as he caught her in his arms and pressed her to his side.

"Jane, my noble girl, don't take on that way for me; it is only what I might have expected."

Jane smiled a sad, sweet smile, as she opened her black eyes, now dim with grief, and looked at him pathetically.

"Now I require your forgiveness, Saul. A woman's weakness, who has suffered when she sees suffering, and yet you are right; she is not worth it all."

Saul had not said so, although he might have thought it at the moment, and as he had heard her words, he was resentful. It was the first false step which Jane had made that afternoon, and instinctively she felt her mistake as she saw the quick change in his face, and, releasing herself from his arms, she sat up and laid her soft, thin, white hand upon his.

“Forgive me again, Saul, if I think more of your pain than of her ; it is only natural, is it not ?”

Saul was once more subdued, and caught the little hand in his with a grateful clasp.

“You are going away to-morrow, Saul. Will you come back to Hobart Town ?”

Saul heard the soft tones of entreaty, and pondered. It depended entirely upon himself whether he ever returned or not ; most likely the ship would hold straight on her way to Sydney after the criminals were caught and transferred to the war-sloop, and then he need not come back. There was no inducement now for him to return, since Kate had given him up ; he had no love to give to this tender-hearted, refined woman who loved him.

The little white-crested waves, which still carried the fragments of his love letters, lapped with a low murmur against the shingle ; the afternoon air breathed softly and warmly along from the north-west, while the distant shores of the bay floated in an amber heat haze, indescribably soothing. It was a delicious afternoon, and seemed specially made to produce languid indecision.

He looked at the woman beside him—first at the fragile hand still lying passive within his brown one like a snowflake, then his eyes wandered up the arm and over the slight figure, covered by the neat-fitting black dress—a figure which had already endured the cold, harsh blasts of the world, and which looked so unfitted for it.

She was not pretty ; a greater contrast to his beautiful Kate could not be imagined. Kate, with the wanton golden-brown tresses, clear blue eyes and fresh colour, and this pale, silent, suffering woman with the small, black, close-set eyes and precise, closely bound in bands of sleek dark hair over her forehead.

But Kate was false and fickle, and this woman was true and tender. It had been a condescension for Kate to take him at the first, while to take this poor orphan would be none. Kate’s had been only a passing fancy, while this woman had loved him from the first moment, secretly and steadfastly, and *both were ladies !*

He did not love her, but he might come to love her ; and he certainly could reward her love and make her happy without much sacrifice to himself ; at least he thought so at this moment. She was alone and friendless in a strange land, a land where no friendless, virtuous woman should be left to

endure its daily scenes of vice and brutality. With one word, he felt that he could change all her life and leave her at least happy. Would he say that word?

Jane Lymburner sat watching Saul, her hand in his, trembling as it lay there.

Her eyes were no longer tear-dimmed, but glowing as if with fever; for she could read him like a book, and knew that her fate was lying in the balance of his mind at that moment, and she scarcely dared to breathe lest a breath should spoil her chance. Her heart stood still in her bosom, and her lips opened with a gasp, disclosing her well-kept teeth, while two red spots began to show themselves upon her usually pale cheeks.

Would he say the word? She strove with all her might to keep her hand firm, trembling lest it should disturb the flow of his present thought; her nerves in a state of tension which felt horrible.

At last he spoke huskily,—

“Jane, would *you* like me to return to Hobart Town?”

“Oh!” There was no affectation in the cry which burst from her heart, as she fell upon his breast and flung her arms round his neck. She could not utter another word; she felt that she must clutch him and hold him tightly or she would die.

Saul shook his head impatiently. He felt that the rubicon was past now, and that he had better get it over quickly.

“Jane, will you marry me if I come back?”

“Yes, Saul, whenever you like.”

No word of love from him, and she did not want any. The words were spoken which made him her own for ever, and that was enough for her heart-thirst, as she lay there thrilling all over with triumph and gratified malice. She had conquered by waiting; he was hers now, and Kate had lost him.

So she hid her face there, with the desire to bite at the breast she leaned against, in her delirium of joy—controlling herself only by a mighty effort from shrieking out hysterically; he was hers now, and she would never let him go free!

And Saul, as he held her, or rather, let her hold him, looked over the bay at that amber-tinted shore blankly, with a heavy feeling at his heart, as if he lay under a nightmare, or some great misfortune had fallen upon him, beyond which he could not look, about which he could not think.

How different it was when Kate had held him and said

that she loved him ; then the stormy sky had grown golden, and the cold blast balmy and light ; now the sun seemed leaden-hued, and the air heavy with oppression.

“Saul, darling ! you will not come back to Hobart Town ; go on straight to Sydney, and I will come to you there.”

“If you would rather have that, Jane, I’ll fix it so.”

“Yes, Saul, it will be best. Write for me when you get there, and I will come by the next vessel.”

So the pair arranged all their plans on that sea-shore ; or, rather, Saul listened and agreed to all that she suggested, and then, as the sun was setting, they rose and returned—Jane to the cottage, and Saul on board the ship, as miserable a wretch as if he had been chained and in jail.

She put up her lips to be kissed ; a pair of dry lips touched hers, and, with a passive embrace on his part, they separated. Saul, as he turned his back upon her and strode away without looking backwards, seemed to have grown ten years older.

Jane stood watching him as he left her, and smiled bitterly as she saw him put up his hand instinctively, as if to wipe away her kiss from his mouth. He did not know that he was doing this ; he only felt wretched and dreadfully hopeless.

“I’ve got you now, and all the Kate Ambroses in the world will not be able to take you from me. Poor fellow ! he is thinking of her at this present moment. How I hate her for that thought ; how I will sting her for it.”

She went into the cottage, and straight to where Mrs Quinton sat alone, still thinking of her husband and Marion Carter.

“Jane, I am glad you have come, for I want your advice about something.”

“Yes, Sarah, and I want to tell you something also.”

“Is it about that vile woman Carter, Jane ?”

“Not exactly, Sarah. But surely you have not noticed anything amiss ?”

“I don’t know, Jane. You are more about than I am ; have you not seen anything during the past three months since she has been with us ?”

Jane thought a moment. Her natural inclinations were to make this woman miserable ; it was so easily done at all times. But to-day she was inclined to be magnanimous ; and she was wearying to tell her her own news, so that Kate would hear about it as soon as possible.

“No, Sarah. I am sure your suspicions are unfounded regarding the Major in this quarter. I have not seen anything

at all to justify even the faintest doubt. Indeed, I am perfectly sure that he has never spoken to her except in your presence."

"Thank God for that! Oh, Jane, you are indeed a true friend! Now, tell me your secret; what is it?"

"Well, it is a secret as yet," replied Jane softly. "I am engaged to be married."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear it, for your sake. And who is the happy man?"

"Mr Clark—Saul Clark," replied Jane, with a side glance at the door, where Kate Ambrose was standing listening.

CHAPTER XXI.

A JEALOUS WIFE.

"WILL you not forgive me, Reginald?"

"What is the use of talking, Sarah. I have forgiven you again, and again, and again, and you have vowed that it would be the last time. Then, without the slightest cause, you flame out once more, insulting me with your unworthy suspicions, and making us both objects of ridicule."

Major Quinton leaned against the verandah of their cottage, dressed in full regimentals, and gazed over the settlement with a weary look in his eyes; while his jealous wife stood beside him, with her lips quivering, and entreaty in her dark face.

"But I have had cause in the past, you know, Reginald."

"Never, my darling, and you ought to know it by this time. I chose you out from all women to be my wife, and I have never ceased to love you the same as when you gave yourself to me. But there—we are going over the old story again, which never convinces you—which you cannot believe."

"I would that I could believe it always."

"Sarah! Oh, it is maddening this reiteration of folly. Did I not give up my regiment at home, because you thought I saw too much company, and come out here to please you only? Do I ever leave your side willingly? Are you not the dearest and the best to me always?"

"Say it again, Reginald, and kiss me."

"God help you, my own dear wife, and give you more faith in me; for, much as you torment my life, I would die if I didn't have my torment. There, go and get ready to accompany me to court. I want you to intercede for that poor woman."

The Major stooped and kissed her fondly, while she laid her dark head for a moment against his breast, feeling happy in the reunion.

These scenes were sadly common between Major Quinton and his wife. It could not be said that she wearied him with the even monotony of her temper, for, since they had been married, their lives had passed like a constant series of tropical tempests and fierce sunshine.

"Now, run and get dressed."

She was going away cheerfully, when suddenly a dark thought struck her, and she paused in the doorway.

"You are strangely anxious about this Carter girl—that she should escape punishment for this attempted theft. Why are you so, if you are quite sure that you know nothing about her?"

She was smiling at him as she spoke, with an uneasy glitter in her eyes. The Major knew what was there, and controlled his desire to laugh, for this was no laughing matter to him—this lurking devil, that was ever ready to leap up and mock at their mutual felicity.

"Because, Sarah, I believe that you are too noble a woman to let even the meanest of your sex suffer a wrong; and because I think that you are the only person now who can save this girl from infamy; is not that enough?"

"Yes, darling; if you are quite sure that you have no further interest in her."

"I am quite sure," replied her husband, looking at her straightly and frankly, while she watched him narrowly. Then, apparently satisfied with her scrutiny, but with a heavy sigh, she went inside.

The Major was one of the most steady-going men in the settlement, without a single thought beyond his wife and his profession—not at all the kind of man for women to flirt with, or even men to speak too coarsely before; and yet he was forced to guard every look and word, and pass the greater portion of his life under a star-chamber examination, without getting a chance of knowing either his crimes or his accusers.

"What a blessed state marriage would be if it wasn't for jealousy," muttered the poor victim, as he twirled his moustache and looked over the landscape.

He had heard of the engagement of Jane Lymburner with

blended feelings of pleasure and indignation—pleasure that he would now have a chance of getting rid of his wife's secret comforter—indignation that Saul should have treated Kate so shabbily, although, for her sake, he also felt greatly relieved, as she might now have a chance of marrying into her own position and rank of society; but he could see that, although she bore up bravely, she was suffering deeply.

"A viper, if ever there was one, this accursed Lymburner," he muttered wrathfully. Then he blushed up furiously, and began coughing uneasily, for there, the object of his abhorrence stood before him.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lymburner, but I did not notice you," he stammered, wondering if she had heard his last remark.

"Don't mention it, Major," she returned, with a quiet smile. "Mrs Quinton has sent me to tell you not to wait for her; she will follow you shortly."

"Very good;" and the Major, with a bow, turned down the steps and strode rapidly away towards the jail, glad enough to be rid of the pest.

"More mischief, I suppose, she has been hatching. Ah, it is a weary life."

"So I am a viper, am I, Major Quinton?" Jane murmured softly to herself. "Well, so, so! I intend to plant my fangs in your side for that remark."

"Jane, did you see how quickly he walked away when I gave him permission to go first?"

It was Mrs Quinton who darted out and laid her hand on Jane's arm, with her face turned towards the Major's back.

"Yes, Sarah, I am afraid that he did show a little eagerness," replied Jane, with a sigh. By reason of her position as a lady-companion, she addressed her mistress by her Christian name.

"Then confess that I am right. It is not all pure philanthropy on his part, the sudden interest in Carter."

Jane shrugged her shoulders.

"I am afraid that philanthropy has very little to do generally with the interest which men take in young and good-looking females—for she is young, you know, Sarah, and pretty."

"I know, I know," cried Mrs Quinton hoarsely. "And I am getting old."

"Oh, dear no, thirty-two is not old, although, of course,

Marion is a *little* younger—thirteen years' difference, that is all."

"He is going straight to the prison to speak to the girl, of course," continued the poor foolish wife, without replying to the malicious stab, although she felt it all the same; "and he will come to me looking fair afterwards, and expect me to get up and speak for the wanton—to be his cover. Oh, how can men be so false."

"Rather wonder how it is that some are so true. Be reasonable, my dear Sarah; they are all alike, as far as their ideas of faith and morality are concerned; these they leave to us women to look after, and Hobart Town is not exactly the school to expect masculine fidelity to flourish in; yet the Major—"

"Aunt, how can you listen to that evil mischief-maker?" interrupted Kate, sailing out to the verandah, and regarding the unabashed Jane with cool contempt. "How can you be so blind to your own happiness?"

"My happiness, Kate! Much happiness I have in life."

"Think of your own self-respect, your husband's dignity, and put this false woman in her proper place."

"Jane Lymburner is my friend, Kate, and you must not speak to her that way."

"No, aunt; she is your worst enemy, and delights in making you miserable."

"Miss Ambrose," said Jane quietly, and with gentle dignity, "I am sorry that you will not be my friend, nor let me be yours. I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings, but you cannot accuse me of acting in any way falsely to you."

"Jane Lymburner, leave me out of this present conversation, if you please. I am speaking of your evil influence over my aunt—of your false lies and insinuations against my uncle."

"Yes, I know that Major Quinton is a favourite of yours, Miss Ambrose, as he is with most young ladies; also, that you trifled with Saul Clark for some reason or other, but for what reason I cannot surmise."

"Ah!" Mrs Quinton was clutching at the trellis-work, and glaring with sudden hatred at Kate, who had grown deadly pale with anger.

"So this is why you carried on the poor sailor, was it, and afterwards cast him off, that I might not notice—that I might not suspect—anything at home?"

"Aunt, control yourself, for heaven's sake! here is your husband returning; and as for you, Jane Lymburner, take care how you say such a base thing again."

"I did not mean anything, Miss Ambrose, only to let you know that I felt for your natural vexation, even if I cannot feel sorry at taking your place."

"Wretch!" panted Kate, rushing past this lady-companion, and striking her face as she flew past.

"Jane, my poor Jane, what has she done to you?"

"Nothing, Sarah, that I cannot overlook."

"She has hurt you; your face is quite red on one side."

"Don't speak about it, Sarah; a little powder will put that all right. Pray compose yourself, and don't let the Major see that you are upset."

"The false villain!" panted Mrs Quinton.

"Don't let him notice it now, or he will be on his guard, and then you will learn nothing at all."

"I say, Sarah, are you not nearly ready yet?" called out the Major at this moment, in a loud, cheery voice from the street.

"Say that I am coming, Jane."

"Mrs Quinton is just about ready, Major," said Jane softly, looking out with her handkerchief at her face.

"All right, I'll wait here for her. The trial is just beginning."

Mrs Quinton appeared at this moment in her bonnet.

"Be careful, Sarah, be discreet," murmured Jane in her ear.

"Oh, I'll be careful, I'll be discreet, never fear. I'm going to settle this part of the business."

Mrs Quinton joined her husband with the set smile and glitter that he was mostly afraid of, but he said nothing as he offered her his arm and led her over to the prison, while she glared straight in front of her.

Jane still stood on the verandah looking after them, and also smiling, with the one side of her face scarlet from that slap, and the other side deadly pale.

"Miss Lymburner." It was Kate, who had once more come into the verandah ashamed of what she had done, and despising herself for giving this woman the advantage over her. "I wish you to forgive me for my most unladylike behaviour to you a moment ago."

Jane turned and looked at her for a space with the same deadly smile, then glancing furtively about her to see if

they were alone, she approached closer to Kate, who was now standing upright and stiff, with her hands hanging limply at her side, and said in a low tone,—

“Kate Ambrose, if I had struck you, what would you do?”

“Slap you back again,” replied Kate promptly. “You can do so if you like now, for I deserve it.”

“Would you forgive me after that?” asked the same even, silky voice.

“Certainly I would.”

“Then listen: I will not slap you back again, and I will never forgive you nor forget this blow while you and I are alive.”

“Thank you, that is enough; now I feel satisfied with myself,” answered Kate, moving away.

“No, wait a moment; I want to tell you something else. I want to tell you that you are a fool, and deserved to lose your lover for your own stupidity, for if you had not helped me I could never have got him; but I have him safe now, and I shall never rest content until he abhors you as I do.”

“Well, I am sure, Miss Lymburner, I hope you will gain contentment at the end; for, since you have won the young man, it does not matter to me now how you won him, nor with what sentiments he regards me in the future. Let me pass.”

Kate was cool now, and on her guard.

“Does it not?” sneered Jane, without attempting to move. “I shall not be satisfied even with that. I intend to make your life miserable in other ways before I leave you. Your uncle—”

“Let me pass, Miss Lymburner. It will be my painful duty to warn my uncle about you next time I see him, and get your visit shortened if I can.”

“Try it, Kate Ambrose, and see which of us will best succeed.”

“If you don’t get out of my way, woman, I shall be tempted to strike you again.”

“I’ll kill you if you do,” whispered Jane huskily in her ear. “Now go inside and think about Saul Clark.”

Kate held her head upright, and smiled scornfully upon her fortunate rival until she had got inside her own room. Then, after she had locked her door, she broke down completely, and sank sobbing into a chair.

“Oh, my poor Saul, how could you be so foolish as to let such a woman influence you?” All her resentment against

Saul was gone, for she now felt that he had been as much a victim as herself. "If I could only warn him of his danger."

Wiping her eyes, she glanced from her window out to the harbour, and saw the war-sloop and the merchantman, with their sails set, tacking out. She was too late now to clear up this misunderstanding; her lover had indeed left her.

Inside the prison, Governor Davey and his staff were holding a court-martial, and the prisoner was Marion Carter. She stood before these officers and pleaded "Not guilty," as she had done before her sweetheart's father in England, with her soft grey eyes looking pleadingly about her, but without much hope.

The witnesses were all duly examined, and gave their evidence as clearly and with as little variation as if they had arranged it beforehand. Pretty Marion Carter hadn't a chance.

Ignatius Taggart swore to the guinea being his. The two convicts stuck to their story, and the matron to her finding the coin in the possession of the prisoner.

"What do you say, Major?" said the kindly Governor. "She is too pretty to hang, yet I'd as soon hang her as order her to the triangle. She was in your service; can you not give her a good character?"

Marion Carter turned her lovely eyes imploringly upon the Major, who shuddered as he saw his wife watching them both like a tigress.

"I never interfere in household matters, your Excellency, but I have no doubt that Mrs Quinton can say something in her favour."

"That's right. What do you say, Mrs Quinton?" shouted the Governor.

Mrs Quinton rose, and, looking fixedly at the prisoner, said,—

"I can say nothing in the woman's favour, your Excellency, except that while she was in my service I did not suspect her of stealing anything from me—"

"Well, that's as much as you can say."

"But since she left—"

"What! Have you missed anything—and do you suspect her?"

"Yes, your Excellency, I am sorry to have to say I do suspect her of stealing something from me," and as she spoke, Mrs Quinton turned her flashing eyes from the prisoner to

her husband, while some of the subalterns sniggered amongst themselves.

"Oh, madam, how can you?" murmured Marion Carter, sinking down, and covering her girlish face with her hands.

"Then you will not have her again if we discharge her?" asked the Governor.

"Decidedly not," and Mrs Quinton sat down calmly.

The Major looked on the ground with a heavy frown. He could not openly accuse his wife of lying, yet he felt strongly inclined to denounce her there and then.

"Well, I suppose we must either hang her or send her to the triangles," said the Governor, after a pause. "Which is it to be, gentlemen?"

Captain Wilmott rose up, and, after twirling his moustache, said,—

"It seems a pity to expose such a fine figure on the triangles, your Excellency. If you like, I'll take the risk of her. I am in need of a housekeeper at present, and I'll take care that she doesn't steal anything from me."

Marion, who had heard and grasped the meaning of the words, sprang up wildly to her feet, and shrieked out,—

"No, no! Sentence me to the gallows, or the lash, if you like, but spare me this degradation."

"She refuses your generous offer, Wilmott," whispered his friend in his ear. "I fancy I'll win that bet yet."

"Wait a bit, my boy; she hasn't tasted the cat yet," sneered the aristocratic Wilmott back again.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say?" asked the Governor.

"The cat, of course, and imprisonment; we must think of the evil example."

"Doctor Blake, how much do you think the prisoner can stand?"

"Four dozen will be plenty for her," replied the Doctor.

"Say two dozen, and a month of solitary confinement. Warder, remove the prisoner, and bring in the next."

Marion Carter had fainted, and now lay in a heap upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT PETER BROWN'S SMITHY.

PETER BROWN, blacksmith, was too useful a man in this young settlement to be long without an appointment; so, like his friend John Whitehouse, he very quickly had a post as Government smith, with a settled salary and other perquisites, besides a grant of land, and unlimited freedom to do outside jobs for the selectors and others not directly connected with the Government.

He fixed upon his selection at about two miles from the settlement, and close to the foot of the mountain which sheltered and overlooked the town, and which the natives called "Pooranetteré." *

It was a lovely site on which Peter Brown had chosen on which to build his smithy. He had come from the same village as his friend Whitehouse, and did not like the bustle of towns—not that there was a great bustle, as yet, in Hobart Town. But he had an eye to the future, also his wife and daughter to consider, and Governor Davey's staff and overseers were not the best company to be near for either matrons or young girls who had not social positions to hedge them in. So Peter wisely fixed his home as close to Mount "Pooranetteré," and as far from the prison and barracks, as he could get, and where he could be woke up in the morning by the chatter of the jays, magpies, parrots and cockatoos, rather than by the oaths, shrieks, and howls arising from the "*canary*" yards.

It had not taken long to clear out portions of his ground and run up a house and workshop, for his patrons gave him plenty of assistants to aid him in his task. Large gangs settled down to work as soon as he had decided where to squat, felling the timber and clearing away the undergrowth, while others cut a direct and wide track from his smithy door right through the intervening woods and down to the main street. Governor Davey always did his utmost to make such settlers as Peter Brown and John Whitehouse comfortable.

On the morning that the search-party left Hobart Town, their visionary leader took them by way of the smithy, for he wanted to bid his old friend good-bye and get some necessary articles, as he also had his quarters here when he stayed in the

* Mount Wellington.

settlement. It was not the most direct road, yet not much out of their way, besides, most of the white men wanted something or other from the workshop of Peter Brown, and so they decided to make a halt here for breakfast.

Mrs Brown and her daughter Polly, with a couple of assigned female servants, were busy at work in the kitchen, getting ready bacon and eggs with tea for the travellers, who made, with their own employer, a large gathering. Peter himself and his hands were working hard at the smithy fires and anvils, while the others lounged about, looking on and giving an account of their adventures on the day previous.

Peter Brown had nearly as large a staff of pupils and workers as the Governor himself, so that his workshop was of roving dimensions. Here all the smith-work was done for the settlement, and where the best behaved amongst the convicts were sent to learn their trade, and as Peter was a kind-hearted master, they all did their best to keep their places, so that the bush smithy was the most comfortable and home-like quarters in the colony.

James Monkland and Tyral O'Bryan, the two political exiles, had taken up their quarters with the smith and his family as assigned servants, their *crimes* being such as made a difference between them and the other servants. They were allowed to sleep in the house and eat with the family, and as they were both—the Irish patriot particularly—highly educated men, their misfortunes served to win them much sympathy, and their own upright characters a vast amount of respect from their honest master. He treated them more like sons than servants, and allowed them to do pretty much as they liked, an indulgence which they never imposed upon. The other assigned servants had built a shed for themselves, where they took their meals and slept at nights.

Polly Brown's young man, the sailor who had protected her at the time of the wreck, had also taken up his quarters with his sweetheart's father, and was busy mastering the different branches needful for a colonial settler. He had declared his intentions, and been accepted as a future son-in-law by the blacksmith, and was now installed as one of the family, and when not occupied in the smithy or the garden, generally filled up his spare time painting and decorating the cottage, under the directions of Polly.

John Whitehouse had brought up with him the last issue of the *Van Dieman's Land Gazette and General Advertiser*, which had been published the night before, and was now read-

ing aloud its meagre contents to his friends, while they worked or gathered round to listen.

This was the second newspaper which had started in Hobart Town; the first, called *The Derwent Star*, having died some time before. *The Gazette* did not exist, however, long either.

It had no regular time for publishing, as it depended entirely upon news and paper, which latter was not always forthcoming. In size and quality it also varied, as well as in the character of its type and orthography, the printer, George Clark, having considerable difficulties to face in his undertaking.*

The present issue was a much more voluminous affair than many of its predecessors, and had been printed upon old sheets of packing paper, so that John had to hold it close to the light, as well as exercise his ingenuity in the piecing together of the disjointed words, in some of which a letter or two had been unavoidably left out, owing to the scarcity of type.

There were two small sheets of it, about the size of foolscap, and throughout which the capitals were scattered without regard to meaning, filling up often the middle of sentences, where the printer had run short of small type. Words were abbreviated to the first and last letters in many instances, so that it presented a valuable and picturesque appearance to the eyes of the reader, and often drew him up short, compelling him to consult the listeners as to the meaning of the lavishly interspersed hieroglyphics before he could proceed. At such times the two most educated hearers, James Monkland and Tyral O'Bryan who had stood over him, generally came to his rescue.

The main bulk of the paper was occupied by the account of the escape from prison and the stealing of the *Storm Bird*, with the engagement between the Government and the natives. Then the picnic came in for its share of description, with the abduction of Miss O'Callaghan and the Doctor. George de la Motte was dismissed in half a line as "a prisoner was also taken away unwillingly." However, that half line would serve afterwards to keep George in mind, and exonerate him from any blame.

* These early newspapers of the colony are great curiosities. My friend Justin Brown, Esq., of Hobart Town, favoured me with a glance over his collection while I was his guest, from which I made my extracts.
—H. N.

Marion Carter's case was not much commented upon either. "A female prisoner caught stealing from the person, and sentenced to the lash in *consideration* of her sex and youth."

It was such a common incident that no one would have remarked about this affair, if John Whitehouse had not commented upon it. He had seen Marion Carter often when he visited Mathuna; and, being present at the court-martial, had been powerfully affected by the scene. He also knew that Tyral O'Bryan was interested in her.

"Tyral, you know the girl who has been accused of theft, unjustly, I think, and who has to suffer this degradation to-morrow?"

"Who is she?" asked O'Bryan quickly. "One of our fellow passengers?"

"Yes; the girl that Mathuna and you rescued from the two ruffians on our first night at Hobart Town."

"My God! Whitehouse, do you mean that Marion Carter has been accused, and is to be flogged to-morrow?"

John nodded his head without speaking.

"And who has accused her?"

"Ignatius Taggart is the man she is said to have robbed; and her accusers are two prisoners and the matron."

And then John narrated the charge, and gave his own opinion upon it.

"But this is infamous! It must be stopped!" shouted out the Irishman, his features working convulsively. "Poor girl, she is as innocent as the babe unborn. I watched her during the voyage, and all the time she has been here, and a purer or better behaved girl never lived."

"Yes; I also think that she is all that, Tyral, therefore in the greater danger. Captain Wilmott has fixed his eyes upon her, and means to force her to live with him."

"But he cannot, he dare not, unless she is willing. Even a prisoner has that option left in this accursed land."

"It is because she has refused that she is to be flogged into submission. Her former mistress has declined to take her back."

"Do you mean Mathuna?"

"No; poor Mathuna knows nothing about it yet; nor will she until it is all over, and the girl disgraced. Mathuna is with the wounded Wilfred Tregarthen, and refuses to be seen. I mean the patroness of Mathuna and the employer of Marion, Mrs Quinton."

"Oh! surely no woman would stand passively and see this outrage on her sex committed. Surely Mrs Quinton would not."

"She has done so, Tyral, already—nay, more, half accused the girl herself; and, as you know, she represents the respectability of the settlement. After her verdict, none of the other ladies will receive Marion into their service. She is doomed, I fear."

"O Lord! how long wilt Thou give the power over souls and bodies to those heartless rulers?" cried Tyral, clasping his hands in wild despair. "Can we do nothing; is there no way of helping innocent women; is there no way of getting at the hearts of the beasts that ruin them?"

"A petition might be drawn up here, and carried round amongst the free settlers, asking the Governor for her release from the lash."

"A petition? Who will sign it in Hobart Town? The friends of the villain who has planned this? But he shall not succeed while I have a knife to reach his black heart," cried out O'Bryan furiously.

"Hold, Tyral," cried the burly blacksmith, flinging down his forehammer and seizing the Irishman by both arms. "Take care what you say. Control yourself. Remember your own position here. A hint of these words reaching this Captain Wilmott, and he will have you dragged off in chains, lashed almost to death, and sentenced to the road-gang. We all know his power and his relentless vindictiveness."

"Listen, friends," said Tyral O'Bryan, looking round him, and almost choking with his emotion; "I think I can trust you all here; but it does not matter now if I cannot, as I must have it out some day with this man."

"Hush! hush! Tyral," again remonstrated the blacksmith warningly.

"This is a vile plot of Captain Wilmott's, as Jack Grey there can tell you; and we must defeat it by fair or foul means. Speak out, Jack, and tell them what you heard at 'The Black Swan.'"

Jack Grey, one of the blacksmith's assigned servants, who had been blowing the bellows, looked round fearfully on the company as he was thus appealed to by O'Bryan, and, instead of coming forward, shrank timidly back into the shadow.

"Speak out, mate. We won't sell you, nor O'Bryan neither," cried out the other convict servants.

“It ain’t that I’m afraid of, mates,” answered Jack, unwillingly leaving his corner of the fire, and coming more into the light, wiping the perspiration from his sweat-covered face with his blackened arm, while his eyes showed the whites in that unmistakable manner, both in horses and men, when they are horrified. “I ain’t afraid of any of you peaching on me; and yet stories do reach headquarters very strangely; and I am comfortable where I am, and don’t want to be shifted if I can help it. You all know what some of these officers are if they take a grudge against us; how jobs are put up, and lies told. First offence six hundred on the bare, and a month on the chain, besides all chance of our tickets gone. And if it stopped there I’d think nothink of it; but the man as tells a story again one of the overseers or officers, and particularly again Captain Wilmott, is a marked man until he swings; for that’s what it comes to afore very long.”

The man spoke quickly and horribly in earnest, with the sweat rolling down his cheeks, and leaving dark shadows behind.

“Don’t ax me to say again what I heard at the ‘Black Swan,’ mate,” he said, turning appealingly to Tyrul. “There’s a chum of mine hanging now before its door, Tom Hardy. You all know what sort he was?”

“Ay, ay,” replied the others; “as good a chap as lived.”

“Yes, he was. Well, this yer aristocratic Captain wanted his wife, who came out after him, and hired him out, and because neither of them would agree he had his knife into poor Tom, dragged him from her on some charge or other, and got plenty of witnesses, too; that blind fiddler was in that job also.”

“He is in most hanging jobs,” cried the others savagely.

“You bet, he has more than one trade at his finger ends. Well, they got Tom convicted, and lashed again and again, now for insubordination, now for larceny, until his back was like a crocodile’s for toughness, and all the time he was being punished, his wife was being persecuted by the Captain. Last time he was tied up at the triangles he took on *seven thousand* strokes,* the Captain all the time standing beside him, and telling him that he had got his wife after all, and taunting him with all sorts of stings, until the poor chap fainted.”

* In case that the reader should doubt this extraordinary sentence, I saw a man in Hobart Jail who, I was informed, had suffered at one sentence, in the olden days, fifteen thousand lashes.—H. N.

"And was it true?" asked Whitehouse, in an awed voice.

"Not at the time," replied the man. "But Tom believed him, and got desperate, for as soon as he was able to walk he went for the Captain and nearly throttled him afore they got him off. That finished Tom, and made a widow of his wife, for his next sentence was 'Sandy Bay.'"

"And the widow?" asked John, still in a subdued voice.

"She went to see the last of her man, as women always do, when there is a hanging match on, and, growing faint at the sight, Mrs Taggart took her into the 'Black Swan' and poured a glass of 'hoccussed' rum down her throat; least-aways I suppose it must have been 'hoccussed,' for when she left the house the next morning she went out and wandered about the town, quite stupid-looking, and without knowing any of her friends. In the dark, that night, after, she must have tumbled into the water and got drowned, for her body was found at daylight down by 'Hunter's Island;' that's what comes of contradicting the likes of Captain Wilmott."

The man again wiped his face, and looked round at his fellow-servants, who nodded their heads to confirm what he had told.

"It's the gospel truth what Jack says," said one of them at last, breaking the horrified silence.

"Forgive me, Jack, for asking you to speak—and forget, boys, that I did so," cried O'Bryan, controlling his emotion.

"That's all right, and no harm done, so long as you don't ask me to be a witness against the Captain," saying which Jack Grey slunk back to the forge, and began blowing up the fire with energy.

"Come inside to the house, friends," said the blacksmith quietly. "We'll talk the matter over there."

Whitehouse, O'Bryan and Monkland followed Peter Brown into the cottage best room, when, after shutting the door, he spoke:—

"Now, Tyral, tell us what Jack heard at the 'Black Swan'; there is no use endangering his liberty, for his word would have no weight with the Governor against that of an officer."

O'Bryan told them about the wager between the Captain and his friend, and how, afterwards, on another night, he had

heard Taggart and the Captain arranging something together, the reward of which was to be five guineas, two of which had been paid to the blind landlord as earnest.

"The horrible scoundrel; and we are powerless to reach him," exclaimed John Whitehouse.

"One thing may be done," observed the blacksmith. "Governor Davey likes to encourage legal marriages amongst the convicts. If Tyral can make up his mind to marry this Marion Carter, I would start off and ask her for him."

"I have already asked her," answered O'Bryan sadly; "but she will not have me."

"What! not have you for a husband," exclaimed his hearers in amazement. "You as good as a settler almost, O'Bryan, and a good-looking man to boot."

"That is so. Marion Carter has scruples, wonderful though it sounds in convict land, and from a convicted thief; but she vows she will come to no man while her innocence is unproved."

"God help her in Hobart Town if she persists in that folly," cried the blacksmith; "for she will be in a worse plight in no time. However, let us call in Mrs Brown; perhaps she may be able to help us in this dilemma."

CHAPTER XXIII.

SEPARATION.

AFTER giving her evidence, and watching the effect which her base words had, not only upon the poor girl Marion Carter, but upon her husband, Mrs Quinton retired, and went back to the cottage not at all satisfied with herself.

She was naturally, and in her normal condition, a generous woman and a truth-loving lady; and she felt that she had outraged these qualities, indeed, that she had overstepped the bounds of common decency by her late behaviour; and, for the sake of gratifying a hatred raised from suspicion only, she had insinuated a lie against what may have been an innocent girl,

and doomed her to everlasting degradation. She had insinuated in the open court that the girl had pilfered from her, when a kindly, generous word might have saved her.

"But has she not stolen from me?" she muttered to herself as she crossed the street—the most dastardly theft which any one could be guilty of.

But if the girl was innocent, what then? She, Mrs Quinton, had become the most contemptible amongst women.

Her husband did not look up as she left the apartment where the court was sitting. She glanced yearningly over to him, and thought that she had never seen him look so stern. Was that look caused by the girl whom he could not save, or by the wife he was ashamed of?

A chilly numbness fell upon her heart as she entered her own house, and, taking off her bonnet, sat down to think.

"I must see Jane Lymburner," she cried at last, sick of her own dark thoughts. "She generally can put me right when I am uncertain."

She touched the little gong which hung in the receiving-room, and which was used for calling the servants. After a moment or two the door opened, and a young prisoner appeared.

"Tell Miss Lymburner that I have returned, and would like to see her."

"Miss Lymburner has just gone out, madam."

"Oh, indeed; that will do."

As the servant retired, Kate opened the door and entered. Her aunt, seeing who it was, leaned back and regarded her with a dark frown.

"May I come in, aunt?"

"Yes, if you like. I am just going to lie down; I am tired," replied her aunt coldly.

"Aunt, do not look at me that way," said poor Kate, coming forward. "I am very wretched, and want to speak to you."

"Well, I am ready to listen. What have you got to say?"

"Oh, aunt, don't speak to me so coldly. I feel wretched on your account."

"Ha! ha! You think a lot about my state of mind, I daresay."

"Yes, aunt. I cannot help thinking and wondering at you playing with your own happiness as you are doing."

"Kate Ambrose, don't be a hypocrite, and try to come

fawning round me with your false protestations. You heard what Jane Lymburner said before I left?"

"Yes; I heard what the vile woman said before you left, and also what she said behind your back. She told me that she had plotted to take my lover from me, and had succeeded, because I was a simple fool. She told me that she intended to make me still more miserable, and would never rest until I was driven out of your door."

"That is a lie, Miss Kate Ambrose!"

Kate turned round sharply, to see Jane Lymburner standing inside the room with her bonnet on, slowly drawing off her black gloves, and regarding her steadily.

"Say, Mrs Quinton, that you believe it to be a falsehood on your niece's part, or else I will leave your house and never enter it again."

"Sit down, Jane, my dear. You know that I would not believe such things about you from any one."

Jane smiled quietly, and, taking a chair, sat down and folded her now gloveless hands placidly.

"Aunt, do you mean that you believe the word of that woman instead of your dead brother's daughter?"

Kate had risen, and was pointing in the direction of the enemy, her eyes sparkling like diamonds.

"I believe that Jane Lymburner is my true and disinterested friend, Kate Ambrose; but I do not know the position in which I have to regard you as holding towards myself or to—my husband," replied her infatuated aunt coldly, yet with concentrated bitterness.

"Enough, Mrs Quinton; I shall not trouble you any longer with my presence." With which words, Kate walked proudly out of the room.

When she reached her own room, she stood for some time thinking about what she was now to do. It was impossible for her to remain an hour longer in her aunt's house, and her present trouble was how to explain away her leaving so abruptly, and where she was to go to if she left. She had a little money in her own right which her parents had left her—not much, for her father had lived nearly up to his income during his life-time, but still enough to keep her moderately while she stayed in Hobart Town, and prevent her starving if she went home to England. But she did not wish to make a scandal, so she must think about some excuse.

"I shall walk over to Mrs Davey, and ask her to take

me in for a few days, and get her advice; she will tell me how to act."

She dressed herself and went out quietly; but as she crossed the street she met her uncle, who was striding along with a very stern, set face. He stopped her as she was passing, and, looking at her, observed her agitation.

"What is the matter with you, Kate, and where are you going?"

Kate would rather not have seen the Major at that moment, for she wished to compose herself, and be able to give him some reason without dragging in her aunt; and yet she felt that she ought to put him upon his guard against this evil companion. They had always been frank enough with each other, and Mrs Quinton's jealousy of every one had been too openly exhibited for any need of concealment in the present instance. Besides, it was now time that her uncle should assert his authority, and dismiss Jane Lymburner. So, without any further attempt at excuses, she told him the whole events of the morning.

As he listened, the Major's brow grew dark, and his mouth hard and relentless.

"I have long thought that your aunt was mad, Kate; but she has done a thing this morning which I can never forgive."

"It is all through the evil influence of this false woman, uncle. Dismiss her, and all will be well."

"No, Kate; Jane Lymburner was not beside her in the court to-day when she gave false testimony against a girl who has never wronged her—an unfortunate whose position ought to have moved her compassion. I cannot live again with a woman who can condescend to that."

"Oh, uncle, dismiss this woman, and give my poor aunt another chance. You know how madly she loves you."

"I am tired of her mad love, which produces only misery. She will be better apart from me. Come, I will go with you to Mrs Davey and explain matters. You are quite right to leave your aunt."

As Jane sat in her chair, she could see from the sitting-room window the meeting of Major Quinton and his niece.

"Look over there, Mrs Quinton."

Mrs Quinton sprang to her feet and looked out.

"They have met. She is telling him all about it. Now, are you convinced?"

"Yes, Jane—quite. But I did not require this evidence;

it has been in my mind for a long time. Ah! they are going off together."

"Yes, he is taking her away to find a new home for her. Ah, my dear Sarah, I am afraid that you have been too impulsive, that you have played into their hands to-day!"

"But, Jane, you made me do this!" cried the wretched woman, bursting into tears, and flinging herself down upon the couch.

"No, Sarah; I told you to be careful, to be discreet," answered Jane, who enjoyed the other's misery, and did not care now how soon she left this establishment, of which she was getting tired.

"But you said that you would leave me if I did not believe you before her."

"Yes, I confess that I lost my temper when I heard the horrible things she was accusing me of; but I did not imagine for a moment that you would pause between your own niece and a humble friend like myself."

"You know, Jane, that I could not endure my wretched life without your pity. You know how much I depend upon you."

So these two women sat together and talked—the one helplessly dependent, like a drunkard who cannot live without the poison which is consuming him, and the other goading her victim on to madness, like the demon drink.

In about a couple of hours' time, the Major came back and disturbed this conversation. Jane, when she saw him enter, rose up to leave the husband and wife together, but he sternly closed the door and ordered her to remain. At the sight of his hard, set face, Mrs Quinton felt her heart stand still.

"You need not leave the room just yet, Miss Lymburner, I have something to say to you."

Jane bent her head and sat down quietly; she knew that her hour had come, and she felt very glad that it was so.

"Madam, I have just come from Colonel Davey's house, where I left your niece. She is not coming back here again."

"You dared to take her there, sir?" exclaimed Mrs Quinton furiously.

"Yes, madam; I thought that it was my duty, as the husband of her aunt, to see the young relation whom she should have protected from insult into some place of shelter."

"Major Quinton, I had better retire now, while you are speaking of these domestic matters with your wife," here Jane said as she rose again.

"Sit down, Miss Lymburner; you have interfered too much already in my domestic affairs for me to allow you to be absent from the last interview which I intend to have with my wife. I shall have something to say to you also presently."

