

Settler and Savage

One Hundred Years Ago in Australia

De Boos, Charles (1819-1900)

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One Hundred Years Ago in Australia
Sydney
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Publishers' Note

This story was first published in 1867, under the title of "FIFTY YEARS AGO"; but, in order to give the events their true perspective, it was deemed advisable to alter the title to "SETTLER AND SAVAGE ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN AUSTRALIA."

The Publishers, having purchased the copyright from the late Author's heirs, have had the work carefully revised and illustrated, and hope that, in its new dress, the book may prove as attractive as it did forty years ago, and thereby justify the present edition.

Book One—The Oath

Chapter I The Marauders

THE sun was setting over the ranges just beyond the headwater of the Paterson River, a tributary of the Hunter, on the east coast of New South Wales. All there was still and silent, with no sign abroad of animal life, until three native blacks made their appearance upon the ranges above. They halted upon a small flat that had been formed in the curve of one of the steeper spurs, and as they looked round, it was evident that they were men of mark in their tribe, for three finer specimens of the aboriginal race could scarce have been encountered, even in those early days. And here it must be remembered that, beyond the boundaries of settlement, the Australian savage had not been inoculated with the vices introduced into the land by the white usurpers of his domain. The tribe of the Upper Paterson claimed as their patrimony the hunting grounds lying intermediate between those of the Port Stephens and Manning River tribes, and these three blacks were of that tribe.

They were fully armed after the Australian fashion. Each man carried in his left hand his shield and a bundle of spears. In his right he held his woomera, the instrument by which the spear is propelled when it is required to be thrown with greater force or to a longer distance than usual. Each wore a girdle of opossum hair, with the exception of which they were entirely nude. Stuck in it was the never-absent tomahawk and two or three boomerangs. The hair of each was drawn up into a knot upon the top of his head, and beautified by feathers fixed in the ligature that bound the hair. In the selection of these feathers, which were worn not so much as a matter of taste as a distinctive badge, each warrior differed. Macomo, the leader of the party, wore the pinion feather of the eagle hawk, the tall plume giving an appearance of greater height to his stature; Atare wore the tail feathers of the black cockatoo; and Opara was decked with the feathers of the blue crane. Round the forehead of each was bound a broad strip of the fine inner bark of the stringybark tree, and from this being coloured red, any person cognisant of the habits of the blacks might have known that the three savages were out upon some deed of bold daring, and that it would be derogatory to their manhood to return to their tribe without some evidence of success, even if it were but that disgusting aboriginal trophy of triumph, the kidney fat of a foe.

Having chosen a camping-ground, one set himself to work collecting materials for a fire; another employed himself in stripping a few short sheets of bark to form a gunya or rude shelter; whilst the third went off in search of game. By the time the gunya was completed, the fire was burning with a ruddy glow, and the hunter soon arrived with an opossum he had secured. This was thrown on to the red embers

without the slightest culinary preparation, and when done—being in a state that a European would call “warm through”—it was taken off, cut up into three with a tomahawk, and the portion allotted to each speedily devoured.

Hitherto there had been but little talk amongst the blacks, save only what was necessary in connection with what each had undertaken for the general comfort; but now they sat round the fire, evidently with a fixed intention of having what bushmen would term a yarn.

“Atare has never smoked the dark leaves of the whitefellow?” said Macomo.

Atare shook his head in reply, and then asked, “Does it give pleasant thoughts and happy dreams, as the Port Stephens men say?”

“One smoke,” replied Macomo, “is better than the greatest feed of wombat. When another sun goes down, we will have tobacco enough to last us many moons; and sugar and tea for warm drink, and perhaps a bottle of strong water.”

“Macomo is right,” put in Opara. “If the sheep man goes out with his flock, we shall have what we want before the next sun goes out. He never comes back to the fire of his gunya until the sun is below the hills. We have our time.”

“But if he should send out his son?” questioned Atare. “He is a brave man, and his gun carries farther than our spears.”

“The eaglehawk mounts into the sky, and wheels round and round, watching, with untiring eye, when to make his descent upon his prey,” answered Macomo. “Is Atare less patient than a bird? Can he not watch and wait until the moment comes for swooping down upon his prey?”

“True! True!” said Atare, somewhat abashed. “Atare has lain and watched for half a sun to spear a wallabi; he will watch half a moon for the strong water, the sugar, and the whitefellow's leaves.”

“You said there were three blankets in the hut?” asked Opara by way of solving some doubt that had arisen in his mind. “The wind is cold when the sun goes out, and fire sends a track up into the sky that is seen a long way. A blanket is better than a fire for a warpath.”

“There are three and more than three—there are six,” replied Macomo. “Atare will have one for himself, and one for the young gin he brought into the camp last moon. Opara will not need to maan a gin, for the young girls from other tribes will come to him when he shows the blanket he has to give.”

Atare's eyes dilated with cupidity and expectation at this remark; and Opara, equally eager, said, “Let Macomo tell us again of the many good things he saw in the sheep man's hut.”

“Open your ears, then, for the talk of the many wonderful things that are to be yours when the next sun comes up,” Macomo commenced, and then, with much

grandiloquence of diction, and with considerable exaggeration, he proceeded to tell of what appeared to these wretched blacks the boundless wealth contained in the hut of a shepherd. To this hut he had gone from accounts given him by others of his tribe. He had eaten white-fellow's bread, drunk his tea, and tasted his sheep flesh. All that they could conceive of best in the bush was not worthy to be named in the same breath with the white man's articles. He then dwelt upon the blankets, the tea, the sugar, the tobacco, the flour, calling into play all his powers of eloquence and description, and succeeded so well that when at last his companions lay down to sleep, it was with a firm resolve to make all that store of wealth their own, no matter at what cost to themselves either in suffering or endurance.

At the time of which we write, there was no way of legally holding land in Australia except by free grant under the hand of the Governor. These grants were issued to civilians or emigrants, on proof of the possession of so much capital, the quantity of land given being in proportion to the cash in hand for investment. To military settlers retiring from the service, grants of land were made in accordance with prescribed regulations. But already a kind of embryo squatting, though on a very small scale, had been initiated. There was certainly but little stock then in the colony, for it was not until some ten or twelve years after that the great sheep and cattle mania fell upon the land, in conjunction with the first issue of the occupation permits; still, however, there were some who took a more correct view of the great grazing capabilities of Australia, and maintained small flocks of sheep. But the animal was still somewhat rare, was difficult to obtain, and was high-priced, so that the possession of a few hundred of them was, in those early days, regarded as an indication of great wealth. It is with one of these shepherd squatters that we have now to do.

The spot to which we would now introduce our readers is some eight miles from that upon which we last night left the three black warriors camped; but upon the same river, and lower down its course. Not much more than a stone's throw from the river stood the residence of the owner of the land. It was but a hut of bark, and a rude enough structure, too, and a gold-miner of our day would have looked with the greatest contempt upon such a display of building ignorance.

For some distance from the hut, the level ground, together with the gentle slope down to the river, had been cleared of timber. Part of the clearing had been fenced in, and was evidently under cultivation. A rude stockyard had also been constructed for the temporary restraint of the few milkers that formed the settler's herd, during the process of morning milking. The hut was divided into two unequal portions, forming bed and sitting rooms, with two small lean-to rooms at the back, one being a children's bed-room and the other a store. The sitting-room was plainly, though

comfortably, furnished, in a style somewhat better than was usually seen in these early days beyond the city; and everything was peculiarly clean and neat, showing the hand, not only of care and attention, but also of taste. The common wooden sofa, or stretcher, had a clean chintz cover over its mattress, and the plain deal table, at which the family were seated, was as white as snow. The fireplace extended along the end of the house nearly from one side to the other, and two or three heavy logs were burning on the hearth. Over them, suspended by a hook and chain fastened to a beam in the chimney, hung a huge, three-legged, iron pot, not long placed there, for the water was not yet steaming. A small dog, of the long-haired terrier species, sat before the fire, abstractedly gazing upon the pot, and with melancholy as plainly depicted on his countenance as it could possibly be. His meditations seemed to render him still more uncomfortable, for he went out to the door, sniffed the air in all directions, and then returned to the fire, once more to continue that abstracted stare upon the iron pot.

The owner of this snug location was seated at the head of the table, and had just finished his morning's meal. As he leant back in his chair, he showed the full breadth of an ample chest, and it was evident that he was a powerful and an athletic man, from thirty-five to thirty-eight years of age, and in his grey eye there was that look of quiet resolution that none could mistake, and that few would dare.

George Maxwell came to the colony some few years prior to the opening of our tale as a sergeant in the——Regiment, and, having attained the rank of sergeant-major, retired from the service when his regiment's term of service in the colony had expired. He then obtained, under the regulations, the grant of the land he now occupied, and at once took it up. To the money he had saved from his pay and allowances, he had added the proceeds of a small property of his own in England, and the amount he had invested in sheep. He had barely been twelve months upon the land, but already he had done much, making what he fondly hoped would be a home for his old age, and for his children after him.

His wife was a buxom, matronly woman, the very *beau ideal* of a soldier's wife, and, looking upon her, you could not help feeling that, when the occasion demanded, she would be ready in execution and apt at expedient. She carried an infant in her arms, which, though a baby giant that would bear down most women, she handled and turned as though it were a feather. Two children, a boy and girl of three and six years old respectively, sat on either side of her at the table, whilst an elder lad of some twelve years of age sat near his father. This boy, though short for his years, was remarkable for his stout build, having strength of form and constitution unmistakably carved in every limb and lineament. He was his father's right-hand man, and was the ordinary shepherd of the flock of sheep that formed the

family wealth. Perhaps it was the lonely hours he had passed in the bush whilst tending these sheep that had caused the look of pensiveness, or rather of mental weariness, that would often cloud his countenance. But whatever may have been the cause, the lad had that peculiar look which in Scotland would be denominated “fey,” or, in other words, of a person who is innately, but only spiritually, conscious of some great impending and mortal danger.

“Well, I will look after the sheep to-day, and give Jem a spell,” said George Maxwell. “The boy begins to look half fretted and moidered by his lonely wandering in the bush.”

“No, father,” expostulated the boy; “I don't mind it. Besides, you are best at home; for you can help mother better than I can, and somehow I'm more at ease when you're at home.”

“But your father has been very hard at work these last few days, and a rest after the sheep will do him as much good as the change to work will do you,” put in the mother. “It's just as well to make things pleasant all round, and a change of work is always pleasant.”

“Well, old woman, as you have given the word of command, so let it be,” said the father in a decided tone intended to stop further discussion. “I go with the sheep to-day so soon as they draw off.”

Here the dog, that had previously given the signs of uneasiness, raised his head, looked miserably at his master, and gave a long, low whine, as though he had known the decision that had been come to, and had appealed against it in the humblest possible manner.

“Why, what's the matter with the Marshal?” asked George. “Why, Blucher, old fellow, what is it?”

Blucher replied only by another long whine.

“Perhaps you forgot to feed him?” suggested the wife.

“Very likely,” answered George; “and, now I think of it, I remember that he did not come as usual to ask for his share of breakfast. Come on, Blucher, poor fellow!” At the same time he took a piece of meat off a plate and offered it to the dog.

The animal took no notice of the temptation thus held out to him, but, looking reproachfully at his master, once more went to the door, looked round, sniffed the air, and vented his feelings in a lugubrious, but only half-decided howl.

“What can possibly be the matter with him now?” cried the wife.

“I can't even guess,” said George; “I hope nothing is wrong with him, for, after being so long in the regiment, I should be sorry to lose the poor old fellow.” And he went out to the dog with the intention of taking him up and examining him. Blucher, however, kept beyond his reach, and, though he whined and fawned, would not

allow his master to touch him. He called and coaxed in vain, for still the dog kept beyond arm's length, and he was on the point of getting out of temper, when he observed that the sheep had begun to feed off on the side of a ridge, on passing which they would be out of sight. So he left the Marshal to his own devices, and, bidding his wife a hasty farewell, he whistled the dogs after him, and followed on the track of the sheep.

And so things went on in their ordinary daily routine upon the miniature station for fully a couple of hours; and then, just as the goodwife was thinking of preparing the dinner, the dog gave a low growl, then another and a louder one, and then, springing up, commenced barking savagely and incessantly.

Chapter II The Massacre

RUNNING to the door to see what had caused this sudden change of mood in the animal, the wife was astonished, though certainly not alarmed, at seeing three blacks, armed with spear and boomerang, almost close to the hut.

The dog sprang out upon the blacks in the most furious manner, but he was too small to be of any use in the way of defence, although sufficiently attached to his owners to be the cause of mischief by the offence and irritation that his attacks would give to the blacks. Thus, when he rushed out at them, and the savages threatened him with their spears, she called him back, and, by a few soothing words, induced him to enter the hut, though all her persuasion was insufficient to keep him quiet, or to prevent him from keeping up a continued growling.

The blacks now came up, and Macomo, the leader, stalked with an air of authority into the hut, whilst Atare and Opara took up their station just within the doorway. As they cast their eyes around the hut, and marked its contents, there was in them a greedy and exulting gleam that did not escape the woman's observation. There was something there, though she could not read its whole meaning, that told her feminine instincts that she was not safe. With true maternal precaution, she gathered her two elder children up close to her, as though, at all events, to shield them from the first fury of the storm should it burst forth; and, taking up her position by the side of the cradle in which her infant was sleeping, she faced the intruders boldly, and addressed them sternly, no quaver of fear in her voice, no want of courage in her eye.

“Now, what is it you want?” she inquired.

The savages looked at each other, for, though Macomo may have known sufficient of the whitefellows' language to understand a simple sentence addressed to him, there were but very few words that he could speak himself. His companions were altogether ignorant of the tongue; but still the manner of the woman left no doubt in their minds as to what she was saying.

Macomo opened his mouth, put his fingers into it in a manner not to be mistaken, and said the one word, “Eat.”

“If you want food, go outside and camp down by the stockyard, and I will bring you something,” and she pointed with her hand to the door.

Macomo shook his head, and, with a half-imperative gesture, placed his hand upon the table, and indicated by signs that the meal should be served there.

“No!” answered the wife. “My husband will be home directly to his dinner, and he will not suffer you in the house. You must go outside.”

She was watching them narrowly, and she caught sight of the fierce significant glance that passed between them when Macomo told them the purport of what she had just said. She became aware then that, though Macomo pretended not to know what was said, he understood every word. The bearing of the three was such as to convince her that danger was impending and imminent, though of what kind she was unable to say. Judging from the wild and ruthless look of the savages, the very worst might be expected. What, then, was she to do? Should she make a bold effort and endeavour to escape? Alas, those little ones would impede her flight, and she had rather die with them than leave them in such pitiless hands. She must temporise, then; hold them in play; gain time—precious time. Perhaps her husband might take it into his head to come home to dinner. He had done so occasionally; but as she thought this she knew that she was deceiving herself, for only on one or two occasions had he done so. Still, time gained was something.

All this passed like a flash through her mind, and her plan was at once formed. Changing her tone to one of easy indifference, she said, “Well, never mind; if he comes in I must make peace for you. So sit down.”

With a calmness that nothing but the exercise of the most powerful will could have given, she placed chairs at the table, and, after laying plates and knives and forks on the board, she sat her children down on a stool by the fire, and went into the storeroom to fetch the food. “Perhaps,” she thought, “I may see some opening of escape in that direction.”

But again the thought of the helpless little ones came upon her, and she knew that escape with them was impossible. Almost mechanically, for her mind was busy upon some means of escape, she opened the safe, and was taking out the food, when she became aware of the presence of Blucher. He had followed her into the store, and was whining and fondling on her feet, expressing in the best way that nature permitted to him the sympathy he felt for her dangerous position.

“My poor Marshal,” she said, “and you foresaw this, and this it was that caused the uneasiness for which we were inclined to blame you.”

The dog jumped and fondled upon her almost in ecstasy, as if he knew now that his conduct of the morning had been appreciated. “Oh,” she continued, “that you had but the power of speech, that you might aid me with your counsel, and tell me what is best to be done.”

Blucher wagged his tail and looked up in her face reflectively, a low whine being possibly intended to express the regret he felt at not being able to do what his mistress wished.

Suddenly the thought came upon her that George could not be very far away, and that the distance would be nothing when traversed at the full speed of the willing

dog. If the dog could be sent away with a message, she might manage to keep the blacks in good humour, and George might be home in time to prevent mischief. But how to send a message; she had no materials for writing —nothing to send him as a sign of their danger. Stay! There was the locket with her dear mother's hair. George knew that she never parted with that, and that nothing but a dire extremity would induce her to risk its loss. She would tie it round the dog's neck, and when George saw it, he would guess the rest. But would the dog find her husband? and then, would her husband notice the locket on his neck? She would not doubt. She would try the experiment, and leave the result in the hands of Providence. All this passed through her mind in an instant of time, and in a few seconds afterwards the locket was taken from her own neck, and tied, in such a manner as to be readily remarked, round that of the dog, and the dog himself was dropped noiselessly out of the window, after he had been taken up by his mistress, caressed, and received this instruction—“Use all the speed you can, my good dog, to find your master, and bring him back to save us.”

This done, she left the store with as much coolness as if nothing had occurred. On opening the door, she found Atare standing on the watch, and, motioning him to go before—a direction that the black obeyed with evident unwillingness—she returned to the main room, and her heart was relieved from a load when she saw her children sitting safe where she had left them.

She placed the meat and bread upon the table, and was about to cut off some meat for the blacks, when the knife and fork were rudely snatched from her hand by Opara, who made signs to indicate that he would help himself.

Macomo now turned to her, and, going through a feigned process of drinking, said, “Tea!”

She shook her head. “No water,” she said. “Blackfellow go to river and get water.”

Macomo answered by pointing, with a sardonic grin, to the kettle that was boiling on the hearth.

“That is for the tea that my husband takes with his dinner, and must not be used.”

Again that savage gleam shot out of the eyes of the black. He, however, contented himself with making an imperative negative gesture, and pointed to himself and his companions.

She caught the look, however, and was warned by it. “Why, you surely would not eat my husband's dinner, and then leave him without a cup of tea also,” she said, in a voice of constrained pleasantry, even smiling on them, in the hope of temporarily restraining them from the execution of their manifest design of pillage.

The words fell upon ears that could not comprehend their meaning; but her tone of

voice was readily understood; in fact, so well had the woman played her part, that, keen savage as he was, the cadence of the words, and the smile that accompanied them, completely deceived Macomo. Taking advantage of the seeming complaisance of the mistress of the house, he seized the hand which in speaking she had stretched out towards them. There could be no mistaking the look that accompanied this action, and all the Saxon blood of the virtuous English matron was at once up in arms.

Snatching her hand away with every token of disgust, and her eyes fairly ablaze with anger, she cried, "Out from the hut, ye black curs! Troop, march! Out of the hut, or I'll take your punishment into my own hands, and leave not a strip of your black hides for my husband to flog off you on his return!"

The blacks had started to their feet. The concentrated fury in which the last words were uttered left no possible excuse for mistaking the woman's meaning. In an instant their tomahawks were in their hands. As they thus confronted her, the woman took two paces backward, seized a small saucepan that was at hand, ladled it full of boiling water from the huge iron pot that was hung over the fire, and, preparing to cast it over the blacks, she said, "Clear out, every one of you! March out, or I will scald you so that your own tribe shall not know you again!"

Alas! Well would it have been for her had she cast on them the water without giving them warning. In the suddenness of attack she might have surprised them into flight, and so saved her life. It would have been beyond their power to have endured the pain that would have been caused by the hot water upon their nude bodies. But, though they understood the action of the woman, and its threatening character, they did not understand the words; and, the first surprise overcome, their wily wits were soon at work. That moment's pause had cost the poor mother her life; for Atare, who was close to the cradle, pounced suddenly down upon it, and, seizing the infant, that had been lying sleeping in it, in an iron clutch that almost crunched the young bones, and brought out a yell of agony from the babe, he, with a shout of derision, held it before him as a shield. This sight, and the cry of pain from her babe, was more than the mother's courage could stand. Letting fall the saucepan she had held, but had failed to use, she rushed forward to the rescue of her infant. She had barely taken three steps towards Atare, when the tomahawk of Macomo was buried in her brain. With a wild ringing shriek she fell, and the last sight that her dying eye encountered as she was falling was one that had called forth that shriek of agony more than any bodily pang of her own. She saw, and had still the consciousness to be agonised by the action, her beloved babe dashed savagely down upon the earth by the now furious barbarian who had temporarily made it his protection. She saw this, and then Heaven, in its mercy, called her away. The two

little ones, who were crying with fright in the chimney corner, were despatched almost before they were aware of what had happened. The poor babe had had all its little life crushed out of it by that one violent cast.

