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The Watchman.

THURSDAY, MAY 26th, 1898

LOST IN THE BUSH

It is now rather more than twelve years since the disappearance and the finding of Henry Powell, on Moorooloolo station, New South Wales, and rather less since the subsequent case in which I myself was perhaps the principal witness And I think that the time has arrived for confessing that the evidence which I gave on that occasion, though indeed "nothing but the truth," was nevertheless not "the whole truth" at all.

I did not and do not believe there was a single being in that Colonial court who would have credited the whole truth had I told it there and then upon my oath. Nor was it essential to the case Nor did I care to return to the station, new chum as I still was, with yet another handle for native-born buffoonery. But I am no longer the storekeeper of Moorooloolo; and I believe the public mind to be broader than it was in the matter of so-called ghosts. At all events I am going to tell you for the first time what my own eyes saw, on a day and night in January, in the year 1884.

I had been some six weeks in the Riverina, and I was alone at our homestation for the night. The owner was paying us a visit. He and the manager were camping at an out-station nineteen miles away The overseer was absent on his holiday. I had the homestead entirely to myself, for there was neither woman nor child upon the place. Suddenly, between nine and ten o'clock, as I sat smoking and thinking on the back verands, a spur jingled, and I made out the crinkled moleskins and the felt wideawake of one of the men.

"Powell, the rabbiter, is lost in the bush, minster," said he.

I sprang to my feet, for the news was like that of a man overboard at sea.

"How long has he been out?"

"Since yesterday morning."

"But I thought he camped with old Wylie at the Five mile whim?"

"So he does."

"Then why didn't Wylie come in sooner?"

"Ah! there you hit it," said my man. "That's what we've all been asking him, but Wylie says his mate was given to stopping odd nights at other chaps' camps, and he never thought anything of it till he didn't turn up this evening. Even if he had he couldn't have left the whim, Wylie couldn't with no other water anywhere near, and the sheep drawing to the troughs from four paddocks, But he's come in now, and he's up at the hut if you like to see him."

And at the men's hut I found the whim-driver, the centre still of an attentive group, but no longer, I thought, the target of questions and cross-questions implying criticism and blame. On the contrary, there was now every token of sympathy with the anxiety and distress of mind from which Wylie was obviously suffering, and at the sight of which I also could spare him some of the pity which I felt for the missing rabbiter.

The whim-driver was an elderly man, with brown wrinkles all over his face, and gray whiskers parting at a baggy throat; but he was still powerfully built, and a typical bushman, with his eagle eye and his strong bare arms. His eye, however, was hot with horror and remorse as it met mine, and the whole man was twitching as he told me his tale.

"If I only had guessed anything was wrong, sir," he cried, "I would have left the sheep in a minute, though my billet depended upon it. But he's so often stopped away one night that it never bothered me till the day wore on and he didn't come back. God forgive me, I never even thought of telling the bosses when they passed this morning on their way to the outstation. Yet I might ha' known—I might ha' known! He was a sailor, poor Powell was, and sailors are always the worst kind of bushmen. I've known him get bushed before, but only for an hour or two, And to think of him being out all this time—in this heat, with not a drop of water in the crab holes! He may—he may be dead already—my poor mate, my poor mate!"

With that he turned his back upon us, in the most evident agitation, so that we thought it kindest not to refer to him in the brief council of war which the men and I now held together. It was promptly decided that all hands should form a search party to start at daybreak, with the exception of Wylie and myself. Wylie must return to his whim.

My knowledge of the country was as yet very limited, and therefore I was the one who could best be spared to ride at once to the out station, and inform the "bosses" of what had occurred. The night-horse was the only animal in the yard, but I took it to save time, and shortly after ten o'clock rode off with Wylie, our way coinciding as far as the Five mile whim.

There was no moon, and the night was anything but clear for that land of bright stars and cloudless skies. A hot north wind of several days' duration had flown suddenly into the south, whence it was now blowing hard and chill, so that I buttoned my coat up as we cantered side by side, and took off my eye-glasses lest the rushing wind should lift them from my nose. We spoke very little as we rode, but once, when we drew rein and ambled for a little, my companion reproached himself for not having given an earlier alarm.

It was impossible not to feel sorry for him, but equally impossible to acquit him of blame, so I said very little in reply. When we came to the hut a dull red glow burnt steadily within, and Wylie sighed bitterly as he explained that he had built up the fire before leaving, that his poor mate might find all comfortable if some happy chance should bring him back. He added that he supposed I would push straight on without dismounting, but I was cold and the glow looked grateful, and I had slipped from my saddle before the words were out of his mouth. Next moment I uttered a loud cry.

The door of the hut was at one end, to the left of the dying fire, and at the opposite end were two low, rude bunks, one in each corner. On the foot of the right-hand bunk sat a figure I could have sworn to even without my glasses. It was the missing rabbiter, in a red checked shirt which I had often seen him wear, and his face was buried in his hands.