"As you please, sir," replied Jane, sitting down, this time sullenly.

"What do you mean, Reginald, by last interview?" faltered Mrs Quinton.

"What I say, madam! That I do not wish ever to see you again privately; that the time has gone past for any further explanations between us. Your conduct this morning finished up any lingering respect that I may have had for you; and that, after to-day, you will go your way, and let me take mine in peace."

"Oh, Reginald!" Mrs Quinton sank back on the couch and covered her face with her hands, while the Major continued pitilessly, turning this time towards Jane Lymburner,—

"As for you, woman! and the share which you have had in this business, I will say as little as possible. I took you into my wife's service at her intercession, and because she told me that you were on the point of starvation in London. I want you to understand clearly that I employed you entirely out of charity, and not because my wife required your services."

"This is unmanly; this is most ungentlemanly," murmured Jane from her chair.

"Yes; I know that it is ungentlemanly, and words that I would not think of addressing to any other woman whom I have ever yet met. But when I am speaking to you, I do not consider that I am speaking to a woman; I only regard you as a venomous reptile, whom it is necessary to remove from my vicinity as quickly and as effectually as possible"

"Oh! this is most shameful, Major Quinton. Let me go, please."

"Presently, Miss Lymburner. Being a female, I cannot thrash you, as I would assuredly have done had you belonged to my own sex; but I can discharge you from my service, and that is what I want you to understand plainly that I now do. There are still some arrears of salary due to you, I think. You will make up your account when you leave this room, please, and send it to me at the barracks. And, shall we say six months' advance instead of a warning, and, of course, your passage-money back to England?"

"Yes, that will do, if Mrs Quinton does not require me."

"Oh, Jane! what will I do without you, my only friend?" sobbed Mrs Quinton from the couch, while Jane smiled.

"That matter I shall leave Mrs Quinton to arrange with you after I have left her; if she can afford to re-engage you, I shall not have any right to interfere. Meanwhile, understand that you are no longer in *my* service after to-day."

"Then, if I am free now, sir, let me leave the room."

"You are not at liberty yet. I require your attendance for a few minutes longer," said the Major coldly.

"Reginald, you are not going to leave me surely?"

"Yes, madam, for ever!" replied the Major.

"Oh, what have I done? Is it for Kate or that other woman?" cried Mrs Quinton, standing up wildly.

"Yes, for both; and out of consideration for yourself mainly."

"Forgive me, Reginald, and I will go on my knees to the Governor, and ask him to pardon the woman. I will confess that I have wronged her, and take her back again if you want her. Do not leave me, husband. Bring back Kate, do what you like, only forgive me, and do not leave me."

Mrs Quinton flung herself on her knees, and clasped him round the legs, grovelling and weeping wildly.

"It is too late, Sarah, now, for I can never trust you any more; too late to save this poor girl from her disgrace unless her innocence can be proven; too late now for your niece Kate to come back, for the Governor knows that she has left you, and why she has left you."

"Then you love me no longer, Reginald?"

"I love you no longer, Sarah. My love was killed this morning with my respect."

Jane was smiling at the mischief she had caused, and as the Major saw that smile he could hardly control his temper.

"Oh, what shall I do? oh, what shall I do?" moaned the poor, demon-torn woman, as she lay on the ground.

"Rise up and compose yourself, and do not give that woman the chance of laughing at you. I shall send over the doctor to see you; and now, good-bye!"

Mrs Quinton raised herself on her hands and looked at her husband, her dark face pallid, and her rich brown eyes staring madly, while her massy hair fell over her neck and panting breast in tangled ripples.

"Good-b—?"

As her quivering lips parted to whisper the words, with the accent of inquiry, it was suddenly choked by a stream of

blood which burst from her mouth as she fell forward upon her face.

"Go, woman, and fetch the doctor," cried out the Major, clutching at Jane Lymburner, and pushing her roughly out of the room. Then he rushed back and lifted up his wife.

Her teeth were clenched and her eyes staring, as he lifted her over to the couch and laid her down; while the ruddy stream still forced its way from between the closed teeth, and ran down her breast, staining the front of her white summer dress; while convulsive shudders passed over her.

"Oh, my God! Sarah, my darling—my darling!"

Frantically he sprang to the door, and shouted out for the servants, who came running in.

"Run for Miss Ambrose; tell her that her aunt is dying; she is at the Governor's house. Get the doctor, for God's sake, quick! Ah, Mathuna, come in. My poor wife is dying, and I have killed her!"

Mathuna strode forward hastily, and flung herself down beside the couch.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CAPTAIN WILMOTT LOSES HIS BET.

It was a balmy morning in that most delicious of all seasons throughout Australia—the spring-time—when the bush is one glowing mass of blossoms. The eucalyptus tree, with its dual-sexed feathery flowers, amber-tinted and large in its completeness, while the young leaves spread out like delicate, plumb-coloured flowers; the wattle, with its golden balls, the upstarting native musk, and the thousand varieties of heaths, each exhaling delicious perfumes. All the land spread out like a carefully-kept garden in full bloom, floating in the early mist, and bursting like softened flashes of bright colour from the dew-laden bush-spiders' webs which hung over misty paths in graceful and silvery festoons.

The bay was sleeping, and without a sigh passing over its softened breast, so that the promontories and vessels repeated

themselves, as if in a looking-glass, with the rosy clouds which were blending amongst the pearly upper space; while Mount Pooranetteré, with its organ-like cliffs and its detached patches of snow, broke picturesquely from the rolling cloud-wreaths, soft and purple.

"We're going to have a good day for our sport, Wilmott," observed the young subaltern, as he stood beside his friend in the prison-yard enjoying his first cigar for the day.

"Yes; she won't catch cold, I reckon," answered Wilmott, as he puffed out a volume of smoke and watched it slowly eddy up until it became lost to view in the clear atmosphere.

"It's a confounded shame, you know, Wilmott, to scar such a tender back, and all because she cannot fancy you."

"Oh, she won't wait to be marked much. One welt will bring her to her senses. What do you say? Another pony that she caves in at the second. I'll give her the second for grace—say two at most; and if she stands a third, I'll consent to lose."

"No, Wilmott; you are too lucky. How can I know that you haven't arranged the programme with her in order to diddle me? You saw her last night, I know."

"On my honour as a gentleman, Fred, there is no connivance on her part. I did see her last night, for I didn't want to expose her before all you fellows; but she was as obstinate as a donkey—struck at me, in fact, because I insisted on having a good-night kiss. Oh, I do assure you that she means to face it up, and thinks that she can, but I know better."

"She is a fine bit of goods, Wilmott, and I envy you your luck as senior officer. You get all the pick of the prison."

Captain Wilmott was a little, slenderly-built man of about thirty-three, with sallow cheeks and coal-black eyes, and a cruel, hard mouth, which closed like a vice above the protruding chin; a wicked-looking face and a remorseless pair of eyes, which could glitter with rage, but never softened or twinkled with merriment. He spoke slowly, and drawled out his words in a monotonous tone as if it was with an effort.

"Then you will not take up this bet, Fred!"

"No."

"Warders, fetch along the prisoner." He uttered his orders sharply and promptly to the men who were standing near, and, touching their caps, they disappeared, while he resumed his languid drawl.

"You'll regret it, Fred; for I really believe she will have

pluck to hold on till the fifth cut before she gives herself up to my tender mercy."

"I'll risk my loss, Wilmott; here they come."

There were not many men in the yard this balmy morning. Captain Wilmott had taken care to have none as witnesses but those that he could depend upon, and who knew him too well to betray any irregularity that he might be guilty of—half-a-dozen warders and the two brutal-looking convict flagellators, who now stood with the whip in their hand, feeling the lead-tipped ends of the tails with their hard fingers.

The Governor and most of the other garrison men would not be awake until long after it was over, for Wilmott had seen them all safely to bed the night before after a late carouse. The whipping of a woman was nothing at all so uncommon to force any of these worthies out of their beds at six o'clock, unless on special duty. Fred had only risen to look after his bet, with a little curiosity to see how Marion Carter stood her punishment, and how she looked after it.

Captain Wilmott had deserved death on the gibbet a hundred times more than did the coarse ruffians whom he had aided to string up so frequently, and had been close enough to death's sweeping scythe himself often enough without knowing it, but he would never know how very closely he had stood to the Grim Terror the night before as he was leaving the prison gate after his late interview with the fair prisoner Marion, or that only his farewell retort to the warder had been the cause of him being spared for the time.

"I suppose it's all right, sir, and that we won't need the whippers to-morrow morning at six o'clock."

"No, it isn't all right. The fool won't give in, so that the punishment must go on according to order."

Tyral O'Bryan, as he lay on the ground watching for this disgrace to his uniform, put back his knife into its sheath, and let Wilmott go past unmolested. He had followed the Captain from the mess-room to the prison. His heart racked with torturing suspense lest fear of her near punishment and disgrace might tempt the girl to give way, feeling instinctively why the Captain had left his boon companions for the prison at such an hour, and determined to kill him on his return, and so rid the world of an encumbrance to man; but when he heard the words which proved the firmness and courage of the girl he loved, a wild wave of exultation passed over him. Here was a woman well fitted to be a patriot's wife, if he could only win her.

He buried his face in the grass and groaned, for the thrill of pride and exultation had been succeeded by the passion of despair. What of to-morrow?

All the afternoon and evening his friend the blacksmith, with his wife, had gone about trying their hardest to get Marion pardoned, but without success. The Governor told them that it was useless, that the settlement needed a stern example, and that she must be punished as a lesson to the other prisoners, male and female. All the concession they could get from him had been that the punishment would be conducted as privately and delivered as lightly as possible.

Their visit to Major Quinton had been equally unsuccessful, for they found the cottage in wildest confusion, when no one could be permitted to enter. Mrs Quinton had burst a blood-vessel, and now lay in a most critical condition, and the Major was distraught, so with reluctant steps they were turned from door to door, and forced to return home, leaving O'Bryan to wait and watch outside the walls.

The execution of the sentence was fixed for six o'clock, but Captain Wilmott determined to take time by the forelock, thus he had risen an hour earlier, to get it over before any one could interfere. All night O'Bryan lay outside the prison, vainly trying to think of some plan to save the prisoner. She was as far beyond his power to help as he had been when he lay inside Dublin stronghold, waiting upon his banishment from his beloved native land.

He saw Captain Wilmott and his friend walk over to the prison in the early dawn, and then he waited for the finale. Would she be able to endure to the end without yielding to what was worse than death, or would the force of bodily pain overpower her virtue and endurance? Perhaps she would stand firm and be killed, for he had seen strong men die under these flagellator's skilful cuts with less than two dozen.

The wall round the yard was about eight feet high; too high to look over, and there were too many warders about for him to attempt to climb up to the top; he might be seen and shot at, or dragged away before the end and imprisoned, and so rendered powerless to help her in the future.

He crept up to the wooden gateway, and found that he could see inside through the divisions of the planks, so he stood here, and pressing his face against the wood, he watched, with murder in his hot heart, all that took place.

He saw the Captain and his friend standing smoking their cigars beside the triangle, and their creatures beside them, the

warders waiting stolidly, and the flagellators, with their jackets off and their hairy arms bare, fondling their whip ends, as if delighted with their approaching task, and eager to begin. These flagellators liked their job, and took great pride in their skilful manipulation of the strokes. They could kill a man, if friendly disposed towards him, with a very few cuts, or linger over their work and cause infinite torture towards those whom they had a grudge against. As he watched their brutal faces and thought upon the tender skin soon to be hanging in ribbons from that sensitive back, he shuddered violently.

Why was the doctor not there? He should have been, according to law. Then Tyril remembered that he was at the cottage attending Mrs Quinton, and thought of running back for him, only that, in his fascination of horror, he could not tear himself away from the plank door.

He heard Wilmott and his friend speaking, with the words they uttered, and ground his teeth together with fury.

"You will never get her, even if she yields, for at the words I will stab you to the heart," he muttered, feeling for his knife.

"Warders, fetch along the prisoner."

After these words and the drawl which followed, O'Bryan heard him speak to the whippers.

"You know what to do this morning, prisoners?"

"Yes, sir; cut well about the outside of the shoulders first, and high up."

"Right; don't let her faint, or I'll get you each a couple of hundred."

"No fear of her fainting for the first dozen, sir. We'll make them stingers that will keep her lively."

O'Bryan watched the evil eyes of the Captain, as they glittered like pieces of gas coal, and vowed that for every scar Marion had to wear, he would make a brand upon him that would last his life-time.

He now saw the prison doors open and four warders appear, leading out the pallid victim. She had not slept over night any more than he had, and bore the traces of her sleepless vigil in her grey face, which was blanched to the lips. Dark, purple rings were round those tearless eyes, no longer clear grey, but dimmed and dove-tinted, while her golden brown hair looked lustreless in the morning light.

A poor victim for such a manly hero to tackle, without much of her gentle beauty left. When she first appeared she had tottered weakly, and been forced to lean for an instant only

against the doorway, but as she did so she caught the Captain's cruel eyes fixed upon her, and the expectant smile which curled his thin lips, and with an effort she braced herself up, and walked forward steadily over to the triangle and the punishers, who dropped their whips and put their hands upon her.

"Did you tell the doctor of the alteration in the time, warder?" asked Wilmott.

"I left word for him at his room, sir."

"That's all right; he is ten minutes late, so we will not wait any longer for him. Strip the prisoner."

A crimson wave passed over the face and neck of Marion as the two convicts tore off the upper portion of her coarse prison dress. Then O'Bryan saw her teeth meet in her lip, forcing out a drop of blood, and she became once more deadly white, but passive in their hands.

He shut his eyes and groaned at the vile outrage. When he opened them again, her back was towards him, and the convicts were putting up her arms, tied firmly at the wrist, over her head, and fastening them to the top of the triangle.

The flagellators now placed themselves on each side of their victim, and waited on the word of command to begin.

"Must I give the order, Marion Carter, or will you let me save you?" asked the Captain in a clear voice.

O'Bryan saw Marion turn her head towards her tormentor with a glance of horror, and her lips moving, but no reply came. The Captain also saw the look, and interpreted it his own way.

"Then you agree to my terms?"

"No! Go on."

She spoke the words hoarsely, and turned her head once more to the wall.

The Captain stepped back to his place, and nodded his head to the left-hand flagellator, who raised his whip and made the tails swing as he whirled them round his head.

"Oh, my God!" cried O'Bryan, as he heard the lash whistle through the air and descend upon the fair shoulders, while a piercing shriek broke from the writhing girl.

"One!" cried out the Captain, again nodding to the right-hand man, who slowly swung his whip aloft.

O'Bryan could stand no more. With a howl like a wild beast, he rushed down the street, holding his ears to shut out the second shriek, straight on to the cottage where he knew the Doctor was.

He sprang up the verandah steps, and, dashing himself

against the front door, burst it open, and ran into the lobby, shouting out,—

“Doctor Blake, come quick, or she will be murdered!”

The loud noise of the smashed door and his roar brought out not only the Doctor and the Major, but Mathuna and the newly-risen servants.

“What’s all this about, madman?” shouted the Doctor, as he ran forward and shook the intruder. “Don’t you know that a lady is lying dangerously ill inside?”

“And a woman is being murdered outside; they are lashing Marion Carter to death in the yard. Come, I tell you—come and stop the devils.”

“Marion Carter, my maid?” cried out Mathuna, startled at the news, for she had not heard anything about the arrest.

“Yes, yes. You can save her, Mathuna,” replied O’Bryan eagerly. “Come and stop it before it is too late.”

Saying which, he caught her by the arm and dragged her outside, and along the streets at a run, his excitement passing into her, and rousing up her savage blood.

As they approached the wall, another wild shriek rang out.

“Ah!” Mathuna needs no urging forward now, for, breaking from his hand, she darts on in front at her full speed, her brown eyes blazing.

She does not consider the gate, or stop an instant in her rush when she reaches the wall, but, with a wild leap, she has caught the upper ledge, and vaults over into the yard, while O’Bryan is still a couple of dozen feet from the outside.

“Seven,” the Captain remarks calmly, as the Savage Queen recovers herself, and looks round her.

It is enough. With a tiger bound Mathuna dashes her clenched fist full in the Captain’s face, felling him to the ground; then back again to the triangle, where the flagellators stand.

The left-hand flagellator, nearest to her, is also lying on the ground like the Captain, face up, while Mathuna has got his whip, and is using it with tremendous energy, if without the science of the professional—using it indiscriminately over the heads and faces of those nearest her, who are rushing for the gate, to get out of the fury’s road, for none of them can stand against that clenched fist and the whistling cat-o’-nine-tails.

O'Bryan is inside also now, hard at work freeing Marion, without the girl knowing who has aided her, for she has fallen senseless against him, and while supporting her, he covers her up.

Then the Captain tries to get up to his feet with a savage oath, which turns again the attention of Mathuna upon him, for she has cleared the yard of the others.

"Ah, you little man!" Mathuna cannot find stronger English at the moment to express her rage and scorn, and she wastes no more time in words, but swings the tails about his head, cutting and bringing away great strips of skin each time they descend and swing back.

He is blinded and dazed as he rushes aimlessly about, while she follows him up and lashes him without mercy. At last he finds his way to the open gate and gets free.

"Now," said Mathuna, flinging down the whip, and going up to O'Bryan, who is holding the senseless form of Marion, "come along with me, and bring her to the cottage; only don't make any more noise, for Wilfred must not be disturbed."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE IDYL OF MATHUNA.

WHEN Mathuna got back to the cottage, with O'Bryan following her bearing his tender load, she called her two old women, and put the girl into their hands to cure. She then went in to see how her own patient had been during her absence.

Wilfrid was still lying asleep. He had not been disturbed by the uproar, and, indeed, was getting along towards recovery as surely and quickly as a healthy young man could get, under such unrelaxing care, after receiving a couple of native spears into his body, and a *coup de grâce* on the head with a waddy, and even Mathuna, who knew from experience the after-effect of such accidents of war, felt satisfied that her "sun-god" would soon be all right again. The spears had not

touched any of the internal organs, and the waddy had only knocked him senseless, without damaging his skull.

While her native women were dressing the wounds on the back of Marion, she went into the sitting-room to consult with the Major and the Doctor as to what next should be done with her two newly-found *protégés*. She knew enough of the penal laws to be aware that she had committed a serious misdemeanour in rescuing this captive, also that O'Bryan would most likely have to bear the brunt of it, and she wanted to get their help.

Her serenity was not in the slightest degree overcast by the late tornado in the prison-yard. It was a very trivial matter, the castigation of a few men, white or black, and Captain Wilmott had been the only one she had dealt severely with; the others bore off with them a few marks which would take nearly the same time to heal up as Marion's back, possibly a little longer, for Mathuna possessed a heavy hand when weighted by passion. But Captain Wilmott she thought and hoped that she had branded for life on the part he was most particular about—his aristocratic face. No, he would never get quite over some of those cuts, but would wear the trade-stamp of the cat-o'-nine-tails, which he had been so fond of seeing used on the backs of others, as long as ever he lived; and that thought pleased Mathuna, and helped to compose her wonderfully, even although she was not quite so sure of how the Governor would view her little escapade.

The Major, although too heart-broken at present to interest himself greatly in outside matters, as well as the Doctor, shook his head doubtfully when he heard of her feats. Both men felt glad enough that she had rescued Marion from the clutches of the law, and not at all sorry to hear that she had punished the heartless reprobate Wilmott; yet the immediate consequences to herself, but more particularly to both O'Bryan and Marion, troubled them greatly.

"Of course, O'Bryan has been seen in this affair, and will be reported—he may now reckon himself a marked man—and as for the girl, the sooner we get her smuggled out of the way the better for her," remarked the Doctor. "As for yourself, my Forest Queen, you'll have to stand an examination as a law-breaker, only I think that we will be able to get you off. Send the man O'Bryan in."

When O'Bryan came, the Doctor said to him abruptly,—

"Have you any friends you can trust, my man, who will help you to hide until this storm blows over?"

O'Bryan told them about his friends the Browns, and how they could always warn him, and get him away to the bush easily.

"That will do for the present. Indeed, it is the best place you can go too, and take the woman Carter to also for the present. They will not think of looking for you so close to town. Yes, go off there, and at once if you can manage it, before the settlement is raised."

Mathuna again came to the rescue with a little brown ochre and charcoal. She said that she could turn them both into members of her tribe. She would send some of her people to carry Marion, as a sick native, up to the hills, and see them both safely placed with their friends without suspicion.

So the transformation was at once made on the pair. To Marion, still drowsy and stupid with the pain, the Doctor gave a sleeping draught, so that they could paint and dress her in skins without her being aware of the change. In a very short time, under the escort of about a dozen of the most faithful fighting-men, the procession left Hobart Town, and made their way up to Peter Brown's smithy.

Here the worthy pair received them, and put Marion to bed in their own room, while O'Bryan and one of the natives remained to look out. He resolved for the present to stick to his dark skin and native disguise. His friend Monkland had gone off with John Whitehouse and the search party.

There was a wild scene of excitement in Hobart Town when the news spread about the escape and the flagellators being flagellated. Mathuna, amongst the convicts, became a heroine, and the avenger of their thousand wrongs. They could not rejoice openly over the punishment of the obnoxious tyrant, but they all went about their daily work with joyful hearts, wishing that she had killed him outright.

Wilmott staggered about wildly and aimlessly for some time, until, overcome with the agony and loss of blood, he fell down upon the road, where some of the overseers found him, and carried him into his own quarters. Here the Doctor came and examined him, and dressed his wounds. Both eye-balls were found to be damaged—one totally blinded by a stroke of the lead-tipped tail—while the other portions of his face, neck and hands presented the same appearance as the back of a severely-flogged man. The skin hung in patches like the sharded bark on a gum-trunk, with deep furrows of raw flesh and exposed muscles—a horrible and inhuman sight.

It would be weeks before he could leave his rooms, and no art of surgery would ever erase that carving; for when a man has once been properly flogged with the cat-o'-nine-tails, he carries the marks to his grave, and Mathuna had flogged Captain Wilmott properly.

The Doctor took good care to lay his complaint before the Governor, as soon as he left his graceless patient, about the illegality of the whole affair, and so gained his ear first, about the premature hour chosen, and the girl being whipped without his presence. The kind-hearted, if careless, Governor was furious with his Captain's gross breach of discipline, now that it reached his ears so directly, and made him view the interference of Mathuna with great indulgence. He vowed that he would have the Captain court-marshalled as soon as he was able to attend, and laughingly said,—

“By Jove, she's a vixen; we'll have to call her up and reprimand her publicly, as an example, of course, and find and punish the two prisoners, O'Bryan and Carter; but I wish that I could have seen her clearing that yard; it was homeric.”

Mathuna did not trouble her head about the excitement she had created in the little town, but went into Jane Lymburner's room, that lady having taken her departure, and placed her valuable services at the disposal of Mrs Carrodus, in consideration for her board and lodgings, until she could look round her.

Mathuna went into the vacant bedroom, which she had now fixed upon as her own dressing-room, and, after changing her morning robes, considerably damaged with her recent exercise, she dressed herself afresh, and went in quietly to wait upon the wounded Wilfred.

She was happy now; for, being weak, he was more reliant upon her, and having only her to look upon and speak to, he became doubly interested in her, and showed a greater amount of tenderness towards her.

She could see him watching her wistfully, or she thought so, as she moved about the room. She often required to lift him up and shift his position, and sometimes hold him in her arms while he rested his fair head on her breast and languidly stroked her hands, as invalids will do when they are easy. Often, also, when she sat beside him he would get her to lay her head upon his pillow, while he passed his hands through her thick hair, watching the light playing over it with a blue lustre, while the shadows looked like rich purple-brown. He was thinking upon the effect while he lifted it up and let it

filter through his thin white fingers; for he could paint a little; analysing the colours, and saying to himself, as he gazed admiringly upon it, "I would use vandyke-brown with a little purple-lake in these shadows, and Prussian-blue—no, ultramarine and blue-black, with white for the lights."

Mathuna did not know anything about painting, except the war-streaks of her tribe, and when she saw the tender admiration in his eyes, she would thrill with delight and bring her brown face on his breast, which only heaved when the weight of her head became oppressive.

He allowed her to kiss him whenever she felt inclined, which was as often as she could find an opportunity or excuse for doing so, and say fond things to him; nay, he often kissed her back again, and called her endearing names, as he used to address his sisters at home; for a sick man is apt to get as familiar with his nurse as with his sister.

She washed his face and hands and dressed his wounds, laying her head down upon the pillow beside his when he was tired and wanted to go to sleep, stroking his face gently until she had soothed him over, and murmuring in his ear little disjointed words, half English and half native, which made him smile contentedly, until, falling asleep, he would unconsciously take hold of her hand and keep her near him until he woke again.

She almost blessed the wounds which had brought them so close to one another, for she felt that he could no longer live without her. Sometimes he would start up in his sleep with a cry of horror as he dreamt some nightmare dream, and fling his arms round her neck; then, as she kissed him and murmured how much she adored him, he would sink back again with a pleased smile, and drift away once more into dreamless and health-giving slumber.

"I do believe that Mathuna will cage her white bird after all," the Doctor used to say to the Major. "Nothing like a sickbed for making lovers. They cannot help themselves; it grows on them with each breath they take towards health, and she deserves her prize, for she has nursed him well."

Mathuna, in her own mind, felt quite sure of it now. Never a single doubt disturbed her mind but that whenever he was strong enough he would take her into his arms and substitute the words which he so often used now: "Mathuna, I do like you," into "Mathuna, I do love you."

She had looked in the dictionary for the word "like," and found that it meant, "To be pleased; to choose." Then he

had "chosen" her, and he was "pleased" with her. What more could any girl want from the one whom she had chosen from amongst men to be her heart's master? She was chosen; and so when he was well again they would be married, of course.

Yes, he was pleased with her, as he lay there engrossing every moment of her time—more than pleased. For the first time in his life he felt grateful and fond, for he had never been ill before, and had never felt the need of any one as he now felt the need of her. He could not move himself without her strong arms about him to help him; and what a comfort it was to have that bosom to lean against when he grew tired of the pillows.

He had intended to pay five thousand pounds into the bank for her use when he left her, but he was now so grateful for her kindness that he had made up his mind to make it ten thousand.

"I shall never forget your goodness, Mathuna, to me during my illness. You are a perfect angel."

Ah! she had been called a goddess and a star by Captain Wilmott, but an "angel" was better. She hid her burning face on his breast, and sobbed with pure delight.

"Before this illness, Mathuna," he continued, stroking her head absently, "I used to wonder how people could grow fond of each other to such an extent as to mourn when they parted, but now it does not seem so strange. I used to find most pleasure in being by myself, and satisfied with my own company; now I cannot bear to be left alone."

"Oh, Wilfred, you like me always to be with you?"

"Yes; I rest better and feel more contented when you are near me—when I can see you and feel you like this."

"And you want no other person beside you, Wilfred?"

"Certainly not, Mathuna. I would not care for any one else to be so much near me as you are."

"Yes, Wilfred; you feel as I do now, don't you? annoyed when any one else comes in; even the doctor is unwelcome."

"That's it exactly. I hate any one else to see me lying here helpless. I am so used to you, that it seems almost as if I were alone, only better."

"Dear Wilfred, you are happy, as I am?"

"As happy as I can be lying in bed and watching the warm sun shining outside; but it will be glorious to be up once more and out to the forest."

"You and I, of course, Wilfred?"

"Of course, Mathuna; you carrying my game-bag and me the gun, or the fishing-rod. What times we have had together; haven't we, dear?"

"Yes, darling; and what times we will have together again!"

"Perhaps," replied Wilfred, thinking that he would soon have to go away. Then, with his usual love of putting off unpleasant tidings, he continued,—

"By Jove, Mathuna, I don't know any one I ever met who fitted in with me as you do. Whatever I want to do, you seem to want also. It is nice, it is pleasant, it is soothing."

"I am so glad, Wilfred, and so happy, that you like all that, for it pleases me most to please you."

"Now, do you know what I'd like at this moment, Mathuna?"

"Yes," answered Mathuna, simply following the direction of his eyes, which were watching the airy flight of a sea-gull as it swept through the sky, and with love's keen instinct reading his passing wish.

"What is it?"

"To be that bird—that punna, and fly about; is it not so?"

"That is just what I was thinking at the moment. You are a regular witch."

"What is a witch," asked Mathuna.

"A diviner of thoughts—a fascinator," he replied, laughing.

Mathuna knew the meaning of the word "fascination," and flushed up with pleasure.

"And do you know what I would like to be, Wilfred, if you were that punna?"

"No; how can I? I am not a wizard."

"Is wizard the male for witch?"

"Yes, Mathuna."

"Then I think that you are a wizard, although you cannot guess my present thought."

"What was it, Mathuna?"

"This was it, Wilfred. If you were that punna flying about, I would like to be the munwaddia."

As Mathuna spoke so boldly, she flushed hotly and turned away her head, so that she might not look at him.

"What is the munwaddia, Mathuna?"

"I won't tell you ; find it out for yourself."

"Now, Mathuna, that is not fair ; nor is it polite to speak a foreign language before people who do not understand it. Tell me at once—is it the sky?"

"No."

"What is it, then? Speak, or I shall be angry with you."

"Don't be angry, Wilfred," cried Mathuna pathetically.

"It was only foolishness on my part."

"Tell me what it means, for all that."

"It means the feathers," murmured the poor girl, hiding her face on the pillows.

"Oh, is that all? Why, that is only right ; then we could fly together."

"Yes, Wilfred ; we would fly together, for then I would belong to you."

While this foolish conversation was taking place in the one room, Mrs Quinton was lying motionless in the other, with her husband watching her white face anxiously, while she looked at him with large, mournful eyes, in which regret and love were blent. She could not speak to him, for the doctor had forbidden that ; but her eyes were saying plainly—
"Forgive."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WITH THE BUSHRANGERS.

MISS O'CALLIGHAN had a very vague idea of what bushrangers were ; but she had experienced some months amongst convicts, from which material she knew bushrangers were created ; and she had been very roughly treated in her transit through the forest towards the boat, within which she had been pitched with as little regard to her sensitive bones as if she had been a pig going to market ; and she felt horribly afraid lest her ultimate fate would be similar.

It all depended upon how far they intended taking her, and how provisions held out amongst the outlaws ; for, even with all her vanity, she did not believe that they would prefer

stewed O'Callighan even before pickled pig. So she congratulated herself upon her age and general dryness for the first time in her life, and gleaned a kind of ghostly comfort from the knowledge that the fat doctor would most likely be taken first, and after him George de la Motte, who was young, and looked fairly tender.

There were tales told in Hobart Town of bushrangers being found in the bush with some of the remains of their companions still left, which, added to their cold-blooded atrocities, made her shiver as if with the ague, and wish that she had not lingered so long on that fallen tree trunk, or given way to that feminine craving for attention. The bird which she had once held in her hand, and lost, had really proved, in her case, to be worth the four in the bush.

Fatal bush and unlucky birds, who had been the means of decoying her into this awful trap.

"If I had only stayed where I was, in the camp, or gone back with honest Samuel Biddle, all would have been well with me. Honest Samuel, if a little rough and outspoken, would I could be with you now."

So the poor captive maiden lay at the bottom of the damp boat, and inwardly bewailed her luckless fate.

They could not see each other, for they were now lying within the shelter and shadow of the overhanging trees; but she could feel her companions in misfortune, and by their motions she knew that they were both trying to encourage her to hope. The Doctor lay on her right, and George on her left; and as they lay they each nudged her softly in the ribs with their elbows. She knew which elbow was George's, because she could feel his elbow bone more plainly against hers, whereas the Doctor's was softer and more easily endured.

"A stout, middle-aged gentleman is much more comfortable as a companion in a damp boat, I must say," she thought, getting a momentary tangent relief from her apprehension as she felt the elbows; "much more comfortable than a young man, no matter how highly he may be connected. I wish that I could speak, and be able to ask George not to show his sympathy by poking me so hard. He means well; but it is decidedly painful."

It was the most atrocious part of the outrage upon her chaste person, this gagging arrangement; for she could only wriggle and endure double torture through not being allowed to speak, while the gallant George, thinking that she under-

stood his elbow protestations, and forgetting how fragile she was, continued to "lay it on thick," as he was in the habit of applying his flattery. Unfortunately he did not know that his tongue was a much softer member than his elbow, or that her wriggling under his dexterous touch meant modest disapproval. Even royal pickpockets are not always infallible.

After about half an hour of this exercise, three other boats drew up alongside of them, and were moored along the bank, while the inmates landed—a pretty large crowd.

"Have they gone on, Mike?" said one of the inmates of the other boats to their guard.

"Yes," replied the man. "You are to keep to the left side. They have gone right by the river. Got any muskets or 'munition?"

"Not a blessed shot. They warn't in the stores."

"What have you with you, then?"

"Pickaxes, spades, hammers, and leg chains."

"Well, they're better nor nothin'. Slide on and keep to the left. You've two hours yet afore ye. Watch the boats."

"All right," replied the man in charge, and then the others moved off.

They were too far from the camp to see either the lights from the fires, or hear any noise, so they waited, watching the moon shining on the opposite shores, and the night mist slowly rising, chilling them through and through, while the dew fell from above, and made them all feel as damp on the upper side as the leaks in the boat's bottom made them on the under side. Miss O'Callighan felt that she was taking influenza, and would shortly be sneezing her head off. She was ice-cold on three sides, the upper, under, and left side; for the princely George had no heat in him to exhale. It was only on the Doctor's side that Miss O'Callighan felt comfortable; and gratefully she moved herself closer to him.

"Decidedly a stout man is the best on a chilly night," thought the shivering lady; "and the nights of Van Dieman's Land are chilly. I wish that the royal family ran to more fat in their youth."

The boatman had nodded his head once or twice after refreshing himself from a flask of rum, and now gave sonorous evidence that he felt wearied, while the lady was in full possession of the demon influenza, and keeping time to his snores with her violent sneezes, when they were once more disturbed by the return of the outlaws. From the different

voices, they could hear that both sexes were assembled, also that they were excited, and in a hurry to be off.

"We've been sold! The Governor and his crew are on their guard; they have struck the camp, and are marching home."

"Where is Mosquito and his lot?" asked the man in the boat.

"Oh, they're coming on; they'll tackle them for a bit, and give us time to get to the harbour. You're to keep on up the river to the camp, where the Captain and Mosquito will jine ye after; we're going on."

"Right you are!"

The crowd of men and women hurried into their boats and struck down the river, while the watcher took up his oars, and, loosing off, began to row into the stream.

After a time they reached the deserted camp, where they were hailed by some voices, upon hearing which the man rowed ashore and made fast the boat.

"They have left us plenty provisions, at any rate, Mike. Sit down and make yourself comfortable until Mosquito gets back."

Miss O'Callighan heard these glad tidings of plenty provisions, and rejoiced in her inmost heart.

"We'd better have the prisoners out for a bit, and take their gags from their mouths," continued the leader. "Give Mike a hand out of the boat with them, Dyan and Tommy."

Two out of the four men who had been standing at the fires turned and strode down to the river-side, and the next moment Miss O'Callighan and her two admirers were on *terra firma*. The first use which the irate lady made of her tongue was to abuse George roundly for his conduct, and the liberty be had taken with her ribs.

"Believe me, madam," replied George, in his mellifluous tones, and with a sadly reproachful look, which made her melt instantly—"believe me, madam, what I did was done in all respect and devotion to your service, to inform you, in as delicate a manner as circumstances would permit, that I was ready to die for you."

"Very well, George, that will do; and I believe in the sincerity of your protestations, even although your mode of conveying them was just a little too forcible. Now, George, speak to these bushrangers, and ask them to let us go home; you know what kind of men they are better than I do."

Miss O'Callighan was speaking in the loud tone which

some people are apt to use before foreigners, as if they were deaf as well as unable to use the language; but before George could translate her message, the head outlaw answered her directly,—

“See here, ma’am; they say as you have heaps of money—thousands of pounds somewhere; ain’t that so?”

“Yes, Mr Bushranger,” replied Miss O’Callighan, trembling.

“And how much will you give me down on the spot if I does let you go home?”

“I have only got thirty shillings in my purse—if that will do—”

“That ain’t quarter enough to pay for your carriage and boat fare up to here and back again to Hobart Town.”

“Dear Mr Bushranger, if you let us go, we can easily walk back, and not put you to any expense. I have an extra pound or two lying at Kilkenny Cottage, which you are quite welcome to if you let us go.”

“I’ve got that few pounds already. Four and a-half guineas exactly, aint it?”

“Yes, sir; in an old teapot. How did you get it?”

“Oh! you see, ma’am, I am a countryman of yours, and am up to the teapot trick. My ould mother used to have a brother to it in her cupboard for the same purpose, so that it didn’t take me long to find it out, and what it was used for. Now, where do you keep the rest?”

“I have the rest in England, sir.”

“Ah! that’s where our pardons are being made up, but they are too far away to wait for,” remarked the man, looking moodily into the fire. He was the same pard-like stranger who had visited the “Black Swan” on the night when Captain Wilmott had made his unlucky wager with Fred.

“But I can give you a line to the Colonial Treasurer, who will pay you with promissory notes for the amount you require for my ransom,” continued the lady, in a tone of entreaty.

“Promissory notes! No, ma’am, they don’t pass amongst us bushrangers; we want the hard. You must go with us.”

“Where must I go?”

“Well, ma’am, we have a little business to do up the country first—some old debts to pay off before we can leave the blooming land, and as we’re honest men, we always like to pay our debts, as I hope you do also.”

“Well, Mr Bushranger, I think that is only fair, and what I always try to do myself.”

"Yes, ma'am, I am very glad to hear that you approve of my principles," said the tall man, with a sardonic grin. "I can see that you won't be long in my company before we have a mutual respect for each other. You are a real lady, Miss O'Callighan, and I was once a gentleman, and may be again, for what one knows. Give us your flipper on it."

George de la Motte looked a little anxiously on the gigantic seafaring man, as he strode over and held out his hand to Miss O'Callighan, who took it timorously, he paying no more attention to the other's looks than he did to the heavy scowl of the Doctor.

"Yes, ma'am, you'll find that Michael Howe isn't a bad sort to them as treats him fairly, although damnation to the one who crosses him. I'll tell you what I'm going to do with you, ma'am."

He fixed his bold black eyes upon her wizened face as he spoke, still holding her skinny hand in his with such a wolfish glare that she shivered with horror.

"You are not going to eat me, surely, sir?"

"Eat you? ha! ha! ha!" his coarse loud laugh re-echoed through the forest. "Eat the goose that lays the golden eggs? No dashed fear of that, ma'am; I'm going to give you a trip to America after I have paid all my debts in Van Dieman's Land, and splice you fair and square; what do you think of that, now, for honest principle?"

"Oh, sir, you cover me with confusion," murmured poor Miss O'Callighan. She, who had just given up all hopes of a husband, found them in Van Dieman's Land hanging thick as blackberries to every hedge.

"Yes, ma'am, I am an honourable man, and, like yourself, a good Catholic; and I flatter myself that I'm not the sort of figure that any countrywoman of my own would be likely to despise."

He drew himself up proudly, and slapped his broad chest with his massive hand until it rang again.

"Yes," Miss O'Callighan thought, as she looked up at him timidly. "He is a proper man: six feet four if an inch; bold and fierce-looking as a lion, with eyes that blazed out like glowing coals." The rest must take a back seat when he advanced to the lists—a man in his full strength, with a reckless, devil-may-care freedom about him that was almost irresistible.

"I'll have a ship of my own presently. My boys have gone down to fetch it for me, then we will sail away to the

land of the free, and I'll do the right thing by you ; never you be in the least afraid of Michael Howe."

"And what do you want me for?" asked the Doctor sullenly.

"Oh, I'll get your appointment all made out, Doctor. You'll look after the wounded when they come in ; and faith, here they come,"

Michael Howe did not speak with much of an accent, any more than did Miss O'Callighan. A little richness and rolling out of the words were all which proclaimed his nationality. He had been many years absent from his native land.

As he spoke, from the forest the Oyster Bay natives and white people were swarming out ; they came helter-skelter, and without order, and plunged at once upon the remains of the feast, scrambling for it and devouring it up like wolves.

"Well, Mosquito, and how have you got on?"

"Bully, Captain, you bet," answered Mosquito, looking up from a leg of mutton which he was busy tearing at with his teeth. "The boys have gone down to the harbour, and the Governor is waiting on the hill, expecting us to come out again. He stay there until daylight, and then come after us."

"Well, Mosquito, we must not wait till daylight. Finish up your suppers, and let us be moving."

Miss O'Callighan was not so frightened now ; even the sight of these ferocious savages did not horrify her so greatly as they might have done, had the gigantic leader not declared his amiable intentions.

Still, she was not sorry when she heard that they were to continue their journey for a time by water, while Mosquito and his gang were to keep to the forest ; neither was she at all alarmed when Michael Howe said that he would accompany her.

"Eat and drink, ma'am," he said, rescuing a chicken and a pannikin of rum from the hands of the marauders, and placing them before her. "Eat as much as you can while you can get it ; we have a few miles to row before we can get any more."

He went down to the river gallantly, and drew some water, at her request, to weaken the rum with, and by the time she had finished that first supply and been assisted to another, Miss O'Callighan was inclined to think that *The Van Dieman's Land Gazette* had grossly maligned the bushrangers generally, and Michael Howe in particular ; he was a fine man, and not nearly so rough as the absent and almost unregretted Samuel Bidle.