And now the savages dispersed over the hut, admiring, breaking, and destroying; collecting together all such articles as, according to their notions, were the most valuable, and wantonly smashing up all that they could not remove. Already they had gathered three heaps of goods, when the sound of hurried footsteps caught their ready ears. Opara at once sprang forward, looking out in the direction whence the sound came, but keeping himself concealed. A short observation satisfied him, and he grinned gaily to his companions as he told them that it was only the boy, and that if they would keep themselves quiet, the lad would run into the trap, and be very quickly disposed of.

Poor Jamie! He had heard whilst at work at the lower end of the clearing that piercing shriek, the last cry of his dying mother; and, changed as it was, and in a tone that he had never heard before, he knew that mother's voice. Stupefied for the moment by the thrill of horror that it caused to pass through his frame, he stood aghast and irresolute. He knew nothing of the arrival of the blacks, and could not therefore in any way conjecture what could possibly have called forth that cry of agony. That something dreadful had occurred he was convinced, and he at once set off at his utmost speed for the hut.

Nearer he came, his cheeks pale with the haste he had made, as well as from the remembrance of that dreadful cry that still seemed ringing in his ears. As he approached, however within fair sight of the doorway, the unwonted stillness that reigned around seemed to raise some suspicion in his mind, and he came to a dead halt, and peered inquiringly in at the door, now not more than fifty yards distant. He could see nothing of those he sought, nor of any living thing. He had left Blucher in the hut, and if Blucher were there, he would not have allowed him to come thus near without a bark of recognition. They might be down at the river, and some accident might have occurred there. Still he was sure that shriek—and the memory of it made him shudder—had come from the hut. He considered for a moment, and had almost made up his mind to go down to the river and search for his mother there, when suddenly a black form glided through the doorway, and in another moment a spear was cast from Opara's woomera, and came whizzing through the air straight towards him. Quick as lightning he dropped flat upon his face, and the spear sped harmlessly over him, and stuck quivering in the ground some twenty yards beyond.

The boy, however, did not wait to watch the course of the weapon, but, springing at once to his feet, he bounded off at his utmost speed along the upper line of the fence in the direction that had that morning been taken by his father. But he had

cunning enemies at his heels. Opara ran after him only so far as to give himself a steady aim, and his weapon the required distance for a correct throw. Having attained this, he paused for a moment to steady himself, and then launched a boomerang from his hand. The weapon rose slightly from the throw, and then, cutting the air in a series of curves, at last struck the boy over the legs, and brought him to the ground with a broken thigh bone. Drawing his tomahawk from his belt, for he had left his spears behind him in the hut, Opara ran off at full speed to the spot where the lad had fallen.

In spite of the agony the action caused him, Jamie raised himself till he stood upright. All was now clear to him. He knew too well the meaning of that fatal scream, and the cause of that unwonted silence. The savages had desolated his home, and one of them was now approaching eager to take his life. That life he would sell dearly, if but the chance were given him; for, boy though he was, the heart of a man was in his bosom. Hastily looking round for some weapon of defence against the savage who was fast nearing him, he was almost driven to despair at finding that there was not so much as a stick within his reach. There were, however, a quantity of stones lying along the bottom of the fence. Quickly selecting one of these, he kept it as far as he could out of sight, and with a beating heart awaited the approach of the black. He had but to wait a few seconds, and then Opara was down upon him; and, as the savage raised his tomahawk to strike, the boy with all his strength launched the stone full in the face of the black. It struck the mark at which it had been so steadily aimed, and with such good-will that the savage fell as if he had been shot. This, however, did not save the boy, for the blow aimed by the black had already parted, and the tomahawk descended upon his head. Jamie dropped senseless, and apparently dead, and, at the same moment, his assailant, equally senseless, fell on top of him.

They lay thus for some minutes, for it was not until that time that Macomo and Atare missed their companion. His continued absence, however, at last led them to deem it advisable to follow on his track and learn what had detained him. They had not far to go, and their astonishment was great at finding him lying senseless upon the apparently dead body of the boy. Raising him up, they saw the ghastly wound that had been inflicted, a wound of so extensive a character that they despaired of their comrade's life. Their rage knew no bounds, and, spurning the lad's body with their feet, they would, no doubt, have hacked it piecemeal, had not their companion's precarious condition demanded their instant attention. They at once gave all their skill to restoring him to consciousness.

When at last he opened his eyes and gave a deep groan, they turned their attention to the boy. There is a kind of superstition amongst the Australian aborigines that the

slayer of one of their tribe should not only be killed, but should also be buried out of sight, so that the members of his own tribe may never be able to claim and pay the last rites to the body. By this only, as they believe, can the spirit of their departed comrade be fully satisfied. Thus, then, in order to propitiate Opara's spirit, in the event of a serious termination to his wound, Macomo and Atare proceeded to put the boy's body out of sight.

Scooping out with their tomahawks a shallow trench in the softer ground that lay under shelter of the fence, they threw Jamie's body into it. They then drew over it the surface earth they had previously removed, heaping on the top a number of the stones before referred to, and scattering over all a quantity of leaves and twigs, in such a way as to leave but little trace of the bloody deed that had been thus concealed.

Having done this to their satisfaction, they bore the body of Opara to the hut, and, by the use of the rude aboriginal remedies, they succeeded in bringing him back to full consciousness, and ultimately in putting him in a state to move away. This was all the more necessary since these occurrences had consumed a considerable amount of time, and they began to feel that there was a danger that the settler might come upon them before they could get a sufficient distance away to provide for their comrade's safety. They had missed the dog, knowing that he would not have remained quiet throughout all this violence had he been anywhere handy; and they could give a pretty shrewd guess as to the direction in which he had gone. Their own wily and observant natures also told them that important information was to be conveyed by very trifling indications, such as would scarcely be remarked by an ordinary or uninterested observer, or one not acquainted with the token sent.

Packing together, then, as much of their selected plunder as they could conveniently carry, they set fire to the hut, and before it had burst into a blaze, left the spot, their wounded companion toiling painfully after them.

As George Maxwell left his home in the morning, it was only to be expected that the melancholy howlings of the dog, which followed his footsteps, should have had some depressing influence upon him. He was a brave man, but he had the warmest affection for his family, and the strongest anxiety for their safety; and, as those cries followed him, he felt much more uneasy than he would willingly acknowledge to himself. This feeling became so strong upon him that, when he reached the top of the ridge, he paused for a moment hesitatingly, with more than a half inclination to turn back and send his son in his place. But upon what slight circumstances do the most important events of our life frequently hinge! Have not the most momentous occurrences but too frequently been dependent, in the first instance, upon some circumstance of the most trivial kind, that for the moment has passed by us

disregarded?

And so it was in the present instance. At the instant when George paused, and just as he was on the point of turning back, he took one look at the sheep, still a long way ahead of him. He saw that the leaders of the flock were about to dip into a thick jungly gully. Had they fed into this, he knew that there was great danger of their separating, and of a large portion of the flock being lost. He could not, therefore, leave them at this particular juncture, and, hurrying forward after them, he determined to extricate them from this difficulty, to place them upon some clear feeding-ground, and then to return.

Suddenly he heard a distant cry, or rather, as it might be, the echo of a cry, that sounded to him like a shriek of distress, and coming, too, from the direction of his home. His heart almost ceased to beat as he heard, and then again he checked his fears. Could he have heard a cry at that distance from his home? It was folly. It must be a delusion of his sense of hearing acted upon by the nervous excitement his mind had been undergoing for the last few hours. And so he reassured himself.

Hardly had he made up his mind to return home than he had started; but he had not taken more than a hundred paces before the dog Blucher dashed breathless and panting out of the bush, and commenced to bark and to jump upon his master. He gave but a short time, however, to the caress of his master, for, almost immediately, he left him, ran back towards home, stopped to see if his master followed, and, finding that he did not do so, came back a short distance towards him, and then again dashed off homeward, as though tempting George to follow at the same speed.

“Well, Marshal,” said George, “so you have changed your mind, old fellow, and have come out to inspect the forces after all.”

The dog wagged his tail at the friendly salutation, but whined pleadingly, and once more started off on the homeward track.

As Maxwell hesitated, Blucher instantly ran back to him, and, seizing him by the trousers, endeavoured to drag him on the way towards the hut. Then, when his master turned and faced in the homeward direction, the dog once more bounded off on the track, stopping, however, when he had gone some distance, and looking back anxiously to see if his master followed.

George was fairly perplexed at the Marshal's conduct. “Confound the dog!” he said. “I hope he's not going mad. It seems very much like it. If he comes near me again in that style, I'll give him a charge of lead, and prevent accidents.”

He turned away, and once more the dog came back to him. George heard him coming, and at once faced round and raised his gun with a view to carry out his threat; but, in running his eye along the animal's body in search of the spot at which to aim, he perceived, for the first time, the black ribbon that was round its neck, and,

tracing this ribbon with his eye, he saw the locket attached to it, and at once recognised it as his wife's.

Something like a suspicion of the truth seemed to dart across George's mind when he saw the locket. As his wife had well surmised, he knew the trinket never left her possession. The dog was now close to him, so, seizing the animal with one hand, with the other he detached the ribbon and locket from its neck. Yes, it was hers—there could be no doubt about it. Had this been sent by his wife? It could have been in the hands of none other. Then it could only have been sent in a moment of great urgency as a token that he was instantly required. And then the conduct of the dog—yes, that was all clear enough now. And he had been about to shoot the poor brute; and instead of following the faithful animal, who knew its mistress's danger, he had lost time, valuable time, that could never be regained. These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he ran now at his utmost speed towards home.

“Oh! would to God I may not be too late!” was the expression, and the only one that passed the lips, of the agonised man, almost unconsciously, as he rushed wildly homewards. He saw it all now, plainly and palpably; at least he saw that some imminent danger impended—a danger that might fall at any moment on his own loved ones before he was there to aid them. But from what quarter and in what form did it threaten? And then that shriek—“Oh! would to God I may not be too late!” he cried, as the sweat, not of exertion, but of agony, poured from his brow. “Oh! Marshal, Marshal! would that you had language equal to your intelligence! Would that you could tell all that you have so recently seen!”

At last he reached a spot whence he had been accustomed to see the smoke from his hut fire rising into the air. Yes, there it was! But no; the largest fire of the coldest night never sent up such a smoke as that! And with the thought he dashed forward more fiercely and more eagerly than before. The summit of the next rise was reached, and then he came into full view of what had so recently been his happy, thriving home. One look told him all. That burning hut; with no one living soul near, spoke the whole history to his quick perceptions. He stopped abruptly and looked upon the ruin, and as he looked there was something in the sight that seemed to turn the man to stone. Grinding his teeth together with rage, he clenched his hands so violently as to be almost forcible enough to crush the polished barrel of the gun he held in one of them. He ceased at once the pious ejaculation he had previously so frequently and so fervently uttered. The blow had fallen—he had no need of prayer now. No word passed his lips, but the look of agony left his face, and in its place his countenance assumed the terrible scowl of vengeful determination—a scowl of which, ten minutes before, none would have thought it capable. Satisfied

with his survey, he moved forward, but no longer with the head-long speed he had hitherto used. It was at a quick walk only that he came towards the spot, knowing that the blow had fallen—that the worst had occurred, and that what had happened was irreparable.

He reached the hut, and while it was burning, he stood as near as he conveniently could, and, leaning on his gun, passively watched the flames doing the work of destruction. To have seen him, one would have said that he was an utterly disinterested and an exceedingly nonchalant spectator of the ruin, but for the look of his face. There was still there that look of vengeful determination, that seemed now to have been firmly and indelibly chiselled into it in hard and unmistakable lines. There was no sign of his wife or his children. He did not expect to meet with any. He seemed to know instinctively that he must look there—there amongst that burning mass, for what had been his wife and children. And he must wait—wait patiently till he could search for and bring them forth. Well, he would wait. He could wait and bide his time; but his time would come at last, and then—and he ground his teeth savagely together as he thought upon what would happen then.

It had only been a bark hut, and the fire was not long before it had exhausted itself, and left nothing but smouldering ruins behind. As soon as he could venture amongst the heated wreck, George was at work upon it, heedless of burns and injuries to himself, dragging out the still burning sheets of bark that had fallen from the roof, and clearing away and rooting down to what he knew was below lying on the earthen floor. He came first to the body of his wife. He raised her remains tenderly and carefully, and laid them out on the spot of grass in front of the hut.

In removing her he came upon the crushed body of the babe. Yes, he knew that the mother would not allow her infant to be far separated from her, even in death. Close by were the bodies of the other two children; but where was Jamie? His body was not near that burnt and hideous mass. Where could it be? And he searched over the whole hut, clearing out every portion of the ruin. Had Jamie escaped? Had he turned coward, and, saving himself, left his mother to be slaughtered without a blow in her defence? And a darker scowl than it had ever yet borne passed over his face. No! He could not believe it. Jamie would have died for his mother, and he must be dead, or his mother would not be lying there. But where was his body? Without waiting for any answer to his question, he hastily decided to dig a grave for the remains of his loved ones, and, when that was completed, he stood and looked down upon the corpses. He uttered no word; he shed no tear; there was not so much as a sigh breathed forth to relieve that heavy oppression that seemed to be suffocating him. Yes, his mind was clearer now, and he determined to search for Jamie's body, believing that the demons who had killed the others had sacrificed him also.

Chapter III The Vow

GEORGE set himself vigorously to work to search for the body of the boy. He had come across the track of the two blacks who had borne their wounded comrade down from the upper side of the paddock to the hut. He followed along this track, guided by the blood drops, but this was unusual work to him, and he did it but slowly. At times he lost the traces altogether, and then was long at finding them again. At one point he almost despaired of success; but suddenly he received assistance. Blucher, who had left him unaccountably at the time of his arrival, and whom he had not seen since, came running up to him. The dog whined, and then went forward in the direction of the track which George had been following. He still uttered no word, but he nodded his head as though to tell the dog that he would follow this time.

Blucher needed no answer, for he could read his master's look, and with an appearance of satisfaction he started off briskly. George followed after him, and after taking a few steps he again saw the goutts of blood upon the earth. And then he came to the spot where the two blows had been struck, and, examining the ground, he saw, with a kind of savage joy, the earth saturated with blood. His experienced eye told him that there was there more of the vital fluid than would have flowed from any one wound; and his joy arose from the belief that the boy had not fallen unavenged. By this time Blucher was scratching at a heap of stones lying close under the fence. Hardly had he reached the dog's side than he was almost unnerved by hearing a feeble moan issuing from below that stony heap. Quick as thought he cleared off the stones, and in a few seconds the shallow trench was opened, and the senseless body of Jamie was exposed to view. George drew it out carefully, and as he did so, the lad once more gave forth a feeble moan.

"He is not yet dead—there may be hope," was George's thought, and he laid the boy down upon the grass and commenced a careful examination of the wounds; for his military experience had given him a kind of rough-and-ready knowledge of surgery that stood him in good stead on the present occasion. He dressed the wound on the head, which, after all, was not so serious as he had at first thought it; he reduced the dislocation of a broken arm, and set and bandaged a broken leg; and before his work was completed had the satisfaction of seeing Jamie open his eyes.

He had done for the boy all that could be done at present; and now there was the more serious, but imperative duty of burying his dead out of sight. One by one he lowered them down to their final resting-place, and then he paused and reflected.

No; the grave shall not be filled up yet. There was something more to do. In that

Jamie must take a part. To-morrow—yes, to-morrow, and Jamie might be sufficiently recovered to be conscious of what was doing. He would leave the work, then, till to-morrow.

So he decided in thought, for even yet he had uttered no word. So, covering over the mouth of the grave, he sat himself down silently and patiently by its side to watch through the night. His gun between his knees, and his shot-belt and powder-flask hanging from his shoulder, he made no movement, save only when he went over to tend his wounded son. His sheep came home of themselves at sundown, but he took no notice of them. His cows came to the yard to be milked, but they were unheeded. All his attention was absorbed by, and divided between, that apparently dying boy who was lying in the hastily-reared shed, and the unrecognisable heap of charred remains that lay in the pit he had dug.

Morning found Maxwell sitting with unblinking eyes, keeping watch by the grave-side. But, instead of the hale, hearty man, with dark-brown hair and fresh countenance, there sat a grey-haired, decrepit, oldman with pinched-up face into which deep lines had been worn—so deep that the furrows, you would say, could only have been ploughed by years of care. There was still that settled vengeful look, all the more fearful for the sunken cheeks and hollow eyes that now accompanied it.

Silent, impassive, motionless he sat, his stony gaze ever rivetted upon that open grave over which he had kept his steadfast watch, and only showing a sign of life whenever a motion or a moan of pain came from the other object of his care.

At last the boy opened his eyes, greeted him with a weak cry of, “Oh! Father!” and looked round with a half-vacant gaze, as wondering where he might be.

George watched him with that fixed look upon his face, for not even the sight before him could change it in the least. At last, with a mighty effort, for the power of speech seemed to have left him, he spoke in a voice hoarse and hollow.

“You know me, Jamie?”

The boy looked at him for a moment, and his thoughts evidently wavered; but, as he looked, memory seemed to come back, his eye lightened up, and he moaned, “Oh! Father! My head, my head!”

“Who did it?” George constrained himself to ask.

Jamie's eye, so recently bright with intelligence, now wandered restlessly, whilst a look of intense horror came over his face, as his mind was thus taken back to the fearful scene in which he had been an actor. He tried to raise himself as he shrieked out—“The blacks! The blacks! Keep them away—oh! keep them away!” The excitement was too much for his weak state, and he had hardly spoken when he fell back unconscious.

A long-drawn expiration marked the satisfaction with which George received this

intelligence. He had remained breathlessly waiting the answer to his question, and now it had come he was satisfied. Now he knew where to look for the murderers. All through that dreary night he had passed the weary hours of watching in pondering over the course he would pursue in the event of the ruffians being whites or blacks. Were they whites, he would take such a course; were they blacks, he would take other and different steps. All had been arranged in his own mind, and every step to be taken had been carefully arranged. They were blacks, and he had now only to trace them out who had done the deed. There was now but one thing more to be done here, but in that Jamie must bear a part; and, as Jamie had relapsed into insensibility, he must await his return to consciousness.

Carefully did he watch and tend the boy through what seemed to his impatience those long hours of delay. The sun was already high in the heavens before Jamie gave any evidence of awakening sensibility.

“Jamie,” said the father, when at last the mind of the boy was sufficiently aroused to comprehend the meaning of words, “Jamie! Have you courage enough to look upon your mother and the little ones?”

The eyes of the boy were opened wide with wonder at the question. He uttered a faint murmur of acquiescence, adding something that was inaudible.

“It must be done,” muttered the father. “It seems cruel to the lad to do it just now, but it is useless delaying longer. He must have care and attention at once, or he will never do his share of the work; and that which is to be done must be done before we quit this spot.”

Then, as he prepared to take the boy in his arms, he added aloud, “Come, then, and I will show them to you.”

He carried Jamie in his arms the few paces that intervened between the fence and the pit. “Now, courage, my boy! Courage!” he whispered hoarsely, as he held the lad over the drear opening—“Look! There, down there!”

The boy gave an idiotic laugh as he looked down; then asked in a voice that could scarce be heard, “Where's mother?”

“There—there, Jamie!” he cried in a voice of subdued savagery. “That black heap, which none but the eyes of affection could ever recognise for what it once was! That was your mother, boy. Now, look your last, for you will never see even that much of her again.”

He laid the boy down by the side of the pit, and, with the same unchanged countenance, and with the same business air with which he had thrown out the earth, he filled in the grave, rounded it over, and then covered it with such remnants of bark as had been spared by the fire in order to save the earth from being scratched away by native dogs, roping and pegging them down, in order to prevent their

removal. Then he took two pieces of hardwood board, of unequal length, and, nailing one across the other, he constructed a rough semblance to the emblem of Christianity. Cutting one end of the longer board to a point, he drove it into the ground at the head of the grave. And now his work was nearly done.