"Wylie," cried I, wheeling round on the threshold, "he has come back, and here he is—sitting on his bunk!"

It was too dark for me to see Wylie's face, but he tumbled rather than dismounted from his horse, and I felt him trembling as he brushed past me into the hut. I followed him, but during the single instant my back had been turned the rabbiter had moved. He was not on the bunk. Wylie kicked the logs into a blaze and then turned upon me fiercely. For the rabbiter was not in the hut at all.

"What d'ye mean," he roared "by playing tricks on a chap who's lost his mate? Out of my hut, you young devil—out of my hut!"

Never have I seen a man more completely beside himself; he was shaking from head to foot in a perfect palsy, and his clenched fists were shaking in my face. I assured him I had played no conscious trick—it was my defective eyesight that must have played one on me. Now that I put on my glasses I could see that the hut was empty but for our two selves; that it must have been absolutely empty till we entered. And yet I could have sworn that I had seen the lost rabbiter nursing his face at the foot of the right-hand bunk.

My companion cooled down, however, on becoming convinced of my good faith, and instead of turning me out, seemed to set his heart upon explaining my fancied vision before he would let me go. Pictures from the illustrated papers had been tacked up over the rabbiter's bunk. One was the old colored print of Red Riding Hood, with the four trees like an elephant's legs; and Wylie would have it that the firelight glowing on the child's hood had made the splotch of red which my nerves had exaggerated into a Crimean shirt.

To me this explanation seemed much more ridiculous than the thing it sought to explain, but I had to admit that I could see but poorly without my glasses, and indeed I was very ready to confess to some inexplicable delusion on my part. So at that we left it, and I was glad enough to turn my back on the Five-mile hut, and to push on to the out-station at a hand-gallop.

Mr. Armit, the owner, and Mr. Mackeson, his manager, were still sitting up, discussing ways and means of coping with the long-continued drought; and the owner was good enough to praise my promptitude in coming to them at once. It was now midnight, and after a little consideration it was decided that we should all lie down for a bit preparatory to starting back a couple of hours before daybreak in order to take part in the search. For my part, I made myself very comfortable before the fire, with my saddle for a pillow, and fell asleep in a moment, And in another, as it seemed to me, there was Mackeson laying hold of my shoulder and shouting in my ear that we were an hour late in starting as it was.

Our owner, however, had not long been accustomed to the hardships of the bush, and when the time came he could not face the keen edge of the day without his pannkin of tea and his bite of "browny." So the sun was on us before we were half-way to the Five-mile—not the red ball of nineteen out of twenty Riverina dawnings, but a coppery disc like a new penny. Clouds of sand were whirling in the wind, which had risen greatly in the night, and was rising still; puffs of sand kept breaking from the plain to join the clouds; and we coughed, all three of us, as we cantered neck and neck.

"Do you think you could drive a whim?" said Mr. Armit, drawing rein as we sighted the Five mile, and suddenly turning to me.

"I believe I could, sir. I have seen one working, and it looks simple enough."

"It's as easy as it looks if you keep your tank nice and full and feed your troughs regularly. Wylie will show you all that's necessary in five minutes; the fact is, I think of leaving you in charge of this whim here, since you can hardly know the paddocks well enough to be of much use in the search, whereas Wylie knows every inch of the run. What do you say, Mr. Mackeson? It is for you to decide."

Concluded next week.

LIFTING THE FARM MORTGAGE.