In an hour they were once more afloat, and pulling up the river, with Michael Howe steering, and six bushrangers rowing, while the captive lay a little more comfortably upon some wraps which the picnic party had left behind.

They kept on for about three hours steadily, and then once more moored alongside of some cliffs, when the leader and five of the bushrangers left them.

"I'm just going to pay off one of my old debts, Miss O'Callighan," he said, as he left her. "But I won't be gone long; keep yourself easy meanwhile."

It seemed a long time before he returned, and in reality it was some time before he did come. The party in the boat saw the sky over the cliffs become dusky red, as if from a distant conflagration. When he appeared, he had a white rag bound round his head, all blood-stained, while one of his five companions was absent; the rest were heavily laden with packages and bags.

"That's one long-standing debt cleared off, Miss O'Callighan," Michael remarked, with a hoarse chuckle, as he took his seat once more at the stern, while the other four men deposited their burdens in the boat, and resumed their oars.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON BOARD THE *STORM BIRD*.

No ship had ever been stolen so easily as the *Storm Bird*. All that the escaped convicts had to do was to pull up their boats, scramble over the sides, and take quiet possession.

She was absolutely deserted, and fully equipped for sea, which indeed was the reason why they had chosen her from the half-dozen then lying at their disposal. A thought had crossed the mind of Barry Wheelen, the red-haired companion of Howe, and who was now directing the convicts in the lifting of the anchor, that it would be a splendid piece of revenge and policy to set the other ships on fire, only that to do this would put off too much time, and, as the wind was

favourable, and the night quiet, he decided to forego that pleasure, and sail out of the bay at once, while they were undisturbed.

Barry Wheelen had been brought up a sailor, and, indeed, like his friend, Michael Howe, was fully qualified to take the position of a captain, while, amongst the desperate criminals whom he had helped to liberate that morning, were a fair sprinkling of seamen, fellows who had sailed about these seas as whalers, and been guilty of every atrocity, both on white men and natives, which could blacken the souls of humanity. Therefore he was at no loss for hands to carry out his orders deftly and professionally. While the mixed rabble of male and female furies poured into the cabins and pantries, he and his own picked crew worked the ship.

Swiftly they set sails, and tacked out of the harbour and into Storm Bay, under cover of the night, beating about to right and left, and obeying their self-appointed commander with as much promptitude and obedience as if they had signed articles, and spent their first month's pay, for, no matter how low a sailor may sink, he never forgets the duty he owes to the ship he may be on, but performs it as instinctively as a woman who has been brought up to orderly habits will start tidying up a room which she may happen to be left in charge of.

Cheerily they hauled away at ropes, and altered yards, chanting their sea-choruses while they worked all through the night, as if they had been the most unsophisticated of sea-dogs, instead of the most degraded felons of Hobart Town, while their commander walked the poop, and trumpeted his orders clearly and as decidedly as if he had a well-ordered crew under his eye. Such is the effect of work when it goes with the grain on even the vilest—they were working for their liberty, and did not grudge putting out the strength of their arms.

Those who were not wanted on deck went below to eat, drink and sleep. Bess Martin and her man, Ned Quigley, were of no use to Barry Wheelen, and as they had experienced a pretty hard day of it, they also retired with the others.

By daylight they were under Tasman's Peninsula, and passing Cape Raoul, a bold headland, something like the Giant's Causeway, with regular columns upstarting from a wall-like base, strange, weird and detached masses, with deep spaces between, and isolated pillars, which lifted themselves into the misty air like ruined temples, utterly devoid of

covering of any sort, although in some parts white with clustering birds.

They were now into the open, where the sea is always more or less rough, and the dark waves tumbled against each other, or dashed whitely upon those forbidding islands and bare precipices. Most of the female pirates were now sea-sick with the unaccustomed tumbling of the vessel, and lying helplessly about the decks, to where they had climbed for fresh air. Many of the men were also overcome, either with drink or the nausea, and lay on their backs torpid and without an effort left in them, while the working crew still tramped along over them, and obeyed orders without showing any signs of weariness or unwillingness: they knew the coast hereabouts, and that they must get well round Cape Pillar before they could venture to lie down and rest.

They were now tacking about an inlet which was afterwards to be immortalised as a special convict hell—Port Arthur—as yet, however, unnamed and unthought of.

Now they are approaching the passage which runs between Tasman's Island and Cape Pillar, and the sun is well up in the sky, a lightsome, warm sun, which heats the decks and makes the waves outside sparkle like light-coloured sapphires. The sea-sick convicts are beginning to take a languid interest in the scenery about them, and a few of them even thinking about breakfast.

They have plenty of meat for the cooking of it, and Bess Martin has not been idle all the morning. She has lighted the galley fire, and already appetising smells are beginning to pervade the deck.

She is mistress of the galley, and laughs merrily as she helps each of them to a lavish share as they troop up. Bess has never lost her reckless gaiety and high spirits for all the hard lines she has had to go through since leaving the *Stirling Castle*. She is a good deal thinner and older-looking, but she shouts out as boisterously, and chaffs as freely, as ever.

Ned is now standing on the poop beside Barry Wheelen, smoking his pipe and killing time.

"I wish Mike Howe had given up that land journey of his, and shipped right off with us, Barry. We could have gone straight out now instead of putting off time waiting for him."

"So do I," answered Wheelen. "In fact, I don't like this waiting job at all, with them vessels behind us; and if it

wasn't for your young woman standing so much out against it, I'd about ship even now, and set the sails straight for the wind."

"Well, why the devil don't you? Bess will never know what road you are taking," answered Ned gruffly.

"There's another thing which stops me. I've been pal now with Michael for the last six years, and he's a rare good friend, but a devil of an enemy. If I was to desert him now, without giving him a chance, I've a feeling that we'd have no luck."

"Why did he not come with us? It was easy enough then."

"He is a man as never forgives, or breaks his word, either to friend or enemy; and he promised Mosquito to help him with one or two jobs; and there are one or two settlers which he has revenge on his own account to work out for injuries received, and no power on earth will make him forego that. He would not be able to rest afterwards for thinking of it if he let them go."

"Then I suppose you mean to go up to the Bay and wait for him?"

"Yes, unless we are chased."

"How long will it take us to get up there?"

"Two days at the most with this wind."

"And how long before Howe can reach the coast?"

"Oh, he knows every inch of the road, and can go like the wind after he gets up to where the horses are. He'll not be long. I reckon, if all goes on well, that he will be with us about the fourth day from this, at the outside."

"But, meanwhile, if we are chased?"

"Then we'll put right out to sea, and run in when we can. He will understand and wait."

For all the way up, Barry Wheelen hardly left his post, and only for a few hours at a stretch during the day, and at such times as they were well off the coast. They kept out to sea after leaving Tasman's Peninsula, so as to give a wide berth to Maria Island, and then ran in with side sails past the under side of Schouten Island, and into Oyster Bay. On the second afternoon after leaving Storm Bay, they brought to anchor.

Barry Wheelen was in a dreadful state of anxiety while they lay at anchor, and rested badly on that first night, for he expected to be followed, and was impatient to be away with his prize. He lay down and tried to sleep, then rose up and

drank heavily, and still he could only take snatches. At length, as morning was breaking, he got up with an oath.

"I can't stand this any longer, not even for friendship. Up with the anchor, boys, and let's keep out to sea."

He was now getting his vessel under control, and beginning to know her sailing qualities. She would have been a swift sailer if not so heavily laden. So, taking the opportunity of the good weather they were still having, he ran straight before the wind south-east until well out of sight of land; and then, making all hands help, he opened the hatches. He began to unload the vessel of all unnecessary cargo, retaining only what contained provisions. This cargo they recklessly pitched overboard.

So another day and night passed, and on the afternoon of the fourth day, he once again turned his course towards Oyster Bay, keeping a couple of men on the masthead to look out for strange sails.

The sun was setting—a brilliant panorama of gold and crimson over the rugged table-land—as they once again sighted the purple shores. Barry Wheelen, tired out with his sleepless vigils, was leaning against the taffrail, nodding his head occasionally with intense weariness, yet ever starting up and shading his bloodshot, fiery eyeballs with his hand, and sweeping the horizon round and round; while Bess and some of the women lay stretched out full length in lazy, careless enjoyment of their holiday. Ned and the yellow-fringed "canaries" were enjoying that convict's paradise—glowing pipes, and plenty of tobacco to refill.

"Signals to shore!" shouted the man on the look-out.

And the leader shouted back,—

"Right you are, mate!" And then, shading his eyes with his hand, he caught sight of the three columns of smoke rising up blue against the distant haze, and then changing to crimson as they crossed the molten globe of yellow flame.

They were now running straight towards the smoke-columns, and Barry prepared his answering signals—some oakum steeped in tar, and damped at the ends to cause plenty of smoke. The oakum burned clearly at the first, and then began to splutter, upon which some fresh stuff was put over it, and a dense cloud floated up from the deck and wafted seaward.

"They have seen it, and are answering," shouted down the man.

And then Barry took up the late captain of the *Storm Bird's* telescope, and looked through it steadily.

"Do you see them?" asked Bess, getting up.

"Yes; I can just make out the crowd," returned Barry.

"Let's have a look," cried out Bess.

"There; hold it steady."

"Sail ho!" shouted the man on the look-out.

"Where away?"

"To the south."

"By thunder, we must turn back!" shouted out Barry, springing up alert and active, and losing in an instant his wearied air.

"Fire the gun to warn them of danger ahead. Ready about there, lads; all hands ahoy and aloft. Hard a-lee, steersman. Stand on, lads."

Ned sprang forward to the loaded gun, and sent it off while the convict-sailors were reefing the yards. Then, as the vessel turned on her tacks, and the sails were once more set, the temporary captain shouted,—

"Where away sail?"

"Tacking to the west, and just rising up."

"They don't see us yet," said Barry, "but they darn soon will if we don't look alive."

Slowly the *Storm Bird* swung round to the helm, while the sails, after a few thundering flaps, caught the steady breeze, and became filled; and as she drove to sea, the sun dipped behind the land where they were flying from their brother criminals, leaving the sky all filled with broken masses of clouds and fantastic airy forms.

They had clapped on all the sails that she could carry, and were cutting along gallantly, straight for the south-east, before the breeze.

"We are seen," shouted down the look-out man. "They are tacking east."

"I thought so," said Barry. "Now, Ned, I appoint you and Bess as leaders of the passengers. Get out the muskets and cutlasses, and be ready, if they come to close quarters, for a fight."

"Right you are, Barry."

"They won't catch up to us before dark, and I'll try to dodge them after that by tacking. But drill them all, and arm them, both men and women; we won't be taken back."

"Right you are, mate."

Very quickly the darkness came upon them, and during the

hour or two before the morn rose, they tacked about to the north, and ran up that way.

Then the moon rose up out of the sea, lurid at first, and without any lustre, but gradually growing stronger, until the decks and sails shone like silver.

"Sail ho!" shouted the man on the look-out.

"Where away?"

"Nor'ward," sang out the man.

"Curse it; there are two after us," yelled Barry. "How far?"

"Five miles."

"Run again afore the wind, and risk it."

After about an hour's steady sailing, the man on the look-out sang,—

"We are leaving her behind."

When morning dawned, they were in an open ocean, with the high billows sweltering past them, and the wind growing fresher, but without a sign of their pursuers. They had, for the time being, outwitted them.

"What's to be done now?" asked Bess and Ned, as they sat at breakfast.

"Only one thing. We must keep on as are doing for another day or two, and then consult whether we can turn back or not. I don't like to leave my mates, but it's mighty risky to turn back."

"No matter about the risk," answered Bess Martin. "We must go back. I'd never pal with Ned Quigley any more if he could forsake a friend."

"Don't be afeard," growled Ned. "We don't mean to leave them; do we, Barry?"

"Not without another shy for it."

Bess was busy now with her Amazons, drilling them with herself to the use of the cutlass. One of the sailors acted as instructor, and put them through their facings.

"Now, gals, if you wants to fight free, do as we sailors does in an action; strip to the waist, and practise that way."

Modesty was not one of the virtues on board the *Storm Bird*; so, without demur, men and women faced one another with as little on as they could conveniently carry, showing backs, when they turned about, with the exception of Bess and Ned, all so well corrugated by the flagellators, until they had become so hard and caked over with bark-like skin that they looked like armour. Bess and Ned had not yet been through the

Hobart Town prison, and shone out conspicuous in their smooth softness.

Bess went amongst her companions, feeling their rough hides, while her blue eyes blazed with rage.

“So that’s the way they treat prisoners over there, is it? By heavens, if I had a back like that I would not have left one of the devils alive.”

“Oh, that’s nothink when you’re used to it, Bess,” said one of the hags. “Why, I often let Warder Biddle do it for pure fun. I used to aggravate him to flog me whenever I felt my back itch, to take the tickle out of it. Lord love you, try a rope’s-end now on me. I’ll laugh at all you can give me, till you fall down tired out. I’ll bet you again a jolly kiss, Ned Quigley, if Bess will hold the stakes, that ye can’t hurt me, and I’ll let you lay on as hard as ye can.”

Another said, “When the fighting comes on I’m going to run backwards at them, and let ’em cut away while I kick. My old hide would stand a musket-ball now, and flatten it, afore it got to me. We ‘canaries’ think nothink of a thousand or two; often took it for a chaw o’ ’bacca.”

Bess, who was proud of her soft, clean skin, vowed that they would cut her in pieces before they took her back to Hobart Town.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SEARCH PARTY.

THE mid-day meal was well over, and the dishes cleaned, before the search party started from the hospitable cottage of Peter Brown, and commenced their march through the forest.

It may appear strange, perhaps, to many people who have been used to revival meetings, that an enthusiast like James Whitehouse should have taken the leadership of a party organised solely for the purpose of bringing criminals to justice—not exactly the part that an evangelist should have taken.

But John Whitehouse was all right in his ideas regarding his duty both to black fellow and white criminal. He had seen the Governor privately before taking the responsibility upon his shoulders, and represented what he intended to do under the circumstances, with Colonel Davey's entire approval; and he now carried in his pocket a free pardon to all the criminals and hostile natives who would submit and return peaceably with him.

John was satisfied that these promises would be kept on the part of the Governor and his Government; for whoever returned with him from this raid were to be left under his charge, and for whose future good conduct he was to be held responsible. These were the conditions upon which the enthusiast held his present commission.

It was a commission, with conditions attached, which few men would have cared to have undertaken, and of the few, only such natures as his, who could be buoyed up by implicit belief in destiny; for the dangers of the march were manifold, with that army of hostile natives and those white desperadoes to bring to submission, and to trust him enough to return with him to the lion's den. He had an arduous march before him through an unknown country, with a small and varied company to keep cheerful, and an overpowering enemy before him, who might be able to lurk about in well-known lairs, and trap that small handful of followers as they followed up the tracks.

But John had faith; indeed, he had a stronger instinct, which imparted to him courage, cheerfulness and hope, and which, carried by his personality and magnetism, very soon passed into the hearts of his followers, and made them all regardless of dangers and confident of success. This unreasonable instinct was a conviction which nothing could move, that he was reserved to go through this with safety, if not with complete success.

It was within a few miles from the settlement that the first striking evidence of this special protection was given to him and his followers. He was marching on in front of his white followers, with the scouts before them, when he trod by accident upon a diamond snake—one of the most venomous of its deadly tribe. Monkland, who was a little distance behind, saw the reptile dart back its head to bite at the leg passing over it, but instead of obeying its natural instinct, it sank again into the grass, and glided away as if robbed of all power to harm this heaven-protected leader, who strode on, unconscious of his

deadly peril. A little farther on a spear was sent flying from the thicket, with sure aim, at John's heart. As it struck him he staggered for a pace or two, and then recovered himself. It had glanced off from the buckle of his knapsack without wounding him. When Monkland saw this second escape, he caved in, and came round to the same opinion as the others held, that John's opinion of himself was not all a fabricless superstition, and that he must be reserved for some destiny.

The enemy who had flung the spear they quickly discovered, and added to their party. He was found to be one of the Oyster Bay men who had been wounded, and left behind. John took him and the other two prisoners under his special charge. He marched beside them, and talked to them all the way as they were going along, gradually getting behind their sullen reserve until before they camped for the night he had completely won their hearts. He had no longer any fear of them, but allowed them perfect liberty after the first day, and although they could have done so easily, they did not offer to run away, but took their places willingly in the ranks of scouts, reporting at regular intervals with the others. John felt justly elated at his successful subjugation of these three savages, for it meant success with their whole tribe.

Monkland, who was strongly materialistic in his ideas, could not help wondering at this peculiar odic influence of the leader, even while he unconsciously succumbed to it himself. He tried to resent and resist the stoppages for prayer and exhortation which John insisted upon from time to time, but when he saw the effect that they had upon the others, he submitted to be also prayed and preached at, and listened with attention, if not with conviction. John was firm in his belief that, while he had a company of about eight souls in the body following him, they were surrounded by a countless army of guardian angels, who were keeping all danger from them.

"I see them all about us," he said to his men, "and I must speak to them in the language which they understand best, the language of prayer and praise, and interpret to you again the messages which they are giving to me. No harm can come to us while we can keep these guards around us." His followers became infected with his enthusiasm, and tramped along, confident and elevated.*

Samuel Biddle, however, did not yield altogether or with-

* This John Whitehouse is not a creation of mine, but the portrait of a real personage, and who doubtless will be recognised by any student of Tasmanian history.—H. N.

out a struggle to this strange ascendancy. He had his own ideas about salvation, having been admitted into the chosen circle of the elect in an opposition shop many years before, and regarding all other sects and branches with sour contempt, as delusions of the "arch-sarpint" of mankind.

He saw no army of angels alongside of them, nor any necessity for "sich" like ghosts a-haunting of them, while they had their muskets and cutlasses to protect them; he didn't believe in no such nonsense, the times were past for "hangels" to interfere with men on the march. John Whitehouse was an impostor, and a-trying to introduce High-Church fandangoes on them for the deluding and leading astray of already saved souls like his own, but he was up to the wily tricks of all papishers and false prophets, and he'd see the little man ——— before he'd knuckle down and bend his knees to any bull of Bashan. He was a man as believed in white-washed walls, without any scroll work; and in eternal damnation without any flummums, soft sawder, the hauling in of angels, saints, or any other on natural appendages.

Samuel's tenets were as simple and definite as the old Roman law code. If you were elected, you got saved whether you wanted to be saved or not, and without any exertion on your own part. If you were not one of the lucky, then salvation passed over your head, and dropped upon some one fore-ordained. After the saving process was over, and you were sure of it, then it did not matter much what you did or said. The Lord took care of His own precious lambs, and washed them white by grace whenever they stumbled in the mud and got dirty; that was fair, square, and as it ought to be, in course of natural laws.

If asked how he came to know that he was one of the few chosen, and how he first had felt it, he replied,—

"Well, it came on all of a suddent, like a sunstroke, and stuck there, like as a sunstroke sticks, to a man for life, and only them as has been struck can feel it or onderstand about it. If ye axed the question, you might take it as a sure sign that you were bound to be damned. It was as clear as a marlinspike to them as had been chosen, and as dark as a starless night to them as hadn't."

"But what of your oaths, Samuel, and your unnatural hatred towards the sex that your mother belonged to?"

"As to my oaths," Samuel would reply, "them as raises them by aggravating me will have to answer for it at the Eternal Bar; while as for my hatred of sarpints, that's one of

the signs of grace; that my own mother belonged to the breed is her misfortune, not mine. Don't the Scriptures say as how we are conceived in sin and brought forth from iniquity? an' ain't a sarpint the outward semblance of sin? and ain't pizin iniquity? Yah, ye don't ketch Samuel Biddle with a herring-net, nor yet with the devil's three-pronged harpoon."

John Whitehouse also believed in fore-ordination, but it was fore-ordination upon broader and more active lines than Samuel took up. He believed that the blood which had been spilt upon Calvary had flowed for the whole human race who could be induced to dip into it, and, like a keen hunter, he spread his net to capture sinners, and bring them by force and persuasion to the flood; and so exalted was his faith that he despaired of none. So, while Samuel snarled out his hopeless creed of punishment, John spoke only of all-sufficing and all-embracing love. He saw the angels, and rejoiced, while Samuel only believed in the devils, and hoarsely chuckled because he had succeeded in wriggling out of their clutches.

In due time they passed the picnic camp, and followed the well-defined tracks of Mosquito and his allies along the river, or cutting through the forest at the windings, keeping a straight line north-west.

They halted for a short time at the ashes of a demolished farm, which the outlaws had burnt to the ground.

"Tim Briarley's selection," said the Inspector.

"Who was Tim Briarley?" said John.

"One of our men, who had retired on his pension. Now I know whose tracks we are on."

"Whose?"

"Michael Howe. He swore to be even with Tim, and now he has kept his word. Hallo! there's something hanging to yonder tree."

They went over to the tree, and found the body of the settler, with a paper fastened on his shirt. The Inspector opened it, and read,—

"This is the body of ex-Constable Briarley, of Hobart Town, who laid false information against Michael Howe during the year 1809, and got him five thousand lashes."

"Ah; was he married?" asked John, after a pause.

"No; but he had some assigned servants, male and female, with him."

"Possibly they have joined the bushrangers. Let us bury the poor fellow."

They found, at a short distance away from the tree on which the body hung, another corpse, clad in convict garb, and shot through the head, so they buried the two together, and then, after a rest and prayers, they went on again.

Tim Briarley's farm was only the first of many demolished homesteads that they came across in their march, with ghastly evidences of the bloodthirsty cruelty of the bush-rangers, although they occasionally came to farms still flourishing and untouched, the inmates of which made them welcome, and offered to join them in their expedition. John now began to fear that the journey he was upon would not be likely to terminate peacefully. However, he declined the proffer of these outlying settlers, and pushed on.

There were none of the homesteads belonging to non-official settlers destroyed. Like the avenging angel, Michael Howe and his gang had only visited those ex-officials and masters who, for past services, had received grants of land, and in some parts even they had been spared. Most of the men found murdered had a long list of injuries against their names—overseers who, through severity, had rendered themselves obnoxious to the convicts, thereby proving that indiscriminate plunder or wanton cruelty were not the main motives of the raid so much as savage justice and revenge.

As he advanced and saw the devastation, and the number of dead in his way, he had to own to himself that for the leaders of these outrages there could be no hope of pardon held out. It was his duty to capture them, however, if he could do so, for the sake of society, and save as many as he could of the rank and file.

They had travelled in the open tracks of the outlaws, along the banks of the Derwent, for about forty miles, when they came to the mouth of a smaller river which joined at this part with the Derwent, and tended in a north-easterly direction.

There was a ford at this part of the river; and from the traces they could see that the outlaws had crossed, so they followed the trail, which led them over an even, rich country, mostly grass and scrub covered, therefore comparatively easy walking, until they arrived at the border of a large fresh-water lake, or rather two lakes lying together, with only a narrow strip of swamp between. At the point where they camped, it was about three miles wide, and literally covered with black swans, snipe, herons, ducks and other aquatic frequenters.

They had now been on the march for five days, and had covered a distance of about seventy miles without meeting any natives; they had observed traces of them—their fires, lately deserted—and once or twice seen signals which proved to them that they were being watched and avoided. John Whitehouse resolved that he would come again to this quarter, and try to get hold of them after his present mission was concluded.

They were now at a considerable height above the sea-level, for the air felt sharp at nights; yet they had no cause as yet to complain of the weather, for the mornings had been fresh and clear, the days brilliant with sunshine, and the nights calm and filled with the lustre of the white moon.

The land about the lake was sedgy and tufted, with a sprinkling of light timber. They pitched their camp upon the site of the camp of those whom they were following, and whom they now reckoned to be about two days in advance of them. All along hitherto they had been uninterrupted; and, from where they now rested, they could see the tracks of many feet—naked, intermingling with the boots of white men and the hoofs of horses—passing round the lake and leading easterly; before them the distant hills stretched beyond the wide extent of plain, softly blending into the sky.

Nothing disturbed them that night excepting the cries of the water birds; and at daybreak they were once more up, and, after a bush breakfast of broiled wild-duck and tea, they moved on.

The tracks now lead directly east, over the hills, which, as they approached, became more rugged than they could have supposed them to be in the distance.

At one portion they came to some caves where the outlaws had evidently rested.

“This is where they roosted at such times as they visited this part of the country,” said the Inspector, looking into one of those caves. “This has been used as their stables, and that is why they have come here.”

The remains of fodder and bedding were still lying about, but the horses had all been taken away.

“We are too late, you may depend, Whitehouse; they must long ago have reached the coast, and unless the vessels were sharp enough to stop them, they have shipped and are away.”

“We shall be in good enough time to find the natives, and that is the most important part of our expedition,” replied John calmly.

"Darn it all! What do we want with natives, except to get our throats all cut?" said the Inspector. "I, for one, don't fancy going much farther after that lot. Oyster Bay bears a jolly bad name."

"Nor I," said the Sergeant; "and I move that we draw up our report and turn back."

"You may turn back if you like," snarled Samuel; "but I am going on. There's a party in their hands, which means something to me if it don't to any one else, and I ain't going to come this long tramp, and then give it up because a few niggers stand in the way to my fortune."

"A few niggers! Confound it, warder, don't you know that these Oyster Bay men are the biggest and most ferocious tribe in Van Dieman's Land?"

"Well, turn back if you like; I'm going on."

They were passing through a narrow gully as they spoke, when, all at once, John called a halt; he had seen the scouts running in rapidly.

"What is the matter?"

"The Oyster Bay men; we are surrounded!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISS O'CALLIGHAN GETS HER LIBERTY.

THERE was a moment of indecision amongst the party as to what to do at this startling tidings, for, in their present position, they were in a regular trap.

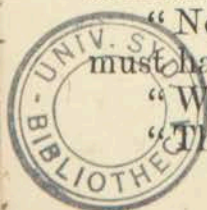
The sides of the gully on both sides of them were uncovered by trees and sloping upwards, with a few boulders here and there starting up baldly from the grass, but none large enough or rugged enough to afford them a shelter.

"Have we not time to get back to the caves?" asked John anxiously of the scouts.

"No," replied the natives; "they are on all sides. Some must have been in the caves watching us as we passed."

"Where are the three Oyster Bay natives?"

"They have joined their friends."



"I thought so," muttered the Inspector. "That's what one gets by trusting to a savage."

John looked for a moment round him bewildered, then he turned his glance towards the sky, while his lips moved as if in prayer. All at once the look of perplexity gave place to one of joyful relief, while he exclaimed,—

"God be thanked, we are saved!"

"What do you mean, John?" asked Monkland doubtfully.

"The three natives, of course, have gone to make peace for us with their friends."

"I am glad you think so," sneered the Inspector.

"I don't think so, I know it," replied John with conviction. "Friends, let us advance, and without fear; we are safe."

As he spoke, he set the example by moving down the glen at a rapid pace.

"Our leader has great faith in miracles, men; but if you take my advice you will see well to the state of your muskets."

This from the Inspector, as he slung round his musket and began to examine the cap, replacing the old one with a fresh cover.

"Do not fire a single shot, men, as you value your lives and mine, until I come back. Close round in a circle and take shelter against yonder rock, and wait quietly and fearlessly, for I *know* that there is no danger."

"Where are you going yourself now, John?" asked Monkland.

"To meet the natives," replied John, as he disarmed himself and prepared to advance.

"Let me go with you!" cried Monkland after him.

"No, no; I am best alone, and with those who are guarding me. Only keep quiet, and do not begin hostilities."

"He is a plucky fellow," observed Monkland, looking after him admiringly, as John went down the glen perfectly unarmed.

"A madman; he'll be cut to pieces first, and then our turn comes next; yet his advice is good about the rock. Close round, lads, for yonder they come!" As the Inspector spoke, they could see, over the brow of the hill, several dark figures appear to their left, and, with one impulse, they rushed for the rock and stood wedged as close to it as they could get.

John Whitehouse was meanwhile going forward at a steady walk, with his arms hanging down easily, and his head

held upright—going straight on towards the body of savages, who were already entering the gully.

The savages now began to cover both sides of the hill and show up darkly against the mid-day sky, but they did not attempt as yet to rush down—contenting themselves instead with watching, while they gradually surrounded the little band at the bottom. They were in great force, and apparently in no hurry to demolish the entrapped little company; their attention was now devoted to the solitary evangelist, who walked so fearlessly up to the main body.

“He’ll be killed, to a dead certainty,” said the Inspector.

“I don’t agree with you,” said Monkland, as he watched keenly. “See, he has taken them by surprise; they have stopped and are waiting upon him—”

“Waiting to spit him, you mean!”

“No; if we are to escape this present danger, John Whitehouse, with his faith, is the only man alive who can do it. See, he is speaking, and they are listening.”

It was true. As they watched wonderingly, they saw John walk quietly up to within a few feet of the front rank, while they opened round him, without attempting to molest him in any way.

“Are these Oyster Bay natives?” asked Monkland incredulously.

“Yes,” said one of the natives; “and that is Mosquito standing beside the chief.”

They could distinguish Mosquito from his darker shade, the rest of the natives being copper-coloured. The chief and he were both standing leaning upon their spears, and listening attentively to what John was saying, and seemingly understanding him, for he was speaking to them in their own language.

On the ridges of the hills the other savages were also standing motionlessly, waiting upon the termination of the interview.

John spoke for a long time, and with animation. He was telling them that he had come as their friend, sent to them by God to help them. Mosquito, by reason of his long experience of the white man, listened with an amused but indulgent grin, while the more unsophisticated natives were impressed. Mosquito had seen John before in Hobart Town, and did not dislike him.

“Yes,” he observed, after John had delivered his message, “you dam good fellow, I know; but Gov’nor humbug you all

same. He say he pardon us until he gets us down, and then swing us all up."

"No, Mosquito, I have his promise here, and you are also mentioned in it."

"Let me see it?"

John took out his proclamation, and read it out clearly and slowly, translating it as he went along.

"Whar my name there?" asked Mosquito.

"There," replied John quietly, pointing to the place, and spelling it out to him.

"Yes, that is so; but why should we go back? Why do you want these Oyster Bay men to leave their own land, which belongs to them?"

"See, Mosquito, you know the white man; how he comes to a country and makes it his own. You know that no one can stand against him, and that what he cannot buy he takes without paying. I am a white man on the outside, and a black man inside, and God has told me that I must be your friend, and do the best I can for you. See, I have come to you because I love you, and want you to live and be happy. I have no gun. You can kill me if you like, only I know that you will not."

"How do you know that, now we have got you?" asked the chief softly.

"Because when I was coming down the gulley I saw an angel hold back your spear, see?"

John fixed his luminous eyes full upon the chief, and swiftly darted his hand towards him.

"The angel is still holding back your spear so that you cannot lift it. Try if you can."

The chief made an effort to raise his spear without success.

"That is so; but I do not see any fellow holding my spear."

"But you feel him, and when you listen to me you will be able to see him also. Will you be my friend?"

"Yes," said the chief, awed in spite of himself at this strange power which John possessed without knowing what it was.

The other natives near crowded closer, with intense wonderment upon their faces. Only Mosquito looked a little sceptical.

"See here, white fellow, if you are our friend, what for you bring all those other fellows along with you?"

"They have come with me to bring back the convicts."

"But that no good, for the convicts are our friends, and we no give them up."

"I have come to offer the convicts the same terms as I give to you," replied John quietly.

"What! you offer these ole lags free pardon, and you think the Gov'nor let 'em off? Ha! ha!! You no know the Gover'ment, I can see."

"At anyrate, Mosquito, let me go on and make them the offer."

Mosquito consulted for a few minutes with his friend the chief, and then turned again to the enthusiast.

"See here, white fellow, you good sort, but it's no good, all same. The convicts no trust your Gover'ment; they much too fly for that. Besides, before you can get down to coast they will be away in the ship, so we think that you had better go back now."

"No," said John firmly, "I shall go on."

"Then we no stop you, only you'll be sorry for it. We come here to kill you all; but now for you we will let you live and go on, and we will show you the road; will that do?"

"Yes," replied John, shaking hands with the chief and Mosquito.

The party beside the rocks could hardly credit their eyes when they saw the negotiations terminate so peacefully, and John return, quietly walking between the chief and Mosquito, and the dark-skinned army following.

"Well?" shouted Monkland to John when they got within hailing distance.

"It's all right," replied John. "These are our friends, and are going on with us to Oyster Bay."

"This beats cock-fighting," muttered the Inspector.

"It's witchcraft, that's what it is," said Samuel Biddle wrathfully; "regular devil-work; an' but for that ongrateful sarpint Agnes O'Callighan, I'd sail no longer under such a captin'."

"It is the hand of God," replied Whitehouse quietly. "He has given these children of His into my care to look after, and so He smoothes away all obstacles. Come, my friends, let us pray."

There was not a man in that company who did not feel inclined to thank God for their wonderful escape; even Samuel Biddle grew silent under the mesmeric eyes of his leader.

"Darn me if he ain't got the evil eye!" he muttered. "I can say nothing when he looks on me."

It was an impressive scene on that bare hill-side on this sunny day, to see John Whitehouse standing up, while the rest kneeled around him; for the savages, seeing the position of the white men, and thinking that some incantation was about to be performed by their little priest, followed their example, and also went down upon their knees and folded their hands. Then John raised his eyes to the angels, which he always saw floating around him, and spoke to God direct,—

"Oh, Father! look down upon Thy poor children and make them understand Thy glory and Thy tenderness. Help me to bring them to Thee; help me to the end!"

He did not thank God for his deliverance from his late danger, for so utter had been his faith that he had not felt in any danger.

Then quickly he burst out in the native language, with all his fiery eloquence; and, as he spoke, the savages from the hill-side came down and knelt like the others were doing. He had the control of them all once more, as he had charmed the convicts in the hold of the *Stirling Castle*; even Mosquito wept and groaned, while the more impressionable savages grovelled on the ground.

An impressive sight, those grey-coated prison hands, those red-coated soldiers and the other whites, listening and feeling the magic of his uneducated voice, even although they could not follow the fiery words which swept so impetuously over the dusky congregation.

All at once he stopped abruptly, tired out and faint; and, after an expectant pause, a mighty shout rose up from the savages, while they rushed forward to kiss his hands and feet.

"No, no! not I, but the good God up there! Do you not see the angels now?"

"Yes, father," answered the chief brokenly, as he looked up with glittering eyes at the clouds sailing past.

"And you will come with me when I go back?"

"Yes, yes! we will go with you, little white father, wherever you like to take us."

From that hour, John Whitehouse discarded all carnal weapons, and went unarmed through the land, until the day when the last of Tasmania's race succumbed to his stronger power.

It was like a triumphal march after this through the rest

of the journey down to the coast, which they reached on the second day, sweeping down upon the bushrangers like an avalanche.

John had given his word that he would not use any force with Michael Howe and his gang, so that his followers were forced to stand by and allow him to use his moral persuasion, which, however, was of no avail. Michael Howe, like Mosquito, only laughed at the idea of the Hobart Town authorities showing any mercy to him or his kind.

"No, my boy! we are going to find a country for ourselves; thank ye the same for your kindness. I've settled all the debts in Van Dieman's Land that I can think of just now."

"And your prisoners," said John, at length finding his efforts all useless with this hardened criminal. "I must have them."

"Yes, you can have them—that is, unless any of them care to take a trip with me."

The bold bushranger gazed significantly upon Miss O'Callaghan as he spoke, while the poor and sadly-perplexed lady hung her head and murmured that she would think of it, and let him know before the ship came.

Miss O'Callaghan had never been in such a predicament before in her life, and she doubted if any other poor female had ever been so placed. Here she sat in a savage bark hut, with only a few rags left of the light spring costume which she had worn at the picnic, and not a change to be had for love or money.

All the aspirants to her hand were assembled now to view her present destitution, yet none of them in the slightest degree appeared less eager to claim her. She held up her hands and counted her lovers over on her fingers—the bold Michael, one, Samuel Biddle, two, George de la Motte, three—for he had now also declared his passion—the Doctor, four, the Inspector, five, and the Sergeant, six.

As her maiden fancy wandered over their different charms and defects, she found it hard to make up her mind amongst the former three, at any rate.

Michael Howe loomed up first, as the most proper man. Ah, he was a man that any woman's heart might flutter for, if it hadn't been for his bloodthirsty proclivities. She had seen enough during her wanderings with this fine man to make her shudder with horror at the thought of being left alone with him. Samuel Biddle was here again, and had the advantage over all the others of precedence. She had accepted him once,

and so he had a claim to her consideration. George, the royal-born and graceful, but who, like herself, was desperately lanky. The other three were easily summed up and dismissed.

While she squatted in the subdued light of the bark hut, and pondered, a substantial shadow glided in; it was the Doctor.

"I have offered you my heart, ma'am, a faithful heart; don't trifle with an honest affection."

She shrank modestly back to hide her shrivelled lower limbs, which even her squatting position could not altogether conceal, the garments were so worn and frayed, but she answered not.

"Madam, remember your adoring servant," murmured a soft voice close by.

"If ye wants for to keep my respect, you'll keep your promise," snarled another familiar voice.

Two other voices broke upon her ponderings, those of the Inspector and the Sergeant, softly cooing both of them and alluring. But the big man did not come to disturb her, much as she wished for it, he was busy on the sea shore; preparing to ship, for the *Storm Bird* had managed to evade her pursuers, and was anchored there, and Barry wanted to be off again before daybreak.

Miss O'Callighan waited in vain for the boisterous voice of the tall bushranger, for, in the excitement of the sudden arrival, Michael Howe had forgotten all about his fair captive. At last she fell asleep, and also forgot her rage at his neglect.

When morning dawned, she started up, still undecided, but, on the whole, inclined to go off with the fascinating rover.

"I will be coy, and punish him for his neglect; for the honour of our country he must not think to win an Irish girl too easily." So she thought as she made her meagre morning toilet.

"Thank you, madam, for discarding the wicked pirate; he is off, and you are free." It was George's sweet voice which uttered the words.

"Off!" Miss O'Callighan sprang to the doorway, and craned her lean and uncovered neck out to view the ocean.

Away on the horizon, and just dipping out of sight, was the ship which carried her best-looking but most faithless and recreant of lovers, and he had left her without even a last good-bye.

CHAPTER XXX.

WIPING OFF THE SLATE.

IGNATIUS TAGGART sat in his front parlour with his violin upon the table beside him, and his long fingers occasionally touching the strings, and making harp-like sounds, while over against him stood the diminutive figure of the little pickpocket, Mat Tucker.

Taggart was in a vile temper, and showed it, as he always did, by becoming more ferociously jocular and ogreish in his questions and conversation. He was playing, cat-like, with the little man, who looked more like a half-killed mouse in front of an ugly monster than the impudent, jaunty cock of the walk which he had been on board the *Stirling Castle*.

It was two weeks since the morning that Captain Wilmott had been carried senseless into his own quarters, and the weather was getting warmer every day. Sandy Bay was the only place that the sunny weather could not make look cheerful, but this was by reason of its associations and those ghastly appendages which adorned it, not from its own natural surroundings, for they were pretty enough.

From the one window of the parlour which the two were now occupying—for there were two windows, a back and a front one, the room occupying the entire width of the house, which was long and narrow—from the front window could be seen the distant settlement, reaching out in a straggling fashion along the tongue of land, behind which flowed the Derwent; while opposite lay Kangaroo Point, and in the extreme distance floated the picturesque range of mountains which hedged it in from the north. The back window commanded a fair view of Mount Pooranetteré, afterwards called Wellington, in commemoration of the hero of the yet unfought Waterloo, showing its bold front and organ pipes above the intervening forests, with those awful tokens of civilisation, the gibbets and gallows-tree, standing in front, by reason of which the perfume of the wild flowers became quenched before they could enter the unadorned windows of the "Black Swan." Taggart could not see flowers, and he hated to be reminded of the proximity of such earth-beautifiers, the aroma which

the wind occasionally wafted indoors from these creaking laden chains was much more to his taste. He called this his fruit garden, and liked to know that his customers could see them hanging and ripening, even if he could not enjoy that pleasure himself.

He was in a vile temper this morning, and which Mat was receiving the full benefit of, for there were no other customers at present in the house, trade not being very brisk during the day.

Mat had come very unwillingly, and, since he had entered, remained standing in a very uneasy attitude, without calling for any refreshment—an ominous sign which the landlord did not appear to be aware of, and which, although Mrs Taggart glided in and out often, she did not offer to rectify.

“So, Mat, you haven’t been able to find out where the two escaped prisoners are yet, although you have been a full week on the job; and you are equally unsuccessful in laying a trap of any kind for Mathuna. That is bad, my dear boy—very bad, with your five weeks’ bill unsettled to my beauty, and the Captain getting better. I am afraid, Mat, that your nose has lost its keen scent, and that your active wits are getting dull—eh?”

The white eyeballs stared blankly at the wretched little man, while the fingers struck a jerky chord or two on the violin strings.

“See here, Nat, I’ve tried my very utmost to find out about O’Bryan and his girl, but I think they have got clear away and joined the ship.”

“No, they haven’t,” replied Taggart; “for I have seen George de la Motte since his return, and he tells me different. They haven’t left Hobart Town; and, since you cannot find them, I must set some one else on the job, and drop you.”