“You know that your mother, your brother, and your sisters are all lying there?” he asked of Jamie, who had intently watched the whole proceedings, though as yet scarcely able to comprehend them.

The boy answered, “Yes,” though his look expressed that personally he was by no means satisfied that such was the case, but that he had taken his father's word for it.

“You know how they came by their death!” And as George commenced, that look of horror again fell upon the boy's countenance. His father noticed it at once, and, seizing his son by the hand, as though his strong grasp would give the other confidence, he continued: “Command yourself! Attend to me! You are safe here, and I am by to protect you. You know how they died?”

Jamie groaned. “Oh, yes yes!” he answered in the weak voice of exhaustion, whilst a shudder ran through his frame as he spoke.

“And now attend to me well, Jamie! What would you be prepared to do to those who have thus slain your mother and your brethren, and struck down yourself?” asked George, as he fixed his firm, stony eyes upon the boy.

The boy's eyes opened to their full width as this question was asked, and as they met those of his father, one would have said that the savage vengeful spirit of the one had been transmitted by that look to the other, for there was in the one the same wild gleam of revenge that was in the other. Clenching his uninjured hand, he groaned out between his teeth the one word, “Kill!”

George laughed grimly. “Yes, yes—you would kill—kill! Good, good; you would kill! My own son, my own brave boy! I recognise you now. Yes, kill, kill!” and he laughed again that wild discordant laugh of frenzy. “You shall have your wish! Now listen! I am about to swear an oath, and if, when I have finished it, you agree with it, and are content to take it also, and to be bound by it, hold up your hand—your uninjured hand—in token that you do so; but if your heart fail—if you experience even the slightest qualm of disinclination to join yourself with me in what I shall undertake, let your hand remain quiescent, and I will work alone! You understand?”

“Yes,” Jamie replied.

And then George knelt down upon that newly-filled grave, and, raising his hands to Heaven in solemn tones—tones better suited for holier and more Christian work—took a deep and fearful oath of vengeance. The boy looked on, not more than half-conscious of what was going on, but still understanding enough of the dreadful words to know that there was vengeance in the midst of them, and that a

share of it had been promised to him. And so, when George had done, and looked towards his son, Jamie, with more energy than could have been expected from him in his then weak state, raised his arm into the air, and, with his hand fiercely clenched, he exclaimed, almost in his old tone of voice, "I swear!" And then, overcome by the exertion begotten of his temporary excitement, he fell back senseless.

A few hours after this the settlement was deserted. As month after month passed away, the grass grew over the lonely grave, and over the earth that had once been trodden bare with the tramp of happy infant feet, and for long, long days after, the spot was shunned by white and black, for the tale of the massacre soon got abroad, and, when once known, it would have been a bold man indeed who would have ventured near that grave after nightfall.

Some two or three days after the events just recorded, George made his appearance in Newcastle, then the penal settlement of the colony, bringing with him his wounded boy, almost at the point of death from exhaustion. He was well known to the authorities, and received every assistance at their hands. His boy was attended to by the medical officers of the settlement, and, as poor George's sad tale got noised abroad, universal commiseration was felt for him, whilst offers of service were made by those in power. With that same settled stony manner, he put aside all tenders of kindness—all attempts at condolence, shutting himself up with his son, over whom he watched patiently and anxiously. When at last the hope of recovery was turned into certainty, the lad's robust frame and excellent constitution having wonderfully seconded the skill of his medical attendants, George began cautiously to make his arrangements. He almost trembled for his project, however, when he found that, as Jamie gained strength of body, he gradually lost strength of mind. The injury he had received on the head had so far unsettled his reason as to make him occasionally something more than partially idiotic. Whilst the medical men were arguing upon the boy's cure, and disputing as to the probability of his ever fully recovering his reason, George and the subject of the dispute suddenly disappeared, and, notwithstanding that every search and every inquiry were made for them, no trace of them could be found.

Chapter IV On The Track

SINCE leaving the hospital at Newcastle, George and his son had scoured the country all round about their old residence, in search of the murderers; but, though they had come across many parties of blacks belonging to the tribes in the neighbourhood, they had as yet found no trace of those they sought. They knew that, the occurrence being so recent, they would find in the tribe some evidence of the foray; whilst Jamie, in his saner moments, declared to his father that at any time, and under any circumstances, even to his dying day, he should know the black who smote him down, even if he had not left upon him a mark about which there could be no mistake.

Unkempt, travel-stained, haggard, and gaunt from months of camping in the open, their changed appearance so far favoured them that there was not much probability of either one or the other being recognised; yet still they had to pursue their perquisitions very carefully, for the first whisper that inquiry was afoot would be sure to be the signal for removing all trace of the crime, and they well knew how quickly intelligence travelled amongst the native tribes. Having thus visited the families of the tribes nearer to them, they were now making their way amongst the more savage tribes that dwelt still farther from the narrow line of settlement that bordered the Hunter and one or two of its tributaries. They had now to be exceedingly cautious, for every step was fraught with danger, as they were on the territory of a fierce, hostile, and untamed tribe, who would give them up to slaughter the instant they were discovered.

George, on first starting on his long-planned expedition, had designed to leave his dog behind, but the recollection of the good service the animal had rendered in time of need—the remembrance of the wonderful sagacity, almost amounting to reason, that he had displayed, and the mute appeals of the poor brute itself, all combined to make George change his intention. Once in the bush, he had only to train the dog to silence and immobility when necessary, and then he might be made a useful companion. Not only did Blucher learn this lesson, but when, from constant observation, he began to comprehend what they were after, he at once showed them the valuable service he could render by picking up a blackfellow's track, over which they were hesitating, and by running it down so noiselessly as to bring them into the centre of the camp of a sleeping tribe, without awakening a soul amongst those easily-aroused sleepers.

When this valuable instinct of the animal was thus shown, George congratulated himself upon what he had previously considered to have been a weakness on his

part, and, as may be conceived, it was frequently made use of. The half-idiot boy, possessing himself great skill in all bush lore, yet looked with an eye of admiration upon the superior qualifications of the Marshal, regarding him in all such matters as an authority against which there was no appeal.

Having obliterated all trace of their camp, or at all events sufficiently blinded their trail to throw any who might pursue them off the scent, they moved off to a stony ridge a short distance back, and, basking out in the open sun, warmed themselves in his rays, until at last, when what he conceived to be the suitable time had arrived, George gave the order to start.

One of the aboriginal tribes is evidently on a hunting expedition, and a halt has been called for the night. Those who have been provident on the march have thrown down upon the ground the opossums or wallabies that have rewarded their hunting. Those who have not been so, and who are yet unprovided with a meal, set their gins to work to form the covering for the night, and scatter over the valley in search of game. These drive their yam sticks, of which they carry two or three, into the ground, and against this they rear up the shed or gunya, which their lord and master usually monopolises. Having done this, they collect the sticks for the fire, at which the men will cook their food. They have no firestick with them, so they must have the means of procuring fire; for the old aboriginal process of rubbing two sticks together until ignition is caused is a long, tedious, and wearing one—never resorted to except in the event of an accident. And until the flint, steel, and tinder of the white was known to the tribes, a lighted stick was always carefully preserved to furnish fire when needed.

And now, all being prepared, one of the gins goes over to one who appears to be the leader of the party, and from him receives flint, steel, and tinder, and, with a great show of importance, proceeds to strike a light. That this is a comparatively recent introduction into the tribe is evident from the fact that several gather round to witness the ceremony, thus showing that it had not yet altogether lost its novelty. The spark has caught, a few leaves and dry pieces of bark are ignited, and then fire is soon distributed amongst the tribe.

But where got they, in those wilds, this article so invaluable to the savage? And who is he that reclaims it when it has served its purpose, and carefully puts it in a place of safety about his own person, as though it were regarded as the most valuable of his possessions—so valuable that it could not be entrusted to the care of his gin?

Yes, it is Macomo. He is now the leader of the present party, as he was recently the leader of the band of murderers at the station. A wallaby he has speared lies on the ground before him, and he reclines indolently upon the grass watching the

gins—for he has two of them —build the fire that is for his use.

The men who have been out hunting now come into camp with varied success—some with more, some with less game, but none empty-handed, or with less than was sufficient for themselves. Should the meal run short, the gins and children suffer, for the noble male first gorges himself, and then distributes what he cannot eat amongst his family.

They were all busily engaged in cooking and eating, and there was consequently a partial cessation of the noise arising from the confusion of tongues that had hitherto prevailed. Just then, a coo-ee, uttered in that peculiar tone that indicated that it was meant for the warning note of the arrival of a friend, and just loud enough to reach their ears, proceeded from the hill down which they had themselves approached.

The new-comer approached rapidly, and as he came within the circle of light given out by the fire, the awfully hideous appearance of the man became clearly perceptible. He was young, tall, and well-made, but he had received some fearful injury to the upper part of the face that had deprived him of the sight of one eye, and that had not merely broken, but had crushed in and obliterated, all traces of the upper part of his nose, and left a broad white scar that there was no concealing full upon his forehead. Would Jamie recognise in the black that now stood here the savage who struck him down? Not by the features, certainly, for they had been crushed out of recognition; but the traces of the wound that the lad's powerful arm had inflicted would be sure to prove an unfailing identification.

“Well,” said Macomo, when at last Opara stood by his side; “what news does Opara bring?”

“There is a man of the Port Stephens tribe lying dead at the foot of the peaked hill near which we last night camped.”

“Dead! and how?” ejaculated the other.

“As Opara was coming into camp, he came upon a foot-mark that he knew belonged to none of his party. He followed it, and came upon the man of Port Stephens when his ears were shut, and sent a spear through him before he knew that any was near. See!” and putting his hand into his belt, he drew forth the fat torn from the inside of the slain man, displaying it as the trophy of his victory.

“Were there others of his tribe with him?” questioned Macomo, to this startling intelligence.

“Opara saw no other tracks than those of the man and his gin,” and he laughed satisfactorily. “He must have been a fool, or a boy on his first war-trail, to bring his gin with him into an enemy's hunting-grounds!”

“What!” said Macomo, his eyes opening wide with astonishment. “His gin?”

The other contented himself by nodding an affirmative.

“And did you spear her, too?” asked the chief.

“No,” said the other, in a careless tone. “I am without a gin, and she is young and strong, so I brought her on with me, after some trouble. That is how I am so late.”

“Perhaps he was coming to join our tribe,” suggested Macomo.

“He should have used other colours, then. He was painted for war,” responded Opara.

“Where is the girl?” said the chief.

“She is now waiting my summons on the other side of the ridge,” replied the other.

“Go, fetch her! There must be something more in this than we see at present!” exclaimed Macomo.

“I have questioned her already. She knows nothing,” rejoined the other. “Her man was only a poor fellow in his tribe, and she is very stupid. She knows nothing of what he came to do.”

“Fetch her, then, into the camp,” and the chief drew himself up proudly, as if issuing a decree, “and let her from this night be one of our tribe.”

When Macomo had ceased speaking, Opara retired to the foot of the ridge, and coo-eed. He waited and listened for the answering cry, but it came not. Again he coo-eed, this time louder than before, but, attentively as he listened, no answer came. With an aboriginal exclamation of rage, he dashed up the ridge to the spot where he had left the girl, and, on reaching it, the reason why he had received no answer was apparent. The young girl was lying prone upon the ground, to all appearance totally insensible.

When she was left to herself by her captor, the young girl sank down to the earth, a prey to despair and grief. She presented a most pitiful sight. Her head was bleeding from three or four wounds that had been inflicted by Opara with the blunt end or eye of the tomahawk. This was no more than was altogether in accordance with the orthodox, though rough, mode of aboriginal wooing. When the black has fixed upon the female that is to be his gin, and she is mostly the member of some other tribe than his own, he watches his opportunity till he finds her alone, and then, coming down upon her suddenly, and perhaps unobserved, he knocks her senseless, usually with the waddy or native club of wood.

Raising her head, the girl was startled at hearing a rustle in a cluster of scrub near by, that her quick ear told her was made by some animal moving through it. She had but just fixed her eyes upon the spot, in eager watchfulness, when a little rough-haired dog pushed through the bush, looked round with quick, sharp eyes, and then retreated by the way he came.

She had not long to wait for a solution of this extraordinary proceeding, for,

hardly had the bushes ceased to rustle after his departure, when they were again agitated more violently than before, and then she heard the words uttered in a low tone, "Hist! Hist, girl! Make no sound or cry! We are friends."

It may here be mentioned that the girl had come from a part of the Port Stephens, whose hunting-grounds bordered upon the settlement of the whites. She was, therefore, acquainted with the language in which the words were spoken, and perfectly understood them; but, notwithstanding the caution given, she could hardly refrain from screaming, when a grey-haired man, bearing a gun, at the trail, in his hands, stood before her. It would be useless, and at the same time need too much explanation, to follow the gibberish, half aboriginal, half English, in which the conversation that followed was conducted, and we shall therefore narrate it as if spoken properly and in correct English.

"Young girl! I know your sad history, for I have been on your track all day long, hoping you were other than you are. Your husband's body told me the tale of what had happened, though I came up too late to save him," commenced George—for he it was.

"Not my husband—my brother," the girl interrupted.

"No matter which. I would have saved him had I been in time. Failing in this, I have done all I could for his body, by putting it under ground so deep that the warrigals will never be able to reach him," he continued.

"The white man is very good, but Eumerella can do nothing more than thank him," put in the girl.

"I need no thanks for what I would have done for any who needed it. But Eumerella, if so you call yourself, you can do more than thank me, if you will," added George.

The girl shook her head sorrowfully. "She can do nothing," she said. "She is weak, and wounded, and is a slave to the one-eyed murderer of her brother."

A black frown came over the man's face as this allusion was made to Opara, and when he next spoke it was in a voice tremulous with restrained passion. "Listen! Is Eumerella content to let the blood of her brother lie staining the grass on the mountain-side, and to make no effort to avenge it?"

The dark eyes of the girl gleamed for an instant, but she relapsed into apathy as, holding up her hands helplessly, she said, "What can I do?"

"You can do much," he added. "What would Eumerella do, if she had the power, to the murderer of her brother?"

"Tear out his fat whilst he was still living, and throw it, whilst his one eye looked on, to the warrigals to eat!" she exclaimed with savage energy, the sparkle of intense vengeance shooting out from her black eyes, and showing how intensely

earnest she was, as she added passionately, "And I would do the same for the whole of the cursed tribe, if I had them in my hand!"

"You do not love them, then," he said, regarding the girl with a look that seemed to read into her most secret thoughts.

"Love them!" the girl poured out savagely between her teeth. "I hate them! Whether in my own tribe, or as a slave to this sneaking, one-eyed coward, I shall always hate them. White man, hear my words! Eumerella is alone in the world. My brother was all that was left to me, and to-day he was slaughtered. Father, mother, brothers, and sisters have now all been destroyed by the tomahawks and spears of these wretched bandicoots, and now I am alone, and, what is worse still, I am a captive in the hands of my worst foes."

"Good," said George, when the young girl had concluded her story. "And now hear what I have to tell, and learn how very nearly, by the same bond of misfortune, we are bound together. The same one-eyed devil, the cowardly dog that murdered the boy, your brother, was one of a band who burnt down my house and slaughtered my wife and children. I, like yourself, am on their track for the purpose of revenge—though, unlike you, I would strike only those who had a hand in the fell deed that made me childless. I must know first who were those who were with this one-eyed dog, and, knowing that, I shall take my vengeance in my own way and at my own time. Say, will you assist me? and in return you shall have aid from me."

"Tell me how, and I will do it!" she replied.

"You are about to make one of the tribe—at all events for a time; for it must be evident to you that it is useless just now to think of escape. And you will have frequent opportunities of learning what I require to know," he continued.

"Let the white man point out the track, and I will follow it," she responded. "My wits have been too dulled by blows to see his meaning."

"Your captor was one of the murderers, and must know the others. Go with him quietly to the camp, put on as complaisant an air as possible, and worm from him this information by——" But before he could get further with his instructions, the coo-ee of Opara was heard rising up from the valley.

The girl made no motion, and all energy seemed to be driven out of her by that sound.

"I have no time to explain further," continued George. "If your camp is broken up in the morning, mark in your new camp of to-morrow the exact spot in which the sun sets; then, when darkness has come, leave the camp in the opposite direction, and before you have gone far I shall be with you, and will tell you more. If you remain here, come to this spot."

Again came the sound of Opara's coo-ee, this time uttered in evident anger.

“Have you understood me?” George asked hurriedly, and when the girl had nodded an affirmative, he continued, “Farewell! I must not be discovered. As you have not answered his cry, you will do wisely to fall down and pretend to be insensible.” Even as he spoke he disappeared in the scrub, and not a sound was given out that would indicate the presence of a living thing.

The girl had sense enough left to follow the advice he had given. She threw herself on the ground, and her weak and wounded state, with the excitement of the conversation with the white man, rendered her pretence of feigning insensibility only one very short remove from reality.

When Opara found her thus lying, he had not the slightest suspicion that anything extraordinary had occurred. Darkness had set in, and even if there had been any doubts upon his mind, he could not have satisfied them. But the whole thing seemed natural enough to him. He knew that she had given him a great deal of trouble during the day, and he did not expect to have altogether an easy task with her at once. He knew, too, that he had dealt her some very hard knocks—harder, indeed, than even Australian gallantry demanded, for he had unquestionably lost his temper over her. Her insensibility was, therefore, by no means surprising.

After two or three kicks, and a few Australian expletives from Opara, the girl opened her eyes, and then went naturally enough through all the different stages of returning sensibility, thereby showing how very much alike are women, whether savage or civilised. At last she rose, tottering to her feet, and Opara, after uttering some stern words of caution and direction, stalked on, without taking further notice of her, into the camp. Slowly and painfully she followed, so far restraining herself as not to cast one single glance in the direction in which she knew that her ally was concealed.

The arrival in camp of Opara and his captive was the signal for a fresh outbreak of verbal confusion, more especially amongst the women of the tribe. Opara, who had stood by, amused, and smiling grimly at the abuse which the women were heaping on his captive, now interfered. He marked her proud bearing, and thought all the more highly of her for it, and he now drew her from amongst them, taking her apart to a fire he had made with a few sticks begged from a neighbour. When she was seated, he left her for a few minutes, and, then returning, threw over her shoulders an English blanket, with the words, “The gin of Opara shall be as well covered as any in the tribe!”

Notwithstanding the revenge she cherished in her heart, the vanity of the girl was pleased by this magnificent present. She thought of what an answer it would be to the taunts of the gins when, in the morning, she showed herself in the tribe with the warm, heavy blanket hanging from her shoulders. At the same time, this feeling did

not in any way prevent her from keeping steadily in sight her fixed purpose of vengeance. Calling to mind the instructions she had received from the white man who was to aid her, she thought the present moment, when Opara seemed well disposed towards her, and had even displayed some little weakness, would give about the best opportunity of sounding him, and learning from him as much as could be gathered without raising his suspicion.

Cunning as he was, Opara was but as wax in her hands, to be moulded as she would under her superior intelligence. This became so obvious to her as she went on, that her contempt for him became so great as to make her almost scorn to use her power upon so poor a subject. She opened the conversation by asking, in her softest voice, "What is the name of the warrior whom I have to thank for the warm covering of the whites?"

Opara answered by telling her his name.

"It is the name of a great fighting-man," she continued, letting her voice fall into a cadence of sadness. "Eumerella has often heard it mentioned with fear by her tribe."

This was a piece of intelligence that was received with the greatest satisfaction by Opara. It was most flattering to his pride, as it was about the highest compliment that could be paid to a warrior to have his name thus spoken of in a hostile tribe.

"He is a great fighting chief," she continued. "He would never work for the whites to buy this covering. He must have slain in fight the white man to whom it belonged."

Here was another compliment to his prowess that tickled his vanity. The slaughter of a white man was a thing to be proud of, and to be talked about. Under this feeling he lost all caution, and in a short time Eumerella was in possession of the names of the three who had committed the murders.