A FIRST PRIZE ESSAY

Charles E. Weigle of Somerset county, Pa., writes as follows to Farm and Home: My brother and I bought a 200 acre farm at sheriff's sale for $4000. We did not have one dollar to start with, so had to give a mortgage for the entire amount. Our only possessions consisted of two horses and a wagon. The mortgage was given for 20 years, $200 to be paid per year and interest at six per cent. The farm was poor, the house old, the barn a good one, 100 acres of the farm was in timber and 90 acres suitable for cultivation. That fall and winter we cut 3,000 railroad ties and hauled them six miles. That gave us money to make a payment and buy necessities, such as plows, harrows, seed, grain, etc. In the spring of 1890 10 acres were plowed for potatoes, 20 for oat feed, wheat 10, corn 10 and the balance was left in hay and pasture. That first season's crop consisted of 2000 bushels of potatoes, which sold at 50c. per bushel; oats made only 20 bushels per acre and wheat 12 bushels. We determined to raise better crops of wheat and oats, so dug 400 rods of ditch, hauled stones from the fields, filled the ditches and the resulting drain put the land in much better condition. A rotation of crops was adopted in 1891 as follows: Corn on sod, potatoes to follow corn, wheat and clover to follow potatoes. were made the money crop, Crops were given the best of cultivation and kept free from weeds. In 1891 we had 20 acres each of potatoes, corn, wheat and clover, and the result was, potatoes 4200 bushels, corn 1000, wheat 390, clover hay 25 tons. The crops brought $1380, and we had enough left to live on one year and feed for the four horses and one cow. We paid $600 on the mortgage, interest and all expenses. We have farmed on the crop rotation plan ever since and have raised better crops every year. We use $100 worth of good commercial fertilizer every year and all the stable manure made on the farm and sow plenty of clover. The land is thereby being improved each year and we are besides selling $1500 worth of potatoes, wheat, etc. The soil has been put in such condition that last year 20 acres of potatoes produced 5965 bushels, of which 5000 were merchantable, which sold at 60c. per bushel or $3000 for the potato crop alone. Our only expense was $100 for fertilizer and $11 for day help in harvesting. Our 20 acres wheat yielded 50 bushels per acre or 600 bushels of which 500 were sold at 85c or $425. The expense of raising the wheat crop was $50 for a good fertilizer. We raised 1000 bushels of corn, 554 bushels oats and 50 ton No 1 hay. Sold one horse, poultry, eggs, fruit, etc, so that the year's sales, after deducting expenses, amounted to $3504. We paid our mortgage, every dollar, April 1, 1898, and have some money left. We have seven horses, 12 cattle, 10 hogs, binder, drill, mower, hay rake, potato digger. and all the machinery that is needed. They were all bought and paid for during the time the mortgage was being paid, We have good health; therefore could work hard. We are thinking of building a house to cost $3000 this fall, as we believe the best is none too good for a farmer. The farm is worth double what it was in 1889. We expend $20 a year for good agricultural papers, which is the best investment we could possibly make. I am a single young man. My motto is: Don't cry down farming. If you don't succeed, don't curse the monopolies, but get down to business—your own business. If you will put the same intelligence, industry, prudence, foresight and economy and management into farming that you would find indispensable in carrying on any other pursuit, you will have less occasion to cry, farming doesn't pay.

THE FORTIFICATIONS AT HALIFAX.

Improvements of a most important nature are going on quietly but rapidly at various fortifications in and about Halifax. At the citadel, where batteries overlook the sea and land for miles, at George's Island and McNab's Island, whose guns command the main channel of the harbor, a considerable force of men are employed and will be employed for several weeks to come, effecting improvements under the direction of a foreman from the Royal Engineers. The citadel is to receive the most important addition to its equipment which it has had for some years. It consists of what is known as a range-finder, a structure of stone and cement, so located that officers stationed in it will command a view of every possible avenue of approach to Halifax, by land or water; and can in a moment train and discharge guns stationed in any part of this fortification.

The range-finder will reach for miles over the territory to the north and west of the city and across the harbor and over the hills behind the town of Dartmouth. Its powerful glasses will sweep the Atlantic 20 or 30 miles beyond the entrance of the bay. It will be a square structure, some thirty feet wide, revolving on a pivot.

The erection of the range finder behind the citadel ramparts, where it will occupy a position somewhat similar to that of a conning tower on a ship of war, will undoubtedly be followed immediately by the placing of more modern guns in the fortress. The guns now stationed there are of old pattern and almost obsolete. They consist mainly of the slow seventon muzzle loaders, throwing shot of less than two hundred pounds. Military officers now look for the immediate introduction of guns of the latest pattern, and say that if it was intended to place such in the citadel the war office would not have gone to the expense or trouble of erecting the new range-finder, which could not be of great value in operating the old guns now in use.

At George's and McNab's Island the army authorities have ordered the immediate erection of batteries for rapid-firing machine guns, and these are now in process of construction. They will be of sufficient length to enable a number of these modern engines of war to be operated from within their shelter. The military search lights which have been placed at the different harbor fortifications during the past year are now kept in order for instant use, and their far-reaching rays may be thrown across the harbor and over the bay's entrance any moment of the night. The search-lights have undergone careful inspection recently, and strict orders have been issued to the officers in charge at the forts to see that they are always ready for use.

The most powerful light is that at York Redoubt, right at the mouth of the harbor. Several miles nearer the city, at Point Pleasant, two more lights equally powerful are in course of erection.

It is understood here that the work of erecting the much-talked-about fortifications at St. John's, N. F. will be commenced within a very short time, under the direction of competent men from Royal Engineers of this garrison. Tenders for part of the work may be called for immediately. As already announced plans for the forts have been sent to Newfoundland. It is supposed that they were prepared some time ago. The fortifications will be erected on the high hills at either side of the narrow entrance to St. John's harbor. No ships could possibly pass under them, the elevation being too great to permit of an attack from below, and vessels attempting to pass would be completely at the mercy of the British guns. A sea attack on these forts would have to be made from a long distance off shore, and an effective bombardment would be very difficult, if not impossible.

CAMBRAY

Special to the Watchman.

A WORTHY DITCHER.—Mr. Thos. Kinghorn has received a number of ditching contracts this season and is now busily employed. As Mr. Kinghorn has decided to give up this line of work at the end of this season it would be well for persons desirous of having work of this kind done to call on him at once. He will guarentee all his work.

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Lindsay, April 5th, 1898.

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Lindsay, Feb. 4th, 1891. 5

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