“Give me a day or two longer, Taggart.”

“I cannot give you much longer, Mat, my boy. The Captain is growing impatient, and will want to punish some one very soon. He was talking about you yesterday to me in a way that made me imagine that your time had almost come.”

“For God’s sake, don’t split on me, Taggart.”

“I don’t want to do so, Mat, my son, if it can be helped, but I must look after myself, you know; and the Captain knows all about that last plant of yours, and is furious with you for not giving them early warning about the bushrangers, so that he could have collared them. That was mistaken chivalry on your part, Mat, towards your friends.”

"They'd have murdered me if I had split on them," cried Mat, shivering.

"Well, perhaps; and now you are likely to swing for not doing your duty."

"Give me a couple of days more, Taggart," said Mat in despair.

"But if you have fossicked every place without success, I cannot see what is the use. Now George may be more successful; he is smart."

"Have you taken him on the job?"

"Not yet; I wanted to hear you first."

Ignatius Taggart played with his fingers on the violin strings, while the little man shifted uneasily about from one foot to the other, as if he was trying to make up his mind to something that he hated.

"Listen how these dead men are dancing to-day outside, Mat, and how their chains are rattling. They always go on that way before a fresh arrival; it's mighty curious, ain't it?"

Mat shivered violently as he listened to the creaking of the gibbet chains. He wanted to be faithful to his mates if he could, but he was in the blind man's clutches, and hadn't a chance of escape.

"Well, what is it to be, Mat: a clean slate at the 'Black Swan,' or a dance amongst the dead men outside?"

"Give me a glass of rum first, Taggart, for my throat feels like a lime-kiln this morning, and I'll give you my ideas afterwards," at last he cried out, in desperation.

"No, Mat, my son; let me have your idea first, and then Mrs Taggart will fetch a quartern of her very best, and her slate for you to wipe out, if the ideas are worth as much; I must know that first."

"Well, Taggart, I think that I do know where Marion Carter and Tyril O'Bryan are hiding."

"Oh, you only *think*, do you, Mat? That ain't quite good enough. You see you have had such a lot of useless thoughts this last week, which have come to nothing."

"Well, then, I do know, for I have seen them both."

"That is a little better, Mat. Now tell me, my dear, where are they?"

"Up at Peter Brown's smithy."

"How long have you known this, Mat?"

"Since last night. I was up yesterday to get my pick-axe sharpened, when I saw a couple of Mathuna's men at the door—at least I thought they were both aboriginals at the

first—and went forward to speak to them to pass the time, when, as I got closer, I saw the difference, for one of them had blue eyes and a thin nose. Then I had an idea, and changed my mind, so, instead of speaking, I went back and waited on my pickaxe at the forge.”

“Well, Mat, what did you do next?”

“I went back to my work, and waited until it was dark, and then prowled up again, and lay about outside watching for a long time. I saw nothing to rouse my suspicions until after the others had turned in. I noticed the front door open, and one of the natives slip out alongside of a female. They went along, keeping in the shadow of the trees, without speaking, until they came to a quiet part of the bush, near the stream, when they both sat down on the bank, and began to speak. I wasn't near enough to hear what they said at first, so I crawled after them, and had just got near enough, when a twig smashed under my knees and startled them, for the woman sprang up in a fright and said, ‘What was that, Tyral?’ The man jumped up and clapped his hand over the woman's mouth, with a ‘Hush!’ Then I knew who they were.”

“I'd say so,” answered Taggart, in a tone of contempt. “And why didn't you come straight to me last night and tell me of this, eh?”

Mat remained silent.

“Ah, my son, you thought that you could serve two masters, did you? You thought it would be easy to go on deceiving the poor blind man, and run up your score on false pretences?”

“No, Taggart, I meant to tell you, if I saw no other road out of it.”

“Well, go on with your yarn; but wait, what you have told is worth a drink—here, my sweet bird, here, my beauty, bring in the rum; or wait, Mat, my son, I'll get you a drink out of my own private bottle; we'll have one together. Sit down, Mat, and have a smoke, I won't be long gone for that bottle.”

The blind man got up, and, pushing Mat Tucker into a chair, went into the bar, where Mrs Taggart was standing. As he passed her, he caught hold of her shoulders, and, stooping down, whispered something into her ear, on hearing which the little dwarf nodded her long head calmly, but without any expression or intelligence coming into her face.

While the landlord was away, Mat Tucker sat looking

moodily upon the table. He had done a thing of which he was heartily ashamed of—betrayed a brother convict, to whom he owed many former debts of kindness, and a young girl, who, because of the interference of Mathuna, had become a heroine in the eyes of the prisoners—all to save his own carcass.

“I don’t believe that one of the chaps would have done this except myself,” he muttered, feeling unutterably mean in his own eyes; “but I’m dished if I’ll do any more in it.”

“I’ll not ask you, Mat, my son,” replied the high-pitched voice of the blind landlord, as he entered with a bottle of rum and two glasses. “If you will swear that your present information is all genuine, I’ll believe you, for it would be too unsafe for you to deceive me any more.”

“I swear that it is the truth I have been telling you, Taggart,” replied Mat earnestly.

“Well, that is enough; now, help yourself, and go on with your story.”

“The pair didn’t speak any more, but after listening for a while, they both turned away, and got into the house as soon as they could; then I sneaked away without any one noticing me, and got back to the town.”

“Are you quite sure that no one was watching you—the natives, for instance?”

“Quite; no one saw me either going or coming.”

“Well, that will do for your share in that job; I can manage all the rest. Now, what about Mathuna?”

“I have sounded several of the hands, but none of them will help me; they all think too much of her.”

“Still, it might be managed single-handed by a man who wants to slip his neck out of the noose. You know most of the servants about the place.”

“Yes; that’s all right, only Mathuna isn’t the article for a man of my size to tackle single-handed; besides, she never goes out at nights.”

“No; but I could give you some stuff which might be slipped into her grog of a night by a friendly servant, and which would make her sleep soundly, and then, if you know where she puts up, you could easily slip in and cut her throat. That’s what the Captain wants done, and what you must do, if you think to get off yourself.”

“But she doesn’t drink grog, or anything of that sort,” replied Mat.

"Well, she takes grub, don't she? Some of it can be put in that easily."

"But she is pretty nearly always beside this sick block of hers."

"Well, he can be managed the same way, can't he? Send them both to kingdom come."

"No, Taggart, you must give me some other job to do for that slate-score of mine, I can't do that; I never could brace myself up for that game. Give me something lighter, more in my own line, and I'll try my best to oblige you and the Captain."

"Mat, my son, I'm afraid that you won't live long. You are far too virtuous for your position in life. You are getting a little too particular for my taste. You see, a man is no use to me who is for ever shoving up sentiment before my face. You shilly-shally over the nosing-out of these escaped prisoners until my patience is almost exhausted, and then, when I have wormed it out of you, you don't like the job of laying information or leading the soldiers up; and now you refuse point-blank to do the last job which would have made us square. Bah! I am disgusted with a white-livered hound like you!"

"No, Taggart, I draw the line at this last job. I haven't got the pluck. Get some one else, and give me a bit more trust."

"Well, sonny, since you own up frankly that you are a coward, I won't ask you any more. I'll get some one else or do the job myself—me and my little beauty between us. There, Mat, my lad, fill up your glass again and drink. Here's your health, and long life to you."

The blind man all at once threw off his ferocious mockery, and did his best to entertain his guest, making him fill up his glass again, and telling him that he always did like him, and would not be too hard on him for that drink-bill.

"How did you get away this morning, Mat?"

"Well, I was sent up to Peter Brown's for some tools, and slid round this way; but I must be going now."

"Don't go for a few minutes; a minute or two will make no odds. You are a favourite with the overseers, you know, Mat, at least as yet."

"Yes; they do allow me considerable more liberty than most of the other prisoners," replied Mat, who was getting primed up with the drink, and shaking off his depression.

"Of course, only the Captain and me know about your share in that general escape, eh?"

"Don't speak about it, Taggart. It makes me shiver in my boots."

"No necessity, my dear boy. I'll tell the Captain that you haven't got pluck for big things, but that he can always depend upon you in little jobs, eh?"

"Yes, that's right, Taggart. You'll excuse me to him, and ask him to try me with something else at some other time?"

"Depend on me. Now, hang me if the creaking of these outside chains don't make me feel generous this morning, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll clean off your slate myself, and start business between us afresh. There, Mat, my boy, what do you think of that?"

"I think you're not a bad sort after all, Taggart, and I drinks to you in your tip-top rum."

"Now, now. Ha! ha! ha! It's astonishing what fine fellows we landlords are when we wipe off slates, ain't we? Ho! ho! ho!"

The blind man opened his hanging mouth very wide, and laughed in a horrible, high-pitched way, which gave almost a chill of horror to his hearer, who, however, tried to echo it as easily as he could.

He began to think that the rum must be good when it made Taggart so generous and forgiving; and as he laughed he thought to himself that if he only got that present account settled, he would never again go on the chalking-up system at the "Black Swan."

"Now, my boy, you just wait here for a moment, and I'll go and try to find your slate unbeknown to my beauty, who is hard as nails on tick customers."

"Don't be long, Taggart, for I must make a move now for the smithy."

"I won't keep you a moment, my son," returned the blind man, as he once more raised himself up to his extraordinary height, and shambled towards the shut door. He was so tall that his head nearly reached the rafters—for there was no covered-in ceiling to the room, only the shingled roof above the rafters. He stretched out his hands until he had got hold of one of the rafters, and guided himself that fashion over to the partition, and from hence along to the door, feeling his way with his fingers; then he opened it and went out, and shut it behind him.

He returned after a very short time, grinning ogreishly as he held a well-covered slate in his hand.

“I think that this is your special slate, Mat. I know them by their edges. Yours has got three nicks out of it for M-a-t. See for yourself. Is it the right one?”

“Yes,” replied Mat eagerly, as he took the slate in his trembling hands.

“Then wipe it out, my lad. Ha! ha! wipe it out, ho! ho! for our accounts are now all squared up.”

As he said the last words in a loud, shrill voice, the door was opened quickly, and a couple of warders, followed by three or four soldiers, rushed in past the blind man towards the unfortunate Mat, now busily wiping his account from the slate with his sleeve.

“Sold, by ——!” shouted Mat, springing up and sending the half-obliterated slate in the direction of the blind traitor, and hitting him full in the evil-looking face; then, with a leap, he darted to the back window, and was through it even as the blind man, with a hoarse yell, fell forward on the table.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SISTER OF MERCY.

JANE LYMBURNER was not at all comfortable with Mrs Carrodus at Kilkenny Cottage. In the first place, being each of them women who lived exclusively for self, there was in some respects too great a similarity between the pair for them quite to agree. Still, on the whole, although she did not find sufficient scope for her malice, and the special faculty she possessed of making people miserable, Jane, being the keenest analyst of character, was the better able to keep her ascendancy.

Mrs Carrodus was by nature inordinately vain, and as voraciously greedy as a shark; but although she would not for an instant have thought of sacrificing her own pleasure out of consideration to any one else's feelings, or run any scruples of conscience, still, to acquire gifts and receive admiration were her two most prominent vices, and she never went out of her way, as Jane had done, to satisfy the more refined passions of spite or malice. She did not give a thought to other people,

whether they were made happy or miserable by her conduct, so long as she was herself tolerably happy in the gratification of her momentary desire.

There was no inducement for Jane Lymburner to live at Kilkenny Cottage, excepting that it saved her the expense of living elsewhere, although it entailed upon her many duties which she would gladly have dispensed with, if she could have done so.

Mrs Rose Carrodus was uneducated, coarse and underbred in her tastes, while Jane had received the education of a lady. Mrs Rose could not exist without flattery of the very grossest description; but being excessively mean, she never paid for the flattery she demanded so constantly. Jane missed the refined atmosphere of Mrs Quinton's society, also the delicate gifts which were always coming to her for her adroit services. Mrs Rose had the ingrained idea of all *parvenus* that a lady companion was something who could not be paid too little and worked too hard; therefore, in consideration of her board and lodgings, she expected Jane to be at her beck and call continually—treatment which the well-trained poor lady resented.

Her position was hard enough during the absence of Miss O'Callighan, but when that good lady came back, attended by her large train of admirers, it became simply unendurable. Between the pair she led the life of a galley slave, and began to look about her for some way out of her slavery.

Once or twice she had tried her favourite pastime of causing dissension between husband and wife—that is, she had wheedled in her soft, sympathetic style round the now half-witted Captain Carrodus, and tried to drop her little mustard-seeds of suspicion in his heart; but she soon gave that task over as perfectly hopeless. The soil was completely barren for the growth of jealousy. He only laughed at her subtle innuendoes, or passed them over unnoticed. So long as his little airy white Rose enjoyed herself, he was perfectly satisfied. "She could take care of herself," he always said.

"He is a perfect idiot," muttered Miss Lymburner, when she saw that her talents had been thrown away; and, with that expression of supreme disgust, she left him alone to the quiet enjoyment of his pipe and glass.

Now that she had gratified her malice on Kate Ambrose, and gained her end, the object had lost the main interest which had urged her so obstinately on. She was one of those natures who can only be nerved on by the seemingly impossible,

and now that she had really taken Saul Clark from Kate, and completed the misery of that young lady, she began to lessen in her respect and desire for Saul.

He was poor, and she abhorred poverty. He was completely estranged from Kate, for she did not think that the proud young lady would ever forgive him, so she was satisfied that she had separated them for ever; and, with the accomplishment of her desire, her enthusiasm grew less, for personally she had no real love for the young man. He was good enough, but a life with him would mean comparative poverty and hard work. If she married him, she would drop out for ever from the social scale in which she had been born.

Jane Lymburner's father had been a gentleman, and her mother the daughter of an impoverished lord. She had never received any benefits from her relations of either the one side or the other, but still she found it hard to forget her caste. There are many of Jane Lymburner's kind still left in the world.

She began to cast her eyes and her thoughts around the settlement for some fresh victim, who would be easier to manage than her present penurious employer; new game for her ambitious designs—something more worthy of her social instincts and desires.

There was only one man who could in any way fulfil those many ideas, and that was the profligate and remorseless Captain Wilmott.

He was an aristocrat by birth, and therefore her social equal. He also had advantages which Saul Clark had not; he had a large allowance for a younger son—enough to give her social standing, if she could only capture him.

That was the great difficulty which Mathuna kindly, with her cat-o'-nine-tails, smoothed away. As long as the gallant Captain had been in good health and about, she hadn't the ghost of a chance of attracting his attention; but now that he was laid up and disfigured, she felt as if a special Providence had delivered him into her tender hands.

One afternoon, therefore, when Jane was extra badgered by the troublesome Carrodus, she managed to make her escape and paid a visit to Mrs Davey. While there, she opened her batteries recklessly, expressing her sympathy in the Captain's sad mishap; also her desire to turn Sister of Mercy and nurse him, if her dear friend did not think it improper.

"Poor fellow, to be left to these low-bred, assigned ser-

vants ; it seems almost like a sacred duty for some one of his own caste to look after him at this extremity, what do you think ? I have nothing to do now, since the Major has taken an antipathy to me, so that while I wait in Hobart Town I should like to look after this poor gentleman."

Mrs Davey sympathised with the Major and Kate, and she did not like this spiteful and indigent scion of the aristocracy ; she saw also perfectly through her present motives. But she had a horror, and the intense dislike of a good, true woman for the base invalid, and saw in this a chance of serving her favourite Kate, whose love troubles she knew about, and therefore hastened, although with an amused and contemptuous sparkle in her eye, to give her entire approval of the plan.

"It is indeed most charitable of you, Miss Lymburner, to proffer your services on the Captain's behalf, and I am sure that he would gladly accept them at the present moment ; at least, I can easily get the Doctor's authority with the Governor's sanction, and as the poor Captain is not in a position at present to know or care who waits upon him, it can easily be arranged, if you will make the sacrifice."

Miss Jane Lymburner saw the contemptuous sparkle of her hostess's eye, and understood quite clearly the scorn running through her words, but as she had a purpose to achieve, she calmly ignored them both, and answered gratefully,—

"Thank you, my dear Mrs Davey ; I would feel so much obliged if you could arrange this for me."

"Of course in England it would be considered highly improper for a single lady to wait upon a gentleman, especially one who bears the character of Captain Wil-mott ; but out here we are not so very particular ; 'the end justifies the means,' doesn't it, Miss Lymburner, as the Jesuits say, and I think you can look after your own reputation."

The good Governor's lady smiled, and spoke sweetly ; and as sweetly Jane replied that she thought that she could look after Number One.

So this first great difficulty was satisfactorily arranged, and the ladies separated with friendly smiles and different feelings toward each other in their hearts. On the next day after this interview, Jane took up her abode in the chambers of the as yet only partly conscious Captain

Wilmott, and armed with the authority of the Governor and the Doctor, packed the assigned housekeeper back to the penitentiary, and took that ex-favourite's place at the bedside of the unfortunate invalid.

The housekeeper grumbled, of course, at being sent out of the land of plenty to ordinary prison fare, but it was a very subdued and under-the-breath grumble, for Miss Lymburner represented virtue and authority at the bedside of sickness, and the other only represented vice. The housekeeper grumbled the less, because she had already seen her star on the wane, and knew that her dismissal would come sooner or later. As she was one of the best looking of the young prisoners, the Captain's friend Fred hired her promptly, and handed his own housekeeper over to the Sergeant.

Mrs Davey hastened to inform her favourite, Kate Ambrose, of this noble self-imposed mission of Miss Lymburner, much to that young lady's astonishment.

"Let us pray fervently that she may succeed in her designs with the Captain, Kate, my dear. He is a hard-headed man of the world, or rather he was before Mathuna had him under her hands, but she is a talented person, Miss Lymburner, and may succeed where you or I would fail. Let us hope and pray that she may, for they will be a well-matched couple; cruelty and profligacy against craft and cold calculation. Yes, I do think that they are a peculiarly well-matched pair if they can only hit it."

Kate left her kindly friend with bewilderment—indignation blending with hope and fear. She did not blame Saul, for she was just, and could see exactly how he had been decoyed by his most chivalrous and generous feelings of manliness. Besides, she loved him too utterly to be able to judge him harshly; but she wondered how any woman who had the certainty of such a husband as Saul could think of casting him off for such a substitute as Wilmott.

So that, while Jane calmly and methodically arranged her wardrobe and boxes, etc., in the convict-housekeeper's room, she had the prayers and best wishes for the complete success of her present intentions of two people who disliked her very thoroughly, one of whom had the very best reason for hating her rabidly. When prayers are offered up for our success in our undertakings by our enemies, backed by our own best efforts, it would be almost blasphemous to think of failure.

Jane Lymburner had no thought of failure; she was as confident of success, now that she had forced her way in, as

Mathuna had with her sick lover Wilfred; only that, in Jane's case, she was not handicapped in any way. She had a keen knowledge of the world and men, with no love or sentiment to retard her progress, and with perfect self-control to carry her on. It was like a game of chess played by a master against a blind novice. She had the whole range of the board, and nothing to stop her excepting health or death, while he was helpless; he was completely in her soft, white thin hands.

Captain Wilmott was lying in a darkened room when she glided in to him, along with the Doctor, who gave her her directions about bandages, etc.

He was partially delirious with the agony of his deeply-ploughed wounds, and almost blind, so that he could not tell who was attending to him; and she did not flinch when she undid the bandages and saw the horribly disfigured face. What did it matter to her whether he had the face of the Veiled Prophet or not, so that she could lure him on to make her Mrs Wilmott; that was the aim and end of her present existence.

The uglier he was, the greater would be her future chance of securing him; she looked at the scars critically, and then smiled contentedly. Captain Wilmott would not be likely to face up to many women after he rose from that sick-bed, and there were not many women who would be able to look upon him without horror. All she had to do was to make herself needful to him, and then show him a looking-glass at the right moment, and he would at once propose, as Saul had done, and be grateful to her afterwards; which was reversing the tables, as far as Saul was concerned.

Jane sat down quietly in that darkened room, and obeyed the Doctor's directions faithfully and unweariedly; her thin, white face never lost its patient look, nor did it once lose its colour of gentle placidity at the horrible oaths which came from her patient's unconscious lips during these days before he got back his scattered senses.

She took the entire management of his shanty, as if she had been the legally appointed mistress—speaking softly to his assigned man-servant, and smiling so gently upon him that he became completely subjugated.

"That's a real good woman, boys, who has taken the boss in hand," he remarked on the odd nights that she let him go away, and which he generally spent over at Sandy Bay; "I'd say an angel, Taggart, if it wasn't for her infernal crafty eyes;

but, lord, she can't help them. She's as good as an angel, and no sort of airs at all—in fact, she's a real tip-top swell as has come down, like a few more on us."

Ignatius Taggart was mightily interested in this unfledged angel, and took an early opportunity to interview her. The interview was successful, and the blind man returned home again to the "Black Swan," perfectly satisfied with her. Yes, she was a hangel, and so was he; birds of a feather flock together, and so ought angels to do. Taggart was going to help her as far as he possibly could in his humble way; he did not pray, as Kate did, for her, but he did his best in other directions for all that.

Gradually the wandering wits came back again to the Captain; and, on the first day of his consciousness, when the very ugly word which accompanied his request for his housekeeper's presence brought to his side the patient Jane, he looked at her wonderingly.

"I know that you will excuse me coming to wait on you, Captain Wilmott, but I could not help myself. Your mother was a girl-friend of my mother's, which was enough to interest me in you at such a time."

Jane had a copy of "Debrett" in her box, and had studied it diligently during the lonely hours she sat beside him while he cursed and swore in his delirium. She hadn't the least idea whether his mother and hers had ever seen each other, but that didn't matter; they might have been friends, as they were social equals, and this was good enough for her present purpose.

Captain Wilmott did not like her to be there at the first. He would much rather have had his old housekeeper, at whom he could blaze away, and before whom he could speak or act as he pleased; but when, after a few unavoidable slips of the tongue, he found that the pale cheeks did not alter, he became more at his ease with her.

She was a most tender nurse, and spread that subtle kind of well-bred aroma, which he had been accustomed to in his youth, without anything like straight-laced Puritanism. He instinctively felt that she was a lady, but different from the home kind. Her travel had broadened her ideas, and she was not easily shocked, which suited him exactly in his present surroundings.

Gradually he became more unconscious of her being beside him—that sort of unconsciousness which does not mean indifference, but the kind that means dependence. He could

utter what he pleased before her and to her, and find an interested and sympathetic listener in her.

His hatred and thirst for revenge on those who had injured him became almost like virtues as she digested them and spoke again—to kill Mathuna and ruin Marion Carter. Yes, with a subtle stroke, which was genius, Jane turned his thoughts adroitly from lust to murder. He would trap the victim of his passion, and whip her to death, and torture Mathuna.

They were the twin spirits, or rather the true positive and negative—malice and brutality—lapping themselves together, and meeting in a satanic harmony.

One day, at his request, Jane held his looking-glass up to him, and let him see himself in all his hideousness, wearing on her face the pitying smile of an angel as she did so.

Wilmott gave one glance, and fell back with horrible blasphemies.

“My poor friend, my poor, dear friend.”

Jane said this as she gently stroked his hands, while he seized hers, and kissed them savagely and gratefully with his torn lips, all the while howling and sobbing in his fury and pain.

Jane turned aside and smiled—the same smile which she had hid in the breast of Saul Clark on the picnic day in the forest. Her game was almost bagged.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY THE MOUNTAIN LAKE.

A LITTLE over a mile from Peter Brown's cottage and smithy, and some distance up the mountain behind his selection, was a little tarn or mountain lake, so deep and pure and still that it was difficult to tell at first sight where the banks terminated and the reflections began. It was like a double landscape, and made the onlooker almost giddy with its bewilderment and repetition of detail.

Above the strange, square-shaped cliffs of that mist-crowned

mountain, the white-edged, sunny clouds floated lazily over deep vistas of blue; clouds, with heavy bulging sides, floating like purple silken balloons, or dropping in grey showers amongst the dense forest clusters which led up by many a gorge, gully and waterfall to those bare organ pipes and the boulder-crowned top; gulleys and gorges, from which crept the silver mist-wreaths to join the rolling clouds. On the banks of this mountain lake the blue-gums shot up their birch-like trunks, and drooped their oblong leaves gracefully, making a delicious framework and fringe in front of that hazy wreath of foliage and perfumed blossom-land which rose behind.

And upon the glassy surface of this limited tarn, all these multiplicities and lovelinesses were concentrated and faithfully repeated in reversed fashion, the clouds swimming instead of floating, the mountain top brought downward and forward, the trees standing on their heads, with their shining trunks sticking up. When the wanderer first burst upon this secluded tarn, he rubbed his eyes, and wondered which was land and which water; then gradually it all unfolded like the magnified picture within a kaleidoscope, and he drank it in with a deep breath of delight.

On the same afternoon of Mat Tucker's attempted arrest and escape from the "Black Swan," this covered-in picture looked very complete, for, along with the nature-harmony, it possessed the item of human interest which artists generally like to put into pictures of this kind as a finish off, when they want them to sell quickly.

Two figures sat together on the grassy banks, and repeated themselves and their actions underneath. They sat and talked to each other on the banks, and their doubles stood on their heads and mimicked them below, while round them the birds twittered and jawed according to their characteristic habits and species.

A woman and a man, with dark complexions, and clothed in kangaroo skins. At the distance they appeared just as they should be in that Australian bush picture—aboriginals pairing; but if the reader could have crept near enough, he would have been startled, and probably disappointed, at their language, for instead of the liquid flowing of the native tongue, they were conversing in unmistakable English,—that is, the woman was speaking in Devonshire English, and the man with a slight Hibernian roll on the R's, which sounded almost grotesque when compared with their tawny

complexions. As the eyes also looked from their dark setting, the woman's appeared colourless and out of place in their soft grayness, and the man's startlingly blue.

They had both been tempted by the fresh day, and had stolen out of the blacksmith's cottage earlier than they usually dared venture for their walk together. The two weeks of security had lulled their fears to sleep, and both were now thinking more upon their future than the present.

Two weeks of constant companionship and mutual danger had drawn them closer together. Marion no longer attempted to disguise from O'Bryan that he was more to her than any one else in that hostile land; yet he could not induce her, with all his specious arguments, to forget the stain which had ruined her prospects.

"Sure, Marion, if I know your innocence, what does it matter though the rest of the world believe you to be guilty?"

"Tyrall O'Bryan, it is of no use you trying to persuade me to forget that awful past. I come of a family of people who have been poor, but honest, for generations, and with whom theft is regarded as a greater crime and shame than even murder, bad as that is. I was brought up to have the same horror of it; and then all at once to be accused of stealing from my own master, and our squire. Ah! that was the worst blow which could have fallen upon me and mine."

"Tell me about it again, my dear; and try to miss nothing out. Perhaps you may now remember some small matter that did not strike you as of any importance at the other times, but which may now give me a hint."

They had often before talked over this page of life history, now, as the girl thought, for ever shut upon her; but O'Bryan always persisted in hearing it again in all its details before and after. He liked to dwell morbidly upon her love episode with her master's son; and probe her, even to his own unhappiness, upon her feelings at the time, and afterwards.

He had come to this land with only the patriot's love of home in his fiery heart. He was a "lifer," so that Ireland could only be regarded as a past memory; but for this interference of his, and provided that he did not consciously or unconsciously provoke the ill-will of any of his present masters, his fate need not have been a very hard one in his enforced adopted land. He would have been allowed a fair degree of liberty, for Governor Davey thought the cliffs of Van Dieman's Land sufficient safeguards for patriots, and did not

trouble any of them for paroles or promises. Occasionally he indulged in a fit of severity, as in the case of Marion, and put the whole country under martial law, flogging free men as well as convicts for any infringement of his severe and ridiculous regulations; but these fits seldom lasted long. A big spree generally concluded these tyrannical arrangements, with unlimited licence for both free and bound, until some startling outrages once more made this most erratic ruler pull up.

O'Bryan and Monkland had not been looked after at all upon their arrival at the settlement, beyond the registration of their names and sentences as convicts. They had gone to Peter Brown of their own free will in order to keep themselves, and save enough money to purchase some land. Possibly, if all had gone smoothly, they would have become settlers, and gradually forgotten the home troubles in the generous returns which this fertile and beautiful country would give them; or, if remembered at all, they would be only sentimental memories such as Scotsmen get up at times over a Jacobite ballad, and "Wha wadna fecht for thee, bonnie '*green Ireland*'?" substituted for the "Prince Charlie," which generally comes in with the sixth or eighth tumbler.

But this hope of bettering his position was destroyed by the active aid he had given in the rescue of this poor girl from the clutches of that vindictive profligate, Wilmott; and only one prospect opened up now, which was, escape from the Island, and concealment until the very doubtful opportunity occurred.

There was a Government reward of five pounds on each of their heads. To this had been added, within the last few days, a private reward of ten pounds for either of them, dead or alive, from Captain Wilmott,—a sure sign that he was getting better, and meant to spare no means of having them back again. Thirty pounds was a large sum to offer for the capture of two escaped convicts in those hard-up days of the colony, and made their position doubly critical.

Hitherto, however, they had kept their identity concealed from all the inmates of the house, excepting Peter Brown and the immediate members of his family, so that none of the assigned hands knew or suspected that the sick native and his companion were not all that they appeared to be. They saw Tyral and Marion sometimes in the distance, and only the *bona-fide* native at all close; and they both knew very well that they could be in no safer or more comfortable place than their present hiding-place.

Tyral had cleared up the mind of Marion as regards the

picnic charge against her, and they both felt that, with time and diligence, they might be able to expose the Captain and his instruments for their vile plot if they could only retain their freedom.

John Whitehouse and the blacksmith were both busy getting up evidence on their behalf, and hopeful that a chance would come for them to gain the ear of the Governor when he was in a good mood, and inclined to listen to justice; then, perhaps, the groaning prisoners would be relieved of this evil oppressor, while Marion and O'Bryan might once more appear openly. For this they waited and prayed for more than for escape.

"It is a beautiful land, Marion," O'Bryan would say to her, "and if you would only consent to cast away the past, we could both be happy and prosperous in it, that is, if you can love me enough to share it with me."

"Tyral, I do love you, and you are in reality my first love, for that past time was only a young girl's fancy founded on a foolish pride. Now I have suffered, and know myself; but you are an honest man, and I am a convicted thief, and I shall never come to any honest man, or cause him to blush and hang his head for his wife, as my father and mother have had to do for their daughter. I never was a thief, but that does not matter now, since I have been branded as a thief, and stamped for life now for my second crime."

Marion smiled bitterly through her brown paint, while her grey eyes glittered with hopeless passion.

"No, no, Tyral; best give up all thought of me as a wife. It is hopeless to think that I shall ever be cleared in the eyes of the law of that first crime. It is vain to think that my people will ever be able to hear their daughter mentioned without a curse in their hearts. I am branded for life as a thief. I can never more be their innocent, happy Marion. Perhaps they are both dead—dead from shame. I know that it will be the cause of their death when they die, if they are not already dead. Perhaps our old home is broken up, and my brothers and sisters scattered in all directions. I don't know, and I never shall hear any more about them. None of them ever learnt to write; and even if they could, they would not write to this disgrace. I am doomed, Tyral—doomed to shame and misery!"

The poor girl wailed as she clasped her stained hands together—wailed with dry, burning eyes; the time for tears had long since passed away.

"No, Marion, my darling, you are not doomed to misery," answered O'Bryan brokenly. "If I could think this I should have lost all that is worth living for: my faith in eternal justice, my belief in a God."

"Is there a God?" asked Marion drearily, looking with fixed eyes on the lake in front of her. "Can there be a loving Father watching over this world, who does not let a sparrow fall to the ground without noting it, Tyral? or is not that God too busy looking after the sparrows to be able to spare time to attend to the likes of us?"

She clutched his naked arms wildly, while she continued,—

"Does this God ever look down upon Van Dieman's Land, on the beasts who are placed over us? I know the lightning sometimes comes and strikes down the trees; but are they not, like the sparrows, under His special charge? What of us and our miseries, what of us and our shame, while these monsters are permitted to live and whip us into sin or death?"

Marion Carter almost shrieked the last words as she held him by the arm, while her grey eyes blazed into his blue ones with a baleful light.

"Hush, Marion; I do believe in God; I do trust in eternal justice, and the final triumph of innocence, and the righting of wrong. See, already Captain Wilmott has not escaped."

"He!" replied Marion scornfully. "What are the scars he has received in comparison to the souls and bodies which he and his kind have already ruined? The punishment is not a thousand part heavy enough for his iniquities. Ah! he belongs to the favoured ones, and we belong to the overburdened."

"Never mind that now, Marion. Tell me over again your life."

"You know it, Tyral, as far as I know it myself. My father was the Squire's gamekeeper and lodgekeeper, and Harry, the Squire's son, played with me at the gates when we were children. He was a good and a generous boy, if timid by nature—different from you, Tyral, for I had to do all the fighting then."

Tyral had a mental picture of this young Squire—a pale-faced, ricketty boy whom he could have crushed under his strong hand like a rotten branch. He ground his teeth, and waited to hear the rest.

"Then I went as housemaid, when I was old enough, to

the big house, where they were all very kind and made a lot of me, for Master Harry was at college at the time. When he came home we were as good friends as we used to be, and I never gave him a thought past friendship, until one night, when he met me in the carriage road, going down to see father and mother, and told me that he loved me."

"You loved him, then, Marion?"

"Yes, I think I did at the time. It was my first sweetheart, and it came upon me so sudden, that I never thought of saying no to him, the young master."

"Always the master," groaned O'Bryan.

"Yes, Tyral; I was a country girl at the time, and a peasant born, to whom the master meant what the king might mean to the lords and ladies of the court. I wasn't then the branded felon who can look with open eyes upon life. He did me a great honour, for he asked me to marry him, and he came without delay to my father and asked for his consent.

"My father was frightened at it, and went straight to the Squire, offering to take me away if he liked; but the old Squire would not hear of such a thing. He swore and pooh-poohed it all as nonsense, and ordered me to stay where I was, for he would soon bring Harry to his senses.

"They had a wild scene of it at the first, for Harry was obstinate, and would not give in; while I didn't know what to do. I offered to leave several times after these quarrels, for Harry wanted me to go away, but his father would not hear of it. He insisted on me staying where I was, and treated me the same as ever, only venting his ill-nature on his son.

"It was while affairs were at this pass that the things were missed at the Hall. The silver spoons and forks were found short, and the butler complained to the master. Then he sent for a detective from London down, who ordered all our boxes to be searched. A spoon was found in mine, Tyral, for I saw it taken out, although how it got there I cannot tell."

"Had you been over your box before that?"

"I generally took Sunday afternoon to sort my things up, and I had done so the Sunday before. It was Thursday when the detective found the spoon."

"And your box had no lock on it?"

"No; none of our boxes had at the Hall, for we were all neighbours, and could trust each other."

"And you saw no one near your room?"

"No one at all!" answered Marion. "I can accuse no one,

for all my fellow-servants, male and female, were tenants of the Squire's, and friends of my own."

"Did you ever sleep away from the Hall of a night?"

"Yes; every Wednesday I got a night off."

"While at the Hall, did you have a room to yourself?"

"No; the second cook slept with me," answered Marion.

"Did she sleep at the Hall on that last Wednesday?"

Marion thought for a moment, and then said,—

"No; now I think of it, she had gone home sick for two days before that, and only came back on the Thursday."

"What about the Squire; did he sit up late at nights?"

"Always; he generally went round the house to see if all was right before he retired."

"I thought so, Marion. It was the Squire who stole the forks and spoons, and the good name of your parents, in order to prevent a misalliance. Tell me, dear, are you quite sure that you have got over your love for Harry?"

"Tyrall, I never loved Harry. I liked him always, but a true woman loves only once during her lifetime."

As she spoke, she placed her brown hand within his, and looked at him with her clear grey eyes, which appeared so out of harmony with that dark paint.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MIST-CLOUD.

"You see, Tyrall, that it is useless for either you or I to deceive one another any longer. I know that you believe me innocent as I know myself to be, and that is one bond of sympathy between us. I am as miserable as a hopeless woman can be, who sees the probability of a long, lonely life before her; you are not too happy either,—another tie; therefore it would only be affectation on my part if I trifled with your honest love, or made any excuse except the right one for not having you."

"Ah, Marion, I know you to be a true and a noble woman,"

murmured O'Bryan, still holding her hand and looking at her with moistened eyes; "the truest and the noblest."

"Well, I am an honest girl, at any rate, if not too well educated. We Devon women don't generally mince matters any more than our men do; and when we like, we say it, and when we hate, we act. I liked my master's son, because we were boy and girl together; but I love you, Tyral O'Bryan, as a woman should love the man she would like to marry and live always with. But for all that there is a gulf between us which nothing can bridge over on this side the grave—a gulf of shame which I cannot step across; and so it is best for us to face the inevitable, and be as good friends to each other as we can, as long as we are together."

"You are wrong, Marion; there is a bridge, and I have faith enough to believe that it will be put over that gulf, since you will not cross it of your own accord, or let me jump over to you; and that is, your innocence being proved."

"Ah, Tyral, speed that bridge; and when it comes, if ever it does, I will be your wife if you then want me, with my scarred back."

"Every graved stamp will be a mouth to kiss and love, my darling; every raised welt a token to make me trust you through life—badges of purity which a martyr might wear with pride, and a husband adore. But say, Marion, if the time ever comes when you stand a free and justified woman in the eyes of the world, and the choice lies before you, between position and love, will you still say the same?"

"What do you mean, Tyral?"

"If the master's son should come to prove your innocence, with the offer that any true man should make, to right you and make you the mistress when once you were the maid, what would you say?—how would you decide between the convict and the gentleman?"

"I never loved the gentleman, Tyral, but I love the convict. Is that not answer enough?"

"God bless you, my darling!"

It was a solemn promise, and a solemn moment. Tyral O'Bryan leaned forward and caught her to his heart, while their doubles in the lake, mimicking them, seemed to become only one kangaroo-clad figure. Then they sprang apart and to their feet with sudden alarm, while O'Bryan hastily pulled out his pistol and cocked it.

"Stop, O'Bryan; for the love of God don't shoot!" As

the strange voice broke upon the startled pair of lovers, from the belt of bushes which grew above the bank, a figure burst from them, and came rolling down.

"Mat Tucker!" exclaimed O'Bryan, in his astonishment forgetting entirely his *rôle* as a native.

"Yes, O'Bryan; the soldiers are after you; they know where you have been hiding."

"Ah, and how did you know, Mat Tucker, where we were hiding?"

"I saw you together last night," faltered Mat.

"Then you have betrayed me, you miserable hound!" And Tyrall, springing forward, shook the little wretch as a terrier might a mouse.

"Don't, O'Bryan; I haven't betrayed you," cried Mat, with his teeth chattering. "I have come here to warn you, so that you might escape; only you must look alive, or they will be here after you."

"Where are they now?"

"They are at the smithy, searching for you."

"How did you know where to find us?"

"I didn't know nothing about it. I was making my own way up the mountain when I heard your voices, and thought to give you the straight tip."

"Then you are running away also, Mat? why, you are wounded!"

"Yes," replied Mat, a little faintly. "I came over to the lake to get a drink and wet a bandage for my leg; that's how I saw and heard you."

"Let me bind it up for you, Mat, and forgive me for shaking you," said O'Bryan remorsefully, when he saw that the little man was wounded and bleeding. "Quick, Marion; dip this rag into the water and bring it to me, while I hold up the little chap; he must have left a broad track of blood drops all the way up, which will lead them straight to us if we don't stop it."

Mat Tucker, now that he found himself in some one's care, had given way, and was leaning, gasping, in Tyrall's arms. He had been fired at and hit on the shoulder as he was running away from the "Black Swan," but knowing his fate if he were caught, had kept running on with the soldiers after him, and, straining every nerve for freedom, had managed to evade and outstrip them.

O'Bryan took the piece of shirt which Marion had wet, and bound it tightly round the breast and shoulder.

"There, Mat ; do you feel some better ? Do you think you can manage to walk with us ?"

"I must, Tyral, I must, or else it's all up with me ; for Captain Wilmott is the man who has set them on me—him and that blasted Taggart. We must do more than walk ; we must run if we would escape. Come on, Tyral, come on."

Mat started to his feet and tried to steady himself for a run, as a drunken man sometimes tries to do when he finds that he cannot walk straight ; seeing which, O'Bryan caught him by the arm on the unwounded side, and, with Marion on the other, set off up the bank towards the trees as fast as he was able with his double drag. For a few yards Mat kept on bravely, then he suddenly stopped short, and reeled to right and left.

"Hold up, old chap," cried O'Bryan, also stopping, and slipping his arm round the little man.

"It's no good, O'Bryan, I'm done for, and I can't make another step. Look here, I don't want to be taken back, for I can't stand the triangles ; do me a good turn afore you go on, mate."

"But I don't intend to go on, Mat, without you."

"Yes, you must, if you don't want to be taken, for they cannot be far behind us. I saw them turn into the smithy more'n half an hour ago, and Peter Brown cannot keep them long off the scent. Now, do what I want you, and then look after yourselves."

"What is it ?"