"And now let me warn you never, if you value your life, mention to a single soul what you have this night heard, for, if you do, Macomo will brain you wherever he meets you."

Being then satisfied, she readily complied with the direction of Opara to say no more upon the subject. She thus gained credit with Opara for ready acquiescence, when her silence was only due to the circumstance that she herself desired to pursue the matter no further.

On the day following, George and his son, who had been afoot from the earliest dawn, and who had kept a watchful eye upon the camp, withdrew to a spot of greater safety as soon as the first movement was made by the blacks. It was with satisfaction that he saw the men, after taking a hasty meal, start off to their hunting, leaving their women and children behind them; for he knew that if they moved now they would go no great distance. But his satisfaction was still greater when the sun

passed the meridian and commenced to travel towards the west, and there were still no signs of moving the camp. And then he saw the hunters return into camp with their game. So George, followed by Jamie and the dog, left his secure post of observation, and, descending the ridge, approached much nearer to the camp, always taking care that he should be so placed as to be unobserved, whilst he had a full view of all that was done below.

Shortly afterwards he was aroused from a reverie by the harsh cry of the mocking-bird rising from a bush at no great distance—a cry repeated thrice with great rapidity, and sounding in his ears most remarkably like a distortion of the words “Take care!” Turning his head quickly in the direction whence the sound had come, he caught sight of Jamie making rapid signs to him. But, as he caught sight of his son, he, at the same time, saw that which made him think his last hour was come. A tall and powerful black stood, not fifty yards distant from him, with a spear already fitted to the woomera, and in the very act of throwing it. Just as he launched the weapon, and before it had parted from his hand, a small white bundle—for Blucher in his speed looked like nothing else—that had shot out from the bush where Jamie lay concealed, sprang upon the naked legs of the black. The start the savage gave on being thus assailed in rear by an unknown foe, disconcerted his aim, and the weapon that would otherwise have pinned George to the earth flew wide of the mark, passed over the crest of the ridge, and stuck upright in the earth half-way down the descent.

George had been too much taken by surprise to make any move, either aggressive or defensive; but now he sprang to his feet, and, bringing his gun up to his shoulder, held the black covered; then, advancing steadily some paces nearer, he, with an imperative gesture, directed the native to lay down his weapons. The dog meanwhile kept biting at the heels and calves of the black in the most frantic and determined manner, keeping him so well employed in defending himself as to leave him no opportunity to think of escape.

The black said a few words in his own language, and, pointing to the dog, signified that he desired George to keep the animal off.

“First lay down your arms, and then I will call him off!” It was the action that accompanied the words, and not the words themselves, that caused the black to comprehend his meaning. Still battling with the dog, he laid his spears upon the ground beside him.

“Now then the boomerangs!” and, pointing to the girdle of the black, George made him understand that the boomerangs were to be laid down also.

With a sulky air the black drew them forth. No sooner had they left his hand than Jamie darted forth from the bush in which he had been concealed, and seized upon them. At the same time, with a rapid movement, he snatched the tomahawk also

from the girdle of the black.

George now endeavoured to call off the dog, but Blucher for once showed himself intractable. For the first time in George's memory he refused to obey orders, and insisted upon springing and making savage bites at the black. He did not bark, but it was apparent that it was only by the greatest exercise of canine self-control that he kept himself from indulging in that luxury. He indemnified himself, however, for this restraint by biting still more savagely at his opponent; and, as his teeth met in the flesh, he could not forego the satisfaction of uttering a subdued snarl. It was only when Jamie seized him by the back of the neck, and dragged him off by force, that he could be made to cease.

Coming up close to the black, George looked him steadily in the face. Why did the black show so much terror of the dog, he asked himself, and why did Blucher show such frantic rage as to be disobedient to orders? Did they know each other? Had they met before? And George glared suspiciously into the face of the savage, as though he would have read in the black countenance the secret he wished to learn. The wild, restless eyes of the black returned his gaze, and there was nothing but fear to be read there.

“What have I done,” said George, in a calm, severe tone, “that the black should seek to take my life?”

The savage shook his head in a way that expressed that he did not understand what was said, whilst his restless eyes glanced uneasily, and with great rapidity, from George to the boy and the dog, and to the bush around.

“Quick, Jamie!” said George, as he kept his look steadily fixed upon the black. “The cord from my wallet; the black devil is even now thinking of making a bolt. Quick, lad!”

He had scarcely ceased speaking than, with a motion like lightning, he seized the black by the wrist, and held him with a grasp of iron. The savage felt by that fierce grip that he had to do with one who was more than his master, and at once resigned himself, with aboriginal apathy, to his fate, whatever it might be, making no resistance as Jamie bound his hands securely behind him and tied him to a sapling. Drawing a clasp knife from his pocket, George muffled it in a piece of clothing torn from his dress, and before the black could so much as guess at what was intended, this was thrust into his mouth, and he was effectually gagged. He was then removed to a place of greater security, farther back from the crest of the ridge, and then the fastenings of his hands were looked to by George himself; his feet were bound, and, having again lashed him to a sapling, George left Jamie and the dog to mount guard over him.

When the light had so far faded out of the sky that his movements could no longer

be seen from the camp, George, having given full instructions to Jamie for the watching and safe keeping of the prisoner, called Blucher to follow him, made his way to the place of concealment he had occupied the previous evening, and set himself down to wait the coming of his ally.

Chapter V The Compact

GEORGE had not long to wait after the darkness had fairly set in. As soon as he showed himself in the clear ground, the young girl bounded towards him with the light step of triumph, anxious to unburden herself of the important news she had obtained.

“Eumerella knows the murderers of the wife and children of her white friend. She has discovered all that he wished to learn.”

“All?” he asked.

“Yes, all!” she cried, in unrestrained triumph. “The number of the crawling bandicoots that did the deed, and the names of those who were in the party.”

“Quick, quick, then! Tell me all you know!” he urged.

“Eumerella will tell her white friend all he desires to know; but he must first make her a promise, after the manner of the whites when a promise is not to be broken.”

“You mean I must swear it, I suppose?” said George.

The girl gave a sign of acquiescence.

“You might purchase my immortal soul at such a price as you now offer. I swear to do your wish, if it be possible. Now, what is it you require?” he asked.

“It is this. To be faithful to me—to give me your assistance by night or by day, whenever it may be required, and to aid me to your utmost in destroying and sweeping off the face of the earth this tribe of sneaking bandicoots,” and the girl, in her energy, stood out like a pythoness, the very incarnation of savage vengeance.

“Listen to me, girl!” and as he spoke George laid his hand upon her shoulder by way of calming her excitement. “I have promised, and I will faithfully perform all that you require of me in so far as the tribe is concerned—with this reservation, that the destroyers of my house, be they few or many, shall be mine, and mine only, to be dealt with as I may think fit, and at my own time. As for the rest—burn, slay, and destroy as you will; but these must be protected, guarded, saved for me, and for me alone. Agree to this, and you shall have my aid and counsel, and that of my son.” And as she made a gesture of astonishment, he added, “He is with me, but you have not yet seen him.”

“Opara is one of those that my white friend claims,” she rejoined; “and he it was that sneaked like a cowardly warrigal upon my brother and speared him. He must die by no hand but mine, for I am the last of my kindred, or my brother's spirit lies unsatisfied in the bush, asking for vengeance.”

“I tell you, girl, that they are mine, and mine alone! Months ago, before you had suffered any loss at their hands, I was bereft of all by these incarnate fiends, and

then it was I swore the bitter oath that I am bound to keep, no matter who or what stands in my way. Even my own son, now my only child, should perish by my hand if he came between me and the accomplishment of my oath.”

“If the white man has sworn, Eumerella will respect his oath,” she answered; “but she would ask one thing, and that is that Opara shall die soon, and that she shall be present when the time comes.”

“Agreed! I have already promised Jamie,” and he spoke with a bitter laugh, “that Opara shall be the first. In a few short months his day of reckoning will come. And now, having agreed to your terms, tell me the names of those I have purchased, and give me some sign by which I may know them when I see them.”

“There were three engaged in the foray,” she said.

“Three! only three!” he cried; “too few, too few to satisfy my intense yearning for revenge!”

“Let not my friend complain,” added the girl. “Eumerella will make a glorious death-offering, sufficient to satisfy the spirits of her friends and those of the white, when her plans are completed.”

“And their names?” he asked.

“Besides Opara, my captor, whom you have seen, there were Macomo, the great war chief of the tribe, and Atare, whom I have not yet seen. He is absent on some secret expedition, but should have been back to-day. Macomo is uneasy and anxious at his absence, for he is a great warrior, and the news he brings is important.”

“Ah!” he ejaculated, as his thoughts reverted to his captive. “He should have been here to-day?”

“Yes; and Macomo fears that he may have got into some difficulty or danger, if he be not slain. If he comes not back to-morrow, a party, with Macomo at its head, will go out in search of him,” she answered.

“You do not know him—can give me no mark by which to recognise him?”

“No,” she replied. “I only know from what the gins have said that he is one of the leaders of the tribe, and second only to Macomo in bravery.”

“Good! I must learn something of him for myself,” he went on. “And now, how shall I know this Macomo—this chief devil amongst the minor fiends?”

“He is taller than any in the tribe, and stout and strong,” she said. “But, besides this, he may be known by his always wearing three eagle feathers in the binding of his hair.”

“Three eagle feathers!” and he remembered to have seen that morning a tall chief who bore that emblem on his head. “I shall not forget. And now, girl, there is but one thing more to be done, and my path is clear before me, and in that again you must aid me.”

“Let my white friend speak. Eumerella will pay service for service.”

“It is a hard task, in which cunning management will be required. It is to bring Opara here, near this spot, some time to-morrow,” he said.

“To slay him? He shall come!” she answered quickly.

“No, not to slay him; but to tell him of his crimes, and to let him know the punishment that awaits him,” rejoined George.

“What! you would warn him?” cried the girl in amazement.

“Yes,” he replied; “that is a part of my systematic purpose.”

“The white men do things strangely,” and she shook her head. “The black crawls after his foe in secret and strikes him unawares, lest he be too strong or too cunning, and so escape.”

“He shall not escape me. Were he to burrow in the earth, I would scent him out—would follow him down, and drag him forth to die when the time came. But I warn my enemy in order that he may know there is a danger always impending, whilst I keep him in ignorance of the moment when the blow will fall, so that he may always be in dread of it. That is part of my revenge. Think you I would be satisfied by merely slaying the bodies of these devils who have made me homeless? No. I must kill mind as well as body; knowing that the blow will inevitably fall, but not knowing when, they will always dread it—they will always be fearful that every bush they pass shelters the white man and his deadly bullet. I would have them die many deaths through fear, until at last they shall not dare to sleep at night, lest their fate should steal upon them unawares; or walk alone by day, lest it should meet them off their guard. I would wear them out, and destroy their manhood, as they have done by me, and from bold warriors turn them into laughing-stocks for their gins. Now, girl, what think you of that for vengeance? Is not the mere spear-thrust of the black paltry by the side of it?”

The girl almost quailed before the fierce, bitter energy with which these words had been uttered, and, looking up to him with a glance of dread, she answered, “My white friend is very cunning. He has taught me a lesson that I shall not forget. I would have destroyed the whole tribe at one blow, but he is a great chief and knows best. His words shall not be lost upon me.”

“And now,” he continued, “think you that you can, upon some pretence, cajole Opara to this spot?”

“He is a fool!” she answered, “and is easily led away by smooth talk. He shall come; but how shall I escape his vengeance?”

“You shall be made prisoner, too, so that he may not suspect,” rejoined George. “Besides, I shall want you to convey my words to him, so that he may understand them.”

“And Macomo—will you warn him, too?” she asked.

“I must take other steps with him, for I doubt much if he is to be led away like the stupid Opara, if he is the great chief he is said to be. As to Atare, I will care for him, and may, perhaps, have him in my power when we next meet.”

“The white man shall want no aid that Eumerella can give him. Let him watch the camp, and if he sees the blanket taken off my shoulders and thrown over a bush, he will know that I have succeeded, and shall not be long before I come. Farewell!”

And they parted—the one to her enforced residence with her enemy, and the other to his lonely camp, to ponder over the means of best ascertaining whether it was really one of his long-sought foes that he held in his hands. He felt all but certain that his prisoner was the scout Atare of whom Eumerella had spoken, the more so from the behaviour of Blucher. But how to assure himself? There was the difficulty.

Returning to the spot where he had left his prisoner under the guard of Jamie, he threw himself on the ground without uttering a word, and was soon asleep. Waking up shortly after midnight, he relieved Jamie from the watch the boy had been keeping, although no great watch was necessary with so faithful and vigilant a sentinel as Blucher.

When morning had come, and the daylight was sufficiently strong to allow him to see the features of his prisoner, George, who was seated some few feet from the black, turned sharply round to him, and, imitating as nearly as he could the pronunciation of the girl, uttered, in a tone of confidence, and as though calling his prisoner's attention for the purpose of commencing a conversation, the name “Atare.”

The black raised his head suddenly, opened his eyes wide with astonishment that his name should have been discovered, and then signified by a motion that he knew he was addressed, and that he was paying attention.

Yes, that was his name! George was certain now. He bounded to his feet, and, pale with suppressed passion, stood before the black. Only by a violent effort of self-command did he restrain himself from cutting down the helpless man who lay bound at his feet; but, speechless with rage, he shook his fists impotently in the face of the black. One glance at the face of the grey-beard satisfied Atare that he was known. Taken by surprise, he had in some way, he saw, incriminated himself by answering to his name. But how had the white man learnt it? Why was he his enemy? The black could see no reason for this sudden outburst. He was soon to learn that reason.

George, having somewhat regained his composure, called Blucher to him, and, pointing to the animal, by signs informed Atare that the dog had recognised him. Then he brought forward the boy, and, mimicking the actions of cutting down and

burying the boy, he bared the back part of the lad's head, and showed the recently-healed wound that had been inflicted upon it.

“Yes,” thought Atare; “that was where I saw the boy. I felt I knew the face, and must have been a fool not to have remembered it.” And now he supposed he had not many minutes to live. But no; having made Atare aware that he was known, George, who was more calm and impassive than ever, contented himself by looking to the prisoner's fastenings, and tightening up such portions as had become in any way loosened. This done, he was taken to a spot farther removed from the camp, and therefore considered to be more secure. Once more he was lashed to a sapling, of size sufficient to conceal his body, and then, at a sign from George, he was left alone, the boy, with the dog at his heels, following his father to a point whence the camp could be seen.

The blacks, after their gorge of the day before, had remained sleeping until the sun was high up in the heavens, and had obtained full power. Then, when at last they bestirred themselves, there being abundance of food left from the game procured on the previous day, they simply allayed whatever hunger had been generated by their long repose, and then threw themselves down again, basking in the sun, half-sleepily, and not one of them moving from the camp.

Macomo, however, formed an exception. He had shown by his movements that his mind was restless and uneasy. He paced backwards and forwards, now passing far beyond the confines of the camp, then returning to his fire and throwing himself down as though forcing himself to patience, and then, as if by motion he could allay his impatience, starting up again, and hurrying off in the direction whence he expected his messenger to arrive.

By degrees these walks were extended further along the valley, and at last, upon one occasion, he came nearer than he had yet been to the place where George and his son were concealed. Again directing that searching glance of his into the ranges above, something evidently attracted his notice, for he gave a scarcely-perceptible start, and peered steadfastly in one direction, that direction being the one in which George lay concealed. Slight as had been the motion, it had not escaped the attention of George, who had been narrowly watching the chief with the vigilant eyes of hate.

“He has seen us!” said George in a whisper to his son. “Have you, in your tricks, allowed any portion of you to be seen?”

“Not a bit!” said Jamie, in the same low tone. “I've kept so close that if he'd got the eyes of fifty hawks he couldn't see me through this scrub. And look here, I ain't moved an inch!”

“What is it, then, that he is examining, for to a certainty he sees something

suspicious?" continued George.

Jamie, with a cautious movement, parted the bush sufficiently to allow him to look forth, and then, with his quick young eyes, he examined the ground between them and Macomo. Something he, too, saw, and then he grinned maliciously, and asked, "Don't you see what it is?"

"I see nothing," said his father.

"There, right in a line with us and the black hound below, and just a little above the gum sapling with a twisted top! Don't you see it? The black's spear that he shied at you and missed you, when Blucher gave him that grip. My word, wasn't that good fun!"

"Yes, yes, I see it now," George answered; "and I see what fools we were not to recover the spear. It will assuredly lead to our discovery, and disturb all our plans, just as they have been arranged with a fair prospect of success."

"I tell you what it'll do," Jamie whispered. "It'll lead to the death of that tall, smart fellow, if he tries it on to learn anything more than he knows now."

"How do you mean?" asked his father.

"I'll answer for his telling no tales!" and he laughed with a noiseless chuckle as he felt the edge of his tomahawk, and nodded approval of its keenness.

"No, no," hurriedly whispered George; "he must not be injured. He is one of those we want. He must be dealt with in the way we have sworn."

"Ah!" and Jamie opened wide his eyes. "How did you learn that?"

"From the young gin last night. She told me who the murderers were."

"You saw her last night after you left me? I thought so, though you didn't say anything to me," said Jamie; "and wasn't that other fellow that we've got tied up one of 'em?"

"He was," answered George. "You might have seen as much by his manner this morning."

"I thought so," Jamie replied. "Well, then, we must have this one to keep company with the other fellow until you've done your business."

"What, make him prisoner?" cried George.

"Yes!" answered Jamie. "It can be done just as easy as easy. Let him cross the crest of the ridge out of sight of the camp, and then trust me to attract his attention. When I've done this, and he ain't thinking of you, just you steal up to him unawares and knock him on the head. There! He's turning now, and taking up the side of the range. You see he'll turn again presently right on a line with the spear. You keep yourself close, watch him sharply, and when you see by his movements that he is attending to what I am doing, give him a topper, and a good one, too, remember. Now, I'll be off before he turns this way."

Having seen the spear, Macomo went forward in order to investigate, when one of the rapid glances that he sent around suddenly fell upon an object that filled him with amazement. He stopped abruptly, and as he looked his eyes glared excitedly, and not without some signs of fear, upon the unknown object that attracted his attention. Gambolling about on the ground, behind a somewhat thick bush, that partly concealed it from view, was an animal such as Macomo had never before seen. It had hair in colour resembling that of the kangaroo, and on its head and neck hung what appeared to be a long, dark, and shaggy mane. Two immense ears stood out prominently through this, and its huge head was deeply set in between the powerful fore legs that were scarcely seen. It made uncouth antic springs, as though disporting itself, and then rearing itself up on its hind legs, it opened its enormous mouth, though without uttering a sound, and displayed a set of strong white teeth.

Brave as he was, Macomo was but a savage, and he was therefore only too prone to savage superstition, and to delusions of the wonderful. He remembered, too, a tale that had been told him by Opara of the dreaded monster with feet like hands which he had tracked at no great distance from this spot; and he remembered, too, how he had sneered at the tale in utter unbelief. Had the monster now come to avenge himself?

As he thus thought, Macomo kept his gaze steadily fixed on the animal, never moving from the spot upon which he had first come to a halt. And now the monster, with a wild spring, bounded over a log, and rolled itself over and over till it reached a large-sized sapling, behind which it was no doubt crouching, for he lost sight of it for a time. Regaining somewhat of his courage with the disappearance of the unknown beast, Macomo poised his spear, and watched for its reappearance with the full intention of testing its spirituality. He stood, however, rooted to the spot, for he feared to turn and retreat lest the monster should spring on him unawares. As he thus stood prepared for the appearance of the animal from behind the tree, he was astonished to find that the monster had mounted the tree, for he now saw him peering at him from the first fork of the branches, its huge head, with its shaggy mane and outcropping ears, adding to the hideousness of its opened mouth and threatening teeth, with which it grinned out defiance at him. Without stopping to consider consequences, Macomo launched the spear, which flying true to the mark, passed through the fork, precisely at the spot where the head of the monster had been shown. But, whether natural or supernatural, the thing was too quick, for the head was drawn down just as the spear left the hands of the black, and the weapon consequently passed harmlessly through the air.

Whilst Macomo was still looking, doubtful whether his aim had been successful or not, and wondering that the monster had made no sign or sound, a hand, an

unmistakable human hand, and a powerful one, too, to judge by the grip, was laid upon his shoulder. Turning as far as the strong grasp on his arm would permit, he encountered the stern face and angry gaze of George. He uttered but one exclamation of surprise, and then all his cunning and all his bravery came back to him. This was a real, tangible, and known danger, to which he had been accustomed, and with which he felt himself fully able to cope; whilst the monster threatened dangers in quarters that he knew not, and of a kind he could not conceive. He ran his eye hastily over the man who thus confronted him, and who thus held him with vice-like hand. His scrutiny was little encouraging, for whilst the white had hair and beard of grey, there was no sign of age about his person or about the unrelaxing tension of his sinews. His form was powerful, much more so than that of the black, although the latter was taller, and might be more active. Macomo noted this, and remarked also that the stranger bore in one hand one of the fire-spears of the whites, and he had often heard tell of the terrible and death-dealing effects of this weapon. He knew, as he saw all this, that in a hand-to-hand struggle, such as this must be, if it came to the pinch, his opponent had all the advantage over him of weight and power.

“Macomo is welcome to the white man's camp,” said George, still maintaining his grip of the other's shoulder. “Macomo will come and rest with his good friends the whites.”

Macomo understood not the words, although he knew by the tone of voice in which they were uttered, and the look that accompanied them, that they boded him no good. At the same time he recognised his own name, and could not refrain from showing surprise that the white, whom he had never seen before, should know his name. He contented himself, however, by shaking his head, and by saying, in his own tongue, “Macomo knows not the talk of the whites.”

“Does Macomo know what this is?” asked George, as he showed the gun, which he brought to the breast of the black, and by an expressive sign making his meaning understood.

Macomo knew it well, and in the same way expressed his knowledge of the use of the weapon that was now in such unpleasant proximity to his person.

“You must remain here then with us for a time. No injury will be done you if you are quiet. Our safety demands that you should be a prisoner for a time, and besides, I have something to tell you when I get the chance.” All this did George try to convey to the black in words and signs, but it was very doubtful whether Macomo understood anything more than that he was to be bound, and to remain a prisoner for a time.

Having this impression, and not trusting too much in the good faith of those with

whom he himself had never kept faith, he hastily glanced round to pick out a route of escape when he should have torn himself from the grasp that now detained him.

“Don't try that, or I'll try this!” said a voice behind him, and, turning, he was for a moment confounded at finding at his side the monster he had recently seen gambolling in the bush, but who was now erect, armed with a tomahawk that he held up in a most unequivocally threatening manner, and by that action making his words perfectly comprehensible to the quick sense of the black. One glance was sufficient to show him how he had been deceived. Jamie's face was blackened and smeared with the charcoal from some charred logs, and on his back, and bound tightly round his body, was the skin of an old man kangaroo, so arranged that the ears stood out upon the lad's head, whilst his long, tangled hair, hanging by the depression of his head over his shoulders, had a not very distant resemblance to a mane. But before Macomo had recovered from his astonishment, George seized him by one wrist and Jamie by the other, whilst a dog that now, for the first time, came running up to give his aid to his master, made two or three bites at his heels, telling him thus very plainly that there was a third foe he had not reckoned upon, that he would have to encounter. With all the pride of a savage warrior, who, finding himself overmatched, knows that further resistance is useless and undignified, Macomo resigned himself to his destiny, be it what it might. In a few seconds he was safely bound, and was hurried off to a place of concealment, not very far removed from that in which Atare had been placed. There his feet also were bound, he was tied to a sapling, and received, by signs, the intimation that the first sound he uttered would be the signal for bringing upon him the effects of the deadly tube with which the white was armed. Most probably he understood the intimation thus given, for he remained perfectly quiet; and, having watched him for a short time to assure themselves of this, George and his son left him to meditate upon the luckless chance that had consigned him a prisoner to the hands of such strange enemies, and to abuse himself for having allowed himself to become the dupe of the shallow artifice of a boy.

Chapter VI The Warning

ONCE more George returned to take a look down upon the camp. His recent adventure had made him too long neglect to watch for the arranged signal; but one glance as he reached the side of the hill was sufficient. There was the blanket hanging on the bush; but hardly had he seen and marked it than the girl came up and removed it. No time was now to be lost; so, calling Jamie to him, and followed by Blucher, he started off to the place of rendezvous, in order to take up a good position for his proposed ambush. On the way he took the opportunity of explaining to his son all that would be required of him, and on reaching the appointed spot, they at once concealed themselves.

Eumerella had found it much more difficult to arouse the attention of Opara than she had at all expected. After trying various schemes, she only at last succeeded by telling him the truth partially. She told him at first just as much as was necessary to attract his notice, and, when this was done, she began to foster his vanity and excite his cupidity. She told him casually how she had met the whites in the bush; then, when she found he listened eagerly to her tale, she went on to comment upon the stupid way in which they travelled, and the ease with which such a warrior as Opara might, by his skill and courage, surprise and overcome so blind an enemy. After a time he at last rose excited to his feet, and expressed his determination to undertake the adventure. Eumerella joined Opara just as he was on the point of setting out, and, managing to delay him a few minutes longer by some unimportant details, followed him to the spot where the track of the white man was to be picked up.

“Here it was,” she said, as she reached his side, “that I saw the whites last night. And look, here are the tracks!”

“Good!” exclaimed Opara. “We will follow them down, but first we must hide your blanket; and here, in these clusters of scrub, there are good places for the purpose,” and he looked round as though desirous of selecting the thickest.

“Here is one that no eye can pierce,” said Eumerella; “let Opara enter it and see if it be secure.”

One glance was sufficient to satisfy Opara that this was precisely the place he required, and the young girl, divesting herself of the blanket, handed it to the black. He had taken it from her, and was in the act of rolling it up, when he received a blow on the back of his head that laid him senseless on the earth.

“You have performed your part of the agreement well,” said George, “and may depend upon me when the time comes to perform mine. I have been successful beyond all I could ever wish. You do not know,” he cried in bitter triumph, “that I

hold in my hands all three of my foes, and that before you brought Opara here, I had already secured Macomo and Atare!”

“What, Macomo!” and her tone of surprise had also much of incredulity in it.

“Macomo himself. The tall chief with the three eagle feathers!” affirmed George coolly. “Only a few minutes before you gave the signal an accident threw him in our way, and we made a prisoner of him.”

“If, then, you hold these two, it will be necessary that I should likewise be made a prisoner, and wounded heavily also, when I am taken into their presence. Their quick eyes and wits are not to be deluded like those of this brainless log at my feet, and there must be nothing left to my feigning, or it will be observed. Strike, then, and strike hard, if you would save me!” and she presented her head to receive the blow that she asked from George.

Having done as Eumerella desired, and lightly bound her, they bore off the still insensible Opara to the spot they had selected for holding their conclave; and, laying him down, they returned for the girl, who by this time had so far recovered sensibility as to be able to stagger along with some assistance. She was placed by the side of Opara, with instructions to simulate unconsciousness until the time came when her services should be required.

Over these, Jamie, armed with a tomahawk, and aided by Blucher, mounted guard; whilst George brought Macomo from the place where he had been bound, and lashed him to the tree at the foot of which Opara was lying. The chief could scarcely refrain from expressing aloud his astonishment at seeing one of his tribe lying bleeding and apparently dead at his feet. He was at a loss to understand the meaning of the white man in thus making a captive of him and in slaying his warriors. But when Atare was brought forth, something like a gleam of the truth flashed across his mind, especially when, with the aid of this idea, he was enabled to recognise in the body before him the third participant in that deed of blood which he so well remembered. Now, for the first time, there came upon him some misgivings with regard to the intentions of his captor.

Jamie now brought water, and went through the ceremony of recovering Eumerella. She played her part admirably, and awakened no suspicion in the minds of either chief. With Opara the task of recovery was somewhat more difficult, and it was not until more than a half-hour had elapsed that they ultimately succeeded in bringing him to such a state as to be dimly comprehensive of what was going on. Seated immediately below Macomo and Atare, he stared stupidly round, his dull mind being as yet unable to comprehend what connection there was between them and the stern white who confronted them—a connection that his companions had gleaned from the first glance.

And now George walked forward and stood in front of his prisoners, and then, addressing Eumerella, he said: "Girl, you understand the words of the white man, which these of your countrymen do not. I have made you prisoner in order that you should tell them, as near as you can, the words I speak. It is for their benefit that they should know fully who I am and what my objects are. Now, tell them this!"

He paused, and Eumerella at once, with great volubility, told them, not only what George had said, but also dwelt upon the hardship to herself that she should be nearly killed, and then taken prisoner, merely because she could say a few words of the whitefellow's talk.

"And now," resumed George, "ask them if they know this dog."

George watched them as the question was put, and he knew from the look they cast upon the animal that they recognised him. They made no answer, however.

"That dog," he continued, "was the faithful guardian of my house. He was present when you, devils as you are, invaded that home and made it desolate, for he knows *you*, each of you. He it was that first brought me the news of the wicked deed you had committed."

After this had been conveyed to them by the girl, he said: "Ask them if they know this boy."

Atare had been previously informed who he was; otherwise Opara was the only one amongst them who could know and recognise the boy. His attention had been so much devoted to George that he had not spared much of it for Jamie. Now, however, he turned round upon the lad, and looked him in the face with blank wonder. Jamie returned the stare with interest, and with an expression in his eyes that boded no good. At last a full recollection of the struggle, the blow, and the wound came back upon him, as he looked into that face, changed as it was. Macomo contented himself by a sneering smile of cool contempt.

"It was upon this boy," George went on, "that the valour of a savage warrior was exercised. He was the foe that the bravery of Opara selected. It was this boy who was cut down by yon powerful chieftain, who has valour and skill enough to capture women and to slay children, but is no better than a blind pup when he comes face to face with men. It was this boy whom you two buried, but whom I withdrew from the grave and restored to life, to join with me in hunting you down, and in carrying out my project of vengeance. And now ask them if they know who I am."

To this question, as repeated by Eumerella to the blacks, Macomo disdained to make an answer, but with a look of insolent defiance he returned the fierce, vengeful glance of George. Atare hung his head in silence; whilst Opara raised his eyes to George's face in utter bewilderment.

"Tell them, if they have not already guessed it," he continued, in a voice hoarse

with suppressed excitement, “that I am the husband of that woman whom they so cowardly and cruelly murdered; that I am the father of those babes whom they so foully butchered. Tell them that I am he who has been searching them out amongst the tribes from the day on which they did their bloody deed; never halting, never stopping, never turning aside from my one settled purpose. Now I have found them, now that I have them in my power, ask them what they think they deserve at my hands.”

Macomo alone answered boldly to this speech, as conveyed to them by Eumerella. “Let the white man take his vengeance. We are warriors. We know what it is to fall into the hands of an enemy. We have no fear. Let him not waste his breath in words. We are ready!”

A cold, cruel smile curled around the lips of George as this speech was translated to him by the girl. “No,” he said; “tell them that I am not now about to take their lives. When I have said all I wish to say, I shall set them at liberty once more, to roam at large over the open forest and the wide bush!”

When this was told them, even Macomo could not help uttering an exclamation of astonishment, although he could scarcely give credit to the correctness of the announcement.

“But tell them also,” George resumed, “that the same eye that has traced them out, and has followed and found them where they thought themselves secure and beyond the reach of discovery, will still be upon them; and that the same hand that has already fallen upon them and made them captive, tearing them out of the very midst of their tribe, will always be over them, and ready to fall upon them when the time for so doing shall have come. Their lives are forfeited. When the day and the hour I have fixed shall arrive, one by one they must fall by my hand.”

Macomo smiled incredulously as this was told him. He had too much confidence in his own strength and cunning to have much dread of the threats of the white.

George remarked the smile, and read its meaning. “I see Macomo smiles,” he continued; “but let him look at me, and regard me well, for from this day forth in me he sees his destiny. Unseen by him, my eye shall never be off him; and to make him feel more bitterly how dread is the vengeance I now take, and how great is the misery to which I consign him, tell him that he shall be the last of the three to perish, and that his blood shall not be shed until I shall have broken down and crushed that proud spirit, as he by his crime has broken down mine, and that he shall not die until I have first made him a byword— a scorn and a reproach to his people, and until he who is now the great warrior of his tribe shall be less regarded than the feeblest gin!”

Macomo drew himself up proudly, as if such a thing were impossible.

“Macomo will see,” George went on. “He shall see what a white man can do in the way of vengeance, and how miserably your murders will compare with my great revenge. Fiends! Dogs! Devils! Had you no hearts! Is there nothing of humanity about you but your forms! Could you murder in cold blood those little innocents who never did you harm! Could not their little pleading voices move you to one spark of pity, or their angel faces beget one thought of mercy in your iron hearts! Could you not have spared me one—only one little one! Bloody, heartless butchers! But, as you have dealt by me and mine, so, by Heaven! will I deal with you and yours. The men of your tribe shall be thinned, scattered, and destroyed by fire and flood, and by the spears of your enemies. Your women and children shall die off miserably by hunger and thirst—by pestilence and slaughter. And when a blow of this kind falls upon your tribe, remember the hand that inflicts it will be mine.”

He paused, and noted with savage satisfaction that his words had had some effect, even upon Macomo. He then resumed: “I have sworn it! Yes, and this boy, whom you thought you had slain, has also sworn it! And the oath we have taken is, that, on every recurring anniversary of that dread deed of blood, one of the black hands that aided in the slaughter, reft from the lifeless body of the murderer, shall be laid as a death sacrifice upon the lonely grave where now sleep your victims.”

Having paused long enough to allow this to be translated to them as carefully as it was possible to do under the circumstances, and having noted the different effects the announcement produced upon the three savages, he concluded: “Now I shall leave you. I shall take this girl with me”; and he had been careful throughout not to mention her name, so that the blacks should have no suspicion of complicity on her part; “but only for such a distance as will enable me to baffle any pursuit you may set on foot. Then she shall return to you, and set you at liberty. You need not seek me, for you will not find me, until a misfortune is about to come on your tribe; then you will see me too soon for yourselves. Think now on my words, and on the fate that hangs over you. When the day and hour arrive, it will inevitably fall on you, and let that thought, and the evils that you will see your tribe suffering through you, make you in reality the dogs and cowards that you already are in heart.”

So saying, and without turning another look upon them, in a stern voice he ordered Eumerella to follow him, and strode hastily away from the spot. Jamie looked after his father, and then at the three captives, as though he doubted the wisdom of letting them off so easily. However, obedience had been so drilled into him that he was not now prepared to show insubordination. Still, he could not resist the temptation of going up to Opara, and shaking his tomahawk in the face of the savage, so closely as to risk damaging the small portion of nose that his former blow had left, he vengefully hissed out at him—“You first!”

END OF BOOK ONE.

Book Two—The First Black Hand

Chapter I The Mill On Myrtle Creek

AT the junction of Myrtle Creek with the Paterson River stood Morrison's mill, in such a position that the water from the river was made serviceable by means of a mill-race, that turned the great overshot wheel, and set in motion the somewhat primitive machinery that ground the corn of the surrounding district.

The mill was a two-storeyed building. The upper storey, forming the grain and flour store, and the ordinary living rooms of the family, was entered from the hill by two large folding-doors. The lower floor formed the mill proper, and was connected with the floor above by means of a huge trap-door.

The miller, Alexander Morrison, or, as he was more often called, Sandy Morrison, was a native of North Britain, and perhaps one of the best samples that could be found of the pushing, striving, clear, but hard-headed Scotchman. He had been imported into the colony by one of the large employers of labour on account of his farming knowledge and experience; but, after working for this master for a few years, he obtained an order from the Governor to select and occupy a piece of land, and then started in business for himself. He pitched upon the Coal River as being one of the most promising districts then rising into notice, and, with the shrewdness for which his countrymen are proverbial, not without an eye to the future. He saw the large extent of agricultural land that the district contained, and the immense advantages that water carriage must always give by enabling growers to take their produce to market, should it ever happen that Australia became a country of note. Following out this idea, he brought into action some of that mechanical genius for which the men of the north have been so much and so justly distinguished, designed a mill, and, without hesitation, the moment he saw the spot, pitched upon the junction of Myrtle Creek with the river on which to erect it, laying it out in such a way as to be convenient for both mill and residence.

His own head had planned, and his own hand had executed, the whole of the work, if we except only so much as had been done, under his direction, by his hired man, Tom Brown, a young fellow of some six-and-twenty years of age whom he had picked up in Sydney, had brought with him to the river, and had kept with him ever since, a period of about three years. Tom had, no doubt, been a seaman, but how he came to leave his ship and remain in Sydney was a mystery that it is, perhaps, better that we should not too closely inquire into. He was the generally-useful man of the establishment, working in the field in all the ordinary farming occupations, and doing odd jobs in the line of every possible trade, of each of which he seemed to have some knowledge; but the task that more particularly suited him

was that of keeping a careful watch, so as to be able to execute the slightest whim or wish of the miller's pretty daughter, Sophy Morrison.

And here it may be said that on coming to this country Sandy had brought with him a wife and two children, a son and a daughter. His boy died only a few weeks after landing, and his wife, who never recovered the shock that this loss gave her, was laid in the grave beside him just a short time previous to Sandy giving up his situation. Sandy was thus left with an only daughter, Sophy, who, at this time, was between seventeen and eighteen years of age. Constant exercise and occupation had given robust development to a naturally strong constitution, and the fresh country air to which she was exposed had caused her to retain that blooming appearance that is the distinguishing mark of the country-reared girls of the old country. She was rather above the medium height of women, was plump, active, and strong enough to be enduring at hard work. There was nothing at all of the heroine about her, except this—that hers is the only love tale that appears in these pages, and that to that extent she may be regarded as our heroine. With the quick intuitive perception of her sex, she saw Tom's weakness, and, after the manner of women, whether of high or low degree, she worked upon it, and upon poor Tom, too, and kept him pretty constantly going, in his moments of leisure, in her service. But, truth to tell, Sophy ruled the whole household pretty much after her own mind—not even omitting the most difficult in the whole house to manage, the fourth and last occupant of the mill, Shuffling Dick, the man who more especially had charge of the mill and its machinery.

Dick had come to New South Wales in what was then termed the “regular way”—that is, at the expense of the Government and on the direction of a Judge. He had served some considerable portion of his time, but a few months ago had obtained a remission of sentence, and was permitted, under the system then in force, to employ himself in his own way, and maintain himself at his own cost. He had been a miller in the old country, and was well acquainted with the most material part of the miller's occupation, that of cutting and dressing the stones by which the grain is ground. When he had obtained his liberty, he had come to Sandy, and proffered his services at a very low rate of remuneration, giving, as his reason, that he had done so much hard work whilst in Government that he wanted a little ease now, and working at his own old occupation would be comparative ease to him. Sandy, finding that during certain months in the year grist came into the mill frequently enough to justify him in incurring this trifling additional expense, accepted the terms, and Dick had now been nine months thus employed.

Like Tom, Dick seemed fully to appreciate the fresh and blooming charms of the miller's daughter, though his devotion was shown in a very different way to that of

Tom. Instead of always placing himself at her beck and call, and throwing himself in her way to do her service, he appeared rather to shun than to court her society; and it was only by a looker-on catching the stray glances that he cast upon her when he thought there were none by to observe them, that anything like a glimpse into his real feelings could be obtained. He saw the game that Tom was playing, and saw that it would be played successfully unless he could spoil it. He himself was snubbed and bounced by the tyrannical girl in the most unmerciful manner, yet still he did not despair. With the usual tortuous proclivity of his mind, he sought, not to raise himself, but to lower Tom in the estimation of the miller and his daughter. To this end he let slip no opportunity, whether by innuendo or otherwise, to weaken Tom's hold in the favour of the two; whilst he did all he could, by jibe and sarcasm, very carefully concealed, to drive Tom, whose bluff, honest nature was very soon raised up in arms by anything approaching to the offensive into some rupture, or into the commission of some act which would put him in the wrong. Besides this, he had a quiet speculation of his own, and how he succeeded in this, and in the other matter referred to, will be seen in the sequel.