"Lift me up and chuck me into the pond ; it's precious deep, they say, and I cannot swim, so it will soon be all over with me. Save a lot of trouble to all of us—save a lot of pain to me."

With a gasp, Mat was sinking through Tyral's arm, when he loosened his hold on Marion, and caught the other round the waist, lifting him upon his shoulder so that Mat's head hung over his back.

"Can you manage to run alone, Marion ?" Tyral asked, all the while listening intently for sounds from below.

"Yes, yes ; don't think about me ; I can easily keep up with you. Let us go on at all risks ; don't let me be taken back to Hobart Town alive."

"I won't, Marion, don't fear ; I'll kill you first rather. Now for it—come."

He set off, with his burden over his shoulder and Marion beside him, up the mountain side. They had only reached the

shelter of the blue gum belt, when they heard the loud voice of Peter Brown echoing through the air.

"I tell you, boys, you are making a big mistake, and will have your journey up Pooranetteré for nought; there's none of the escaped prison-birds got up there. Best come back and have a pipe in the smithy, and not wear your shins amongst the rocks."

Honest Peter was shouting after the soldiers in order to give the refugees timely notice.

"Hey, there's a storm brewing over the hills, I can see, and it'll be down on ye before sunset; then you'll be lost in the bush. You don't know how dangerous it is up there, I can tell you."

O'Bryan and Marion stopped to listen for a reply to the blacksmith's warning, so as to know where their pursuers were, and were startled to hear them so near at hand. In another moment, if they had stopped by the lake, they would have been seen.

"All right, blacksmith; we won't go too far up to-night, unless we get on their tracks. Which is the best road up?" shouted back one of the soldiers.

"Keep well to your left after leaving the water hole. Are you there yet?"

"Yes," answered the soldier, as he burst from the cover at the other end of the tarn, followed by half-a-dozen more, and two convicts.

"These are the two prisoners who charged me at the picnic with stealing the guinea," whispered Marion softly into O'Bryan's ear as she leaned beside him.

"Ah, I'll remember the scoundrels," muttered O'Bryan, watching through the bushes the party, who now appeared at the opposite side of the lake.

"'Keep well to the left,' he said," cried out the corporal. "This is the left side, I should say."

"If you take my advice, you'll take exactly the opposite direction, sir, and keep well to the right, if you want to catch them prisoners," said one of the convicts to the corporal.

"Why should we do that, prisoner; do you know the road up?" asked the corporal, stopping.

"All roads are pretty much the same on these hills, sir; you've got to find out the easiest as you go along; only, if Peter the blacksmith tells ye to take the left road when you are after friends of his own, it's a pretty sure sign that they have taken the road to the right."

"I won't say but that you are right, prisoner," admitted the corporal, a little less stiffly. "Now, what would you advise us to do as a start?"

"Well, sir, if I may make myself bold, I'd say, start with this pond, since he mentioned it, and keep well on the right side; we may find out a trail that way."

"It is time we were moving," whispered O'Bryan. "Move softly, Marion, and come after me."

It was not easy to force a passage through the trees and bushes with that load on his back without making a noise. Still, Tyral and Marion went as gently as they could, taking as good care not to disturb the loose stones more than they could help.

The men were still speaking loudly by the lake's edge, but by this time too far distant to be heard distinctly; they had not as yet found the trail.

Up they climbed—O'Bryan sweating under his burden so heavily that the brown paint was beginning to roll down his face, leaving rivulets of the original white behind—over boulders and through closely-woven creepers and drooping branches; sometimes a stone or two slipped and rattled down the side of the hill, making what sounded in their ears like a great din. Had they found the trail yet? O'Bryan could not tell, for he could not see past a few feet, so densely grew the vegetation, and no sound of voices reached their ears.

"If the sun would only go down," he muttered through his set teeth.

But the sun was still a good two hours from the setting, so that they had to make the best of it.

They were now clambering the sides of a steep ridge, closely covered with thicket, through which they had to force their way; therefore they made very slow progress. If the soldiers had found their track, it would be easier work for them to follow in single file than for O'Bryan, for he was opening a path. He trusted, however, that they had gone on some other direction.

He did not know if he was going up the best way, or if he would find it passable, that had to be risked now; as long as it led upwards, *Excelsior* was the word! He paused once or twice to rest and listen, but heard no human sound behind him—only the noises of startled birds, with, perhaps, some hill marsupial bounding away.

After battling for over half-an-hour through the scrub and over the rocks, holding on and helping themselves up by the

roots and creepers, they began to get into more open ground—at least they had to cross bald patches between the vegetation, with upstarting masses of stone, over or round which they had to climb or creep, and which made their progress both wearisome and slow. O'Bryan dreaded these bald spots, and tried to skirt them as often as he could manage it.

"Oh, that the night would come!" he gasped huskily, for his throat was getting dry with his anxiety, and his knees beginning to tremble underneath his load.

"Let us rest for a little time here, Marion," he said, as they reached a huge mass of broken-up rock and scrub, while he laid down Mat and flung himself pantingly beside him, Marion following his example.

"I told you that I'd only hinder you," murmured Mat, who had recovered his consciousness, but was too weak to move.

"Nonsense, lad!" answered O'Bryan gruffly. "We are all in the same boat now, and must either sink or swim together."

"I wonder if we have escaped them, Tyral," whispered Marion.

"I fancy they will hardly venture up this length; not if they mean to get back to-night, for the sun will not be long now before it sets, the rays are already becoming reddish as they strike the leaves—see!"

He pointed through the opening above to where some of the upper branches and leaves were shining out ruddy and bright.

"In another hour it will be dusk."

"Is that a sun-ray, a waratah blossom, or a soldier's coat down there, Tyral?" asked Marion, pointing with her outstretched finger down the mountain-side, to where a little spot of scarlet glowed out for an instant and then became lost to view.

"I don't see it, Marion; where is it?"

"Ah, it has shifted; there it comes again, only higher up. It is part of a soldier's coat; they are following up in our track."

Tyral hastily sprang to his feet and lifted Mat again upon his shoulders, then up they scrambled once more—only now without their former precautions—over the rocks which crowned the first ridge; and then they found that they must go down again, for after the ridge came a dip.

It was a hasty rush down that dip, and a feeling of relief when they once more began to ascend. They were now

struggling up the sides of a rushing torrent which roared and foamed a short distance below their feet, over its rugged and rocky bed; but they rejoiced that they were well screened by the overhanging branches, with the tangled mass of hill ferns and young wood, while the roaring of that stream prevented their crushing along from being heard by those coming behind.

"Ah, we must turn back!" groaned O'Bryan; "there is a precipice blocking up our path in front."

"No, no, Tyral; don't turn back. Go on; if you can climb it, I can. There must be some way up."

O'Bryan said no more, but held on his course until they came to the rock-face, which rose fifty feet above them, while at their right side thundered a waterfall over it into the stream.

"Have you strength to hold on by me, Mat?"

"Yes, I think so," replied the wounded pickpocket.

"Then, hang on to my back. Marion, you go first, and I will look after that you do not fall."

It was a desperate climb up the sides of that waterfall—hard enough at the base, although the gnarled roots of trees, protruding through the crevices from the trunks growing above, helped them somewhat until they were about three parts up. After that they had to depend on the projecting masses and ledges for support.

Marion went first, and proved herself to be no mean climber, although, with such a fate as re-capture meant, a more timorous woman than she was might have found courage and strength enough to get up that rugged wall. O'Bryan, with his extra strain, followed in her wake, with his teeth clenched and his muscles strained to their utmost tension.

At last she managed to get hold of an overhanging branch, and drew herself over the top, amongst the grass and ferns, where she sank exhausted with her efforts, while O'Bryan was nerving himself for the final lift up which would place him and Mat beside her.

"By ——, there's two of them," shouted the hoarse voice of the convict. "I knew that we were on the right—"

The rest of his words were lost to Marion's ears by the roll of the musketry as the bullets rattled against the rocks, while at the same instant that the smoke rose up from the soldiers' muskets, it was dashed forward and absorbed in a sudden mist-cloud which swept up the gulley, and buried all within it in dense grey.

Marion sank back upon her perch with a low cry, and the next moment she was also wrapped up in that impenetrable, chilly wreath.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT THE BREAK OF DAY.

JOHN WHITEHOUSE had more than a passing triumph when he arrived in Hobart Town, with the hostile tribe along with his own followers, and announced his bloodless victory to the astonished Governor and his incredulous staff. They had sneered at his wild proposals to subjugate the natives as only the emanation from a cracked brain, but before the first results the most sceptical were compelled to sink dumb. There were the Oyster Bay tribe, their women and children, hitherto the whites' most bitter enemies, quietly marching into the settlement after the little visionary, and preparing to make their camp in the open space between the township and Sandy Bay.

The Governor puckered up his forehead into one of his comical contortions when John appeared before him, and informed him of his first success. Governor Davey used to shave clean, as was the fashion in those days. He had a strongly-marked and rubicund countenance, with a peculiar motion of the scalp, which, when he wanted to appear funny or express astonishment, he used to move backwards, drawing up his eyebrows until the skin appeared like a loose cowl all wrinkled. He was astonished now, and worked his whole face to express it more forcibly.

"You have brought down your first instalment of india-rubber, I see, Whitehouse. Now, I suppose they'll want a grand ceremony over their coming in, with rum and tobacco *ad libitum*?"

"No rum, your Excellency. If it is all the same to you, I'd rather leave out the two latter items from the ceremony of their submission."

"What, Whitehouse, leave out the two most important factors to peace and good-fellowship—Rum and Tobacco?"

Nonsense, man! You've done first-class service to the State, but don't spoil it at the last by cold-blooded Puritanism. It would be most unlucky, I tell you, to have a *dry* peace proclaimed. Go away to your *protégées*, and keep them in good order until to-morrow, when we'll have a general holiday in honour of this victory, and a rousing bonfire in the evening. By the way, Whitehouse, have you thought what to do with them, now that you have brought them in?"

The Governor made another grotesque contortion. It seemed such a comical thing to him to see this little enthusiast so energetic in helping the Government to despoil a nation of their lands and rights, all for the sake of religion. True, John was striving to save their lives and souls by luring them into submission instead of the ordinary practice which usurpers have of hunting them down like wild beasts; but the results came to practically the same end—the spoilation and extermination of the aborigines, and the sordid aggrandisement of the usurper. It was, indeed, comical to see this little man so earnest over the great work, and so simple-minded.

"I have promised to take them back to Oyster Bay, and let them continue to live there for the present as our friends and allies, instead of as our enemies," answered John gently.

"Right you are, Whitehouse; I will ratify all your promises. Make them happy while they remain our guests, and give them presents when they go away. I suppose they are quite willing to dispose of their land to Government as we may require it?"

"Yes," answered John sadly, as he bowed and withdrew from the genial presence. He knew well what the end of this contract would be as far as the black fellow was concerned, but this overpowering tide of civilisation he could not hope to stem. What he was doing was for another purpose—the saving of their immortal souls.

Mosquito had not come down with his friends; he could not trust the good promises of the genial Governor quite so far as that, and he was wise in this discretion after his late murders. He had retired into another portion of the island, and for the present was lying perdu.

The grand ceremony of submission on the side of the natives, and forgiveness on the part of the Government, took place the next day, in great state, and proved a day of great tribulation and anxiety to poor John, for, in spite of all his remonstrances, Colonel Davey insisted on his new friends

drinking with him and toasting to the success of their future league, so that, long before the bonfire was lit, the most of the savages, unaccustomed to the fiery spirit, were overcome, and lying about the camp helplessly drunk. It was the customary orgie on the part of the white population, so that when night fell upon them, and the large fire blazed out, the flames illuminated a scene not unlike what we are apt to imagine pandemonium to be; brown skin and white skin rushing about, interlaced and yelling, or lying in disgraceful attitudes on the ground, helpless and unconscious, while John wandered over the field, wringing his hands in despair, and moaning out, "O Lord, how long, O Lord, how long?"

Governor Davey, with his mistaken kindness, had driven the first nails into the coffins of these poor natives, and rendered the noble efforts of this visionary enthusiast useless, and now John Whitehouse could only mourn over the evil, and pray for patience.

The feasting did not wind up that day, but continued at intervals for many days after the Governor had ceased to give free drinks to his dark allies, for the chief, learning from some of Mathuna's men how money could be raised upon their lands, went to the Government Clerk of Works, and making his mark on certain documents, got promissory notes in return. With these he found his way over to the accommodating Ignatius Taggart, who enabled him and his people to continue their spree. The "Black Swan" was doing a thriving trade with these sons of the forest, while all the remonstrances of John were thrown away before the more potent influence of this new-born spirit of drink. His magnetism and the spirit of God had to sink under, so that, before he could once more waken them up to his eloquence, all the many fertile acres which had been theirs by right of birth were swept down their throats. When John Whitehouse did at last get them away from Hobart Town, the forest and the wilds had lost their attractions to these miserable outcasts, who were only allowed, through the indulgence of Government, and until they could be conveniently driven away, to return and die upon their native shores, landless and degraded drunkards.

At the cottage from which the Major had expelled, too late for his own peace, that evil genius Jane Lymburner, there reigned gloom and tears, for his poor jealous wife was dying; perhaps it was the only way out of her cureless misery, for her fatal disease had taken root with her own life-fibres, and

could never be torn out while her life lasted. It was a moral cancer of long standing, which had fed upon her very heart's blood until it had twisted every other emotion.

The Doctor could do nothing to stop that internal bleeding, and at last prepared the Major for the inevitable.

Wilfred Tregarthen, once more able to be up and about, did not any longer enjoy living at the cottage. He hated the proximity of illness and death, and always tried to get as far out of the atmosphere of gloom as he could manage, without outraging the proprieties, so he excused himself from encroaching any longer on the hospitality of Major Quinton gracefully and considerately enough, and took up his quarters once more at the bachelor portion of the barracks.

He did not any longer want to be bothered either with the trouble at the cottage or too much of Mathuna's company—a walk now and again in the sunshine, with her loving arm supporting him, was all that he now desired; therefore, with his usual tact and good taste, he impressed upon her how needful it was for her to stay and help Kate Ambrose and the Major in their trouble, and leave him as much as possible to himself.

Poor Mathuna, with that blindness which lovers, both civilised and savage, are proverbial for, did not penetrate his motive for urging her from his side; she saw only in this another noble trait in his god-like nature, and wishing to please him, as well as obeying her own kind instincts, she strove with all her might to emulate his self-sacrificing example, and obeyed his desires by remaining as he had asked her, with Kate, who was now very lonely and despondent.

It was a mighty sacrifice for Mathuna to make after all those days of almost complete possession and constant companionship with the man she loved so utterly, but love was beginning to make her very gentle and patient. "If he can do without me just now for the sake of this poor lady, why should I be so selfish as to complain; dear Wilfred, I must try to be more worthy of his unselfish love."

She no longer wondered at his coolness towards her advances. "It is his unselfishness. He cannot bear to be too happy himself when any one else is unhappy." So the fond young woman reasoned against the rebellion of nature, and tried to feel the better for her sacrifice by staying indoors and taking her share of the nursing, while her noble hero went out of the settlement to inhale the fragrance of the forest flowers and bask in the sunshine as he liked best, by himself. He was getting back his health and strength every day, and breathing

in with perfect enjoyment the early summer breezes. Simple in his tastes as a wild animal, he was once again finding the pleasure of living quite sufficient for him.

Mrs Quinton might have got over her first attack if she could have lain quiet, and been as contented as Wilfred Tregarthen had been, but that was an impossibility for her fierce and unquiet spirit.

For a little while she had felt true happiness when she knew that her husband had forgiven her, as he sat beside her smoothing her hands and whispering to her his love. For a very short time she lay passively drinking in the tender assurances, and feeling a sweet trust in his fidelity and truth, but not for long. She was chained to her bed, and he could not always be with her to watch his every look; sometimes he was absent on duty, and while he was gone from her side, she lay and brooded upon where he might be, and what doing now that he knew himself to be safe and out of her sight. Vile pictures floated before her mind constantly, and miserable suspicions, against which her better nature writhed and struggled till she exhausted herself and became like a struggling victim with the arms of a monster octopus, which was slowly strangling her while the thousand suckers pinched her flesh and stung her to madness.

She had no repose, no chance of getting out of the demon clutches as she lay with heaving breast and burning eyes, thinking, thinking and building up those hideous theories. There was Kate and Mathuna in the house constantly along with her husband, and she was in their power and unable to do without them. Sometimes she woke up from a dream-haunted sleep to hear the voices whispering together, Kate and her husband sitting close together and speaking softly to each other for fear of disturbing her. Then she would lie with closed eyes and strain her ears to hear the words, and when she could not catch them, her morbid mind supplied what she could not hear, all to her own torment. Sometimes Mathuna waited upon her while Kate was taking a rest, and the Major was at the barracks. "Where were the guilty pair while Mathuna, the false friend, kept guard?" Ah, it was misery—misery.

Or, perhaps, Kate would be there with her sympathetic eyes, while Mathuna and her husband were both out of sight; false eyes, feigned sympathy they seemed to her distorted fancy. They were only waiting until the tardy end while she lay already lapped in the flames of hell, the only hell

for all miserable sinners or unfortunates such as she was, consuming flames of their own lighting up.

Hours of torture these were which hurried her forward to the edge of the dark gulf over which she would fall, and so lose all that she craved for so hungrily, and which she had always pushed so madly from her grasp—this all-devouring love which had been her bitter torment, and which was now killing her so swiftly, poor, self-immolating victim that she was.

And yet there were moments of exquisite surcease, when the monster octopus relaxed its grasp to gather strength for a fresh hug. Then, like the doomed wretch when released from the rack, she enjoyed a brief respite from her agonies, and felt all the delights of a heart possessed. Then her rich amber eyes would soften and melt under the glance of her husband, and her breaking heart would flutter like a bird's under his tender touch. How she loved him then. At the soft touch of his lips her passionate soul would break from its cruel fetters, and float away to heaven. He was her only love—her first and her last grand passion.

Twice the Doctor had been called for suddenly to stop the fresh outburst. The second time had occurred one night when Mathuna was with her alone. The third breaking of the blood-vessel was when she had started up from a nightmare, in which she had seen Kate in her husband's arms. As she opened her eyes she saw them sitting together at the far side of the room on the couch, with the lamp lowered so that she could not make them out very distinctly. Panting from the horror of her dream, that one uncertain glance killed her; with a hoarse cry she fell forward, swamping the coverlet with her life-blood.

When the Doctor came, he made her once more as comfortable as he could, and managed again to stop the flow from her lips. Then he beckoned the Major outside, and told him that she was dying.

"I'll stay till morning with you, Major. It will be all over then. You can speak to her now, for that last medicine I gave her will enable her to answer you."

The Doctor was right; she did not bleed any more, for she was nearly drained out. Like a white lily she lay on her husband's breast, and drifted slowly away from him.

He could not speak much in that last farewell, for his despair was too deep for words, and she could only whisper faintly in return; but they looked into each other's eyes, and

became once more united in the perfect faith and knowledge which death sometimes allows before it gives the final cut.

"Now I know, Reginald, how mad I have been, and that you have always loved me," the white lips whispered, as she looked at him with large, luminous, wondering eyes.

"Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling!"

"I can read your heart now, Reginald, and know that I need have had no fear; and I cannot understand why I was afraid, my own true love."

Mathuna and Kate were both kneeling beside the bed, Kate praying and weeping for her poor, blinded aunt, who had only received her sight so late. Mathuna was also crying softly as she listened to the words which Kate sobbed out, and wondering what they meant; for Wilfred Tregarthen had forgotten to tell her anything about religion, and she had not as yet given John Whitehouse a chance to speak to her. He was in the other room with the Doctor, waiting to be called in, being the only man of religion in the settlement.

The dying woman did not appear to be conscious of any one else excepting her husband's presence in that room. Her eyes were beaming into his with a luminous flame as he stooped over her, as if her lingering spirit was stretching out and reaching into his heart before unfolding its wings, so that it might get its final draught of earth-strength to bear it on its long journey.

So the minutes passed, and the lamp on the table began to burn dimly, for the pale glow of approaching dawn was creeping through the window blind.

The Doctor came softly in, for he knew that with the light that spirit would go. He had timed his medicine for this. Behind him crept John Whitehouse, who also knelt quietly down between Kate and Mathuna, praying softly.

"Oh, Almighty God, receive this soul. Oh, Heavenly Messenger, bear it safely home."

"Reginald, my own true love."

With a contented smile upon the quivering lips, the luminous flame leapt out of her clear eyes into the eyes of her husband; and then darkness fell upon the dim cavities. Day had come.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CONVERSION OF MATHUNA.

"WHAT is God?" asked Mathuna to John Whitehouse, as they both passed into the outer room from the chamber of death, leaving the Major and his niece behind them.

"God is love, Mathuna. God is life. God is all that we require to be happy for ever."

What John Whitehouse had been long seeking and wishing for had now come to him. This girl, with her grand spirit, who had evaded him for so long, had now come to him, filled with the desire for that knowledge which he had yearned to impart to her. His heart glowed with gratitude and exultation that this boon had been granted to him, even while he prayed for strength to lead her rightly.

It was a difficult task which he had before him, to open up this mind to the spiritual insight of ethics and things unseen; and often she brought him up abruptly with child-like but most pertinent questions, before which his defective reasoning qualities faltered and had to shy aside; but his heart was in his work, and the magnetic power of his eyes, and rugged but passionate eloquence affected her in spite of herself, and awoke in her the vague unrest which revivalists speak of as the premonitory symptoms of conversion.

"Is God the Maker of love?"

"He is Love itself, all embracing, and all satisfying," answered John.

Mathuna thought for a moment; but she did not express her thought, because she had already reached the shy and jealous stage of affection, when it seems a kind of sacrilege to speak of it to a stranger.

She thought, "Then Wilfred must be God; for to me he is all satisfying, and he is love."

She did not utter this thought, but, wishing for more particulars about this idol, she next asked,—

"Where does this love-God live?"

"His footstool is the earth, and His throne is in heaven. That means, Mathuna, that He is everywhere—in us, around us, and above us."

"Ah!"—Wilfred was not quite so boundless. "Does He live in Hobart Town?"

John meditated for a little time. Did God live in this

convict hell, where the rulers were devils incarnate? Then, true to his faith, he bravely crushed down the excusable doubt, and answered,—

“Yes, He is even in Hobart Town. Listen, Mathuna, and I will try to explain what He is, and what He has done for us unhappy sinners.”

“Stop, John; you say ‘us unhappy sinners.’ Now, that is altogether wrong of you, for that would mean me also, which is not true, for I am not a sinner. I have never done anything wicked in my life, nor would I.”

“You have slain people, Mathuna, and that is wicked,” said John gently.

“No; I have killed my enemies, but that is not wicked, that is good; for if I had not slain them they would have killed me and my people. And then, again, you say ‘unhappy.’ Now, I am not unhappy. I was some time ago, before the picnic and the fight—I was a little unhappy—but now I am as happy as the cockatoos when they pair, for—” she paused, and added under her breath—“I have found my mate, and my beloved loves me.”

“Listen to me, Mathuna, and I will try to tell you how we all came to be unhappy and sinners, without knowing it sometimes, and how ‘Our Heavenly Father’ came to save us.”

“Yes, let me hear about it.”

“A very long time ago, when this world was first made, God planted a large garden, and created a man and a woman to look after it, and be happy with one another.”

“Ah, that was a good God, if He gave them love also,” answered Mathuna, with sparkling eyes. This was a pretty story.

“Yes, He gave them love, and also everlasting life, as long as they obeyed Him, and did nothing wrong.”

“And did they not?”

“No; they committed a great sin, for which they were driven out of the garden, and lost all their hopes of living for ever; then God sentenced them to death.”

“Quite right of God. I’d have done the same,” replied Mathuna calmly. “What did they do?”

“God planted a fruit-tree in the garden, and told them that they were not to touch it, but all the other trees they could eat from; but one day the devil came like a snake and tempted the woman, until she stole some of the fruit, and gave it to her husband, so they both tasted it, and were punished.”

“What a greedy pair they were. But, John, you said

that God was everywhere; why did He not see and stop that serpent from coming in?"

"It is too long a story to explain why now, Mathuna, but I will some day, and then you will see how necessary it was for us that the serpent should be allowed to come into the garden."

"If it was necessary that the serpent should tempt them to steal, perhaps it was also necessary for us that they should steal. Go on, John; what happened next?"

"Death came into the world, and sin and misery; all their children—for we come from these first parents—were condemned to die."

"Because they had been tempted to steal that fruit! Ah, go on."

"A long time passed, and then God took pity upon poor men and women, and sent His only Son to die for them, so that they might live."

"Was this necessary to—"

"Yes. What would you do if there was no other way of saving the one you loved excepting to die, Mathuna?"

"Then I would die myself. I would not send any one else to do it for me."

"That is what God did."

John tried to explain to Mathuna the mystery of the Trinity, in which, however, he was not so successful as afterwards, when he warmed up and spoke of the wonderful love of the Saviour of mankind. Here he grew eloquent as he told the pathetic story of divine abnegation; how He came poor and lowly; how He lived a life of sacrifice, His torture on the cross, and His forgiveness of all His enemies.

Mathuna put no more questions to him when he came to this portion. She was too much affected by the pathos and tenderness of the great sacrifice to be able to reason why it had to be done. John spoke with his heart in his voice, and the tears in his eyes; and Mathuna, filled with that late death-bed scene, wept with him out of her womanly tenderness and pity for the Crucified One.

When John left her, she was subdued, and ready for his next visit. Then he came again, and showed her how this lesson of love and forgiveness had been given to men and women, so that they might love and forgive one another.

He taught her the "Lord's Prayer," with the need she had for constant prayers for every action or step which she took in life.

Altogether, John was satisfied with her progress towards grace; she was growing very gracious and gentle, and listened to all that he said with deep attention.

And, like Kate, she began to pray for what she wanted most on earth—the love of Wilfred. What had been before an unuttered wish, she could now put into words, and pour out within her chamber, with the feeling that she had an unseen Listener who could not only hear and sympathise with her, but also help her.

“O Heavenly Father, make him speak to-day!”

It seemed so easy now for her to be good and forgiving. She charmed John with her naïve simplicity, and the interest which she took in all their conversations, so that he became elated with this other victory, and boasted about it, as even the best men will; so that soon the entire settlement knew that Mathuna had become a Christian.

At the instigation of John, Mathuna went with him to see her ancient enemy, the chief of the Oyster Bay tribe, and remonstrate with him upon his backsliding. It was a great sign of her change that she consented to hold friendly converse with this warrior, for, as she explained, he had in former days attempted to carry her off, which had been one of the causes of her losing her patrimony; but she went, and forgave him all his past delinquencies, and reasoned with him upon the error of his present ways.

She was successful, for the chief had paid all his promissory notes into the hands of Taggart, and, having no more credit in the town, had perforce to bring his drinking bout to a close. He listened to her warning words with a very dry mouth and bloodshot eyes, but still with attention, and once more came under the influence of his protector. So, one fine morning, soon after the funeral of Mrs Quinton, the ruined chief gathered his followers together, and, striking his camp, left Hobart Town sadly, and retraced his way, along with John Whitehouse, to the distant east coast.

Mathuna had turned wonderfully good and docile, and was a great comfort to Kate and the Major in their affliction, and as Wilfred once more began to drop in to see them, she was beginning to taste the pleasures of a good and prayerful life. That constant prayer of hers that he might speak and make her happy “to-day,” had not yet been granted, but she had faith that it would be, and so waited expectantly, and tried to prepare herself by extra self-sacrifice for this great reward.

Ignatius Taggart heard of the wonderful spiritual change

which had taken place in Mathuna, and as he sat in his parlour, listening to the dead men's chains, and touched the strings of his violin, the news engendered a plan in his fertile brain whereby his patron, Captain Wilmott, might be also rendered a little happier by this conversion—an inspiration which was almost worthy of his ghastly surroundings.

"George, my boy, I think I'll take a turn over to the barracks to-night to hear how the Captain is keeping. It lies on your way home; see me over, will you?"

George de la Motte was sitting smoking in the bar, and started up with alacrity. He was getting into Taggart's debt, and so dare neither to stop away nor disoblige the blind master. Each visit made his chalking-up grow larger, and himself more of a slave to the landlord of the "Black Swan."

"Finish your drink first, George, and call for another if you like; I'm in no hurry," said the blind man, touching the ugly cut upon his cheek which Mat had made with the slate that morning before he bolted, even while he grinned.

"Oh, I must be going, as the Major expects some company to supper to-night, and I have to wait at table," answered George, gulping down the contents of his glass hurriedly.

"Well, how are you getting on with the old 'un?" asked Taggart, as they got into the open air.

"First-rate," replied George, with forced airiness. He did not feel very happy along with Taggart, who was now clutching his arm with crab-like tenacity.

"I hope so, George, my boy. Thirty thousand pounds sterling ain't to be winked at."

"Oh, it all depends upon me now. Since our return she can hardly let me out of her sight; she is dead nuts on me, I can tell you."

"I don't wonder at it, my royal George," chuckled the blind man shrilly. "What about the other ones?"

"Oh, they're out of it—completely out of it. Here you are, Taggart, at the Captain's door."

"All right, lad; I'll get his man to see me home, I dare say. Good night."

"Good night," answered George, hurrying away.

When the blind man entered, Wilmott was reclining on an easy chair, with his face covered with a handkerchief as far as the mouth, which was left free for the accommodation of his pipe and glass. Miss Lymburner was sitting at the other side of the table, engaged in working a pair of slippers with silk and beads.

"Well, Taggart," said the Captain, fixing his one free eye on the blind man, "have you come to tell me that O'Bryan and Carter are caught?"

"I have no doubt but that this news will be coming in late to-night. The soldiers are still out after them. I have dropped over to give you a bit of news, and lay before you an idea which occurred to me to-night concerning Mathuna."

Taggart spoke obsequiously to the Captain, for he was as much in this tyrant's power as most of the convicts were in his.

"— Mathuna! What about her?"

"They tell me that she has become converted."

"What the devil has that to do with me?" snarled Wilmott savagely, while Jane laid down her slipper, and folded her two white hands on the tablecloth in front of her.

"She's all on the forgiving and forgiven lay just now. She wants to be at peace with all her enemies."

"Well, what is that to me?" growled the Captain.

"Yes, Taggart, tell us your idea," said Jane gently. She could read men, and knew Taggart by this time, and so respected his ideas when he had any.

"Well, Miss and Captain, I was just thinking that she would want you to forgive her next, and be friends."

"Me forgive that she demon!" echoed the Captain wrathfully.

"Yes, sir. I was just thinking that my house, being convenient and out of the way, would be a very good place for a reconciliation between you and her to happen in, so I came to offer it to you for the purpose."

"What do you mean, Taggart?"

"It's a quiet place, the 'Black Swan,' after the customers leave of a night, and the tide flows handy, while I have a good strong cellar underneath the kitchen; and I was thinking that, if you could make up your mind to forgive her for these welts of yours, the young lady here might make a secret appointment with her to come and see you some afternoon without letting any one know, then you could shake hands and part like good Christians."

Taggart paused, with an ugly leer on his sightless face, and waited. After a still pause, Jane spoke.

"It is a very good idea indeed, Mr Taggart, and I think can be carried out beautifully. Get your cellar ready for to-morrow night, and I'll bring this converted heathen along to be forgiven."

“Ah!” The Captain leaned back in his easy-chair, with that grunt of satisfaction. “Now I see what you mean, Taggart. Will you be able to manage her, Jane?”

“Yes, easily,” replied Jane sweetly.

“Then help Taggart to a drink, dear, and arrange the matter between you; only leave me the duty of forgiveness.”

“Yes, Edward; you shall have that pleasure, I promise you.”

When a little while after this Ignatius rose to go, Miss Lymburner was good enough to be his guide home. She went with him into the kitchen, and looked over the cellar, and had a quiet chat with Mrs Taggart; after which she returned to her now accepted lover, for Wilmott had declared his passion, and had been accepted by this talented woman.

Next morning she called upon Mathuna at the hour she knew the Major and Kate would be from home, and was fortunate enough to find her alone.

She spoke with regret about the quarrel which had driven her from the cottage, and with tearful affection about the dead lady, who, she said, had been her only earthly friend.

“Although, Mathuna, I have come to lean more upon a Heavenly Friend—the Father of the fatherless, and the Friend of sinners.”

Mathuna, who had nothing personal against Jane, was touched and delighted with the pious tone of the conversation; and so, when the poor half-civilised savage had been artfully led up to the point, Jane sprung her mine.

“You know, dear, that I have been nursing Captain Wilmott? He has been very ill since your attack.”

“I am sorry that I hurt him so much, Jane, and I hope that he will forgive me.”

“That is just part of my message to-day. Poor fellow! while he has been ill, I have spoken seriously to him, and he has come to see the error of his ways. He has repented, and wishes to prove it by forgiving you.”

“Oh, I am so glad! Can I see him, and have the assurance from his own lips?”

“Yes, if you like,” answered Jane slowly; “only he is sensitive about being seen himself in his present state, and would not like any one to know yet about his repentance.”

“I will not tell any one anything about it,” answered

Mathuna simply; and Jane knew that she would keep her word.

"Then meet me about five o'clock this afternoon, Mathuna, outside the town, over at yonder point, and I'll take you to him."

Jane Lymburner pointed over to a distant tree, half-way between the settlement and Sandy Point, and took her departure.

At five o'clock Mathuna found Jane beside the tree indicated, and together the pair passed over the short distance between it and the "Black Swan," and disappeared within its hospitable portals.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TIGER-WOLF AND TIGER-MAN.

WHEN Marion Carter opened her eyes, the mist was clearing away, while through it she could see the sky flecked over with patches of scarlet and purple, before a deep green upper space. The sun had gone down, and was shooting up a dying glare.

She raised herself to her knees, and stooping forward on her hands, peered over the edge of the precipice into that sea of rolling cloud which began to reveal dark golden stains where the tree-tops were showing themselves through it; but she seemed to be alone, with only that awful roaring and thundering of waters falling beside her into the far-off pool; her lover and his load had disappeared.

As she watched, a grimy hand was stretched out of the thin mist, and clutched at the branch which had helped her up; then the other hand followed, and quickly on that, the face of the climber. With a wild shriek she recognised it, and fled blindly forward; it was the brutish face of the convict who had charged her with theft at the picnic.

She heard a hoarse chuckle sent after her as she rushed upwards; the man had seen her and was after her, but, fortunately for her, the noise of the torrent drowned her footsteps, although, as she was barefoot, she did not make much noise, except for the breaking of branches; also, the night was com-

ing on fast, and that friendly mist had not yet left her. She had no longer leisure to think about the fate of her lover; the mortal terror of being caught by that horrible man was upon her, whilst the instinct of self-preservation urged her forward.

In her girlish days she had often ran barefoot amongst her native cliffs and glens, but the long-acquired habit of boots had made her feet tender, yet her week of exercise and seclusion had hardened them a little again, so that, while the daylight had been with them, and she had been able to see where she was going, it was not so bad.

Now she could not pick her footsteps; she might tread on a deadly snake, and be bitten, or over rough stones and prickles; any of these sharp stings which she felt as she sped on might be a snake-bite; she almost hoped that a diamond or black snake would bite her, and so end her misery, then it would be so easy to die.

A stupor and a falling gently to sleep—that is the effect of a snake-bite; just one slight prick like a fine needle piercing the skin, and then balmy sleep; would that not be better than flying about the mountain with such a horror curdling her blood?

If that awful man caught up to her, what would she do? Tyrall had given her one of his loaded pistols and a knife in case of accidents; these she wore in the belt which held together her kangaroo-skin robe; could she use it? Yes; she was no longer the timid girl, for something in that evil face and those bleary eyes which met hers as he lifted his head above the edge of the precipice, told her that she must not hesitate, if he overtook her, to shoot him at once.

She gripped at the butt of the pistol as she ran, and took it out of her belt without as yet cocking it. She was now above the belt of the trees, and had left the mountain torrent behind her, and was getting amongst the bare grass and tumbled boulders; upwards, she saw the organ-pipe-like cliffs above her looming darkly, for the ghostly glare of twilight had faded, and the night was approaching fast.

She was exhausted with her late efforts, and her feet and legs were bleeding from the many tumbles she had experienced, so at last, meeting a mass of loose boulders over which she hadn't the strength to climb, she crept under one of the overhanging masses, and lay trembling and wondering if she had evaded her dreaded hunter.

It was now night, and the stars were sparkling clearly

overhead from that green-blue vault above her as she lay panting, with that jetty ledge in front. Far below, she could make out the bay, with a spark or two of light here and there, faint and orange-tinted. They were beginning to light their lamps at the settlement, and here was she, a hunted outcast on the mountains, half naked, and without a hope.

Far away in merry England, they would be burning their candles, while from the October logs the flames would be spluttering and blazing in the lodge and up at the Hall.

Dear England! Sweet, sweet Devon! Would she never see them again?

A heavy snort sounded near to her, only on the other side of the rocks, and she held her breath while she listened intently; one man only, breathing and snorting as he pushed upwards and to the left.

It might be O'Bryan with his burden, or that awful convict who was so much worse than death to think about, and so she dare not speak or even breathe until he had gone.

She was rested now, and may go on. The last comer had gone to the left, so she would keep to the right; it was too dark to see, so she must just feel her way upwards with her hands and naked feet.

Those organ-barrel-like cliffs she had to avoid which she saw before her in all their mystic gloom, so she crawled upwards a little and then along the base to the right. The last comer had taken to the left; of this she was sure about, for she had followed his snorts as he ran, within her hearing.

It was a weary climb, but at last she dragged herself over the last ridge and into the "ploughed field," so called because it was so rugged and broken up by boulders.

What rocks these were which faced her in every direction, lying slantways like columns overthrown by earthquakes, standing upright like druidical pillars, lying flat like vast tombstones. A wild terror chilled her heart as if she had stumbled into a deserted graveyard, it was so weird, so fantastic, so horrible, so lonely.

Did the giants of past ages, who lay under these grave-stones, ever rise from their lonely tombs, and haunt this awful ploughed field on the top of the mountains? Would she not see their ghost-candles burn presently against some of those dark grey stones, so fantastically flung about? All the wild legends of her native village came up to terrify her agonised girl-mind.

Down in the settlement lay shame and outrage. These

distant lights inspired her only with horror; here on the mountains dwelt terror unutterable, the vague horror of the unreal struggling against the tangible monstrosities of the definite.

Where was Tyral O'Bryan to-night, while she lay alone like a snared bird on the mountain top, her dark grey eyes outstarting with fright, and her limbs hen-fleshed with cold and horror?

Merciful heavens, what was that in front of her? Two blazing eyeballs glaring through the darkness, with that opaque body which shut out the stars. Is it mortal, or a ghoul from the Titanic tombs?

It is creeping closer to her, and the eyes are lambent and green; closer, and its hot breath is wafting over her as it crawls along the rock above her, before which she crouches, and hangs its head over her—a body as large as a man's, but yet not human, she knows by instinct.

She cocks the pistol in her hand and fires it right into the open jaws as it leaps forward to seize her, and then the weapon is hurled from her as the heavy weight falls on her, while the teeth half meet in her shoulder, as a shrill shriek bursts from her lips, which mingles with the dying yelp of the beast of prey, as his sharp teeth relax their hold, and he rolls over and leaves her free. She has killed one of Van Dieman's Land terrors, the tiger-wolf.

Her shoulder is bleeding from the gash it has made, but she does not mind that wound at present, for a great joy comes upon her. The moon is rising over the ocean below her, and throwing up its silent beams; the awful darkness is at last gone, and she will be able to find her way about, and look out for worse enemies than tiger-wolves, the tiger-men.

She has fallen head downward, and the tiger is lying alongside of her now, with his head also facing the slope, so that she can see the broad bars upon his stiff back—a large animal, and quite strong enough to have devoured her only for that lucky pistol.

That lucky pistol? Has the sound not betrayed her vicinity already? She must get up and shift her quarters quickly, get behind some other of the boulders and upright columns and watch; the rising moon gives her light enough now for that.

“Hallo! my ducky! I thought I'd ketch you up at last.”

Where the tiger-wolf had crouched and made his spring, there is another beast glaring at her—the convict.

Fascinated for a moment, she lies before him as he peers over that boulder with the moonlight shining up his horrible leer; she is also full in the light, with her head down the hill and her half-covered limbs nearest him, then with a mighty effort she leaps to her feet, and attempts to fly.

“Not so quick, my ducky,” he shouts hoarsely, as he leaps on to the body of the dead tiger, and clutches her robe as she turns from him.

She feels desperate, and draws her knife, making a lunge at his heart with it.

“Ha! a tiger-cat. There, take that and be quiet, you jade.”

Marion Carter has got one jab at him, but that is all; the next moment her knife is dashed over the rock face, while she is in his hands, struggling wildly, and biting at the coarse hands which clutch her.

“You accursed hag,” the man yells, as her teeth meet in his arm, and he lets go with the pain, while she darts away from him over the rocks, blind with horror, and unheeding where she runs.

He is after her; all his worst passions are now roused to the boiling point at her resistance and temporary escape. They are alone upon the mountain top, and the moon is now shining brightly, so that she cannot escape for long, as every instant the scene is growing more brightly illuminated.

Over boulders lying flat and hustled together, over up-starting rocks like rocking stones, round druidical pillars they dart, she in front and the monster after her.