Having thus, after the manner of the ancient dramatists, played the part of Chorus, and made our readers acquainted with the new characters about to be introduced, and the motives, if any, by which they are actuated, we shall now proceed with our tale.

Seven months had elapsed since the occurrence of the incidents narrated in the last book, and the first days of June had arrived. The season was wet and drooping. The equinox had set in with heavy rains that had flooded all the streams and watercourses, and the occasional heavy showers that had since fallen had kept them swollen and angry. The Paterson was running down nearly bank high, and the creek upon which the mill was built surged and roared in its course, and dashed its muddy waters almost against the slabs that formed the sides of the building. Heavy water-laden clouds were flying overhead before the fierce wind, one coming occasionally at long intervals lower than the others, and discharging its watery burden in a smart shower as it passed along.

Sandy had been out and about since daylight, his trusty henchman, Tom, accompanying him. He had been engaged in some of the multifarious occupations that a farmer, and especially a farmer in the bush, can always find for himself. At last he came to a gap in the cockatoo fence that enclosed his cultivation ground, that required patching up and mending.

“Eh, lad,” he said to Tom, “there'll be mair timmer wanted here than we ha' gotten. Ye'll need to gae up to the hoose and fetch doon the axe. D'ye ken whar to fin' it?”

“In the old place, I suppose, just inside your room door,” answered Tom.

“Sure, laddie, sure,” responded Sandy, who, being a careful workman, always looked well after his tools, and put them ready to hand, each in its own place. “Noo, then, be smart!”

Tom started off with the greatest alacrity, for he thought there would be a chance of getting a quiet word with Sophy, seeing that Sandy was down at the fence, and that Dick would probably be still between the blankets, as there was then no work doing at the mill. He had only, when he reached the house, to go to the spot where the axe was kept, get it, and take it back with him; but this was not the programme Tom had laid out for himself, as there was a little interlude in the performance at which he hoped to assist. Thus, in pursuance of his plan, he no sooner reached the door than he called gently, “Miss Sophy! Miss Sophy!”

That young lady was, like her father, an early riser, and had been on household cares intent almost from the time when Sandy had left the house. Answering Tom from some recess of the establishment in which she was at the moment employed, she inquired in a brusque tone what it was he wanted.

Rather abashed by the tone more than the words, he replied, very modestly and sheepishly, “Sandy has sent me up for the axe.”

“Well, get it, then; and be off back with it as soon as you can; unless, indeed”—and this in the most effective modulation of voice that women know so well how to use—“you wish me to get it and carry it down for you.”

“I don't want that, Miss Sophy!” he put in eagerly; “but I thought you might know where it is.”

“And where should it be,” she replied, “except in its own place, and you know where that is as well as I do.”

“I thought you might have been using it this morning for the fire,” he excused himself by saying.

“You seem to be doing nothing but thinking this morning,” she said; “but, if I'd been in your place, I should have looked first, and then have asked afterwards if I didn't find it. I wonder that amongst all your thoughts that thought didn't strike you.”

“Don't be angry with me, Miss Sophy,” he said. “It was my mistake, and I thought to save time.”

“Instead of that, you've lost it with your thoughts, and kept father waiting for you down below, and that won't improve his temper, I'll warrant!” and she tossed her head in the most contemptuous manner.

Somewhat abashed, Tom stole off to the bedroom to get the axe, very much after the style of a petted dog that has been chidden. On arriving there, much to his

perplexity, he could not find the implement he had been sent for. For a wonder it was not in its usual place, and it was only after a few minutes' searching that he at last discovered it in a totally different part of the room, and covered by several bags that had been carelessly thrown upon it. He had thus lost much time, which had been spent most unpleasantly, instead of pleasantly, as he had anticipated; and he was all the more annoyed at it from knowing that Sandy, who was by no means the most patient of mortals, was waiting for him, and from hearing the half-jeering remarks that were made by Sophy, reflecting upon his stupidity at not being able to find what was there to his hand.

"You are getting more and more stupid every day," she said pertly; "but I suppose that's owing to your thoughts. I can't understand what you want to be poking about there for half-an-hour over what I could lay my hand on in an instant."

Tom had just then got the axe, and, galled at the last remark, instead of trying to deprecate her anger, as he intended to do, he strode away sullenly out of the house, without so much as a word in reply to his tormentor.

But, besides Sophy, there had been another who had seen part of what occurred, and who had heard all that had been said. He had been previously on the watch, and had been all attention from the very moment when Tom's first words had been uttered. With the trap that connected the upper with the lower floor just raised sufficiently to allow him to see through without attracting observation, Dick had silently watched Tom's whole proceedings. When the other was so long in the bedroom, Dick's countenance showed evident signs of uneasiness, and when Tom came out with the axe, the watcher scanned his face very narrowly. "I wonder if he has done it, and spoiled my chance," he thought to himself. "If so, it will work for me another way, that's all." But, reassured by the look of ill-temper that appeared on his mate's features, he added, "No, he has not got it; and now, my flash kiddy, if I don't fix you, say I'm nobody."

When Sophy went out to watch Tom, Dick took the opportunity thus afforded to open the trap, step through quickly and noiselessly, and to let down the door again. All this was done so quietly and easily, without the slightest creak or sound, as to lead to the impression that all the preparations for the venture, whatever it might be, had been previously made in anticipation. Having closed the trap, he concealed himself behind some sacks that stood on the side nearest the miller's bedroom, keeping his eye on the girl, and, finding that she did not return, he was about to slip round and enter the room, when a movement of Sophy warned him that he was too late.

When, according to Dick's idea, she had been long enough occupied to have her mind fixed upon her work, he emerged from his hiding-place. He must have

previously satisfied himself that he could not be seen from where Sophy now was, for he walked straight to the room the girl had just left, and the door of which stood open, with a quick but a silent and stealthy step. Entering that room, his eye fell at once upon what he sought, a small hair-covered trunk, on which the initials of the miller were marked in brass-headed nails. Into the lock of this he fitted a key that he drew from his pocket. "Not a bad guess, after only seeing the real screw twice!" he muttered to himself, as the key worked round in the lock and the box stood open. In another instant he had taken out a small, but well-filled canvas bag, withdrew the key from the lock, leaving the box open, and then retired to his former hiding-place.

The girl was standing with her back towards him, holding her work in her hands, and humming, for her voice had sunk to that, the melancholy tune in which her whole thoughts were absorbed. With the light step of an accomplished burglar, Dick, as soon as he found her thus engaged, crossed the floor without giving the slightest sound to betray his presence. Raising the trap as noiselessly and as quickly as before, he descended the steps, but, at the very last moment, the trap, in closing, came down rather more sharply than he intended, and with a sound which, though slight, was sufficient to attract Sophy's attention.

"Who's that?" she cried, as she turned and looked sharply round. "Is that you, Dick?"

There was no answer, though Dick stood there motionless at the head of the steps with a scowl on his face, and that terrible knife grasped determinedly in his hand.

"Is that you, Dick?" she repeated, but still without receiving an answer. "No. It couldn't be him. The lazy hound is no doubt still in bed and fast asleep," she soliloquised. "But what made me fancy that the trap-door closed?" And with the spirit of inquiry that becomes almost an instinct in the resident of the bush, she determined to satisfy herself by actual inspection.

"Why, who could have left the door open!" she exclaimed, when she found the trap unbolted. "I must tell father of this. Somebody must have been very careless!" And then she suddenly remembered who that somebody must have been, for it came into her mind that it was Tom's usual work every night, before going to bed, to go round the place and see all fastened up safe. As she thought this, she pushed the bolt with her foot and shot it into the hasps. She was repaid for that loyal thought for her lover, albeit she knew not that the action saved her life. Then she recollected that Tom had secured it last night, or had gone with the intention of doing so, because Dick had stopped yarning longer than usual, and it had been at his suggestion that Tom had done so, in order to save the miller the trouble of coming out to fasten the trap. She was reminded, too, that Dick, owing to the place being secured, had gone out the front way, and, passing round the house and down the hill side, had let

himself into his own domain of the mill floor, where he slept, by the lower door.

She was not satisfied as she remembered this, and her hand was put down to draw the bolt back again, and see if that shuffling wretch had been up to any tricks. She knew not how near he was, though, had she listened, she might have heard his heavy breathing. "No," she thought, "if that's his move, I'll take care that he doesn't make it again." And she returned to her occupation, resolving that, though she would say nothing to her father, she would explain all to Tom, in order that he might use additional sharpness in future.

Chapter II A False Accusation

WHEN Tom got back to the miller after leaving the house, he found him fuming and fretting at having been kept so long waiting in the cold. "Whar' the deil ha' ye been, mon, that ye've been sae lang about naething?" he asked as Tom came up.

Tom had been altogether too much ruffled to make any conciliatory reply, or to offer anything in the way of an excuse, so he simply murmured out something that ended with "as quick as I could."

"As ye've been sae lang daunerin' about, ye may e'en finish the wark by yersel'," responded Sandy.

"All right!" said Tom, as he set to work, chopping away at random in all directions.

Sandy gave him an astonished look, for, like his daughter, he noticed something different to usual in the young man. "Gin ye've been as quick as ye can, and dinna hasten mair in future, our contract weell sune be ower."

Everything went wrong with Tom that morning, and it was only by working away with more than his usual expedition, that he had contrived to complete his job before the signal for breakfast was given. He returned to the house still out of temper with himself and with everyone else, and was accordingly, contrary to his usual custom, silent and morose during the meal.

Dick had made his appearance some half-hour before breakfast, and with a cunning that usually overdoes itself, knocked for admittance with a great deal of ostentatious display at the door of the trap. Sophy, with mixed feelings pervading her mind, made as much display in the act of drawing back the bolt. Dick gave her one look as he ascended, in order to see if there were in her countenance any traces of suspicion. There was nothing of the kind, but the little innocent deceit she was practising gave her a certain embarrassed look that it puzzled Dick to understand.

Sophy had determined that when Tom arrived she would rate him soundly for his ill-temper towards her, and then scold him quietly about his carelessness in regard to the bolt; but, when he came up, he was evidently in bad humour, and she at once decided upon treating him in precisely the same manner that he chose to treat her.

The meal thus passed over very uncomfortably for all parties except Dick, who, delighted at the evident misunderstanding that prevailed among the others, enjoyed himself amazingly, and was more than usually brilliant and bitter in his sayings, more especially when anything was to be said at the expense of Tom. To use his own expression, he "chaffed to the nines" his unlucky mate, until he had made him still more out of sorts and out of temper than ever.

“Eh, weel,” said Sandy at last. “I dinna ken what's the matter wi' ye a'; there's Tom has na' a word but a grumph for a body; and there's Sophy, that's aye as blythe as a mavis i' the morn, sitting as douce as an auld wife at a Sunday meeting; an' I'm no what I shud be mysel'. Are ye a' fey? Let's a' dune wi' this. And ye, Tom, laddie, get the bay mare and gae doon to Jock Tomson's, and pay him the siller that's awing for the grist we boucht o' him. I'll make oot the receipt and count the siller.”

This broke up the breakfast party, and Tom at once rose, lit his pipe, and went in search of the mare, which he knew would not be at any great distance off.

Sandy went into his room, where for a time he busied himself with his books; whilst Dick, who knew that something was coming whereupon it might be desirable for him to have the first word, remained hanging about the fireplace in the most careless manner, to all appearance thinking of nothing but the pipe he was smoking. Sophy, determined to keep up the game of cross-purposes as long as Tom might choose to play it, put on her grandest air of unconcernedness, and occupied herself over removing the remains of the meal.

Suddenly the voice of Sandy was heard. “Ech, dears! What's this?”

“Now it's coming!” thought Dick. “Now for my chance to work it right.”

“Ech! Sophy! Tom! Dick!” calling each in the order in which they ranged themselves in his mind. “Come ben here, a' o' ye! The siller's a' gane. I'm roupet, an' reived, an' robbit in my ain hoose!”

“Why, what's the matter, Sandy?” said Dick, stalking into the room with apparent astonishment, but fully prepared for what was to come.

“The siller's gane! That's the matter, man! Fifty an' five holey dollars in a bag were in this box this blessed morn's morn, for I seed them wi' my ain een, and lockit the box afore I gaed oot. An' noo the're a' gane, clean gane, bag an' a', and the box unlockit.”

“Why, who could have taken them?” and as Dick said this he looked at Sophy, as though she might throw some light upon this subject if she wanted.

“I'll fin' it oot!” cried Sandy, “though I bring a' the constables o' the settlement to do it.”

“It seems to me easy enough to trace up,” put in Dick. “Who's been here since you've been out? I haven't seen nobody.” And again he looked at Sophy as though he wished her to say whether she had seen anybody.

“Ech, man, an' that's true for ye,” answered Sandy. “Wha's been here?” And Sandy thought, and so did Sophy, and both hit at the same time upon the same answer—who but Tom? “Yes. I recollect. I sendit Tom up for the axe, and the deil's ain time he took to bring it. Did you see him, Sophy?”

“No,” she answered. “I didn't see him, but I spoke to him.”

“An' was he lang i' the room?” he asked of his daughter.

“No, not particularly long,” she replied.

“But langer than was wanted to get what he sought?” he continued, still questioning.

“That depends upon whether he got it at once,” she suggested.

“But ye ken it's a'ways keepit i' the one spot. An' when he cam' doon to me he never speakit a word about not findin' it, but jist tauld me he'd been as quick's he cou'd.”

Dick all this while said nothing. His game was being played for him by Sandy's suspicions, which his suggestion had set off on the track he desired. There was no necessity for his interference, but he now asked—“How could he open the box if you locked it?”

“Hoo!—hoo, but by getting a key to fit it!” shouted Sandy in wrath.

“And what would he do with the money?” continued Dick. “It will be in his pocket or in the house.”

“He's had meikle time to plant it, for I left him his lane at his wark; and noo I've gien him anither chance to do it.”

“And do you imagine for an instant that Tom could be guilty of taking your money?” Sophy asked indignantly.

“Hooly an' fairly, lassie, it could na' ha' been anybodie else,” replied Sandy. “Dick has not been in the place?” and he looked to Sophy for an answer, and, as his daughter looked at him in return, there flashed upon her mind the remembrance of the moving trap-door, and of the bolt being unfastened.

“I will pledge my life on Tom,” she said; “he would never do such a thing. It's a plan devised by some devil to ruin him.”

“Gae easy, lass, gae easy,” responded Sandy. “Wha else could it hae been? Naebodie else has been near the place.”

“And you know,” put in Dick, “that you unbolted the trap for me when I came in this morning.” It had been an excess of caution that had led him to make this remark. Desiring to clear himself from even the shadow of a suspicion, he had spoken hastily; but no sooner had the words been uttered than he discovered the mistake he had made. He remembered that Sophy had herself bolted the door, which she had found unbolted, and that consequently to her, if she had sense enough to perceive it, this remark was all but tantamount to an admission of guilt.

Dick was not far wrong in this after-thought, for almost the same idea passed through the mind of Sophy. She gave Dick one sharp, rapid glance, and in that glance he read, as clearly as possible, the thought of her mind. Whatever she thought, however, she only replied coolly, “Say no more at present. Wait till Tom is

here to answer for himself.”

They had not long to wait, for they had hardly broken up the conclave, when Tom, who had caught the mare and brought her up to the house, entered the room in search of a saddle.

“Come ben, man, come ben,” said Sandy, the moment he caught sight of Tom. “I want a wee bit crack wi' ye.” And as Tom entered the room, he continued, “What hae ye dune wi' my siller?”

“What d'ye mean—with your silver?” exclaimed Tom, with astonishment.

“Yes, wi' my siller—my dollars! You reiving, thieving blackguard!” shouted Sandy, “that ever I should live to ca' ye so, when ye were as my ain bairn to me!”

“Patience, father, patience!” said Sophy. “Is this the way to question an innocent man? For innocent he is, you may take my word.”

“I don't understand all this,” put in Tom, more and more surprised.

“Look at him, father! Does that look like guilt?” continued Sophy. “He will soon prove his innocence if you but give him a chance.”

“I'd be ower glad, lassie, to hear him clear himself, but I canna see hoo he's to do it,” responded Sandy, as he shook his head.

“Are you all mad this morning? What on earth is it all?” asked Tom.

“It's my siller, my dollars, that's been stau'n awa frae me,” answered Sandy.

“And do you suspect me of having taken them?” and Tom's eyes flashed again as he spoke.

“Were na ye in my room this morn?” questioned Sandy.

“To be sure I was,” Tom replied.

“And didna' ye leave me doon yonder, blawing my fingers in the wet to keep them warm, a much langer time than was necessary?” Sandy again questioned.

“Certainly I did, and I was very sorry for it,” Tom answered.

“An' hoo the deil was it ye tauld me ye'd been as quick's ye cou'd?” asked Sandy.

“Well, as it's come to this, I may as well tell you that, in the first place, I spoke to your daughter, and that delayed me a few minutes, and then I couldn't find the axe. It had got chucked out of its usual place, and lay covered over with a lot of sacks.”

“An' why didna' ye tell me a' this when ye cam' doon to me?”

“Somehow I got into a pelter with myself at my stupidity, and that put me out o' sorts with everybody,” Tom responded.

“It's true, dear father, it's true!” put in Sophy. “He did speak to me, and I know that what I said to him irritated him, and perhaps that made him less capable of finding what he was looking for. And it was me that threw the axe down where it could not be found.”

“It's a' vera weel for ye to say, it's a' me, an' it's a' me!” exclaimed Sandy. “May be

ye'll say next that. ye ha' the siller."

"I wish I could say it, for your sake, dear father," added Sophy; "but I don't think it's very far away, if it was only well looked for."

"An' whaur, in the name o' patience, are we to look for't, tell me that, noo?" asked Sandy.

"Ask Dick, there," said Sophy; "he may give you some clue."

"Nae, nae, lassie!" replied her father. "Haud yer tongue, Dick!" as the latter protested his innocence. "I'm no to be turned aff this gait. I ken weel yer kin' feeling towards Tom, an' he is amaist as my ain bairn to me; but richt is richt, though, for your sake, Sophy, gin he'll return the siller, I'll forget and forgie!"

"Return it!" shouted Tom in anger. "Why, I never took it. I've told you honestly how it was I was so long. You know where I've been since. Search me now, and then follow me on the track of where I've been. If the money isn't on me, I must have planted it, and I can't have planted it without leaving a track."

"Weel, there's sense in that, and if we only had a black——" said the miller.

"No need," answered Tom. "I'll take you there myself, and show you my track to where I caught the mare, and where I brought her back here. You know yourself where I was at work this morning, and can go and search there."

"It will be some satisfaction, nae doot; but then, if we dinna fin' the siller——"

"After that, father, if your search should be unsuccessful, as I'm sure it will be, you must turn in another direction," and she looked boldly at Dick, who returned her gaze with a grim, ominous smile.

"Come awa', then, Dick," said Sandy; "ye're no a bad haun at tracking fut prents; and you, Tom, gae wi' us, and see that we gie ye fair play."

Chapter III A Woman's Vengeance

IN pursuance of their plan of revenge, George Maxwell and his son spent a great deal of time amongst the blacks, and, for their own particular purpose, set themselves to acquire the language of the aborigines, and were soon able to hold conversations with the blacks in their own tongue. This acquisition, as might be expected, very materially aided them in their adventurous life, and obtained for them much information that they would not otherwise have possessed.

Sitting before a good fire, they were both enjoying the luxury of a smoke, for they were taking things very much easier now than they did in their inexperience a few months back.

"I cannot think what Eumerella is up to," said George, "nor how she intends to manage. I don't see my way clear through the business."

"Oh, she's a cunning one, she is," replied Jamie. "Let her alone for working it out her own way. All we've got to do when the time comes is to obey orders."

"Yes; but I should like to know what it is she's driving at," George remarked meditatively.

"Haven't you often told me," responded Jamie, in a most argumentative tone, "that the first duty of a soldier is to obey orders and ask no questions?"

"Yes, yes; but we are not soldiers now; we haven't taken the bounty," answered George

"Haven't we?" cried Jamie triumphantly, as if he had now completely vanquished his father. "Then I would like to know what she has done for us, and whether that wasn't as fair bounty as we could take. Look here! d'ye think we would have got hold of them three black dogs only for her? D'ye think we would even have got away from them and the whole tribe without leaving a sign of our trail only for her? Didn't she work it all? My word, she's a clever one! As clever as the—no—not quite as clever as the Marshal, but not so very far off, neither. Is she, Marshal?"