If she only had her knife now, she would plunge it into her own panting heart, for she is desperate and hopeless; he is sure to catch her up at last, for she is almost worn out now. On! The triangle was not so bad as this, for there she had her option betwixt shame and death; now it is not only shame but death.

On! If she can only reach the edge of the organ-pipe precipice, she will cast herself over, and be safe from her greatest peril at any rate; on, over the rocks with her bleeding feet and torn limbs. “Oh, Tyrul, if we had only perished together in that quiet lake,” oh, the horror! oh, the horror of this awful chase.

“I’ve got ye, ye blooming beauty.”

Yes, she is fighting now as she never fought before, with

his hot breath mingling with hers, and her nails tearing flicks from his soddened skin, writhing in his powerful clutches, and biting at him with her white teeth like a wild beast, while he laughs hoarsely as he struggles with her on that desolate mountain top.

“Oh, God! oh, God! oh, God!”

She is uttering piercing shrieks, which could be heard two miles away, shrieking with madness, while she fights in despair.

“Hell fire! what is that?”

The convict has let go his hold of her, and turns to face another opponent, who has torn him from the woman, and now clutches him with giant strength, while poor Marion lies panting and helpless.

Backwards and forwards they toss and fight, the convict and his unknown foeman. Marion knows she is for a moment safe, and instinctively reaches out for her skin-robe, and draws it around her, without being able to make another effort.

At last; the new wrestler is fresh to the work and furious, so that the convict hasn't a chance in his hands. With a fierce hug he suddenly lifts the demon up, and dashes him backwards against the sharp edge of a huge rock; after that the convict lies supine, for his back is broken.

“Marion, my darling!”

“Yes, Tyrall; God bless you.”

She leaps from the ground and into his outstretched arms with a frantic cry, while he clasps her to his heart, and covers her face with kisses.

“My darling, my darling!”

As she gasps out the wild words, she kisses him back again on the mouth and on the eyes—kissing him with blood-frothed lips, and all unconscious that she is doing so.

“Prisoners, surrender, for you are covered!”

It is the corporal who sings out the words on the moonlit air. And as O'Bryan looks up from his lover's face, he sees the barrels of five muskets presented at his breast and back, and knows that it is useless longer to resist.

“All right, soldiers, we cave in.”

The muskets are lowered, while two of the soldiers run forward with handcuffs, which they speedily clasp over the wrists of Marion Carter and O'Bryan. Then the two prisoners sit down to rest, while the others fling themselves also on the rocks, tired out with their exertions.

"Well, prisoners, we've had a hunt after you, and no mistake; and only for that girl's screeches I don't know where we'd have been."

"What have you done with Mat Tucker?" asked O'Bryan calmly.

"Oh, he's all right, only got his death-wound. I sent him on with one of my men after we found him at the foot of that waterfall."

"Was he hit, then?"

"Yes; I don't expect him to face through the night. We wounded you also, did we not?"

"Yes; I got one of your bullets in my arm, which made me let go."

"I thought you were killed with that fall down the cliff."

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had," muttered O'Bryan gloomily.

"Don't say that, Tyral. Where should I have been if you had not come?" cried Marion. "But you are wounded; where is it?"

"Oh, that is nothing worth speaking about; it is all right now, or will be soon enough. I managed to bandage it up, and bathed it in the stream. The wound is nothing, but the feeling that I had lost you was awful, and now we are prisoners."

"Don't you bother about that, Tyral O'Bryan. Captain Wilmott is your only enemy, and his days are about over in our camp, so cheer up."

The corporal said this with a cheerful air. He and O'Bryan had often had a drink together, and outside his duty he wasn't a bad sort.

"Hallo! there's that Flyn Brady; have you killed him, O'Bryan?"

"I think so—and I hope so—but you had better look after him."

The corporal and O'Bryan went over to the convict, who was still lying, face upwards, on the stones, over which O'Bryan had flung him.

His eyes were wide open, and there was a pitiful expression on his coarse features as he lay there, with the moonlight shining full upon him. But he was not dead; indeed, when the corporal spoke to him he answered him quietly.

"Hallo, Brady! what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, corporal."

"Then get up, and don't lie there looking at the moon."

But Brady made no effort to rise, and then O'Bryan went over to him, and looked closely at him.

"There's no use lifting him; he'll be dead in half-an-hour."

"Dead!" murmured the convict. "What blooming lies. I'm all right; don't feel any pain; I only want to rest a bit."

"Your back is broken, and you are dying fast," said O'Bryan roughly. "You have only time to do one act of justice to this poor girl, that you have tried to ruin. Will you speak out like a man, and tell the truth?"

"If you are quite certain that I won't live to see the Captain, I wouldn't mind, for I've no grudge against the wench."

"You'll never see the Captain again. Speak out, man, and you may have a chance of Eternity."

"Tell her to come over to me," said the convict, in a low tone.

Marion rose, and drawing her cloak round her with her manacled hands, she walked over to the dying man, shivering with disgust as she did so.

"Don't shiver, my beauty, at me, for you got the best of me; not that I mind much, now that my blood is cool, and I must say as you are a game 'un; then forgive me, since I'm getting out of the roll. I'll speak the truth, so help me God, that guinea job was a put-up affair at the picnic. Listen, corporal and men, Captain Wilmott and Taggart the blind fiddler put me and my mate up to it all."

"That's a lie, Flynn," shouted out the other convict furiously, at seeing himself incriminated.

"No, it ain't a lie; it's the blessed truth. We got five bob a-piece for swearing it, and the matron got a quid for her trouble. It was old Taggart got the most; five quid was his share. He always does get the most, but the gal is innocent. There, I've made a clean breast of it, believe it or not, as you blamed well like."

They did not ask him any more questions; only, at a sign from the corporal, his men got out another pair of handcuffs, and fastened them round the wrists of the other convict.

"There'll have to be an inquiry over this, Ben Cox, and if you take my advice you'll swear clean; it's your best move now."

They waited until the wretched convict died, which he did

quietly, and then the corporal gave the word of command, "Right about ; close up ; quick march."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT SAMUEL BIDDLE SAW.

HONEST Samuel Biddle was in a very morose and cynical mood, as he always was when extra depressed with the evils of existence, and, as he felt himself, he had fairly good reasons for being depressed ever since the gaol insurrection, which had left his "sarpint" cages empty.

In the first place, he was a man without an occupation, for as his billet had been merely a fill-gap, now that the most desperate of the female prisoners had taken French leave, the prison cells in the penitentiary stood empty, excepting for the convicts who were now cleaning and whitewashing them, the better behaved females being all hired out as housekeepers, ladies'-maids, or general servants, it was only an occasional offender who was foolish enough to be found out, or unfortunate enough to incur the displeasure of her master or mistress, who had occasion to use them now, and the ordinary warders or matrons were enough to manage them easily ; therefore, since his return from the east coast, Samuel had found his occupation gone, his peculiar serpent-charming talents not being at present required by the authorities.

He was not altogether dismissed, for they all expected the daily arrival of the two vessels with their captives, but he was having an enforced holiday on uncertain wages, and idleness did not agree with this active son of Neptune, so that this made him extra bilious and unhappy ; and when a man is bilious, idle, with prospects not flourishing, and to crown all, rather short of funds, it is to be expected that he will take a Timonian view of humanity.

Samuel need not have been short at the present time, for his salary as warder was still running on ; only that he was a proud old man in his own way, and when not working could

not think to apply for his weekly advance, so now he sat on the day when Mathuna met Jane Lymburner, and while Marion Carter and Tyrul O'Bryan were being brought down from the mountain to jail. He sat on this day, as Diogenes did in his tub, or Timon did in his cave, upon a look-out perch which he had made for himself on one of the many eminences overlooking the harbour, and reflected savagely on his bad luck and the general falseness of those descendants of the old serpent, woman, while he occasionally applied his eye to his well-battered but serviceable telescope, which he had focussed towards a certain point in the extensive landscape around him.

He was decidedly snarly on this day, for he had not been able to afford himself a single glass of grog for three full days; and he had met no one in the settlement at all inclined to stand him treat.

His love affairs, also, were at a standstill, or rather they were progressing, like the crab, backwards since his return. Miss O'Callighan had struck once more against his aggressive bad temper, and, after a hot and bitter quarrel, had forbidden him to speak to her, or visit at Kilkenny Cottage any more, unless he was inclined to be more amiable in future, and to apologise for his last violent outbreak. Both conditions of truce being moral impossibilities to a man of Biddle's temperament, he had sullenly taken his *congé*, and resolutely kept away.

"I'll see the old whip-snake roasted first before I 'umbles myself to beg her parding," he muttered wrathfully, as he sat on his perch.

The mound upon which he had made his hermitage was a little way out of the town, towards the south-west, a kind of natural growth, with rocks and bushes clustering about it, so that any one sitting would likely be unobserved at a distance, or, if seen, not distinguished from the other natural objects, while he had the advantage of being able to command a general view all round him; to the west the open bay, with its islands and promontories; to the south the place of execution, with its laden gibbets, and the public house beside them, which Samuel patronised when he could afford it; but which, at the present, was like that temple of love, Kilkenny Cottage, a debarred Eden to him; while on the east and north the entire settlement spread out before him, inviting his inspection.

He sat upon the ground, with his legs doubled under him

in the fashion which tailors, sailmakers and boatswains take their ease when they have no chairs near at hand, while, in front of him, facing the town, stood a flat rock about the level of his eyes, on which he had placed his telescope handy, along with his empty pipe, while he slowly masticated his last quid ; for Samuel had also come to the finish up of his tobacco-cake, about the lowest stage of a seaman's misery.

He had levelled his telescope at a particular point, and beyond an occasional sweep round or passing glance at some other casual object, he watched this point with scowling attention. It was the open window and front garden of Kilkenny Cottage which now claimed all his jealous care, and which faced him from where he sat, lonely, empty lockered and unobserved.

He had spent his days watching this forbidden paradise since his expulsion, and occupied his nights prowling about the windows and listening to the voices of the fortunate revellers within, a vicious but lonely old red-eyed man.

"Yas, I thought so, the foolish old condor," he snarled to himself, as he glued his eye to the glass. "She's a-letting that young criminal get the better on her, and forgetting her station in life. Yah! ain't it enough to sicken a whale, to see the airs an' graces she puts on while she listens to his wheedlin' tongue."

Samuel wound up his soliloquy with a long string of sea-faring expressions, which had better be left to the imagination of the reader than written down in this particular age of word purity ; and the picture which that telescope revealed to his bilious vision was enough to excuse a few adjectives more or less florid.

A pleasant enough picture to the parties at present making it, if blighting to the lonely looker-on. Miss O'Callighan reclining upon a deck-chair at the open window, dressed in the flowery muslin which our ancestors delighted in, of a short-waisted, juvenile fashion, a slight flush of pleasure, or, perhaps, early refreshment tinting her high cheek bones and sharp, tip-tilted nose, while she inhaled the perfumed breezes wafting over the blossom-covered lea, and beside her the ever-faithful George de la Motte in white trousers and thin jacket, gracefully but respectfully bending over her, and gently fanning her faded face.

That George was deluding the aging spinster the ex-boat-swain knew, for his telescope was a far-reaching and good one in spite of its battered exterior ; and he could plainly see his

rival's lips moving as he waved the fan with one hand, while the other clawed the air or fumbled the back of the chair in dangerous proximity of the vestal's thin neck. George was much more at his ease, and best seen to advantage, in a civilised condition of things than he had been in the damp boat as a captive; and apparently his mistress had forgotten the sharpness of his elbow joints to-day.

"It's getting hotter nor ever every day," muttered the watcher as he looked, a remark which might apply to the weather with appropriate truth; for the season was advancing swiftly to summer.

"Hotter nor ever! Yah! How she has dressed him up, too. White ducks, no less, and nankeen jacket instead of the proper greys, with the broad harrow for a pattern. And, lor'! how his hair have grown, with the ile dripping off the ringlets. Maybe she helps him to curl 'em with her own tongs."

As the old man sneered and thought this bitter probability, a horrible contraction passed over his features, while he drew his horny hand across his own bald scalp to remove the gathering beads of cold perspiration. It was bitter to contemplate, from this distance, youth and infamy stepping so easily into the shoes of honest integrity, while the money was slipping out of his reach. He, the woman-hater, who had been ready to crush down his antipathies in her particular case, and warm again a serpent in his manly bosom, to be supplanted by a convict!

Samuel gasped with indignation, and looked round him wearily to seaward, where a distant sail was rising out of the horizon; to Sandy Bay, where the dead men creaked as they swung in their chains, while the sign-post of the "Black Swan" reminded him of his useless thirst, and helped to goad him almost to madness; to the main street of the settlement, where he could make out, with his naked eye, the black-robed figure of Jane Lymburner returning from her forenoon visit to Mathuna.

"There goes that deadly adder of a governess," he muttered, as he followed her with his glaring eyes, glad of any object to relieve him for a moment. "She have been a-sunning of herself and a-hatching of more pizen, I'll sware, or else she would not have stirred from her hole jest yet!"

He glued his eyes once more to the glass, and ground his yellow teeth together.

"Bless my eyes! if he ain't flopped down on his knees now, and cotched hold of her fin. I expected it would come

to that in time; I expected the fanning was leading up to this. Lord, lord! jest like a piece of acting in a theatre. He ain't a-fanning of her now," Biddle continued to himself, with ferocious sarcasm. "No, she don't need it now, the blind old eel; for he's giving her enough wind of his own. Yas, yas; blow on, ye blastin' jawer, an' crack her up with your brazen cheek—you a convict, and she a toothless sarpint. Squeeze away with your flippers. Ah, it's 'ard, 'ard to endure, although just as I might have expected when I give myself away."

Again he turned his head from the loathed spectacle, and looked around him wildly.

Out at sea, the looming sail had become separated into a full-rigged vessel with sails close hauled, while the hull was coming up into sight. Samuel took this in, even in the midst of his anguish, and instinctively turned his telescope and pointed it to sea.

"A merchantman coming in, and light on her tracks; like enough the *Gorgon*, with my bloomin' sarpints. I hope so, for I ain't had a day's happiness since they bolted. Yas, it does look like her rig."

After a steady survey of the incoming vessel, he turned his glass again to Kilkenny Cottage, and beheld a sight which made him turn ghastly pale, while his trembling hands dropped limply to his side.

"I knew how it would be; I knew it! Cuss 'em both! He has done it at last, an' now my Hagnes is a lost woman."

As he grunted out the words brokenly, he sank back weakly against the mound behind him, and fairly burst into tears.

"Thirty thousand pounds gone to an infernal lag, and a honest 'eart broken!"

It is a terrible sight to see a strong man weeping—so some author or other at least says. Samuel Biddle was a strong man for his years, and he was unmistakably weeping—howling and blubbering, in fact—over the ingratitude and perfidy of one of the reptiles he had hitherto abhorred, and whom he had foolishly held in his hands and allowed to sting him.

This is what the virtuous old man beheld through the telescope, and which had unnerved him so completely.

George de la Motte, sitting like the prince he was on the deck-chair lately occupied by his mistress, while that infatuated lady perched upon his knee, with her muslin-draped arms about his neck, and her shrunken face laid upon his shoulder.

Nor was this the worst outrage which met the old boatswain's vision ; for, while the conqueror held her on his knee, with one of his arms encircling her waist, and she reached over to kiss him, an amber gleam sparkled in the other hand. He had nonchalantly taken up her tumbler from the work-table beside them, and was bringing it slowly to his audacious lips, while, as the sun-rays struck it, Samuel could tell, even from that long distance, that it was diluted rum which George was enjoying at the same moment that he held and owned the lady. That distant rum proved the last drop in the boatswain's overflowing cup of misery. He lay back with tear-bedewed, red-rimmed, glaring blue eyes, and looked vacantly at the passing clouds.

Some men similarly placed might have fainted right away ; most women would have done so without a pause. Even a strong man might have been excused if he had gone off, under the circumstances, and taken an apoplectic fit.

Samuel Biddle neither fainted nor took a fit ; but he lay for the next few hours on his back, with a dull feeling in his head, as if he had taken a deal more than was good for him the night before of Ignatius Taggart's extremely bad spirits—the stuff which was concocted specially for customers like the boatswain. He lay glaring skyward until the afternoon sun had fallen well down towards the sea-line, and the air was becoming chilly.

Then he rose to his feet and staggered about for a while, rubbing his eyes, and wondering if he had walked in his sleep over to the "Black Swan," and got credit without knowing it.

When he had rubbed his eyes vigorously for a few moments, he looked straight before him ; and, as he chanced to be facing Sandy Bay, he saw that spot first. The "Black Swan," with the gibbets behind it, looming duskily and darkly up against the yellow sky ; and, at the door of the public-house, the blind landlord and his dwarf wife standing as if they were waiting upon customers.

"Taggart is empty to-night," the boatswain muttered, with a roll of his dry tongue over his caked lips, as he thought of the fare within.

Then his wandering eye was attracted by two females who were hurrying along the rough track towards the inn, and he growled as he recognised them both.

"Mathuna with the deadly adder ; I wonder what they are up to so near to Taggart's."

He might well wonder, for it wasn't the place where

respectable ladies often went, and particularly at sundown. He did not call Mathuna a sarpint, for somehow he could never think upon any of the reptile world to compare her to.

He watched the two figures curiously from his hiding-place, Mathuna so tall and powerful looking as she strode along by the side of her gliding companion.

"I'm dashed if they ain't both going inside; now, that is mighty singular."

He saw Taggart move indoors before they came forward, while the dwarf received her visitors, and ushered them in.

Samuel waited to see them disappear, and then turned towards the barracks.

"Hallo! they've got the two runaways," he cried, as he saw the file of soldiers winding along past the Governor's cottage with their prisoners, Tyrall O'Bryan and Marion Carter. They had not been able to leave the mountain before late that morning, owing to a heavy mist which had gathered up and covered them up, hence their reason for being so long.

He next looked with savage hatred towards Kilkenny Cottage, while he shut his telescope with a bang. The windows were discreetly closed up to keep out the mosquitoes, so that he could not see any more ghastly horrors.

Lastly, he looked at the shipping, and gave a start of delight, then he made a clutch at his hat, and started down the hill at a run.

"It is the *Gorgon* come in, so I'll be able to have a drink to-night after all."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MISS O'CALLIGHAN BECOMES A SHIELD.

"HAVE you trapped her, Jane? But there—I can see from your face that you have done the bag of tricks. You are a wonderful woman, Jane, you always do succeed in what you undertake."

“Nearly always,” replied Jane quietly, as she yielded herself up to Captain Wilmott’s embrace, and then disengaged herself gently from his savage hug. He was growing ferociously fond of her now that he knew her better, and saw how ably she could aid him in his revenges. He had never admired virtue much in his life—not that he had seen much of it at any time, or had the power to appreciate it, when it did cross his path; but this composed woman, who could soothe him so well when he was excited, yet keep him so completely at arm’s length; who could not be shocked by either his depravity or his cruelty, yet had such perfect breeding, and who could take such good care of herself, touched him as no other woman ever had done before.

He reasoned as Saul Clark had done, but from a different starting-point. She was not at all pretty, nor even attractive-looking; her eyes were crafty, unpleasant eyes to look at, her figure was insignificant at the first general glance over it.

Not exactly unattractive either, for the long, narrow, colourless face, with its pointed strong jaw, was full of a subtle power, the deadly power of evil. Her teeth were remarkably good and large, and her figure was lithe and supple in its thinness, while she always dressed plainly and with perfect taste; with an easy carriage, a gentle manner and a gliding step, she suited him as a sick man exactly.

Then, again, the cool composure with which she had discussed with him the details of this outrage fascinated and subdued him. “She is a devilishly wicked woman,” he thought admiringly. “As bad as I could be myself, if she had the chance,” and this was a further bond of sympathy which passes with most people who are drawn toward each other for love.

If the Captain, bad as he was, could have been able to read the heart of Jane Lymburner as clearly as she read his, instead of saying “as bad,” he would have said “a thousand-fold worse,” and so been nearer the right estimate of her character. However, as he flattered himself on being the worst devil in Hobart Town, his vanity was incapable of paying her a higher compliment than this. His measurement of evil was like Wilfred Tregarthen’s idea of love—limited to the depth he could take himself.

“I could not have a better wife, or one who could understand me as well as Jane,” he added, and in this he was right. She understood him thoroughly.

"Did no one see you going or coming, Jane?"

"No one; and now be happy, Edward, for you have got all your enemies in your power to-night. The man O'Bryan and the woman Carter are caught and locked safely up."

"Thank God for that; I shall have them both flogged to death." He thanked God for the success of his devilish project.

"Yes, there's no one—excepting, perhaps, the Major—who is likely to object to you enjoying that pleasure. But I say, Edward, are you an expert with the duelling pistol?"

"I was at one time, Jane; why?"

"Because I want you, as soon as you are better, to insult this Major Quinton, and—kill him."

"I can do that easily for you, Jane, or get him killed, if you like, without troubling to call him out."

"No, Edward; I'd like to hear that you had insulted him. Strike him in the face publicly, and make him wince, and then I'd like to see you kill him. I wish indeed that you could wound him through his wife's niece, Kate Ambrose, first; that might make an excuse. Could you not get her carried away some night after you are better?"

"Do you advise me to do this, Jane? She is wondrously pretty, don't you know?"

"Do you think I would be jealous of you, Edward?"

"Most women in love with a man would."

"But I am not like most women, or I never would have won the heart of that wicked rake Edward Wilmott, who has had most of the pretty girls through his hands; it wasn't my looks that won you, you know."

She looked at him with a smile, and a glitter in her snaky eyes.

"No, Jane; it was your infernal wickedness that, I think, won me, and something else about you which no other woman ever had for me."

"That's what they call odic-sympathy, Edward; the good to the good, and *vice versa*, I suppose; but we will talk about Kate Ambrose when you are stronger, and more able to avenge the injuries which she and her uncle have done to me; meanwhile, it is your revenge which is on the *tapis*, and which I must interest myself in first. I have got Mathuna all safely trapped for you at the 'Black Swan.'"

"Did she go willingly, Jane?"

"Like a lamb led to the slaughter," answered Jane, im-

piously and mockingly. She could now take liberties with this captive of hers, and be witty for his benefit.

"How did you manage to get her into the cellar, for she has the strength of ten women."

"Yes; she has the strength of a Samson, I must admit, and struggled pretty much as he must have done with the Philistines when he was betrayed. Taggart had it all arranged, as I felt sure he would; the only customers whom he had in the house were those wanted for the work, and whom he could trust."

"Yes; Taggart has a good number under his thumb in this settlement," observed Wilmott.

"They were all there ready to pounce upon her when I gave the signal. I had given her to understand, as we went along, that you could not come before dark, but she was all unsuspecting, and went quite willingly into the kitchen to wait. Mrs Taggart placed a chair for her, directly under a rafter over which they had hung a rope with a running noose, also with her back to the door, so that she could not see the men waiting outside.

"After she was comfortably placed, one of the men entered carelessly and began working on the rope behind her. She was talking to Taggart, who managed to interest her with an account of his own conversion on board the ship. She was so greatly taken up with this wonderful conversion that she never even turned to look at the man who was fumbling about her with the noose. I saw by his eye as he stood there behind her, and the noose over her head, that he was ready. I then gave the signal, and in an instant the noose had dropped over her arms and the chair back, and the others rushed in upon her from the outside; she had not even time to look surprised before the man had drawn the rope tightly about her, and was running about her and the chair, coiling it, layer by layer, about her, while the others had thrown themselves upon her legs and head."

"I suppose she woke up then to the full value of salvation?"

"You are right, Edward. She got up, chair and all, and managed to throw the men from her five times running before she succumbed under their clutches, and even then it took ten men to hold her until they could bind her. The chair hampered her motions a good deal, and gave them the advantage over her, or I verily believe that she would have got out of the house and away in spite of them."

"Did she make much noise?"

"Not a sound; she fought silently and savagely, with her eyes blazing and her white teeth gleaming like a wild cat. It was only at the last, when Mrs Taggart ran over with a rope and got it round her neck, and so half-strangled her, that they succeeded. It was a pretty battle, I can tell you, and I was much interested in it, particularly in watching how the wooden face of the blind man's dwarf wife lighted up when she got that rope round Mathuna's neck, and pulled against the others. What a strength these dwarfs have, to be sure; I thought that she would have killed Mathuna outright, and so robbed you of your revenge, only they managed to get her dragged off just in time. Then they had her strapped and gagged, and pushed down the trap-door of the cellar amongst the mud, and the door re-barred before they left."

"What was Taggart doing all this time?"

"Oh, he sat on a chair in the bar, just outside, and played some lively tunes on his violin, in case any chance customer should come in and hear the scuffle, so that it might pass for dancing, I suppose. After it was all over, he came in and gave the men some refreshment, which they all required, I can assure you, for they were hot and worn out with their exertions."

"So she is in my power at last!" exclaimed Wilmott exultantly.

"Yes; you have only to walk over to-night, and do as you please with her, without any risk or danger to yourself, Edward."

Jane spoke softly, yet, for the life of her, could not keep a sneer of mockery as she spoke of his easy revenge. Wilmott noticed the sneer, and flushed below his bandaged face, but made no direct remark. He only said,—

"You've a grudge against this native also, have you not, Jane?"

"Yes; a little, Edward. She once insulted me, and, like you, I never forgive."

"A good friend you make, Jane; but a devil of an enemy, I should think."

"Yes; I am not the sweetest enemy to those who offend me; but very faithful to my friends, as you have already proved, Edward."

"I know that, Jane, my dear. Are the flagellators aware of the work in hand to-night?"

"Yes; you will find them waiting for you when you go over. Taggart will clear the place about twelve o'clock, so that you won't be disturbed."

"Would you care to come, dear?"

"Yes; I should like very much to see that woman flogged properly," replied Jane calmly.

"All right; we'll go together. Now send in some dinner as soon as you can, for this good news has made me as hungry as a hunter."

So this noble specimen of the gallant hero and his worthy companion went in to dinner; while Mathuna lay, bound and gagged, in the cellar of the "Black Swan," meditating upon her first reward for trying to put into practice her newly-discovered faith.

When Samuel Biddle reached the wharf, he found the captain and crew of the *Gorgon* just landing amidst the eager populace, to whom a vessel coming was always of great importance. Samuel was looking about him eagerly for his old mate, Saul Clark, from whom he expected his drink, and felt disappointed at not seeing him.

They brought only one prisoner back with them, who stepped ashore heavily ironed; but for all that he drew himself proudly upright, and looked round on the company as fearlessly as if he had been free. Then Samuel recognised his former rival, Michael Howe.

The bushranger had been badly wounded before being taken, and limped as he went along between the file of soldiers, drawn up to receive him, under the charge of Major Quinton. His head also was bound up with a red cotton handkerchief, which, however, added to the picturesqueness of his wild appearance.

"Hallo, my bold buck!" he shouted boisterously, when he saw Samuel. "Back again to trouble your peace of mind, you see; they couldn't do without me in Van Dieman's Land. Say, how is the dear old lady, Miss O'Callaghan?"

He laughed loudly as he spoke, while Samuel turned away with bitterness in his heart.

"I'd as soon she'd got him as the other lag," he muttered angrily.

Saul wasn't on board, and the Captain, who knew Samuel of old, told him to go along with them to the prison first, until they could make their report, and afterwards to the "Black Swan," where, if he would join them in some supper and a

glass of grog, he would tell him all their adventures since they last saw each other.

Samuel, gulping down a sigh of intense satisfaction, promptly accepted the invitation.

"I say, Skipper," said the Major, pushing forward, "I don't see our old mate amongst your company. He went with you, did he not?"

"Yes, Major, he did go with us to sea," replied the Captain, "and I'm sorry to have to tell you that he is not with us. We had a scrimmage with the pirates down south there, but whether he has fallen a prisoner to them, or gone overboard, is more than any of us can tell. We missed him after the fight, and haven't seen him since."

"Poor Kate," thought the Major, as he turned away, "this is sorry news for you." Then aloud, "Come up to my quarters to-night before you turn in, Skipper, and have a pipe and a glass. I'd like to hear all about this matter in detail."

"I will, Major, after I have some supper. Say about ten o'clock."

"Right you are."

The Major fell back, and the procession moved on through the streets under the golden light of the dying day.

As the bushranger walked along, with his handsome head held upright, and his bold black eyes seeming to give back glare for glare of the setting sun, now pouring over his face in a ruddy stream, he suddenly spied Miss O'Callighan, who, with her accepted body-servant, George de la Motte, now stood on her verandah watching the new arrivals. With a wild shout, he stopped and hailed her.

"Musha, boys, but yonder is the light of my eyes, the Queen of the Sea, my colleen—the O'Callighan! Tell me, darling, that you are glad to see your own bold boy back once more? You know that I could not keep away from you for long."

"Go away, you bad bold man," retorted Miss O'Callighan snappishly; for, now that she had at last made up her mind to sacrifice social position, she did not want to be bothered with any more followers.

"And is that the way you treat an old friend, Miss O'Callighan, who has come all the way from the South Pole to see you—risking his life and liberty to have a word of comfort from you?"

"Go away, I say, you wicked rover. You ran away from

me heartlessly, without even a good-bye; you scorned me once, you false deceiver, and I want nothing more to say to you. Go away, I repeat—move on."

Samuel Biddle looked on this scene with a yellow face and a bitter sneer. He divided his lashless scowl between the irate maiden and the timid favoured swain, George, who had now shrunk behind his mistress and owner as if for protection, or to escape observation.

"Listen to her now, boys. She accuses me of being false—me, the truest boy who ever wore out Government shoes, who broke his heart entirely when he was torn from her. Oh, Miss O'Callighan, take pity on a poor captive, who, but for the damage which your charms worked upon his constitution, would have been a fine man at this moment, and coursing the seas. It was you, Miss O'Callighan, that made me a prisoner, not the enemy. I dreamt of you and brooded upon you until the muscles of my arm shrivelled up so that I could not strike a blow. Look now—see the pitiful wreck that you have made of me, Miss O'Callighan, and be cruel any more if you can!"

The reckless Irish bushranger, who was enacting this scene half with the intention of amusing his keepers, and half for the purpose of interesting the lady, raised his manacled hands aloft, and bared his brawny arms, showing as he did so a set of muscles which would have stricken a Roman lady, during the days of Nero, dumb with admiration.

"Look, now, at the shrivelled wreck that I am, Miss O'Callighan."

He was shouting out boisterously and jovially, with his arms stretched as far as the chains would let them, and with his face turned towards the verandah, and his hawk glances all about him amongst the spectators.

"Go away to jail, I tell you, Michael Howe; I will not look."

"So you have forgotten your own true lover, have you, Miss O'Callighan, and you want him to go to jail. I know how it is; you have taken up with the royal George beside you, and nothing less than a prince will content you. Well, well, small blame to you; only I trust the third Mrs de la Motte is dead, for your sake."

"George, what does he mean?" shrieked poor Miss O'Callighan, falling backwards in her consternation, while the spectators roared with laughter.

It was the moment Howe was waiting on, and what he had been leading up to. With a sudden wrench, he tore the

bayoneted musket from the grasp of a grinning private, then, swinging it round his head, he cleared a passage over to the verandah.

“Quick, men, fire; the prisoner is escaping!” shouted the Major.

No. Michael Howe has escaped; for he has got hold of Miss O’Callighan, and is now backing through the front door, with her writhing and shrieking in his arms, as he holds her before him as a shield.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOW THE GORGON SAILED SOUTH.

YES; Michael Howe, the bold pirate and bushranger, had made his escape, and, like the proverbial hart of the wilderness, had gone off and taken his hind, *i.e.*, Miss O’Callighan, with him to the mountains.

Chains and all, he had dashed in at the front door and out at the back window, with the screaming and kicking lady in his arms, as the naughty founders of the Imperial City of Seven Hills did once upon a time with the poor Sabine vestals. He was off, with the war-dogs after him, into the kindly cover of the dense forest.

The choice was not his own; yet, had he been a special favourite of Providence, he could not have had a more appropriate hour given him upon which to make his escape—the sun setting, and blinding the eyes of the soldiers, who dare not fire for fear of killing his human shield.

Miss O’Callighan, poor lady, was but a feather-weight in the arms of this giant, and impeded his progress much less than did his chains; but still neither hindered him very much, as he hopped with kangaroo leaps off the main road and into the thicket.

Then the sun went down, and the short twilight spread over the bush, and after that the quiet night; and while the soldiers returned slowly and unsuccessfully to their barracks, Michael Howe was speeding up the mountains with his fragile load.

Peter Brown and his assistants were still working in the

smithy when the outlaw appeared at the door, covering them with his stolen musket and fixed bayonet.

“Blacksmith, I am Michael Howe, the Governor of the Ranges.* Send out a man with a strong file to me.”

The fierce appearance of the outlaw was quite enough to frighten honest Peter and his hands, while his reputation was too widespread for them to disregard his imperious orders. Trembling, yet with pride, one of the men walked over to him, and stooping humbly down, very quickly filed through his fetters and set him at liberty.

“Prisoner, I thank you; here is a poor lady whom I had to carry off as a shield from Hobart Town; take her indoors, for she has fainted, I think, and tell your master to be kind to her to-night, and see her safe home in the morning; and as he treats her I shall remember him. Michael Howe never leaves a debt unpaid. Good night.”

“Good night, and good luck, Gov’ner,” shouted the assigned servant after the gigantic outlaw, as he bounded out of sight up the mountain. Michael Howe, the terror of Van Dieman’s Land, was once more at liberty and unfettered, while poor Miss O’Callighan, having served his turn, found what she did not expect that night—a decent shelter and a clean bed under the hospitable roof of the smithy.

There was a large gathering also on that same night at the “Black Swan,” much to the landlord’s annoyance, for he had not reckoned upon this unexpected arrival of the *Gorgon*, and much as he liked good custom generally, still, upon this particular night he would rather have been without it.

Captain Wilmott was a person to be considered, and his pleasure to be studied by this blind tyrant of the convicts, who was so completely in his power. He would have liked this to have been a quiet night, and to have dismissed them all early, but that was not easily done on such a night; the bulk of the customers had come on purpose to hear about the adventures of the *Gorgon*, and so that the blind landlord had to resign himself to the inevitable.

“Are you going to sleep here to-night, Skipper?” he asked, as he came in while the kangaroo steaks and tea were being spread upon the table.

“No, Taggart; I have to report myself to Major Quinton at ten o’clock, and get on board afterwards. Remind me of the time, will you?”

* A title this daring bushranger took in Tasmania.

"Depend upon me," answered the blind man, rubbing his lean hands together as he withdrew. It was all right; he would have the house cleared by eleven, and then the Captain could come.

Ignatius Taggart liked his present life very well. He and his dwarf wife were piling up money at every turn of their tortuous way; raking it in, and gloating upon it as it increased so rapidly.

They were both well matched as far as greed was concerned, and held only one strong love between them—the love of lucre. They both liked to gloat upon the money accumulating, although they were not always satisfied to find that a large portion of it was in promissory Government notes; still, even these were good enough in their way, for they represented wealth and land in the future, although they both liked the gold better.

After he had left the company who now filled up his parlour, he sought his deformed little wife, and beckoned her aside.

"Beauty, can you leave any one in the bar; I want you up stairs for a moment."

The dwarf signalled to one of her servants, and opening the door of their private apartment, she followed her master up to the bedroom. Here they locked the door, and sat down on the edge of the bed together.

"Did you see the Captain as I told you to do to-night?"

"Yes, Ignatius."

"And did he pay you the money all in gold?"

"Not all, Ignatius," the dwarf replied. "He gave me twenty golden guineas, as it was all he had, and the rest in paper."

"Was the paper all right?"

"Yes, Ignatius."

"Let me feel the gold."

The little woman fumbled in her dress, and brought out a bag, which she opened, and poured the glittering contents into the huge open hands which were held to receive them—the golden pieces which meant misery to so many.

"Ah, that is good, Beauty; that is refreshing. Count them up, now, and let us know how we stand."

The little ugly dwarf's eyes glittered as she watched the pieces lying in the cavity of his huge lean hands; yellow gleams shot brightly within the wide-set narrow slits. It was only at such times that she woke up from her apathy.

"You want to kiss them, don't you, Beauty," gabbled the blind man. "You love them, don't you, Beauty?"

"Yes, Ignatius," answered the fiddle-faced dwarf.

"Then take it, Beauty; only be quick, for we must get back and make more."

The ogreish creature sank on her short knees, and, hugging the hands of her master, put her shapeless lips down and kissed the contents; then, after this obeisance, she rose to her feet.

"Count them up, Beauty, and lock them away. Reckon up the notes, and place them with the others; be quick, but be exact, Beauty, for we must get back. This is going to be a big night, for, if all goes well, we shall have this Captain in our hands."

Passively the dwarf took the coins, and counting them, placed them again into the bag, after which she opened a chest and put the bag inside in one part, with the promissory notes in another division.

"Is it all safe?"

"Yes, Ignatius."

"Then let us get back to make more."

Softly the pair of gold lovers crept down the stairs again, and re-entered the bar, locking the door of their temple behind them, and feeling greatly refreshed with their unholy orisons.

When the blind man once more entered the parlour, he found the company largely increased; in fact, nearly the whole of the masculine portion of the settlement—that is, all the subordinate portion who could get away from their duties—were assembled round the table at which the Captain of the *Gorgon* and his mates now sat at the present moment, engaged in cutting up their tobacco, preparatory to beginning the evening fairly, now that they had demolished the steaks and tea, while they used their large clasp knives upon the damp, rich-tinted, full-flavoured rolls, paring down the flakes dexterously. Samuel Biddle, who sat close to the fiery-faced Captain, looked on unoccupied but hungrily.

"Hallo! Samuel, where is your pipe, and why are you not cutting up your baccy?" asked the Captain, looking up at the watcher's glistening orbs with solemn astonishment. "It ain't seaman-like, Sam Biddle, which is saying that it ain't neither manly nor manner-like, to sit with empty jaws when 'pipes on' is the word." And Captain Drake looked fiercely reprov- ing at his neighbour, while he banged the table with his hard, stumpy fist.

"I know it ain't neither seaman-like nor manner-like, Captain Drake," returned Samuel mournfully, as he produced his empty pipe and his clasp-knife. "An' here's my pipe and

knife all ready to cut the baccy like the rest of you—when I has it.”

“Help yourself, mate, and excoose my unpoliteness not offering you the ‘prick’ first,” answered the Captain, hastily and shamefacedly; “but of course I wasn’t to know that you had left yours at home; how could I, when you didn’t ax me?”

“Thank ye, arter you,” replied Samuel with the same rough delicacy, passing off the painful subject, and taking the plug calmly, he began to cut his quantity.

It was characteristic of the others present—at least those who were sailors—that although they all knew by this hint that Samuel was in low water, they did not look at all conscious, but seemed to take the Captain’s reason as a good enough excuse for the empty pipe, yet after they had cut enough for their own wants, they carelessly pushed their plugs into the middle of the table, and as near to Samuel as to themselves, so that he might help himself as he felt inclined to what had now become common property.

“Ah, there you are, landlord,” shouted the Captain, as he saw Taggart enter the room. “Send along the grog as soon as you like; I am paymaster to-night, recollect.”

“Thank you, Captain,” and Taggart withdrew to give the order and get it executed. At this moment half a dozen soldiers came in and dropped into the vacant places.

“Well, lads, you’ve got back. So I suppose that the big fellow has escaped, has he?”

“Yes, Captain, he is off clear for to-night.”

“And I’m not at all sorry to hear it, for he is about the gamest man I have seen. We were bound to bring him back when we had got him with us, but he is too fine a fellow to have to swing outside of Taggart’s house here. No, Michael Howe will fall like a man when his time comes; never dangle like a jumping-jack, take my word for that, lads. He fought like a devil while he could stand, and when he was at last cut down, he met his luck cheerfully, and kept us all lively on board afterwards; and here’s to the bold Governor of the Ranges.”

They all drank deeply to the health of Michael the brave, and then, laying down their glasses and resuming their pipes, looked expectantly towards the Captain, who was then clearing his throat.

“Well, lads and friends all, I suppose you want to hear what the *Gorgon* did while she was away, and I’ll do my best not to disappoint ye.

“You know how we left in company with the war-sloop *Sirius*, to sail up the coast as far as Oyster Bay. It was the right tack we were on, for when we got up, we sent a boat load ashore, and managed to capture an old native, who told us that the *Storm Bird*, or some ship at least like her, had been there a couple of days before, but had gone off to sea again.

“At this intelligence, the *Sirius* decided to beat about north as far as Peggy Point, while we went southward and out a bit, for we were sure that they would be back again afore long, and so they did, on the second day after that, for we got sight of them just as they were beating in, and drove them out again afore they could land.

“After that, it was a pretty stiff chase to the south-west, until again we lost them and had to return to our consort. The pirates had once more rounded on us, and returned for their friends, which they had managed this time to pick up.

“We crossed the *Sirius* about fifty miles from the coast, and while we were still passing signals, we both again caught sight of our prize sneaking away to the west. Fortunately it was early morning, for if it had been night, she'd have got right clear off, and no one the wiser.