"We shall know more to-morrow," said George, "for we are now close upon the spot she appointed to meet me at; and just before sundown I saw from the top of the range the glimmering reflection of the camp fires of her tribe. I shall go up to Bald Rock to-morrow, and shall leave camp so as to reach there just after daylight. She is to be there to-morrow or the next morning, to explain all, and give us our final instructions."

"She says," put in Jamie, "that she's going to give it 'em this time—give it 'em so as they won't be a tribe no more. If she says it, she'll do it."

"Did she tell you that?" inquired George.

“She did,” replied the boy; “and if she says it, she'll do it, and no mistake. I know her well, and she knows me, too, and she knows I'm just the chap to help her knock over them black bandicoots, as she calls 'em.”

George looked at his son for a few seconds in a wild, unsteady manner, and with a fiery gleam in his eye; but it soon died out, and then he shook his head. He made no further remark, however, although Jamie went on to tell that it was then that the gin, excited by the slaughter of her own hereditary foes, had given way to a feeling of exultation, during which she had declared that in a few days more the tribe would receive such a wound from her hands as should all but annihilate it.

The boy continued to talk on, though George took no notice, but rolled himself in his blanket, and was soon asleep. Jamie, however, was quite satisfied at having Blucher for an audience. At last Jamie himself got tired of talking, and then he also rolled himself in his blanket and composed himself to sleep, though he did not do this until he had called Blucher to him, and shared with him the warm covering.

It wanted some time to daylight when George roused himself for the work before him. Both he and Jamie had risen occasionally during the night to put the fire together and to add fresh fuel to it. George once more did this, warmed himself over the blaze, rolled up his blanket and travelling store, and placed them in a sheltered spot under the bark covering, to be left behind under Jamie's charge. Then, shouldering his gun, without saying a word to his son—who just opened his eyes, looked at his father, and then composed himself once more to sleep—he took his way up the spur on which they had camped, until he reached the heavier-timbered ground of the main range. Through this he proceeded cautiously in the darkness, until, coming to some more open ground that allowed of his doing it, he passed over to the other fall of the ridge, and was soon at the spot appointed for the meeting. He set himself down to wait, but he had not been more than a quarter of an hour thus resting, when a low, soft coo-ee warned him that some person was approaching who expected to meet another at this spot. In another minute the black figure of Eumerella was seen forcing its way through the deep undergrowth.

“My white friend is true to his word,” she said.

“Yes,” answered George; “and now you had better tell me at once what it is that is to be done, and what part I am to take in it.”

“It is this,” she exclaimed, and her eyes lighted up with wild excitement. “The blow that I have been so long preparing is now at last about to fall upon these miserable bandicoots. I have been whispering into the ears of Opara, and, listening to my words, he and the tribe are about to attack and plunder the mill where the white man grinds the white powder he eats.”

“You have planned this?” cried George in astonishment.

“Yes. I told it to Opara, and he found it good,” and she grinned maliciously.

“You cannot expect me to assist in such a devil's work as this against my own countrymen,” he urged.

“You must assist,” she answered, “not to plunder, but to save the white man.”

“And then what's your great plan?”

“Can my white friend not see?” she said. “I lead the tribe into a trap, in which the white man must fix them.”

“Ah! I begin to see more clearly.”

“My white friend is getting duller than he used to be,” she replied. “Listen. I have told Opara of all that I have seen at the whitefellow's grinding-house. Our tribe has been almost starving this bad weather, and our women and children are dying from cold and hunger. Food and blankets are to be had at the grinding-house, and all the stories I have told have rung in the ears of Opara, and he and the fighting chiefs have resolved to undertake the work.”

“And Macomo?” asked George.

“Luckily for me and my plans, he and Atare, with three of the leading chiefs, are away, or I should never have had this chance. Opara is to lead in the attack, and, fearful that Macomo will return, and take the undertaking into his own hands, and so derive all the honour of it, he is urging on as rapidly as possible to the spot.”

“Opara is to lead the attack?” said George, inquiringly.

“Yes—what attack there will be. But the inhabitants will have nothing to fear, provided they will take proper precautions against surprise, for I myself will deal with the whole tribe, even if the white man does not fire a single shot.”

“You!” exclaimed George in astonishment. “How can you alone do this?”

“I have it all here—here!” she cried, as she struck her forehead. “The vengeance that has been brooding here for moons and moons without result has, at last, found a way of satisfying itself.”

“And what, in the name of all that's good, do you mean to do?” he asked.

“That will be my secret,” she replied.

“But how,” urged George, “can you expect me to help you if I do not know the way in which it is to be done?”

“All I ask you to do is, to go to the white man of the mill, and to tell him all that is about to occur, so that he may take the precautions necessary for his safety. Stay with him, if you will, and help him to defend himself by shooting as many of these wretched bandicoots as possible.”

“Am I, then, to go off and warn them at once?”

“No,” she answered, “that would spoil all; for, if Opara saw that preparations were made to receive him, he would at once give up the enterprise. To-morrow night we

shall camp on the creek seven miles from the mill. The next day we shall reach the mill-flat just before dark. The women and piccaninnies will be there to lull suspicion, and our fires will be far from the house. The attack will not be made before daylight, unless the house can be surprised. Some of the best warriors are to be concealed in the lower part of the mill, and it is against surprise from these the white man will have to guard.”

“I see what you want,” George suggested; “you do not want them to know for certain that the mill will be attacked until after dark.”

“No, and not until as late as possible then.” She mused for a moment, and then resumed—“If you do not go up to the mill until after dark, be careful how you approach, for a close watch will be set round the place, and you will have much trouble in doing what I wish. But I will be on the look-out for you, and give you assistance should you require it.”

“But may I not give them,” George continued, determined to have his directions in such a way that there should be no mistaking, “just as much warning as will lead them to prepare what is necessary in the way of arms and ammunition?”

“Provided you give them no idea,” Eumerella answered, “that an attack has been settled upon.”

“I can do it,” said George. “I can do it in such a way as not to let them know more than you want. But, you see, if they get no word, the chances are that they will be found at night altogether unprepared to meet an attack, and then your revenge will lose half its force.”

“Good! My white friend is wise. Let him say just as much as he thinks necessary, and no more. And now, as I remember the directions of my white friend, let him not forget mine!” And, so saying, she turned upon her heel, and left the spot by the narrow path by which she had reached it.

George sat down and pondered for a while upon what he had just heard; but, after putting together her words and carefully weighing and comparing them, he could make out nothing that would give him a clue to her plan. So, shaking his head, he rose to his feet, shouldered his gun, and took the way to the camp, resolved to consult with Jamie upon all that he had heard.

The distance was as nothing in returning, for he had now the daylight to guide him amongst the fallen timber, which, buried in the high grass, had prevented his making quicker progress in the darkness. He found Jamie just concluding his breakfast, and as there was a quart of water at the fire boiling ready for use, he made his tea and at once sat down, with an appetite by no means injured by his morning's exercise, to his frugal repast.

We return now to the miller, who was about to start off to follow down Tom's

track in search of the plant, if any, and who had come to a stop on seeing a strange arrival. Dick was the first to recognise the new-comer whilst yet at a distance.

“Why, hang me if it isn't Cranky George,” for by that name was George generally known. “What on earth brings him here?”

“Puir man, puir man!” ejaculated Sandy. “He's had enough to make him cranky, when he lost his wife and weans a' at one blow. I dinna ken but I shude gae daft mysel' were I to lose my ain bonnie lassie in that way.”

“Good morning, Sandy! Good morning, Tom!” said George, as he came up and took first one and then the other by the hand; whilst he merely nodded his head coldly to Dick, without addressing a word to him. Then, as he gazed round upon them, and noticed their serious faces, he added, “Why, what are you all looking so glum about? Has anyone been bringing you bad news?”

“Bad eneuch, George, bad eneuch!” cried Sandy. “I've been robbit i' my ain hoose.”

“Robbed!” cried George with astonishment, and he turned and looked Dick full in the face with those wild fiery eyes.

“No! you needn't look at me, Mr. Sergeant as you was,” fiercely retorted Dick, who well understood that look. “Though I am a ticket man, there's no down on me, and, cranky as you are, I won't stand none of your nonsense, I can tell you. Look on the other side of you.”

“What! Tom?” exclaimed George, more astonished than ever.

“Yes,” said the miller dolefully; “ye'd hardly believe it, but sae it is.”

“I'll not believe it!” cried George. “No, not if you found the money on him.”

“Thank you, George,” exclaimed Tom, as he seized the other's hand and shook it warmly. “That's like you, old boy; true as steel always. I've told Sandy here all about what they suspect me for, and that I'm as innocent as a lamb about his money.”

“I'll take my oath of it!” said George energetically. “If there's money taken, it isn't here, but there, you must look for it!” and he pointed from Tom to Dick.

“It's the things that ha' ta'en place this morn that's made me suspec' Tom, tho' gudeness knows I'd as lieve suspec' by ain bairn as Tom.” And Sandy then proceeded to narrate to George all the events of the morning.

George pondered for a time, ever casting quick, searching glances into Dick's countenance. At last he said—“Let the matter rest for the present. If your money is lost, and is not forthcoming before night, I have one with me who'll find it if it were buried fifty fathom in the earth. I shall not be back before evening, but I promise you that the matter shall then be searched out, and the guilty, whoever he may be, brought to light. But, let me ask you, have you examined your daughter? She was up

and about, according to your account, and she must have seen something.”

“Deil a thing!” responded Sandy. “She didna' e'en see Tom, but only spak to him.”

“I will have a few minutes' talk with her; perhaps by my questions I may learn more from her than you have yet. And now to drop this matter, and to talk of something more serious. Are you well armed here?”

“I've gotten a fowling-piece,” said the miller, “an' two auld tower muskets that hae na' been used these months syne.”

“And powder and ball?” continued George.

“There may be a bit powther i' th' hoose, but I dinna' think ye'll fin' a ball if ye'd search't frae top tae bottom,” answered Sandy. “But what are ye speerin for?”

“And can you thus remain unarmed with these prowling devils of blacks about you, hanging round and threatening at any moment to come upon you?” George asked sternly. “Can you, with precious lives depending upon your protection, leave them at the mercy of the first band of black fiends that take it into their heads to fall upon and plunder you? Have I not suffered? Am I not a sufficient warning of what these Satan's imps can do, and of what they may make a man to suffer?”

“Dinna excite yersel', Geordie, man!” replied the miller soothingly, as he noticed the wild glare of the other's eye. “There is na' meikle fear o' they black deevils comin' here, or gin they do the place is strong eneuch wi' us inside to keep them oot till help comes.”

“And what if you are taken by surprise?” George added. “I had my strong arm and my practised hand to defend my home, and now where is it? What did the one or the other serve me? I had powder and lead, and a steady eye to direct them, but they were impotent to save. One shot would have scattered the whole lot, but I was not there to fire it.”

“It seems to me,” Dick put in, “that this is a reason why we don't want your powder and ball—if they don't do no good when you've got them.”

“I was the only man to fire a musket, whilst you are three, and, knowing you to be armed, these fiends will scarcely venture an attack; but, if you neglect precaution, you will leave your house bare and defenceless as I did, but to suffer greater horror than I did, by seeing your home invaded before your eyes, and your child murdered before your very sight.”

“Eich, Geordie, what's a' this? What's been an' pit a' this in yer head? Are the blacks about? Is there danger?” were the questions rapidly put by Sandy.

“I know nothing,” returned George, “except that it is wilful wickedness in you, who have a dear one looking to you for protection, to remain unarmed and defenceless in the case of attack. If you have no thought for yourself, have some for that blooming girl that calls you father. Neglect no precaution, for with these

cunning, watchful fiends around you, the moment of danger will come when least expected.”

Eventually Sandy was persuaded to send Tom off to the nearest settlement for the loan of arms and ammunition, but before he went, Tom took the opportunity of having a few words with Sophy, with the result that she agreed to meet him on his return at a favourite rendezvous near the mill. Tom's trouble seemed to have suddenly opened a way to Sophy's heart, for she sent him on his way with a parting kiss that made him make light of the dastardly accusations of Dick.

Meanwhile, George advised Sophy to keep a strict watch on the ex-convict's movements, for he was quite convinced that Dick had secreted the money somewhere about the mill.

Chapter IV The Miller's Daughter

THE remainder of the day was passed over without incident in the mill. Dick made himself as agreeable as he could, so much so as to fill Sandy with astonishment, and to give him a considerably enhanced opinion of his man. And Sophy? Yes, even she seemed to be overcome by his unwonted amiability, and smiled and talked to him, just as if she had given up every thought of suspicion of him. "Just like them gals," growled Dick to himself.

Outside, however, there was an occurrence that filled Sandy and Dick with surprise, and, taken in connection with George's warning in the morning, with some uneasiness. Late in the afternoon, a tribe of blacks arrived, and took up their station on the flat that intervened between the mill and the river. The river ran upon one side of it, and the creek upon another, and both the streams were running down swollen and angry, and threatening every moment to submerge it. Yet, strange to say, the blacks seemed to be considering whether they should make this their camping-ground.

"Why, the puir doited things, they must be clane gane wud to camp there. It'll a' be under water afore the morn's morn, every bit o't, and there's a gude piece covered the noo!" cried Sandy, as he remarked what was going on.

It now became evident that a large portion of the tribe were of the same opinion as the miller, and began to move away to the higher ground, some three or four hundred yards off.

And now night began to fall. Tom had not returned, although now looked for with some anxiety, as well by Dick as by Sandy. Sophy, however, knew that he would not come back until after he had met and spoken to her; and the time had now almost come at which he had appointed her to meet him. When at last the darkness had set in, without saying a word to her father, she stepped out of the house and made her way to the place of assignation. The night was pitchy dark. Heavy clouds were rolling over the sky in one vast mass, and threatening every moment to pour down their contents in torrents of rain. The moon was completely obscured, and had it not been for the camp fires of the blacks upon the ridge above, that served as a beacon light to guide her, she would scarcely have been able to find her way, even that short distance, along the beaten track that led there from the house. At last she reached the spot, but Tom had not yet arrived. Disappointed and vexed for the moment, she made two or three steps towards returning to the house. But other and better thoughts soon intervened. Tom had something to say to her, and she had much to say to Tom, and all this was of far too much importance to be interfered

with by a petty feeling of ill-temper. So she turned back, sheltered herself as well as she could under the rough logs of the cockatoo fence, and set herself to wait.

She had not been here more than about ten minutes, though to her, in that drear darkness, it seemed more than half an hour, when a casual break in the clouds let out a stray ray or two from the moon. For a few brief moments there was a faint and sickly half-light thrown upon the bush, and by that light, in the direction whence she expected her lover to arrive, she caught sight of an advancing figure. It could be no other than Tom, and she went forth from her shelter to meet him.

“Tom! Tom! is it you?” she called in a low tone.

There was no reply. She stood for a few seconds holding her breath, and her heart almost ceasing to beat with the intensity and fixity of her attention. All at once she heard the sound of a footstep behind her. She turned instantly in that direction. What appeared to be a tall dark form stood before her at a short distance, and the next moment she received a blow on the head, uttered one shriek of terror rather than of pain, and then fell senseless. Some half-dozen blacks now sprang upon her, raised her from the ground, and without a word beyond what was necessary for instructions by the one who appeared to be the leader amongst them, they carried her away, passing along the lower line of the fence, and going in the direction of the camp on the hill side.

They could scarcely have got round the fence, when Tom came crashing through the low scrubby undergrowth of the bush. “Sophy! Sophy!” he cried. “What is the matter? Where are you?” There was no answer. Could he have been deceived? No. He was sure it was her voice. Most likely she had come to the place of appointment, and something had frightened her and she had run home. Yes, that must be it. Well, it had not been his fault that he had been so late. He had had farther to go than he thought; though he should never be able to excuse himself to the poor girl after getting her such a fright, when she had come out on a night like this to meet him. “I don't know how I shall be able to look her in the face,” he thought, as he took up along the path that led to the mill. Just then his eye caught the gleam of the camp fires of the blacks, which he saw now for the first time. “Hillo! What's this?” he thought. He paused to consider. He was not very quick-witted, and did not come to a conclusion very rapidly. He was carrying on his shoulder two fowling-pieces which, with powder and shot, he had obtained during the day. As he rested these upon the ground to take a survey of the fires, he blamed them in his thoughts for causing all his difficulty; then from the guns his mind went back to George, who was so anxious they should have them; and from George to those he so much hated—the blacks. “Ah! Yes, that is it! They are blacks camping there; those are their fires. George suspected they were coming here, and so gave us that warning.

And that scream! Have they molested Sophy, or has she only been frightened by them?" Thus he thought, and as the dread of danger to Sophy came across his mind, he threw the guns over his shoulder, rushed on up the track, and in a few seconds dashed in at the door, which, though closed, was unfastened.

"Sophy, Sophy! Where, oh where is she?" he cried, as, with a pale cheek, he stood before the miller.

"Sophy?" answered Sandy. "She's ben in her ain room, I jalouse."

"Have you seen her?" Tom continued.

"I've no' seen her the last ten minutes," replied Sandy.

"Has she not just come in?" and Tom's voice trembled as he spoke.

"Come in? She's no been oot," said Sandy.

"Oh, be sure, be sure!" exclaimed Tom. "Sophy! Where are you? Answer me, Sophy!" he called out, as he rushed to her room to seek her.

The alarm, that was so unmistakably painted upon Tom's countenance, had by this time communicated itself to that of the miller. "What's a' this ca'ing and crying about, mon?" said he, in a voice that was meant to be angry, to cover the uneasiness he felt. "What for d'ye come frichtening us oot o' our wits, as though ye were daft? What d'ye mean ava'?"

"It means that not ten minutes ago," responded Tom, "I heard Sophy's voice give a scream of alarm."

"Is that a'? Ye jist fancied it. There's a black camp ayont there."

"I know it. I saw their fires" continued Tom. "I heard her voice on the flat, and I thought that perhaps some of the black dogs might have interfered with her. I ran up as fast as I could to see if they had, and now Sophy's not to be found."

"No' to be found? Ye dinna ken what ye're talking about! She's about somewhere. Dinna fricht me, mon; ye ken she's here about!" And he, now seriously alarmed for his daughter, rushed off to her room, and, with Dick and Tom, searched, not only that, but every other room in the place, but without finding her.

"There's no time to be lost," now cried Tom. "We must at once go to the camp of the blacks and get her from them, or at all events die with her." And then he brought forward the two guns he had procured. "It's well I followed George's advice, in spite of all that was said against me," and, as Dick was about to speak, he continued, "But there, that's enough about that. I don't bear malice, and if I wanted to, I couldn't at such a time as this. Dick, you'll stand by us, won't you? For I know you're no coward."

"To be sure I will! To the last," said Dick.

"Here, then, take this gun, and here's powder and shot! And you, Sandy, fetch your fowling-piece; and then, whatever men can do, we'll do; and we'll either get

her back or die for her!” Tom exclaimed.

“We're in the han's o' Providence!” piously ejaculated the miller. “But, oh, my puir bairn! my bonnie lassie! It's ower hard to bear, to know her in the power o' they ruthless savages!”

“Hurry! Hurry!” cried Tom. “She sha'n't be long so if you'll only be quick.”

And they armed themselves, and were almost ready to start forth, when a light tap was struck upon the door outside.

“Come in, whoe'er ye are,” said the miller. “The door's open, ye ken.”

“No, no,” answered a voice outside in a low tone. “We must not be seen to enter. And you, if you value your lives, fasten the door securely. Go round and open the window of the girl's room as quietly as you can, and allow no ray of light to enter the room and show what you've done.”

“And who are you that's making all this ceremony?” asked Tom.

“It's me—George,” replied the same subdued voice. “The mill is surrounded by blacks, and every minute you keep me here makes my life of less value. So be quick, if you do not want to see me speared on your doorstep!”