“Then began the chase, which was a long and a stern one. As soon as she discovered that we were on her track, she clapped on all sail, and ran with the wind south-west. That *Storm Bird* is a good sailor, lads, and no mistake, when she isn't too heavily loaded. We were considerably lower in the water than she was, for the pirates had chucked everything overboard, except only enough for ballast, and afore we could keep up with her, we had to do the same, much as it went against my heart to waste my cargo. Then, after we had made ourselves equal, we both very quickly left the *Sirius* behind, she being weighed down with her guns, while we were both first-class clippers, which had been built for the tea service, where, as you know, first in gets the medal.

“All that day and the next again we ran on with square-set sails full in the wind, which, as we got south, began to blow stronger and colder. All day long and all the night we ran steady on over these big seas, not getting much nearer to one another, but keeping up at about twelve, or so, miles apart. They had set their sails, and had nothing more to do, saving the looking after the wheel, for the

weather was fair, and the nights clear, and well lit up by the moon, so that they had no chance of dodging us, as they might have done if it had been darker.

“The waves were getting bigger and bigger every hour, and the wind colder, for we were well past south latitude 55°, while the *Gorgon* was going along fully eighteen knots, leaping from wave to wave as they rolled under her, with hardly a grip of her keel.

“We could see that the *Storm Bird* was as lightly held down, as we looked out and watched her. She looked just like a bird skimming along on the top of those great breakers, and hardly leaving any furrow behind. My old lass was a good and a fast one with her hull; but, Lord, lads, the vessel which Michael Howe commanded looked the cleanest craft that ever I saw, as she skimmed along the ocean, at times showing her under parts clear out of the froth. By the Lord, sirs, that London poet, lame Byron, may run down the waltz as he blamed well likes, but if he had been aboard of the *Gorgon*, and running as we were then straight on for the South Pole, with that beauty waltzing on in front of us, and baring her heels as she cut along so smoothly, he'd have changed his mind, and not written that bit of spiteful poetry which I bought last time I was at London Docks.

“Lord, lads, she went through those seas—well, I like to be modest with what belongs to myself, as a man ought to be, but as we kept up with her for four days and three nights, and beat her at the last, though that wasn't her fault, poor thing, but only the way of Providence, I may well say, without being called too conceited, she went through those ice-bound seas as well as the *Gorgon* could have done, and with as free a swing. There were her white sails bulging out, just for all the world like a young wife who has married the man of her fancy, with the waves like—like daisies and buttercups kissing her clean feet, and the clouds cuddling of her upwards—a thing of beauty, and a picture to gladden the heart of any true man.

“It was the evening of the fourth day when the accident happened which brought her too for a bit, and let us come up to her afore darkness fell. The wind was now blowing hard, though steady, strong enough to force us to take in some sail, which we could see they were also trying to do in front.

“The sun was going down, yellow and hazy, for we were coming close to the latitude of mists and snows. We could

also smell the icebergs, for it was the season beginning when they loosened off, and floated from the main belt; but we were not yet far enough south to see them, and the sea-birds had not left us yet, although we were fast running away from them.

“Then the thing happened which gave us the chance of running them down. They were short-handed, as far as seamen were concerned, on board the *Storm Bird*, and had not started soon enough to take in sail. We saw all at once the fore-mast top give way, while the wreckage flapped about, and the waves churned up white behind her. Then we knew that our chance had come, and bore swiftly down upon her.

CHAPTER XL.

“BEAUTY, SHUT UP THE SHOP.”

“WE could see her floundering in front of us, and the yellow, blurred sun to the left of her, with that flying cordage dragging her behind; while the foam lashed up over her stern and sides as we rushed down upon them, clearing the decks for action as we bowled along.

“They were hacking away with their axes to clear themselves, but, being so short-handed, they made so little progress that we were right up to them, and grappling, before the last rope had been cut through.

“Then the fun began. We just tackled on as the sun disappeared behind a bank of fog, and in another moment were all at it tooth and nail, hitting out wherever we could find a head to hit, and swarming over the decks of both vessels, for both sides attempted the boarding, and more or less succeeded, so that sometimes we were on the deck of the *Storm Bird*, and again driven back to the *Gorgon*.

“And they fought too, did those furies, male and female—the women more particularly. There they were, with only their last under-petticoat on, and nothing above the waist, swinging their cutlasses about like man-o’-war’s men all the

time that the two vessels were tearing along south before that rising storm-blast, with the fogs closing in upon us, and the darkness coming down. They were flying along with the wind shrieking through the shrouds, and the waves swamping along the decks, just for all the world like two young White-chapel wenches over a man.

"Michael Howe led the men on, and another large-made but good-looking female led the women, who almost drowned the noise of the wind with their infernal screeches; while, owing to the hanking of the two ships together, their speed was checked, so that the waves butted up against them, and broke over the gunwales every few seconds, separating many a wrestler, male and female, and washing many a boarder into the trough of the sea.

"It was a bloody scene, if we had only had light to see it; but we were all fighting in the dark now, or with only the faint reflection of the foam to guide our hands and feet. Women who, like monkeys, clung on with their lanky arms, and bit and gnawed at the cheeks of their opponents when they could get them downmost. It was no use showing any mercy, for they were fighting for their lives, and determined not to be taken back.

"All at once, while I was blazing away on my own main-deck—for I had been driven back by a party of the hell-hags—the storm burst upon us without further warning, except the blowing to pieces of our upper topsail, while a cry got up that the ships were parting company. Then a wild stampede took place, both sides trying to get aboard their own craft in time. Next moment we were rushing away different ways, at a slant from each other, in the midst of as bad a storm as I have been in for a long time—a regular Antarctic buster.

"Michael Howe hadn't time to get back to his vessel, for when the gale broke he was just hewing his way along my poop, and clearing my lads out of his road like ninepins, in spite of a cutlass wound on the head, and a bullet in his thigh, when the end of the upper yard, which had broken off with the sail, struck him butt on the other side of his head as it fell overboard, and laid him flat on the deck. In another moment we had the irons on his arms and ankles, and the hatches over him, and then we had breathing time to think about what was next to be done.

"We were driving along at a furious rate now, with only the mizzen and main-mast topsails half clewed up, and all the rest bare, driving through the pitchy blackness, with a blind-

ing snowstorm pelting about us, and filling up our decks as we raced amongst it.

“Then, after a while, the tornado died away, or rather, I suppose, the denseness of the snow choked its force. At anyrate, we began to feel warmer and more comfortable towards morning than we had been during the fore part of the night.

“At last day broke up, and we could look about us and reckon up the extent of our damage. The foretop mast, with yard gear generally smashed, and gone by the board; six of our regular men missing, besides Saul Clark, one of the volunteers, and five lying badly wounded in the fore-castle. The rest of us were all more or less scratched and damaged, but not bad enough to be mentioned specially in the log, so I just wrote down, after mentioning the serious cases and missing, entire ship’s crew, including the officers and volunteers, all more or less damaged.

“The snow had now stopped, and the sky came out clear as the sun got up—clear and still, but bitterly cold. Every yard was laden with over a couple of feet of snow, and the decks were chock-a-block, until the *Gorgon* looked like a winter farmyard. We found only three of the enemy lying dead on our decks when we cleared away the snow from them—one a woman, and the other two men. All the wounded who could crawl at all had gone back to their own decks, to perish or get better at liberty.

“It was a pretty sight, if a cold one; the snow clogging up the shrouds and sheets on the yards and pulleys and dead-eyes. Wherever it could find a place to hang on to, it was hanging on it, and whitening it up.

“To the north and east the sea was clear, but far away to the south and south-west we could just make out by the morning rays the rugged outline of what looked like snow-covered mountains swimming in blue gas. They were the first of the icebergs which we had as yet seen on this voyage, and the distant sight of them was quite sufficient for us. We had been near enough to the South Pole for one journey, and so, as soon as we could clear the decks, we turned our noses in a northerly direction, and made tracks once more for home, without inquiring further about the *Storm Bird*; for, as she was nowhere to be seen, we took that as a clear sign that Providence did not mean us to bother our heads any more either about her or her most ungodly crew.

“It was no easy job tacking out of that ice-bound ocean, I

can tell you, lads; but after we got out of the circle it became easier. We did not fall in again with either the *Sirius* or the *Storm Bird*, so perhaps they are still cruising about these lonely waters, the one after the other. We kept as straight on, with our wounded, as we could. Michael Howe and the others got on their pins once more. Billy Gunn there was one of the worst hurt, but see—he can now swallow his grog with the best of us. Can't ye, Billy?"

"I'd say as I could," gruffly replied Billy Gunn, who still carried his left arm in a sling.

"And so, my sons, here we are once more, safe and sound, all excepting those poor fellows who are missing."

There were two listeners to the Captain's story a little different from the rest, but equally interested in it; at least one of them pricked up her ears at the mention and account of Saul Clark's disappearance, while she murmured,—

"So! he is lost for ever. A very good thing; it will save any complications from taking place, or unpleasantness. And now I know that she cannot take him from me."

Jane Lymburner and her *gentleman* friend had just dropped in at the point where the fighting was described, so they had paused in the doorway to hear the finish up. Now that the story was ended, they moved into the empty kitchen, and, finding chairs for themselves, sat down to wait for the house being cleared.

They sat for a little while together without speaking to each other. Captain Edward Wilmott did not like being kept waiting, and as he could not show himself before the company in his present bandaged state, he fumed at being kept out of it, and shifted about impatiently. The victim in that cellar under his feet troubled him also, and he wanted to get rid of the good company, in whose jovialities he could not share.

"Why don't you talk to me, Jane? Speak about something to pass the time; you are generally good at that sort of thing," he exclaimed at last petulantly, thoroughly tired out of his own company, and fancying that he heard the breathing of the bound Mathuna down in that damp, dark cellar.

It is impossible for even the most brazen cur in the world not to feel that he is a cur sometimes, in spite of all his assurance and military get-up. Captain Wilmott had cheated at cards, accepted favours from underbred subalterns, who had pandered to him because he was the son of an earl; ruined women and hunted the poor convicts to death without compunction; in fact,

done all the hundred-and-one dirty and ignoble shuffling which form the stock-in-trade of men who, like him, disgrace all genteel professions. But the dastard act he was about to commit to-night pricked even his atom of a conscience.

"Edward," murmured Jane softly, "surely you don't require me to amuse you to-night, with such a pleasure as you have before you to think about? Why, if I were you, I would be like the gourmand before dinner: I would lie back and let nothing disturb me while I contemplated the details of the coming feast. I would touch with my finger every scar in my life-branded face, and revive my sensations of the morning when I received them, so as to stimulate the appetite of my revenge. I would utilise these sensations, and turn them into sherry and bitters to sharpen the edge of my time-jaded appetite. Then I would picture the form of the fool down below, now lying in the slush and damp, bound with cords so tightly that her skin will by this time have swelled right over their bindings; while she lies, perhaps, face downwards, suffering agonies unutterable, for she can neither move nor rest herself in any way. She has been five hours now in the one position, with those ropes drawn tightly round her. Why, it is something like the refined revenge of a Roman Emperor. She can hear us talking now above her, and that must add to her misery."

"By Jove, Jane, you are right; you have given me new life with your words. I begin to think that I am a regular fool in your hands," replied Wilmott, rousing himself at her lashing words, and striking the table near him with his clenched hands.

"Don't think that, Edward, for it is not true. I am only a weak woman in your hands, with a boundless respect for and devotion to her friend and lover; but I want you to be more worthy of yourself, and have no white streaks about you. I love my black sheep for his colour. There, Edward, don't you know that already, you dangerous fellow?"

Jane crossed over to where he sat, and leaned tenderly upon his shoulder, stroking his corrugated chin with her light, soft, cool fingers.

"I can feel them now, Edward, my dear; every cut which makes you dearer and brings you nearer to me, even although they must disfigure you in the eyes of others for life."

"Oh, damnation, Jane, don't allude to that; it drives me mad."

"Not so; it should rather make you cool and steady."

Let me go for Taggart to send you in the floggers; then sit down with them and the shut door, and discuss the punishment over, so that she may hear every word as she lies under your feet, vainly tugging against these cutting cords. Tell them to linger out the flogging, so you will grow hungry while she feels in imagination, every stroke beforehand. That is the way in which I would enjoy the time I had to wait, and so make waiting a double pleasure."

Jane Lymburner at this moment was suffering as acute agony as her victim possibly could. She abhorred the man at her side, and so felt devilish, for the name of Saul Clark had woke up in her once more the passion which she had felt for him before she had won him. He was now beyond her for ever—dead, most likely, but she remembered his vitality and manly appearance, beside which this worn-out rake appeared contemptible in her eyes.

Yes; at this moment she adored the dead image of Saul with a passionate intensity that stretched her on the rack, and made her hate all other humanity. She had only heard a little, and she thirsted to hear more about him from this Captain who had seen him last alive.

"Sit where you are, Edward, and I'll send Taggart and the flagellators in to you. The people in the other room will soon be going now; keep yourself cool, be brave, be resolute, and be like the gallant soldier that you are." She stooped over him, and touched him lightly on the chin with her lips, and then glided out to the bar.

"By Jove, that woman does love me, and she has the pluck of a Semiramis," thought the Captain, as she left him to his meditations.

"Cowardly beast," Jane muttered through her set white teeth as she left him. "I feel wicked enough almost to poison him to-night, only that he represents what I require—position. Oh, Saul! Saul! my dead darling."

She leaned for a moment against the doorway to recover herself from her fierce passion, then looking up, she encountered the small eyes of the dwarf, Mrs Taggart, who stood behind the bar and watched her woodenly, her fiddle-shaped face half hidden by the counter, and only the strange-looking forehead and eyes appearing above it.

"Is your husband inside, Mrs Taggart?"

"Yes, miss."

"Captain Wilmott wants him."

"He will be out presently, miss; he has just gone in

to dismiss the company, as the skipper has to go at ten o'clock."

"That is right; I will go outside for a little, I want the air; it is hot to-night, isn't it, Mrs Taggart?"

"Yes, this house feels hot to some people," replied the dwarf stolidly.

Then Jane went outside, and, leaning her head on the verandah post, looked over the waste ground towards the settlement, and waited on the coming out of Captain Drake and his friends.

"Ten o'clock, Captain," said Ignatius Taggart, as he entered the parlour, now dense with the tobacco smoke from the many pipes.

"Well, what of that, landlord? You don't close afore midnight," cried the Captain, who was happy, and forgetful of all engagements.

"Nothing at all to me, only you told me to remind you of that hour, as you had to report to the Major, and I always like to keep my customers up to their duty."

"By the Lord, but you are right, Taggart; I had quite forgotten, and I'm much obliged to you for the reminder. Good night, friends all, I must be going."

"Hold on, Captain, we will all go," shouted the others, getting up along with him. "Here, Boatswain Biddle, wake up, you land-lubber."

"Sarpints, the whole bilin' on them; pizin, that's what they be," muttered Samuel a little incoherently, as he raised his head, and blearily glared on the company.

"Come along with me, you old enemy of woman-kind; I'll see you safe home," said the Captain, linking his arm through the unsteady Samuel, and dragging him out to the moonlight, the rest following more or less recklessly.

"Captain Drake, could I have a word with you before you go?"

Jane laid her cool, thin hand on the sea-captain's arm as he staggered out.

"What is it? I've got—'ppointment."

"Cap'in, don't you go a-palavering with that 'ere sarpint, for she's the deadliest adder of the lot, and will bite you dangerous," remonstrated Samuel solemnly.

Jane saw her mistake in speaking to these drunken men and attracting notice, and, regretting her impetuosity, drew hastily back into the shadow.

"It does not matter; to-morrow will do."

"Yes; leave it till to-morrow," said the blind landlord, catching hold of her and putting her behind him.

"Good-night, gentlemen all!"

"Good-night, landlord!"

He stood, with Jane behind him, listening to the noisy crowd as they staggered out to the moonlight, and went stumbling over the rough bush track towards the town, and then, when he was sure they were safely away, he turned into the bar, at the counter of which only the two convict flagellators stood drinking.

"Beauty, shut up the shop, and let us get to bed."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE "BLACK SWAN" FLIES AWAY.

MAJOR QUINTON and his niece, Kate Ambrose, sat together in their front room, waiting upon the coming of Captain Drake to make his melancholy report.

A young lady who has broken off with her lover is not supposed to exhibit the same amount of grief over his death or disappearance which a girl with her bark going smoothly towards the haven of matrimony might with good reason be supposed to show. Kate Ambrose had lost Saul for ever when she last beheld the *Gorgon* sailing out of the bay; and whether he had come back to marry Jane Lymburner, or been lost at sea, ought to have been of the same degree of regret to her now; only for the late alteration in the tactics of Jane, which had inspired her with hope that all would yet be made right between her and the poor young man of her heart-choice, for she was in too advanced a stage of love to be any longer resentful, or able to stand upon her dignity.

Now these budding hopes were cruelly nipped, and she was left desolate, to meditate upon the manly form of her lost lover, and review the happy moments which they had spent together before the evil spirit had come between them and parted them.

The Major broke the sad news as kindly as he could do for her, for, since the death of his wife, Kate had done her best to comfort him, and but for her he would have broken down completely; now he did his utmost to soften the blow which had fallen upon her by holding out a faint hope.

"The Captain could not tell anything about him; perhaps he may have been on board the convict ship, and be all right after all."

Faint hope indeed, both thought to themselves, for any one to escape with life who fell into the clutches of those escaped canaries; better fall into the waves at once than face the torture, with the plank to be walked afterwards.

Perhaps it was fortunate for Kate, to-night, that she had the absence of Mathuna to counterbalance her own trouble; it was a most unprecedented thing for that young lady to be out by herself after dark, and now ten o'clock has struck without her arrival, they were all growing very anxious about her.

For a time they had supposed her to have gone off to the forest with Wilfred Tregarthen, and so felt easy, but when that young gentleman dropped in after supper, and informed them that he had not seen her that day, they at once set about making inquiries at her camp, and the houses where she was in the habit of visiting. No one had seen her since lunch time, so that now, while they both sat and waited upon the arrival of the sea-captain, they were also listening eagerly for the return of Wilfred and the servants, who had gone to make a search round the settlement.

At length the unsteady footsteps of the revellers were heard outside, and the Major called from the open window on them to enter, which they at once did in a body, manners in the colony at that time being free-and-easy.

The Captain, supporting the somewhat uncertain form of his friend Samuel Biddle, with half-a-score of his crew behind them, all, with the exception of the ex-boatswain, bowing and scraping to the young lady.

"Hats off, Samuel!" shouted the Captain, plucking Samuel's glazed hat off, and pitching it out of the open window, much to its owner's indignation.

"Look ye here, mate," he snarled, "every man ought to stick to his own principles, and mine is never to 'umble myself to any sarpint, be she toothless, or be she young and fresh-fanged."

"Sit down, gentlemen," said Kate gravely, all unheeding the sultry glare which Samuel bestowed upon her.

"Yes, men, sit down, and help yourselves to some refreshment," echoed the Major.

"The refreshments is welcome, Major, and so is the chairs," replied Samuel solemnly, as he dropped heavily upon a slight bamboo chair which Kate had pushed towards him, bringing it and himself with a crash upon the floor.

"I told ye so, mates. Haven't I always said, drunk or sober, never to put your trust in a sarpint?" cried the fallen woman-hater, as he glared up from the wreck of the bamboo chair upon the innocent cause of his disaster.

"I don't know about the 'sarpint,' boatswain," replied the Major, laughing in spite of himself. "I would say, don't trust yourself blindly to an art-chair."

"Who was it that caused the fall of Adam but a woman, which means sarpint," continued the overthrown hero, unheeding the Major's interruption to his moralising. "Who caused the siege of Troy but one of the same breed. Who caused the death of Mark Antony? And who put Samuel Biddle onto his beam-ends with a bang, fit to break all the bones of his poor old body, but a woman. Yah!"

The fall of Samuel had almost sobered him, but, as yet, he was not quite capable of raising himself to his feet unaided, and as none of the company seemingly felt inclined to lift him, he sat still on the polished floor, clutching the broken pieces of that ruined chair in his hands, and glared savagely on the silent Kate.

At this moment Wilfred Tregarthen came in, followed by the servants and a crowd of Mathuna's tribe, all looking concerned.

"Have you not found her yet?" cried Kate anxiously.

"No; we can hear nothing about her," answered Wilfred.

"No one about the settlement has seen Mathuna."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Samuel, who heard the question and answer. "Who is it that wants Mathuna?"

"We all do," replied Kate quickly, turning upon him. "Have you seen her this afternoon anywhere?"

"Yas, I did see her this afternoon, about sundown."

"Where?"

"Wall, I see her and the deadly adder going along to the 'Black Swan' at that hour."

"Deadly adder; Black Swan!" echoed Kate in bewilderment.

"Yas, you deceitful young sarpint. By the deadly adder I means the governess, Jane Lymburner, and by the 'Black

Swan ' I mean the public-house, as we have just left, down at Sandy Bay."

"Gracious heavens! Mathuna with Jane Lymburner, and going into that house!" cried Kate, throwing up her hands in her sudden fear. "Then there is danger, and she has been lured into some trap. Mr Tregarthen, did you go to the barracks?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Captain Wilmott there?"

"No; he had gone out," answered Wilfred.

"Or Miss Lymburner?"

"She also was absent."

"Yas, I know. We left the deadly adder at the 'Black Swan' half-an-hour ago. That was the one as tackled you, Captain, when we were leaving, as I warned you against," said Samuel from the floor.

"Then there is deadly peril to poor Mathuna. Quick, uncle and friends; go down there and save her. Oh, I must go with you, and see if she has come to no harm."

Kate flew out of the room for her hat, and quickly returned to join the others, who were now outside. Then away they all rushed out of the settlement, gathering the night stragglers as they went along.

Very soon the word passed round the crowd of gentlemen, sailors, convicts and natives that Mathuna had been lured into Taggart's ill-famed house, where the hated Captain Wilmott had also gone. As they went along, some of the convicts scattered to tell their companions, and get what they could find in the shape of implements of offence. A raid was on the *tapis*, and they intended to be in it, and make the most of their chance, while they had it, to wipe off old scores against their two tyrants, Wilmott and Taggart.

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"Sit down, prisoners, and have another drink," said Captain Wilmott to the two flagellators, as they slouched into the kitchen, where he sat waiting. "Landlord!"

"Yes, Captain."

"Is your house empty? Have all your customers gone?"

"Every soul, Captain, and the doors are closed and barred. There will be no admission for any one to-night," answered Taggart, as he stood rubbing his hands.

"That's all right. Now, bring in a bottle of your best rum."

Taggart went out again to the bar, and returned followed by Jane Lymburner and the dwarf, who carried a tray filled with glasses, and a bottle of rum uncorked; these she set before the Captain, and waited while he poured out the drink into the glasses.

"Drink, prisoners; and you had better take some also, Jane, for it seems a cold night."

"Yes, it does seem chilly," replied Jane, taking from him the proffered glass and glancing round the cheerless kitchen with a slight shiver.

"Fifteen shillings, sir, if you please," said the wooden-faced dwarf, stolidly holding out her hand.

"Oh, yes; I forgot. There you are," answered the Captain, taking out his purse and placing a guinea in her hand. "Don't bother about the change."

"Thank you, sir," replied the dwarf.

"Go upstairs, Beauty, and put it away along with the night's drawings," whispered Taggart in her ear, "and I'll come up to you presently. You will not be wanted any more to-night."

"But, Ignatius, I want to see the flogging," answered his wife in a plaintive tone of entreaty. "May I not come down again and see it?"

"Ha! ha!! ho! ho!!" laughed the blind fiddler in his shrill, high-pitched voice. "My Beauty is like all the rest of her sex—filled with curiosity, Captain. She wants to see how a back looks when it is being marked. Will you let her stop and enjoy herself with the rest of us?"

Wilmott shrugged his shoulders with annoyance at the eldritch laugh, but answered gruffly,—

"Yes, yes; she can stay and see it if she likes."

"Go now, my Beauty; I'll come up for you presently."

The dwarf waddled out of the kitchen and into the bar, where she began to empty the till into a pewter pot. As the chinking of the coins fell upon the large ears of the two convict flagellators, their piggish eyes gleamed greedily.

"Now, prisoners, I have promised you a guinea each for this job; take it now, and see that you do your duty."

"Thank you, Captain; we will not fail," replied the wretches, as they clutched at the gold and bit it before pocketing it. "How many is it to be?"

"As many as she can stand."

"Right you are, Captain! Then we have a long job before us, for that woman is like a bull."

"Captain, I'd like a settlement also, if you don't mind," observed Taggart eagerly.

"All right," answered the Captain, again opening his purse. "Fifteen guineas, I think, squares us, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Captain, with the drinks which I had to give the boys this afternoon extra."

"How much do you reckon that to be?"

"They had three bottles of my ten-shilling stuff, which makes thirty extra, Captain."

"There are two guineas over in that lot; will that do?"

"Thank you kindly, Captain."

"Now, finish up your drink and let us begin work," cried the Captain, rising from his chair.

"Excuse me for a moment, until I fetch my Beauty," said Taggart, picking up the pieces and counting them carefully.

"Be quick about it then, for I am cold."

"A second only."

While Taggart was away, the Captain and Jane sat in their chairs and looked on the ground, silently avoiding each other's eyes; the approaching villany and the presence of their degraded companions prevented them from holding converse.

"Now, Captain, we are all ready. Beauty, you carry the lamp, and we will follow."

Taggart, who knew the working of the trap-door, went over, and, kneeling down, drew back the bolt and raised it up—disclosing the darksome cavity with the clumsy ladder leading down to it—and then, the little dwarf going first with the light, they followed one by one, and soon stood amongst the mud which covered the floor.

It was a noisome cellar, and half-filled with hogsheads, barrels and cases. As they stood under the open trap-door, the light of the lamp shot up and made a light spot over the rafters and cobwebs which festooned the kitchen roof, all the rest being dark.

Mathuna lay where she had been thrown, with the chair above her and the side of her face pressing against the mud. She raised her head as far as she could when they entered, and regarded them with glowing eyes.

"Lift her up, prisoners."

The two convicts went over, and, raising her and the chair, set her down in sitting position; then it could be seen that her arms and legs had swollen until the tightly-drawn ropes could hardly be seen where they touched the body. Between

her parted teeth they had stuffed a piece of hard wood covered with a rag.

Captain Wilmott slowly removed his bandages, showing the horrible and half-healed scars which she had made; then he stood in front of her and looked at her with a ferocious contortion.

"So I have you at last, you savage! Look what you have made me, before I begin to pay you out, cut for cut, with interest."

Mathuna looked at him steadily, while a laughing gleam shot from her fiery eyes.

"Ha! you are laughing, are you?" shouted the Captain in a fury. "Give me your whip, flogger, till I have a cut or two before you begin."

As one of the convicts handed him his cat-o'-nine-tails, a sudden smashing was heard upstairs, which made them all start and look up to the trap-door.

"Ah! It is thieves breaking into my house," shouted Taggart in a sudden fear. "Come, Beauty; come and save our gold."

In a panic the blind man ran up the ladder, followed by his dwarf wife, who still carried the lamp, leaving the other occupants of the cellar in darkness.

"Come back with that light, Taggart," shouted the Captain furiously, while the smashing went on at the windows and doors amidst a tumult of human voices.

"Quick, Beauty; save our gold."

The two gold worshippers crossed the kitchen and bar, and made for their bedroom.

"There goes the blind man and his wife," yelled the voices through the broken windows, as they smashed away with their pickaxes and spades.

Now the framework falls, and two or three of the excited mob leap through and fling open the outer door, admitting the others with a wild rush, filling kitchen, bar and parlour, and shouting for light.

"Ha!" Several of the men have tumbled through the open trap, and are shouting below for help as they flounder about the mud.

"We've found Mathuna. Fetch a light."

Up the stairs rush a dozen of the convicts after the landlord and his wife, who carries the lamp.

"My money—my precious money!" shrieks Ignatius Taggart, as he flings himself upon his locked box.

"Bring him along, mates; we'll look after the precious money presently."

Shrieking and struggling like a madman in their hands, the blind monster is dragged down the stairs with his wooden-faced wife, while one carries the lamp after them, into the bar and through the parlour, out to the open air at the back.

The Major and Wilfred do not pay any attention to the movements of the convicts with Taggart. They run after the man who carries the lamp into the kitchen and down the trap ladder, where they see the bound Mathuna on the chair, while her persecutors crouch against the wall in their vain attempt to escape observation. Wilmott still holds the whip in his hand, with his horribly distorted face ghastly with fear, while Jane clings to his arm, and looks over his shoulder wildly at the invaders.

Wilfred has his knife out in a moment, and cuts the ropes asunder which bind Mathuna, who, when at liberty, totters up, and, flinging herself into his arms, makes the first use of her tongue by gasping out,—

"My Wilfred, I knew that you would come and save me."

The convicts, sailors and blacks have rushed upon the four wretches, and are hauling them out of the cellar.

"Mercy! Have mercy on us! Save us, Major Quinton! Save us, Mathuna!" shrieks out Jane Lymburner, as she struggles against the enraged mob, who are dragging her away.

Mathuna has not fainted, as a civilised woman would have done in her place. Still lying on Wilfred's breast, in an ecstasy of holy joy, she hears the appeal, and remembers that she is a Christian, and must forgive as she would be forgiven.

"Keep back, men, their lives are mine now; leave them to me," she cries, as she leaves her shelter and staggers over to the miserable pair.

"No, Mathuna; they belong now to Government as criminals, and I claim their bodies," shouts the Major. "Secure them, and bring them along to prison, boys."

It is over, and Wilfred Tregarthen leads his once Savage, but now Christian Queen out of the front door to where Kate waits to receive her, happy to find her safe. So they they all go off through the moonlight towards the cottage, with the four prisoners behind them being marched off to prison under the charge of Captain Drake and his crew, forgetful of Igna-

tius Taggart, who is left to the tender mercy of the convicts and natives.

Samuel Biddle walks along, clutching tightly to the cords which bind Jane Lymburner. He feels satisfied that he has got the deadly adder at last in his power.

When the party get to the settlement, they divide, with the promise to meet for refreshments at the cottage after they have locked up their prisoners; so, while the sailors turn into the prison yard, the others go on to the cottage.

"Hallo!" said the Major, as a red glare behind causes him to look back; "I forgot the landlord. They have set his house on fire. Go in with the ladies, Wilfred, and wait till I get back. I must go and stop this sort of thing."

Quickly, however, as the Major ran over the ground, he was not quick enough to save either the blind fiddler or his accursed house; but only in time to watch it burning down, while, by the red glare which brought the gibbets into bold relief, he saw that the vacant gallows-tree was again occupied, and that he was too late to save the wretched life of the convicts' betrayer, who now dangled motionlessly in the air, with the flames from his own house revealing his dead face in all its added hideousness. At the foot of the tree sat the dwarf wife, with her hands folded and her wooden face impassive, while, in the distance, could be seen a crowd of convict-clad men hurrying off with a large black box—the treasure chest.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN SOUTH LATITUDE 69.

THE *Storm Bird* flew along at a fearful speed in spite of her broken wing through that Antarctic gale, straight south, after she had broken loose from the *Gorgon*. Through the blinding snow-storm and into the Polar Ocean, with its ice-bound shores and unknown mysteries behind.

It was daylight before the pirates could count their slain, wounded and missing, or think about revenge upon the unfortunate prisoners whom they had captured, as during the

night, after securing their prisoners, they had lain in the state cabin, huddled all together for warmth, for it felt bitterly cold after the excitement of battle was over.

They had lost their chief leader in Michael Howe, the man whose boisterous spirits always kept them cheerful, and whose stern idea of discipline always kept them in order. Ned Quigley was lying below with a split head and a body covered with slashes; Dyan Hopper shot through the chest, and not expected to recover; most of the women wearing ghastly wounds under their short-gowns, for they had fought like untamed tigers, all regardless of themselves, while many of the men who still lived were unable to help at all with the working of the ship, so that she had just to run as the wind and sea carried her.

It was morning, and all who could crawl up to the snow-covered deck were assembled to assist in the condemnation of their prisoners—cold, miserable, but relentless in their desire for vengeance.

Bess Martin had, as usual, been appointed speaker to the assembly. She was also wounded, and carried her arm in a sling, besides having one of her cheeks covered with a cloth, through which the dark blood had saturated, so that she was by no means looking her best.

“Bring along the prisoners, mates,” said Bess, and at her word two or three of the men, least injured, went to the deck house, and reappeared with the captives, all heavily ironed, and with their wounds unheeded and clotted. They shivered violently, and turned livid as they were driven into the cold air, presenting a wretched appearance.

Saul Clark, with a large gash across his cheek and temple, from which the blood had run down his face and shirt, but had congealed during the night, with four companions in misfortune; they staggered forward to meet their doom, trying to look brave, but failing miserably. Extreme cold is a sad demoraliser of courage, particularly when men are wounded, and have to face the cutting blasts with their uncovered hurts.

Not that their captors were in much better plight; they were all blue, all shivering, and with teeth chattering like castanets.

Bess was like a bereaved lioness this morning, for her pal was lying below unconscious, and she felt that she wanted some one to wreak her fury upon, yet at the sight of Saul and his wound, her big, if misdirected, heart softened a little.

Saul had been always pleasant and kindly disposed to the convicts on board the *Stirling Castle*, and Bess did not easily forget a kindness.

“Well, mates, and what’s to be done to these yer criminals, who have come aboard our ship without being axed?” asked Bess, looking round upon her council.

“String ’em up slow.”

“Boil ’em alive.”

“Skin ’em.”

“Tear out their eyes first, and then cut the livers out o’ ’em.”

“Make ’em walk the plank one by one; it’s werry good sport.”

Such were a few of the many suggestions which showered about Bess’s uncovered ear—indeed! her only remaining ear, for the one which should have been on the side now covered was lost, like their leader, and not any more likely to be found again.

“Walking the plank seems to be the most pleasant way of getting rid of them,” replied Bess, in a reflective tone. “Or I’ll tell ye a funnier one if you like, mates.”

“Out with it, Bess.”

“We’re on a pretty lonesome sea here, without many ports of call about, I should say; don’t you, mates?”

“Yes; nothing nearer than the South Pole Hotel,” remarked one of the sailor convicts jocularly.

“Well, I was just thinking that if we was to lend these blokes one of the small boats, and let them have a couple of oars, that they might pull in for that hotel, and let the landlord know as visitors was about to arrive, hungry and thirsty.”

“Dash it, Bess, that’s no punishment; they might be picked up.”

“D’ye think so, Peter Walsh?” said Bess, with a fine air of lofty scorn, turning upon the man who had last spoken. “That’s all you know about it, and it only shows how short-sighted you are.”

Peter was very near-sighted, so that he winced under this sarcasm. She continued,—

“Trust to a woman to be able to think out a proper revenge; now, what is yours, I should like to know?”

“Walking the plank in course; it’s the good old style, and the best.”

“Is it? Now I tell you what it is; this innocent old-

fashioned game of the plank is a fraud in the way of punishment, that's what it is; you blindfold a bloke and tie his hands up, and then set him running over the ship's side, when with a flop it is all over, and he goes to glory just like a blind kitten; is that what you call revenge? Bah!"

"Skinning is better," cried out one of the women.

"No, Agatha, it ain't, nor boilin' neither, nor any other thing as you can think of like to an open boat in an ocean as this is. Skinning ain't so sore as it looks like. Don't we skin eels alive, and what do they care about it? Don't we pop in the crabs, lobsters and perriwinkles into the pot, and they only blushes with pleasure at the ticklin' heat? Lor' bless me, girls, but I'd like to be boiled myself this morning; that I would," and the artful Bess gave a theatrical shiver, which was very catching all round her audience, while she furtively darted a kindly look at Saul which inspired him with a slight thrill of hope.

"Now, an open boat with a wind like this, and no fire, is the proper punishment, which lasts longer nor either skinning or boiling. Give 'em enough meat, says I, to keep 'em in misery for a considerable while, and then set 'em adrift; vessel pick 'em up?—where is the vessel ever comes so far down these blessed seas?"

"The one what tackled us last night, Bess."

"Bah! that craft's had enough of it, you bet; she's turned tail long before this, and gone back to Hobart Town for repairs. I saw her masts give way before we left her; besides, she had enough of us; no, mates, do as you please, of course, but if you want to take my advice—the advice of one as wants to punish them properly, for her old man's sake—shove them into the open boat, with a bag of biscuits to keep them alive for a bit, and let them drift, so they will go on, pricking all over with cold, day after day, and at last begin to scoff one another; that's what I call revenge of the slow and sure sort."

Bess Martin knew her audience, and how to work upon them for, after a long and stormy discussion, during which the poor captives stood and shivered with cold and horror, her plan was finally adopted, with the amendment of no provisions.

"I've done my blamedest for you, mate," she whispered to Saul when she saw a chance. "May the Lord take care of you for the rest; we ain't much better off than you're likely to be, I'm thinkin'."

"Get them to shift about, Bess, as soon as possible, or

you'll be ice-locked before long," replied Saul, willing to show his gratitude by giving him a hint.

"There ain't a man left amongst us as can pull a rope to-day," said Bess dismally. "However, you've got your chance; take it, mate, and be thankful, and if ye does escape, think kindly sometimes of poor Bess Martin, who got it for you."

"I will, Bess. God save you," replied Saul fervently, squeezing her hand.

"The same to you, lad;" saying which Wild Bess turned away.

The boat was lowered over the side—no easy task with those high seas—and then the five prisoners were made to leap over the sides, with their chains on, into it, and a couple of oars pitched after them.

"Now, let's see how you can row, mates," shouted Bess, who had managed unobserved to fling after them a bag.

Saul, and another who could use his arms, promptly picked up the oars, and began rowing, while the *Storm Bird* darted from the little boat, which rocked and danced like a cork on the great rollers, now appearing upon the crest, and again getting lost in the deep valleys of the heaving waste.

Saul and his companions watched the *Storm Bird* as she sped on her way along that dreary ocean. It was all boundless as yet, with the low banks of snow-clouds hovering to the north, and that intense cold sparkle like crystal to the south. They were pulling back towards the snow, while their enemies were hastening towards that sparkling relentless ice atmosphere.

It was utter misery where they sat, with their feet nearly up to their irons in the snow, and the seats covered round them. Yet Saul had knowledge enough to be glad of that snow, for when the cold numbed them he got up, and, taking a handful, rubbed it vigorously over their faces and hands until they glowed again, so saving them from frost-bite.

"Don't go to sleep, lads, but take each a turn at the oars, and pray that we may have another snow-storm to-night; it is our only friend now."

So they kept on all day, facing due north. Saul had a little pocket-compass, therefore was able to guide them along in the right direction. They hadn't much hope of escape, but still, being sailors, they were not easily cast down. The bag also which Bess had flung to them was found to be filled with biscuits, so that they were not likely to starve with hunger

for a time, however much they ran the risk of perishing with cold. The sea and the wind were against them, but still they persevered, and never ceased rowing along.

That night the snow fell again, and while it fell they did not feel the cold so much; it covered them up like a thick blanket, and filled their boat up to the gunwale.

When morning dawned again, Saul discovered that two of the men had fallen asleep, and would never wake again; they were stiff and frozen.

Then the three survivors went on as they had done the day before, pulling alternately to keep the life in them. Another morning dawned, and showed a third victim to that fatal slumber.

On the third day, Saul sat alone in the midst of a desolate but sun-lighted ocean, with four corpses beside him. He was pulling unconsciously at the two oars, taking long, mechanical strokes, with his head drooping on his breast, mortally fatigued, and trying his hardest to keep that awful sleep back which was slowly creeping upon him.

"Boat ahoy!" came a distant voice, like a dream-sound upon his numbed senses. "Boat ahoy!"

Saul raised his head sleepily, with a mist before his eyes.

"Boat ahoy! We're coming to you; keep up."

Yes; that sounded near enough, and closer. Saul tried to shout back, but could not find his voice, to see through that blood-red film which made everything crimson, but without success.

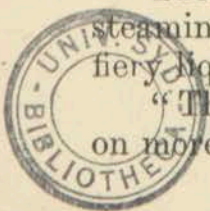
He tried to shake his head but it seemed glued to his neck, while a sound like bells rang in his ears. He no longer felt the oars; indeed, he no longer held them, for they had slipped from his frozen hands, while he was lying on his face, half buried up in that kindly snow.

When he woke up again, he felt warm and comfortable, although he could not see, for the scarlet glare was still in his eyes, neither could he move a limb, yet it was comfortable, although he seemed to have a ton load above him—a ton load of warm blankets.

"Hold up his head, lads," he heard a deep voice say.

Then he was lifted up, and at the grateful aroma of steaming rum hot, he instinctively opened his mouth while the fiery liquid ran down his throat.

"That's all right; now he'll do. Cover him up, and pile on more blankets."



He slept again, heavily and dreamlessly, to wake up on the rack. A thousand red-hot piercers were being run into his bones, and the weight of a house bearing him down; then he felt carried away to a fiery lake, and plunged into the midst of it, to be torn out by invisible fiends, and placed up to his neck amongst ice and snow. He was dead, then, and in the hell of extremes!

Then, after a hundred or two years of this alternating torture, he got a glimpse of the she-demon who was tormenting him, and after that first glimpse she never quitted him, but clawed at him mockingly, a merciless fiend who wore the gentle pale face and crafty eyes of Jane Lymburner.

Then somehow, but without his knowing how, he found himself drawn out of this Hades, and removed to the top of a high mountain around which the soft white clouds floated, with the intense desire upon him to get away from that hard bed which hurt him, and be able to fly.

His wish became fulfilled after a time, and he found himself floating upon the downy clouds, without a sensation of pain left, floating softly and easily, with an angel beside him, who wore the face of his own true lost love, Kate Ambrose.

How long had he floated with her beside him, all tenderness and pity? He could not tell, but it seemed like an eternity. Then he woke up again to find himself still under the blankets, with the stuffy sides and roof of a ship's berth instead of the golden cloud-land, and the weather-beaten face of a naval officer bending over him instead of the rosy lips of brown-haired Kate.

"Where am I?" he asked wonderingly.

"On board His Majesty's Sloop *Sirius*, lad, and within a hundred miles of Hobart Town. You've had a long spell of rheumatic fever," replied the Lieutenant kindly.

The *Storm Bird* sped southward before that steady but deadly breeze, while Bess Martin and her companions robbed the boxes of all the garments that they could find, and piled them on until they looked like Esquimaux waddling about, and drank the rum down like water without feeling its effects.

Barry Wheelen and Dyan Hopper died of their wounds that night, and there was not a man on board who could work the ship or handle the wheel, but that was of no consequence now, for the yards and the wheel were frozen fast in their places, while every rope was bound to their places like soldered iron wires.

On, under a brilliant sun, which sparkled through the air like a lamp through shaking water. The pirates could no longer face the fresh air, but all crept downstairs, and closing the doors, lay against each other in a heap on the saloon floor, careless any longer of meat and drink, with only a stagnant craving left for animal heat.

Their fires had gone out, and they could not light them again; the mercury had sunk until it froze in the glass; their very breath became ice-wreaths, which passed from mouth to mouth like spiders' webs, and glued them together.

A death-ship the *Storm Bird* looked as she flew along, with only a few corpses lying on her decks amongst the glistening snow, while the waves, as they dashed over her stern, turned into solid ice, layer above layer, until her bows stuck out of the waves with the weight of the bottle-green mass on her poop.

The ocean had been wonderfully free up till now of icebergs; but now they were looming on the horizon, like domes and steeples of dazzling crystal flecked with snow.

No bird crossed their track. They were on a silent, lifeless sea—well into south latitude 69°, and within the mystic Antarctic circle.

Now the ship's stern is weighted down to the water's edge, and the ice-layers are falling and hanging like frozen waterfalls from the poop to the main-deck, and gradually spreading along to the galley. The saloon is under water, and fast bound in with walls of ice, while the bows reach up like the roof of a house.

Still she keeps on her way towards those glistening domes and minarets, although sailing now very slowly, for she is driving between a sea like ice-cream, which is thickening.

She has stopped still now, and without a shock, while the ice gathers round her and hardens, until she is firmly docked, with her poop under the water, and her keel at the bows all exposed and dripping with icicles.

Inside the saloon the light drifts green, as if passing through emeralds. The bodies are all huddled close together, and cold.

Bess Martin is the last to see that lovely twilight. She raises her heavy head for a moment, and opens her weary eyelids. Then she lets her head droop once more upon the cold breast of her pal, Ned Quigley, who is lying on his back, with staring eyes and glistening teeth, and, with a gentle sigh, Bess falls asleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MATHUNA BECOMES AN "AGNOSTIC."

"I do not exactly know how far you have advanced in this new fancy of yours, my dear Mathuna, and, as you know, I am the last person in the world to interfere with prejudices of any sort; but I must say that this raving of yours on religion is considered in the world of fashion as extremely bad form."

"What do you mean, Wilfred?"

"Well, only that people in good society generally leave all that sort of fanatical rubbish to shoemakers and ranters. We don't talk or profess religion in genteel circles; in fact, it is uncommonly vulgar and under-bred, if you will pardon me for saying so."

"But John Whitehouse said that it is the one thing needful."

"So it is to the like of John Whitehouse, and men of his education and caste," observed Wilfred Tregarthen quietly.

He was not easily annoyed, but Mathuna had annoyed him lately with her exalted maunderings about the unlimited possibilities of this infant faith of hers.

He had listened attentively, or at least with seeming attention, to what he considered was a new fad of hers, to use a modern phrase, as, in politeness, he would have listened to the fleeting fancy of one of his West End lady friends over some fresh craze. So he had patiently listened to his friend Mathuna's craze about religion with an air of affected interest, until at last it had grown, as he said to himself, confoundedly monotonous.

Mathuna, poor savage, had thought that as Jehovah was the acme of civilisation, according to the primitive John Whitehouse, so also it must be the very highest range she could reach in the faith of her sun-god.

The gentle disapproval of her hero come upon her like an avalanche. He, the god of her idolatry, the hero of her heart-worship, to object to the creed of his own kind! Where had she gone wrong, and how could she right herself in his eyes? That was all which troubled the savage now.

They were in the forest, where they had been all the day; within three miles of the settlement, and under the

setting sun they had sat down to rest before returning to the town.

Wilfred had thrown himself down on the bank-side of the river Derwent, satisfied with his day's sport, and luxuriating in the glow of the setting sun and the scent of the bush flowers. Spring was flying from them with hasty feet, the blossoms were becoming tarnished on the bushes—instead of pink and white, they were becoming amber-tinted and withered—yet the perfume still lingered about them, and their perfume soothed the acute senses of Wilfred Tregarthen.

He wanted no more than to lie back and inhale the deliciousness of nature in her transition between maidenhood and the sedateness of young maturity. This talk of obsolete creeds jarred upon his sensitive nerves. He had a Greek face and a Greek nature, to whom nature in all her phases was enough to satisfy his chaste cravings—to whom the passionate creeds of mankind were, like distempers of the blood, to be avoided.

Mathuna, the impulsive child of nature, was delightful; but Mathuna, as the feverish acolyte of that time-worn creed of Nazareth, became a decided bore.

Wilfred Tregarthen understood neither faith nor love.

“But tell me, Wilfred, do ladies and gentlemen not believe in the Son of God?”

“My dear Mathuna, ladies and gentlemen don't think anything at all about the Son of God, or what He taught in His day. That was eighteen hundred years ago, when people and society were quite different. They used to have lions and tigers to tear martyrs in pieces then, or crucify them, and then it was considered heroic to die for an opinion. Now-a-days we leave all that sort of thing in the hands of the bishops and vicars to look after. We pay them large salaries, and they see to the advance of the Church; we pay their tithes, and are expected to go to church and listen to the service, and that is all which *they* expect or desire from *us*.”

“What is the Church, Wilfred?”

“The Church? Well, in former times it was the Church of Rome, where the Pope looked after the people and their iniquities. There were priests then, who confessed to the bishop, who again confessed to the cardinal, while he laid it all on the Pope, and got absolution. Then the Pope and the King of England had a quarrel, and the King—that is, our King—became the head of the Church instead of the Pope, and organised an entirely new set of rules.”

"But what about Christ, who died for us, Wilfred?"

"Oh, *He* had nothing at all to do with these alterations. He was a carpenter's son, who organised a sect of His own long ago amongst His own kind—fishermen and tanners, and that sort of thing."

"But English people call themselves Christians, Wilfred. Why do they call themselves so?"

"Well, I suppose it is because He founded this sect, from which all the others sprang."

"Do you believe in Christ, Wilfred?"

"Mathuna, that is a difficult question to answer. We have a poet called Shakespeare, whom many people believe was a man, and whom others believe to be a number of writers who called themselves Shakespeare."

"But, Wilfred," continued Mathuna persistently, "John Whitehouse told me that this Christ was God; that He came to die for all of us, so that we might be saved, and live for ever; that Christ was about at the present day; and that, if we liked, He could listen to our wishes now, and help us, the same as when He lived eighteen hundred years ago."

"What nonsense, Mathuna! Did he not tell you that Christ died eighteen hundred years ago?"

"Yes; he said that He died then, but that He rose again, and lives as real now as before He was crucified."

"Oh, that is all ranter's rot. Christ is dead, and only the Church lives."

"Then the Church is like our fire-stick, Wilfred."

"What is your fire-stick, Mathuna?"

"Oh, we have a legend—you call it a superstition—that the fire carried the dead souls up to the stars when the bodies were burnt; but that, if we let our fire die out, the spirit would leave us for ever. Of course, when we came amongst you we very soon knew that this was all nonsense—that there was no spirit at all in it, but that one fire was as good as another. So we let our fire-stick go out, and threw it away; and after that, when we wanted a fire, we lighted it from whatever materials we had handy. That is like your Church, isn't it? There was no spirit at all in it; Christ was only a superstition; and when you got tired of the Pope, you took up the King."

"Yes, Mathuna; you have reckoned it up very fairly. Only we don't reason so directly as you do; in fact, we don't trouble our reasoning faculties about it at all."

"Yet John Whitehouse seems to be very much in earnest about it."

"Yes; we have these people with us always, who go about disturbing the community; but well-bred people only laugh at them."

"Then I don't need to forgive my enemies?"

"Not unless you like, Mathuna; I would say, do just as you like about that. Personally, I have no enemies; but if I had, I would keep out of their way."

"But if you could not, Wilfred?"

"Then I would crush them, and prevent them from troubling me. When I was a little boy, I took everything literally, as you are inclined to do, and thought about heaven and hell as real places, and God as a living personage."

"And now, Wilfred?"

"I live for myself. This world is beautiful; spring is delicious, but spring is nearly dead, so that I must forget spring, and think about the pleasures of summer. The moon is lovely when it is shining, and some people trouble themselves about what the moon is made of, but that is folly. As it shines, it is good enough for me, because it is a lamp, and a pretty one. The stars are lovely to look at, yet some people say that they are worlds. They may or they may not be, for all I care. They look like jewels as they sparkle, and they satisfy me, as I can see them. You are beautiful, Mathuna, and I love you for what you are."

"Oh, Wilfred, do you?"

"Yes; of course. This blossom was beautiful yesterday, but see, it is beginning to fade. Yesterday it was the fairest thing any one could look upon, and gave exquisite pleasure; to-day it is past."

As he spoke, he threw the half-withered blossom away from him carelessly, while Mathuna's heart sank.

"And you are beautiful, Wilfred," she said softly.

"Am I?—and yet, a hundred years after this, I shall be like last spring's flowers. This is how to enjoy life, Mathuna, to take each pleasure before it passes, and not to regret it after it is past."

"That's what I should like to do, Wilfred," murmured poor Mathuna softly.

"It is pleasant to lie on this bank and see the clouds change their colour," continued Wilfred, unconscious of her meaning; "to watch the sun go down all gold and purple."

"Yes, it is pleasant with you, Wilfred."

"And the moon, when it comes up out of the sea. Who would think of any other world while this is left to us?"

"Who would? John Whitehouse is a fool; he only thinks of the pleasures after this life is over; but you are right, Wilfred, this life is the best."

"Of course he is," answered Wilfred, with decision.

"What is God, Wilfred?"

"Like your fire-stick; a savage superstition, bred from fear and ignorance."

"Then there is no real God?"

"No, Mathuna, it is all a superstition."

"And I was right after all, while John Whitehouse was wrong."

"Yes, Mathuna, that is it; so don't bother your head at all about it. There are no churches in Hobart Town, and no religion; whatever is most pleasing to do must be natural and proper."

"I am so glad, Wilfred, that you have told me all this, because I was so unhappy in trying to do what John Whitehouse told me was right. It seemed all a sacrifice, all against what my own nature prompted me to do."

"Believe me, Nature is the best god for us to worship; at least I have always found it to be so."

"But what about propriety, Wilfred? It seems as unpleasant as religion to obey."

"Oh, that is different. You see, Mathuna, we try to act proper, and as others do, because we live with them, and if we don't go in the same way, they can always make it uncomfortable for us; but with the others, we are only crucifying ourselves, without any one being the wiser, or benefiting from it."

"Then we ought only to consider others?"

"As far as it adds to our own comfort; yes—there, Mathuna, I have given you a long enough lesson on morality and manners for one night; let us be moving."

Mathuna rose with him, and together they advanced along by the side of the river. She had got rid of a lot of self-troubles during this walk, and also of a deal of nobility. The sparing of her two enemies, Jane Lymburner and Wilcott, seemed to her now to be a silliness on her part. Why did she spare them, since it would have been so much more natural to have killed them?—so much more natural, and so much more pleasant.

She was indignant that John Whitehouse should have

told her such a pack of lies, and worked upon her sympathy by that legend of Calvary. What a fool he was, and what a fool she had been.

Wilfred was right; he must be, for had he not always put her right when she went wrong; and what he believed in, she must. There was no universal God to conciliate, there was only one god to adore and live up to, and that was Wilfred.

"How would you like to see England, Mathuna?"

"Will you ever go there again, Wilfred?"

"Of course I must; my people are all there, and my property lies there. I must go home some day."

"Ah! then I'd like to see England very much."

"You would like my mother, I think, Mathuna; she would form you much better than I could do."

"But you have formed me well enough, Wilfred."

"Not for London society. What a *furor* you would make at court, Mathuna! By Jove, I'd like to see you there!"

"Would you, Wilfred?"

"I would, indeed; some day you must come."

"Whenever you like I'll go, Wilfred."

During the rest of their walk they said little. Wilfred was thinking already about his voyage home. He would take Sydney first, and then go round that way; and sometime, perhaps, he would take another trip out to Van Dieman's Land, and bring his sister, perhaps, to see Mathuna; then they would take her home to England, and make a lot of her as a native find. She was the finest curiosity he had seen in all his travels.

Mathuna thought,—I will go to England with him when he goes; it will be a great sacrifice to leave my people and my land, but why not, if he wants it?

A delicious walk home that was, for the moon rose up as they went along, and he talked about it to her with such lover-like enthusiasm that she felt it was all a figurative way of telling his own love about her. So she clung to him, and watched him, with passionate intensity, satisfied that she was the real queen of the night whom he was speaking about so eloquently.

They were freer and warmer in their intercourse than they had been before his illness. Now he would often throw his arm about her neck or round her waist, as a brother might have done to a sister, or kiss her before people without think-

ing anything about it; or noticing, as the others did, how she flushed up and shivered with delight at the thrilling contact. To-night they were walking home like two lovers or two school-girls, with their arms round each other's neck, while she fondled the filbert-shaped nails and tapering fingers of that exquisite hand as it hung over her shoulder. The mellow moonlight which he was speaking about fell upon their faces, so nearly on a level, and cast their shadows blackly behind them.

"What is your own religion, Wilfred?" asked Mathuna, coming back to that topic with child-like persistence.

"I was brought up in the Church of England, and attend worship like other people when I am at home; but as to my own private opinions, I am just what I described already to you—what nearly the whole of society are—an epicure, and what I might call an agnostic, to coin an expression."

"What are they?"

"An epicure is one who assumes that pleasure is the highest aim of humanity; while an agnostic is one who doubts everything that he cannot see, touch or feel—what, perhaps, John Whitehouse might call a materialist or an atheist. We are both epicures, Mathuna, for we take all that we can get of nature and life—wishing for more, as is the universal craving of humanity."

"Yes, I am an epicure, for I wish for more," echoed Mathuna softly, with her large eyes fixed dreamily in front of her; "and I will be an agnostic also after this."

That night, when they got to the cottage, they found company there—the Governor and several of his staff. They were discussing the attack on Mathuna, and arranging about the court-martial for the criminals. The Governor was furious, for John Whitehouse was present, and had told his story of the plot against Marion Carter, and other misdemeanours committed by the Captain.

"He has disgraced the army, gentlemen, and must be made an example of, so that settlers may not say that there is one law for the aristocrat and another for the plebeian."

Wilfred found some letters from home waiting on him—for a vessel had arrived that afternoon—with news which demanded his immediate presence in England.

"How long does the *Golden Grove* remain in harbour, Captain?" asked Wilfred, after he had read through his letters.

"We sail again next week," replied the Captain.

The rest of the evening, Wilfrid was very attentive and

tender towards Mathuna; and when they parted, he kissed her almost affectionately, and murmured in her ear, as they stood on the verandah,—

“Good-night, Mathuna; let us go out again to-morrow, for I have something to say to you.”

It was the warmest embrace that he had ever given her, and she nearly swooned with the excess of delight which thrilled her and caused her heart to stand still. To-morrow he would tell her that he was going to marry her; that was it. “Oh, to-morrow, to-morrow, to-morrow!” With the words ringing in her ears, she leaned against the verandah post and watched his graceful figure until it disappeared in the moonlight.

“Well, Mathuna, I hope you are still keeping up your zeal and faith?”

It was little John Whitehouse, who had found her standing here wrapt in that glamour of love and silver light. She glanced down at his earnest face and insignificant figure with contempt.

“No, John Whitehouse, I have changed my faith; I am now an agnostic.”

“An agnostic! What is that, Mathuna?”

“What you call a materialist, or an atheist.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN ARTICLE OF VIRTU.

THE morning of a very important day of ceremony and work for Governor Davey had broken upon his troubled rest, and roused him up to one of the most disagreeable of his many duties—that of dressing himself as became his position as head of the young colony, and representative of His Majesty King George the Third.

Governor Davey hated ceremony and regimentals, and always swore a great deal at his valet on such occasions, when he had to be assisted into his stiff coat and cocked hat; he liked shirt sleeves and duck trousers much better.

But on this day it could not be evaded, for he had three important ceremonies to get through before he could take his ease and enjoy himself with his pipe and glass.

First, he had to officiate as solemniser of the holy ceremony of matrimony; for, like the captain of a vessel when at sea, when there is no clergyman, and couples require immediate "splicing," this was one of the Governor's duties.

Miss O'Callighan had received a letter from home which disturbed her very greatly, although she did not speak about it to any one except the Governor; and it made her resolve upon getting over the ceremony between herself and George de la Motte as quickly as possible. He had declared what none of her other lovers had done, a purely disinterested affection for her; and therefore, upon the receipt of that home-letter, she resolved to reward him at once with her hand, and, for this purpose, had hunted up the Governor the afternoon previous to the court-martial.

Governor Davey heard her intention of blessing the convict George without any surprise. Free settlers often contracted such marriages at that time, although it was more often on the male side than the female that free settlers so decided.

"He is a very well-behaved young man, Miss O'Callighan, and I trust will become a good colonist. I will get his ticket-of-leave made out and present it to you, along with your certificate, to-morrow."

Then the Governor issued an official proclamation, announcing a general holiday on the occasion of the wedding; also, as he liked to get through as many of these jobs as possible at once, that if any one else wanted to be married, they had best come up at the same time and have one service read over for the lot, as he did not wish to be bothered that way again for the next six months.

About a dozen of couples handed in their names promptly, and amongst them came Mary Ann Brown and her sailor sweetheart.

Mathuna was not on the list yet, for their walk had not come off. Wilfred Tregarthen, hearing about the approaching ceremonies when he reached his quarters, had sent round his man with an apology, as he wanted to see the show; also, after a night's rest, with his customary dislike to anticipate unpleasant tidings, he thought it best to postpone his farewell until the last moment.

"It will be plenty of time to let her know that I am

going, and bid her good-bye at the same time, on the day that the vessel sails; that is the kindest and most pleasant way for all parties."

So he went down quietly to the homeward bound ship, *Golden Grove*, and secured the next berth to Captain and Mrs Carrodus, telling the purser to say nothing about it to anyone; he would come aboard at the last moment.

Mathuna gulped down her disappointment as bravely as she could, taking the next best pleasure to a walk through the forest—the attending of the marriages along with her Wilfred, as became a true disciple of Epicurius. She even consented, along with Kate and Mrs Carrodus, to act as bridesmaid to the happy Miss O'Callighan.

Samuel Biddle heard the fatal news with gloomy despair, "It was jest as he had expecked," he muttered grimly to himself; while after a hard wrestle, he determined to attend also, and show the toothless sarpint what she had passed over. Therefore, while the Governor was frowning and swearing over his morning toilet, and Miss O'Callighan was being arrayed in virgin white by the three charming bridesmaids at Kilkenny Cottage, Samuel was hard at work in his own quarters oiling his side locks, and tying his pig-tail with a bright blue ribbon; and altogether rigging himself up regardless of expense.

"It's a darned pity that that blamed Doctor is laid up with the gout, and that the Inspector and Sergeant are out after Howe the bushranger, for I'd have enjoyed seeing them at this cussed wedding."

It was one of his disappointments that his former rivals could not also share in his chagrin, but as he had no excuse for staying away himself, and was too proud to give people cause, Miss O'Callighan most of all, to think that he was hurt, he resolved to be present, and endure stoically his hidden wounds.

"I'll fix her with my eye the whole time, and show her that I doesn't care a fig o' bacca for her now—that will fill her buzzim with regret for wot she's gone and lost."

At ten o'clock the Government reception room was choke-a-block with the applicants for Hymen and their attendents and friends, while the yard outside was crowded with spectators, who continued to arrive during the whole of the ceremony. The Governor had thown open all the doors and windows for ventilation, the day being hot, so that they all had a good view of the kneeling figures inside.

Samuel Biddle took up his position boldly in the front

rank of spectators, where he stood with folded arms, fixing his fiery eye relentlessly upon the foresworn vestal, as he had promised himself.

Miss O'Callighan was the best-dressed bride in the room ; indeed, she was most splendidly attired, for she had prepared her wedding trousseau many years before, and kept it carefully in lavender. It was composed of white satin, covered with old lace, which had been an heirloom ; a bridal veil concealed her worn features—a priceless veil made of the finest and most transparent material, crowned with a large wreath of orange flowers, so that, as the make-up of a bride, she was perfect.

George also was prince-like in his costume, and looked every inch a gentleman. His mistress had given him a court suit, which had belonged to her late brother, and which, with an old maid's partiality for hoarding up relics, she had brought out along with her other effects, and which had been rescued from the wreck of the *Stirling Castle*. Her brother had died before he could wear it much, so that, with a little brushing up, it looked almost new.

A bright green coat, decorated with gold lace, flowered vest, black satin breeches and silk stockings of the same hue, terminated with gold-buckled shoes, and surmounted with a delicate frill and cuffs, with his toledo at his side, and his general languid grace, George de la Motte, in spite of his costume being a decade or so out of date, looked worthy of his royal parentage, and also of his ancient bride.

Samuel looked bitterly and mockingly upon all this pomp and show, doubly bitter when he found out that his baleful glances had no effect upon the giddy pair. They knelt with the others, and made their responses with only the amount of emotion to be expected under the circumstances. Still, Samuel thought he could discern traces of corroding care upon the cheek of that perjured bride, and comforted himself with that discernment. "She was not 'appy, cuss her."

It was over, and Mary Ann Brown, with the others, had written their maiden names down for the last time ; and now, Miss O'Callighan being the last to sign hers, George de la Motte bent over the document gracefully, and attempted to fix his in the vacant space, when lo ! an untimely interruption came, which wrought consternation in that drawing-room, while it changed the bitter scowl upon that watcher's brow, and brought a ferocious grin of joy around his jaw in its place.

"I forbid that scoundrel to commit bigamy," was uttered shrilly at Samuel's side, while a thin, little, sharp-visaged

woman pushed her way through the open door, and confronted the company.

"Who the dickens are you, ma'am?" cried out the Governor.

"That man's lawful wife," replied the little woman sternly, pointing her finger towards the startled George, who still stood with the charged quill in his trembling fingers.

"Saphira!"

"Yes, George; I have just got out in time to prevent you committing another crime. I arrived yesterday in the *Golden Grove*, but was not well enough to come ashore before this morning. Drop that pen, you guilty wretch."

"Oh, blessed Virgin, what is this I hear?" shrieked out the half-married woman, as she sunk back in the strong arms of Mathuna. "And what am I at the present moment?"

"Faith, madam, if this woman's story is true, I'm sure I don't exactly know what you are," replied the perplexed Governor, scratching his head. "You are married right enough as far as you and myself are concerned; it's the man that's alone doubtful."

"A wife without a husband; is that what your Excellency means?"

"That's about it. However, give me time, and I'll think of a way out of it somehow." Then, turning sternly upon the luckless but infamous George, the Governor roared, "Prisoner, is this true?"

George tried to speak, but could not, as he stood before the enraged Governor in that splendid court dress, with his face ashy, and his satin-covered knees knocking together; then the woman spoke up once more.

"Yes, sir, it is true; and here is my paper to prove it. I was married to the base wretch ten years ago for the money my late husband left me, and deserted by him and left destitute six weeks afterwards. I only found out a year ago that he had been transported and sent out to Van Dieman's Land, and came out as soon as I could save enough money to pay my passage to look after him."

"That's all fair," answered the Governor, reading the certificate and handing it back to her.

"Now, gentlemen, how are we to get out of this mess? We can't unmarry Miss O'Callighan. Will we hang up this blackguard and make a widow of her? That appears to be the only solution in the present difficulty."

"There's another way, without going to such extremes,"

observed Wilfred, stepping forward, with a smile. "It is still lawful for a man to sell his wife. Why not put her up to auction?"

"The very thing. Here, you scoundrel, fetch me that bell-rope."

George, very glad to be let off so easily, took a chair and unfastened the rope from the side of the fireplace.

"Now, sir, put that rope round your half-wife's neck, and bring her here."

"Surely you're not going to hang *me*, Colonel Davey?" cried out Miss O'Callighan in dismay.

"No, my dear madam, I am only going to put you up on auction."

"But I won't be sold like a pig."

"It's the only way, ma'am, to get you free from this rascal, and find you another husband."

"Very well, your Excellency; I must submit to the degradation, I suppose."

She glanced, for the first time, with timid appeal, towards where Samuel Biddle stood, watching the proceedings with that grin of unholy exultation on his face; but dropped her eyes again quickly before his fiery glare, and with a heavy sigh took her place before the Governor, with George beside her holding her by the bell-rope.

"Now, prisoner, you want to sell this woman, don't you?"

"Yes, your Excellency," gasped George faintly.

"Then, gentlemen, let us begin. Only free men are allowed to bid, remember."

As all the free settlers present were already married, with the exception of the laughing officers and Samuel Biddle, the Governor fixed his eyes meaningly upon him.

"Now, who bids for this article?"

Samuel remained doggedly silent.

"Warder Biddle, are you not going to make an offer? We all know you were one of her many admirers."

"At one time I wor, your Excellency; but it's gone off now."

"Nonsense; a fine woman, well preserved."

"A cussed sarpint, your Excellency," replied Samuel viciously, while the poor article for sale shivered and hung her head.

"Oh, Samuel, how can you?"

"Well, Agnes," suddenly blurted out the woman-hater,

softened in spite of himself by the pathos of that appeal, "you've been a most deceitful and ongrateful old snake, and treated me badly in the past; but I am a feeling man, I am, and can't be hard even on a crushed viper,—so there, I'll make a bid for ye."

"How much?" asked the Governor, grinning.

"Two weeks' rations, your Excellency."

The Governor made one of his brow contortions.

"What, sir; only two weeks' rations for an article of vertu like this, who carries upon her in that dress a hundred guineas if she carries a farthing?"

"Wall, I don't mind chucking in my allowance of grog into the bargain," again cried out Samuel, a trifle ashamed of his former low bid.

"Including to-day's pint also, I presume?"

"Wall, your Excellency, I didn't reckon upon doing that; but there, I'll be generous, for I suppose she's got something left at home to drink her health in. Say, Agnes, that cussed criminal there hain't emptied your cellar, has he?"

"No, Samuel; there is plenty of rum left at home," murmured the "crushed viper" humbly.

"Then I chucks in that extra pint, your Excellency, but no farder," said Samuel resolutely.

"Gentlemen, any advance on two weeks' rations, with allowance and extra of rum, for this genuine article, with her expectations and hundred-guinea frock?" cried the Governor, looking round him.

No one spoke; few could have done so amongst this laughing audience, the only serious faces being those of the solemn bidder, the article of vertu, her frightened seller, and his watchful, lawful wife.

"No further bids, gentlemen? Going, going—gone! There, Warder Biddle, you've got a dirt-cheap bargain. Come and fill in your name, and take possession of your property."

"Hold, Samuel," said Miss O'Callighan, placing her withered hand upon the arm of her new owner. "Before you sign your name, say before this company if you are taking me for myself alone."

"Of course I be, Agnes. Don't be a hass," returned Samuel gruffly.

"All for myself, and not for anything else?"

"D'ye think I'd stand up like a fool, and chuck away two weeks' rations, with rum extra, if I didn't want ye?"

"No, Samuel; I am satisfied. Now, sign your name."

Miss O'Callighan let go her hold, and watched Samuel curiously as he sat down to the table, and made elaborate preparations for signing his name by squaring his elbows and pushing his tongue out from the side of his large mouth.

"There, your Excellency; 'Samuel Biddle, mariner.' Is that all right?"

"Yes, perfectly legal, Biddle," answered the Governor, signing his own name as witness after Wilfred had also signed, blotting the certificate, and folding it up, after which he presented it to the lady with a hearty kiss.

"There you are, Mrs Biddle; and I wish you both a long and a happy life. Don't go yet, Biddle, I've got something to tell you on behalf of your wife. Stay until I dispose of this scoundrel George."

"Right you are, sir," replied Samuel, tucking his wife under his arm with a cheerful air, while she looked at the floor with a troubled countenance.

"Is it necessary to-day, your Excellency?" she muttered softly.

"Yes, ma'am; it's best to start life fair and square," replied the Governor.

"In course it be, Agnes," added Samuel, with jocular gruffness.

He thought he could guess what the communication was which the Governor had for him—her money arrangements—and he was quite right in his guess. So together they waited—he grinning affably upon the company, and she looking mightily distressed.

"Well, Mrs Motte—for I see the 'de la' is missed out of your certificate—since you have come so far for your husband, I don't want to be hard upon him for your sake; are you willing to hire him from the Government as an assigned servant?"

"Yes, your Excellency; I came out for that purpose," replied Mrs Motte.

"And do you think that you can take care of him, and see that he does not run away from you a second time?"

"I'll take good care of that, sir," again answered the woman grimly.

"That's right; keep him well under your thumb. If he misbehaves in any way, send him back to prison, and we will see that he is flogged into obedience."

"I will, your Excellency."

"Then off with you, prisoner, and take care of your new owner."

"Hold half a moment, felon," cried Samuel, as George was sneaking off. "That yere toggery belongs to me now. So strip it off, and hand it back carefully aired and brushed down, prisoner."

"Yes, sir; you shall have it punctually, promptly, and in good condition," replied George, bowing humbly, and walking out behind his wife and owner.

"Now, Biddle," resumed the Governor, briskly turning upon the expectant bridegroom, "I know that you won't mind what I have to tell you after your late disinterested protestations; yet it is my duty, as your wife's friend, to tell you we have just had news from England respecting her fortune."

"Mine, you mean, your Excellency."

"Yes, exactly," returned the Governor pleasantly; "and I am sorry to say that it has taken wings and vanished. The bank in which it was placed has failed."

"What?" cried Samuel, staggering back, and dropping his wife's arm.

"Yes; a regular smash up—nothing less. And what is worse, we must hold you responsible for Miss O'Callighan's debts which she has contracted while she has been in Hobart Town."

Had the sky fallen? Samuel did not know, for he was lying on the ground in a fit.

CHAPTER XLV.

MATHUNA GETS OVER IT.

THE unfortunate boatswain did not remain long in that fit, nor was it very violent while it lasted. A convulsive twitch or two passed over his face, with a few feeble kicks out of his legs, and then once more he opened his eyes upon this vale of tears, to find himself resting in the arms of his wife, and the

Governor stooping over him with a tumbler filled with spirits.

Samuel's first glimpse of matters mundane revealed that half-pint of amber liquid which made his dim eyes brighten up a little as it hovered so close to his mouth. His second revelation was the tear-bedewed countenance of his virgin bride, which caused him to close his eyes and shut out that tempting first vision in his horror and disgust at the second, as he sank again weakly upon that loving heart, now all his own, while he muttered,—

"Stung, stung to death at last, arter all my warnings, arter all my precautions."

"Bear up and show yourself a man, Biddle," cried out the Governor. "All is not lost; you've got a good wife."

"Ah," moaned the unfortunate man, feeling as if a fresh poison-fang had been driven into his flesh as this bitter reminder reached his ears.

"And a hundred-guinea frock to begin the world on," continued the jest-loving Governor. "Sit up, man, and make the best of a bad job. Sit up and drink this."

"Ah," replied Samuel, opening his eyes and seeing the liquor still nearer to his lips, he sat up and gulped it down.

"Say, Governor, has that cussed lag sent back my toggery?"

"Yes; here it is," answered the Governor, roaring with laughter. "Would you like to put it on?"

"No, your Excellency, but I'd like to know that it was safe," answered Samuel, now getting upon his feet and glaring round him. "And I'd like to know how I stands towards you, Governor, so that I may see if it's worth while continuing this miserable life."

"Oh, don't think upon that now, Biddle. Go home and enjoy yourself to-day; we won't be hard upon you about the bills you are due us, for your good lady."

"How much, Governor?" repeated Biddle doggedly.

"Oh, something under a couple of hundred pounds, I dare say?"

"And how much will these things fetch?"

Samuel pointed with an air of disgust at his wife, who had lifted up her late brother's court dress.

"Do you mean your wife, Biddle?"

"No; I s'pose I can't sell her again, seeing as I was the only bidder?"

“Certainly not! What do you mean?”

“I wants to know how much you will allow for that snake’s glittering skin, and wot she holds in her claws again my debts.”

“Oh, I see! You mean the frock and the suit?”

“Yas, Governor.”

“Nothing. We have not yet opened a second-hand establishment at Hobart Town.”

Samuel Biddle groaned heavily, and, closing his eyes, muttered, “Then life ain’t worth living for.”

“Oh, dear me; yes it is, Biddle,” replied the Governor cheerily. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you to make it worth living. Now that the ‘Black Swan’ is burnt down, we want a respectable public-house in the town. You go home with Mrs Biddle and company and enjoy yourselves for a day or two, then turn Kilkenny Cottage into an inn—call it ‘The Kilkenny Cat’ for a change; we’ll supply you with grog on trust for the next three years, or longer, if you like, and be good customers to you, so that you’ll do famously, and make your fortune in no time. Isn’t that fair and square?”

“Yas, Governor; that is square. If there ain’t no trap under it.”

“Sir, do you mean to insult a gentleman, or doubt his word?” asked the Governor haughtily, drawing himself up stiffly.

“Not so, your Excellency, and I axes your pardon for the offence, but I has been so often bitten by snakes, and sic-like verment, that I feel shy now arter this last bite.”

Samuel, as he ended his apology, shot a vicious glare in the direction of his trembling wife, and then, turning again to the Governor, he continued,—

“But seeing that you have made me this offer fair, and in the company of all these gentlemen, who I humbly trust will be good customers, I accept it gratefully.”

“That’s all right, Biddle; make your preparations, and come to me for orders on the store when you are ready. Come, gentlemen, let us get this court-martial over, and then for the general levee.”

“Come, Agnes, I pardons your duplicity. Come, friends all, and drink our health.”

And Samuel, once more tucking his humble and grateful wife under his arm, led the way to Kilkenny Cottage, followed by his sailor friends, to finish up the day with what George

de la Motte had left in the cellar, which was now his own.

As the Government party were about to leave for the prison—for Mathuna had been asked to attend as a witness, and Kate Ambrose intended to accompany her—Major Quinton entered hastily and said,—

“The *Sirius* has just arrived, your Excellency.”

“Have they brought back any prisoners?”

“No, your Excellency; but I have news for *you*, Kate.”

“What is it, uncle; is it about Saul?”

“Yes, dear; they picked him up, and have brought him back.”

“Where is he? Have you seen him?”

“Yes. He will be here in another moment.”

“Oh, uncle!”

Kate leaned faintly for a moment against the Major, who said,—

“You can meet him the same as ever, Kate. I have cleared away all difficulties, so that he now understands how matters are—see, here they come.”

“Thank you, uncle,” said Kate fervently, as she heard the voices of the new arrivals outside. She did not go out with the others to meet them, but waited to recover herself alone in the drawing-room.

“Kate, my darling!”

Saul!”

So the long-parted lovers were once more re-united.

The court-martial was very quickly got over. Witness after witness came forward eagerly, now that their tyrant was down, and exposed and recounted such awful records of perjury and wanton cruelty that the Governor's eyes blazed with fury, while his Staff looked pitilessly upon their late mess-room companion and his accomplice.

“Prisoner, you are a disgrace to humanity, and ought to be hanged, but, in consideration that you still hold His Gracious Majesty's commission, I will be merciful to you. You are cashiered from the service, and your sentence will be imprisonment and hard labour during His Majesty's pleasure. As for your share in this last vile plot, woman—six months in the penitentiary, and labour. Let the two flagellators receive one thousand lashes each.

As Jane Lymburner was led away with her accomplice, she cast her eyes round the court, and saw Kate Ambrose and

Saul Clark together, watching her, while Mathuna stood at their side with Wilfred Tregarthen. A bitter spasm crossed her white face, while a flame of baffled hatred shot from her narrow, crafty eyes.

There was one spectator amongst the crowd who watched eagerly the vindication of Marion Carter as she stood alongside of Tyral O'Bryan. He had also come out from England in the *Golden Grove*. A slight-built, delicate young gentleman of about twenty-two years of age. Now, as the Governor ended his congratulatory speech to the two convicts, this young man pushed his way forward, and as he did so he caught her eye.

"Master Harry!" cried out Marion with surprise, while O'Bryan looked at the young man uneasily.

"Yes, Marion. I have come all the way from England to prove your innocence, and take you back to your father and mother."

"Are they still alive, *sir*?"

"Yes, Marion, and happy in your innocence."

"Who was the thief?" asked Marion eagerly.

The young man hung his head, and answered sadly,—

"My father. He died three months after you had sailed, and confessed his fault."

"Three months! Then why have I been kept a convict all this time?"

"It took a long time to get at the Home Secretary; lawyers had to be employed, and all the case gone over again before we formally obtained your free pardon."

"My *free pardon*!" echoed the girl bitterly.

"Yes; I have brought it with me, dear Marion, and to ask you to be my wife."

"You are too late, Master Harry. While you were interviewing the Home Secretary, and he was thinking about *pardon*ing me for the crime that your dead father committed, I found a man willing to take me as I was—the convict, and he is here."

Marion Carter, as she spoke, placed her hand within that of Tyral O'Bryan's.

"I can come to you now, Tyral, my own true lover—my man!"

Away on the high seas speeds the *Golden Grove*, with her complement of passengers. They are half way now between Hobart Town and Sydney, and have beautiful weather for

their voyage. Little Mrs Carrodus is busy flirting, as usual, while Wilfred Tregarthen lies on his deck chair, basking in the sunshine, full of life and contentment. He enjoys the white clouds and the sparkle of the blue waves as they dance along above and below.

He has quite recovered from the momentary vexation and scandal which Mathuna caused him at the parting, and thinks now once more kindly and gratefully upon her tender care of him while he was ill, and the pleasure which her companionship gave to his life while he visited Van Dieman's Land. The memory of her will always be a pleasant subject to recal when he is not otherwise interested.

"Dear Mathuna," he murmurs, as he looks up at the sky, "so impulsive and child-like. She was very sweet, even although she did show up a little badly at the last; but I dare say she has forgotten all about that unpleasant scene, as I have now done, and has got over it ere this."

Yes, his easy surmise was correct. Mathuna had got over it by that time.

He reviewed lazily all the scenes of those few months—her sudden fancy for him, that furious battle in the valley, her attempts at being a refined lady, that very short time when John Whitehouse had her under his influence—and she was really a bit of a bore, with her religious mania, to Wilfred.

Then his lips curled with a beautiful smile as he thought how easy a task it had been for him to destroy this vulgar, religious fabric in the heart of the simple savage.

He thought on in this fashion, enjoying the memories, with the sunshine and the air, until he gently fell asleep and lay still, with that beautiful smile upon his perfect, fair face, looking like a re-animated Greek god.

Mathuna had cut up roughly at their sudden good-bye; but at last the ship had sailed, and she had been carried ashore in her first lady-like faint.

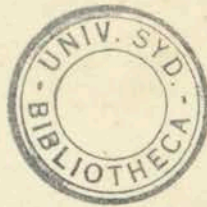
Down by Sandy Bay, the men and women of Mathuna's tribe are assembled, and with them sits John Whitehouse, with his head between his hands, rocking himself, and moaning with anguish at all his wasted efforts.

It is twilight, and they are waiting for night to light their fire, which they have built high up, as they did those in the forest, a weird twilight, with sable bars of cloud crossing a chill, leaden sky; for although the night is warm, the

sky looks cold and ashy, with the moaning wind to sea-ward, and those waves gurgling and sobbing as they wash ashore.

Mathuna had made her escape that morning from her friends, and her own people had found her about an hour ago, and laid her upon that bark-covered bed.

So she reclines, clad once more in her native skins. Her people have taken off her civilised costume, and it lies in a drenched heap beside the huge pile, while the natives sit still and wait upon the coming night to fire it—Mathuna, with her long massive tresses wet and dripping over the logs as she rests, with closed eyes, waiting to be carried up to the stars. Yes, Wilfred Tregarthen, who destroyed the good work of the lonely little visionary, now weeping and moaning beside that drowned queen, your surmise was a correct one:—Mathuna has got over the parting.



THE END.