Without stopping to inquire further, Tom ran round to Sophy's room and obeyed the instructions given. George immediately came through, then the dog Blucher was passed in, and last of all Jamie entered, getting in at the opening very deliberately, and stopping occasionally to look back, as if he rather preferred to be outside amongst his enemies. George immediately shut and secured the windows, and then, with much noise, went to the door and shot to the bolts of that also. Then he turned towards the three men, and for the first time perceived that they were armed.

“So, then, it seems you've found it out,” he said; “and there was all the less need for me to come and tell you.”

“Oh, Geordie, Geordie, we had nae thocht o' oursels,” cried the miller; “but it's my lassie, my ain only bairn! She's gane, stow'n awa' by thae reiving blacks!”

“Sophy gone, and in the hands of the blacks!” shouted George, in the height of astonishment.

“We fear so, George,” said Tom; whilst Sandy wrung his hands in agony of mind.

“Gone!” George again exclaimed, as though uncertain that he had heard rightly. Then, suddenly turning upon Dick, he seized him by the throat, whilst his eyes blazed with passion. “You hang-dog villain! Do you know anything of this?”

“No, no!” said Tom, coming to Dick's rescue, and trying to unloosen George's grip. “He could have known nothing about it.” And then he explained more fully than he had done before how Sophy had that morning made an appointment to meet him, and how, from the spot where she was to have found him, he had heard a cry of distress in, as he thought, her voice.

“And now to rescue her!” cried Tom.

“Rescue her!” and George gave a grim smile. “Why, you couldn't go fifty yards from the door before there would be a dozen spears through each of you.”

“What!” they all exclaimed simultaneously.

“Yes,” continued George. “The mill is surrounded by these black devils, and it was only by the greatest care and caution, and with some assistance that I had from a friend, that I managed to pass through their line; and when me and Jamie are put to the pinch, I don't know how you would fare.”

“But,” put in Tom, “I had only just come in ten minutes before you, and I saw no sign of a living soul.”

“You must have come up by a path that had been left for a time unguarded—no doubt, from the absence of those who captured Sophy. Had you been ten minutes later, you would never have been able to reach the house.”

“What are we to do, then?” asked Tom. “Sit down here, and leave Sophy in the hands of these devils?”

“You must wait patiently till morning, and secure the house as well as you can,” replied George calmly. “It will be attacked at daylight, and much will depend upon the result of that attack. Show no signs of fear or suspicion, and the chances are that nothing will be attempted till morning. You heard the noise I purposely made in fastening the door?”

“Yes,” said they.

“Well, they've heard it too, and it will give them a hint that no good is to be got in that direction, and will keep them from you till daylight. These devils have no stomach for fighting in the dark, though, had I been a few minutes later, and you had left your door unfastened, it's very likely you would have been rushed and tomahawked, and my advice would have been useless.”

“But my bairn! My puir Sophy! My ain dear dautie!” put in Sandy.

“Have no fear for her. I will watch over her!” replied George.

“You!” cried Tom in astonishment. “Will you venture out again?”

“I have a mission to perform, and can receive no hurt till it is done!” George answered solemnly. “Have no fear for me. If Sophy is uninjured when I get outside, depend upon it she will remain so. Jamie and the dog I will leave with you, and they will do you good service. Has the lower part of the mill been secured?”

“There is nothing there to secure,” replied Dick, “except the one room, and they won't find anything there but my bedding.”

“Then, if that is the case, there are no doubt a dozen of these black devils safely lodged below by this time. So, secure the trap doors as well as you can, and keep a sharp eye in that direction to prevent surprise. Jamie will keep watch at this

window, looking out towards the creek, for that will be the quarter I shall be in. He will report any signals I may make for your guidance, for he understands them, and I will keep a sharp look-out. The main rush, however, will be in the front, and so prepare for it. Don't sleep a wink, for these imps of Satan are capable of taking up their perch on the roof, and dropping down upon you at daylight between the sheets of bark."

"And Sophy!" exclaimed Tom and the miller in one voice, when he had concluded.

"If she is safe now, she shall remain so; I pledge you the word of a soldier on it. Do you keep good watch here, and trust me to mount guard over her. There! Now I'll go forth and give her some hope, poor girl, for I dare say she's sad enough now." So saying, and after innumerable messages on the one side and directions on the other, George went to the window by which he had entered, and, waiting for an opportunity when the moon was covered by a darker cloud than ordinary, he opened the shutter, and dropped out gently and noiselessly.

Chapter V The Attack

ONCE or twice during this early part of the evening, Blucher showed visible signs of uneasiness; but after a time he seemed to be more satisfied, for he curled himself up before the fire and composed himself to sleep. When the dog lay down, Jamie called the others to him, and, pointing to the animal, said in a whisper, "There, you see the Marshal? Well, that's the way he has of saying that there isn't anything more to be done to-night. So now, if you three like to lay down and have a sleep, I'll keep watch; and then one of you can give me a spell by'n-bye. We'll be ready, then, for these niggers in the morning."

Poor Sandy was thinking too much of the precarious position in which his daughter was placed to allow him to entertain the least idea of sleep, and Tom was in much about the same predicament. These two, on consulting over the matter, proposed to watch through the night, whilst Jamie and Dick slept; it being understood that when the two sentries felt disposed for sleep, they should awake the sleepers. Jamie consented to this arrangement at once, although he stipulated that the watchers should pay every attention to the movements of the Marshal, and that he should be roused up the very instant the dog made a move. He then lay down, and in a few minutes was asleep, whilst Dick was not long in following his example.

In this way the night passed over, but just previous to the dawn of day a heavier storm than usual passed over. The rain came pouring down in torrents, accompanied by vivid flashes of lightning and heavy thunder. So great was the riot of the elements, that the sleepers were instantly aroused, and listened with something approaching to awe to the angry turmoil without. Mingled with the bellowing of the storm came the fierce roaring of the river, which had broken over its banks, covered the flat upon which last night the blacks had thought to make their camp, and was lashing against the outer slabs that enclosed the lower floor. The ripple of the water could be plainly heard amongst the timbers of the machinery, whilst the creek above came pouring down the rocky bed, and added by its furious dash to the general tumult. Blucher sprang up with the rest, as if to give the signal that the time for action had now come. Only for an instant he stood undecided whether to go to the front or the back, and, then running off to the large front doors, he put his nose to the bottom of them, sniffed vigorously there, scratched at the boards to try to make himself a way out, and then showed his teeth in order to evince his desire to use them upon something outside.

Suddenly there came a thundering blow upon the door that shook it to its centre.

Several blacks had brought down a large log, which they were using as a battering-ram; but the door was composed of stout slabs, adzed down to something like smoothness, and bolted together through cross pieces of similar hard and enduring materials—materials sufficiently hard to have resisted for a time the battering of the ordinary artillery of those days. Blow after blow fell rapidly upon the door, almost before the besieged knew what was coming. On hearing these blows upon the front door, the blacks below, as though it had been a signal, thundered upon the trap-door, and tried their utmost to force it open. Luckily every precaution had been taken in this direction.

“Don't stand looking!” shouted Jamie, “but give 'em pepper through the window.”

Tom's salt-water experience had been of service in this respect, for he had secured pieces of rope fastened to the shutter bolts through staples driven into the window posts. The rope, being knotted, allowed the shutter to be opened only a sufficient width to fire through, and then to be closed again immediately. Jamie withdrew the bolt, pushed the shutter open as far as it would go, and fired into the midst of the blacks who held the log. One fell, and the others in their fright dropped the log. Sandy now took Jamie's place whilst the other reloaded, fired, and hit another black; and, as they still stood irresolute, the window on the other side of the door was opened, and two shots in quick succession brought down as many blacks, whilst the rest, completely disconcerted, fell back with wild yells and in the greatest confusion.

Tom then placed Dick at the window whence they had fired, and ran into the store, upon the trap-door of which the blacks were working vigorously with their tomahawks, although with their light axes they could make but little impression upon the hard wood. At the same time they had this advantage, that Tom could find but one or two places through which he could put the muzzle of his gun, whilst from no spot could he reach those who were crowding on the steps and hammering at the trap-door. At a loss how to proceed, he had only to wait until the blacks themselves had cut an orifice, through which he could deliver his fire.

After the retreat from the front of the house, Jamie had gone to the post which his father had directed him to occupy, and he arrived there not a minute too soon to prevent evil consequences. When he opened the window to look out, he found that three blacks had climbed up from the lower storey, and were passing along the sleeper into which the upper row of slabs had been let. One of these was close to the window when it was opened, and, startled by the suddenness of the boy's movements, he slipped, just as his hand was about to clutch the sill, and fell; but before he reached the ground he received the contents of Jamie's gun, and, with a shriek of pain, fell into the stream below.

The blacks had all disappeared from the front of the house, and they had no doubt

withdrawn to consider some other plan of attack, now that they had found the doors too strong to be forced. The shouts of triumph from those below, however, showed that they knew the advantage of their position, and that they believed the trap-door was yielding before their blows. Finding that all their united exertions would be required to meet the danger that threatened in this direction, Tom at once called the miller and Dick to his assistance. These, confiding the look-out in front to Jamie, ran at once to the rescue. A hasty consultation took place, and then Dick, seizing an axe, began cutting openings in the floor, through which they occasionally fired. Sandy also brought every possible description of timber he could find long enough to reach across the opening, and threw it on to the trap-door, in order to embarrass them if the door were forced. At last a hole was cut through the door itself, partly by the blacks and partly by Dick, and then the three, stationing themselves round it, fired down repeatedly, one after the other, and soon made the stairway too hot for the black besiegers.

Time and again the battle waxed and waned, principally around the trap-door. The guns of the defenders accounted for no small number of the rascally blacks, and Jamie's tally kept ever increasing, until it reached the number of eight. "Not a bad score for a morning's work before breakfast," he exclaimed, as he turned to load again.

There was for a moment a temporary lull in the attack. The blacks were evidently preparing for a last and desperate rush at the trap. They had matured their plans, and the signal had just been given, and had been responded to by the most horrible yells; when, above all their wild cries, above the fierce bellowings of the storm, there came a deep booming report that made the air vibrate, and caused even the solidly-built mill to tremble. All, whites and blacks, held their breath for a while in awe of that fearful unknown sound—so loud, so terrible, so threatening, that all stood aghast. In the next instant it was explained, for, with a terrible roar, the vast volume of water, that had been kept back by the dam above, came down in one mighty wave upon them. The race, the mill wheel, everything that could be moved, were torn up and borne away like straws before the irresistible violence of that immense body of water. The under part of the mill was swept clean out, leaving not a trace of the black-skins, who, a moment before, had all but carried the broken trap-door. The whole thing, however, was almost instantaneous. That vast wall of water had come down on them and departed even whilst they drew their breath; and, almost before they knew what had occurred, they had to thank a benign Providence that had watched over them, and held up their dwelling against so terrible a force.

Chapter VI Eumerella's Vengeance

WHEN George left the mill, just before the attack, he at once made his way to a spot where he had arranged to meet Eumerella, and from her he learned that it was Opara who had captured Sophy, whom he intended to make his gin. The girl further explained that she would be able to protect the miller's daughter in the mean time, and ultimately enable her to escape.

Pressed by George as to how she intended to circumvent Opara, she declined to give him any information, further than to say, "Eumerella has all prepared, and when the fight begins, her white friend will see that the young girl of Port Stephens knows how to carry out with her hand whatever her head has planned."

With the first streak of daylight, Eumerella made her way to the mill dam. Once there, she descended into the bed of the creek, and carefully examined the various supports by which the dam was held in position, and enabled to hold good against the great weight of water that it kept back. There was an immense body of water pouring over the dam, as the creek itself was heavily flooded, and it was in itself a task of no small difficulty and danger to pass, sometimes under, sometimes through, the cascade that poured down from the height above. She now produced a small tomahawk, and went vigorously to work to cut down or remove the greater part of the sloping stakes which formed stays or supports to the heavy mass of blended stones and earth that composed the dam. Every here and there one was left, but the earth was so loosened round the foot of it as to make it give way readily upon the slightest increase of pressure upon it. The roar of the waters drowned the sound of the strokes of her tomahawk, and she worked long and hard, in danger of being swept away at any moment, for, had she made the least mistake by removing stays essential to the construction, she must have been overwhelmed in the ruin that would have followed. She knew all this. She had come prepared for it, and held her life as nothing in the balance against her great revenge.

Hardly had she completed her task, when that mighty storm, that fearful conflict of the elements, that had ushered in the morning, burst over the spot. Then came the hurry of the attack and the noise of conflict. With an outward appearance of calm, but with an inward excitement for the success of her plot, she watched the various phases of the strife, and was almost in despair when the attack upon the front was so nearly successful. Then came the shout of triumph from below, and the rush of those above to participate in the triumph of their fellows, and then she knew that the time for her revenge had now come. The dam already surged and quivered under the weight of the accumulated waters; one blow, and it would fall. Mounting to a jutting

rock that over-hung the creek, she cast down upon one of the few main supports still left a huge log that she had provided for the occasion, and had long since placed in readiness to give the final stroke to the work of destruction. Guided by her too willing hand, the heavy weight struck fair upon the point intended, and the support gave way and fell. In an instant the water burst its bonds, and, with an angry roar, leapt forth upon its course of devastation. Before she could look round upon what she had done, every vestige of the dam had been swept clean away, and the whole body of water had rushed down in a solid wall upon the horde of yelling savages whom she had doomed to destruction. This, then, had been her plan, and this had been the reason why she had striven so hard to form the camp upon the flat below. Had not the flooded river rendered it impossible to camp upon the flat, neither woman nor child would have escaped from that terrible wave to have told the tale of the tribe's annihilation.

Only by an effort had she escaped, and now, perched upon an eminence, she watched the descending flood that she had set loose, and, as it struck the mill, and everything disappeared before it, she uttered a fierce yell of exultation, which, loud as it was, was drowned by the terrific roar of the rushing water.

There was another, however, who had seen the devastating effects of the inundation caused by the breaking down of the mill dam. Throughout the whole of the conflict, George had been engaged in keeping his eyes on Opara, whom he regarded as his special prey, dreading lest, in the heat of conflict, this chief might fall by some other hand than his. He was determined, however, not to be robbed of his prey, if any effort of his could prevent it: and as he saw the black figures of the natives borne away upon the rushing torrent, he dashed down the bank of the creek to a thick group of saplings that were growing upon the water's edge. Here he had left a small boat belonging to the mill, that he had brought over the previous evening and concealed in this thicket. He at once cast off the fastenings and jumped in, and the next instant he was whirled into the fast-running current. Hastily scanning the faces of the struggling blacks he passed by one after the other, until he had almost begun to despair of success. At last, with a cry that was almost joyful, he guided his boat towards one swimmer, who in his strength had managed to get out of the main force of the current, and who was at once recognised by George as his mortal foe. There was a gleam of baffled rage in the face of Opara, who, assured that his last hour had come, gave once glance of scornful defiance, and then lay passive in the water, resigned to the death-stroke which he made sure he was about to receive.

“Has Opara lived too long, that he allows himself to float down the water to the dark land?” asked George.

Opara made no reply, although he turned up his eyes inquiringly as though to ask whether his foe were taunting him.

“Opara has but to get into the canoe of the white, and he is saved,” George continued.

Still the black made no reply; but George held out his disengaged hand, and it was seized by Opara, who, after some struggling, and by the assistance of George, was enabled to get into the boat, while George managed to pull the boat under the lee of a thick growth of timber, that broke the force of the stream. Here he landed, and, pulling the boat up, directed Opara to land also. The black, who had by this time recovered from his exhaustion, did as he was bid, and stepped ashore without aid. And now, as the two confronted each other, George looked upon his enemy long and steadily.

“Did Opara think that his last hour had come?” asked George, as he caught a scowling look from the savage.

“Opara is not afraid to die!” the other answered proudly. “Let the white man do his worst; Opara is ready.”

George smiled grimly. “The time has not yet come,” he said. “When the day and hour arrive, Opara will know it only by the blow he receives. Does Opara remember what the white man told him on the Sassafras Range?”

Opara's lip curled contemptuously.

“Did not the white man say that he would watch, and that no injury should come to Opara? Opara was in amongst the fire of the white man's guns, and no shot hit him. He was carried away by the fierce waters, and yet now he is safe. Neither Opara, nor Macomo, nor Atare shall die in any other way than by the hand of the white whom they have made childless.”

Opara seemed somewhat impressed by this, but still made no answer.

“Did not the white man say that he would preserve them from death until the day and hour came when he would take their lives and fulfil his oath. Had not the white man sworn that oath, he would have left the body of Opara to be carried down on the stream, as the bodies of the bravest of his tribe have been by this time. You know me now, and you know that I am ever on the watch. Now go; you are free to depart, but beware of the time when next we meet.”

“Why should Opara depart, or why has the white man saved him? Opara has failed, and all the bravest of his tribe have perished. He has led them into danger, and has not shared their fate. He will be a scorn to his tribe, and the gins will jeer. Opara can never again meet the men of his tribe who remain.”

“Opara must live till his time comes,” replied George. “Let him join his tribe without loss of time, and repair the injury he has done to it and others. And if he

would do well, let him send back the white girl of the mill to her friends.”

A sudden glow of exultation spread over the face of Opara, as he remembered for the first time since his meeting with George that he held the miller's daughter captive. Through her he would be enabled to revenge himself upon the whites who had so greatly injured his tribe, and through her also he might strike another blow at the white man before him, who evidently took an interest in her. All this passed rapidly through his mind, and in a moment his despondency had departed, and the reverses of the morning were forgotten in the hope of revenge that was now held out to him. His whole manner changed, and he, who the moment before had been resigned to meet his death-stroke, was now in his turn threatening and vengeful. Raising his hand defiantly in the air, he exclaimed—“Good! Opara will go. It is the turn of the white this time; but before long it will be the turn of the black. Let the white man also take heed of our next meeting.” So saying, he turned off from the water, and dashed away up the slope of the ridge, halting at the top to again face his foe and shake his hand vengefully towards him. Thereupon George made his way towards the mill with speedy steps, and by as short a cut through the bush as he could find.

Chapter VII The Rescue

MAXWELL reached the mill in as brief a time as the distance permitted, but only to find it deserted. He was not disappointed at this, for it was no more than he expected. His first proceeding was to satisfy himself as to the direction that the mill people had taken, and to do this he followed their track for some distance from the house. In doing this, he learnt that Jamie and the dog had accompanied the others, and this discovery gave him no small amount of satisfaction, as he rather trusted to the recognised experience of his son, and the known instinct of Blucher, than to the hot-headed haste of Sandy and his two men. Assured upon this point, he returned to the house, drew together the embers of the fire, and put down a quart of water to boil. Helping himself to bread and meat from the pantry, he made himself a pot of tea, and then, sitting down, took a hearty breakfast. This over, he took another and a more careful survey of the tracks, so as to assure himself of the point at which the party were aiming, and then, going down to the creek, he managed to find a crossing-place. Here he procured his gun, ammunition, blankets, &c., which he had left behind when he had sprung into the boat. He now took up the creek, crossed it considerably above the spot where he had last done so, and started upon the track which now lay clear and open before him.

After witnessing the successful issue of her scheme of vengeance, Eumerella made her way to the camp of the gins, who had been ordered to move about four miles further inland, and there await the return of the warriors. She found Sophy in the charge of two old harridans, who guarded her so jealously that it was only by strategy she succeeded in getting a word with her. She infused fresh hope in the white girl's breast by telling her of the destruction of the tribe and of the safety of those at the mill, and assured Sophy of her willingness to assist in her escape whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Meanwhile, Opara and the survivors of the mill catastrophe, knowing that the whites would soon be on their tracks, made all possible haste to strike across the ranges, carefully blinding their trails as they went. But, in so doing, they forget that Jamie and his dog were experts at black-tracking, and knew every turn and trick in the aboriginal game. Consequently it was not long before the mill party were in hot pursuit, guided chiefly by the unerring instinct of Blucher, whose sense of smell came to the rescue when the blinded trail baffled even the keen eyesight of his youthful master.

After a considerable time they came to a point where the trail divided, and they were at a loss which track to follow. Eventually it was decided that Sandy, Tom,

and Dick should reconnoitre the path to the left, while Jamie and his canine mate should try that to the right, with what results we shall see further on.

Finding the mill deserted, George had pressed with all speed upon the tracks of the blacks, and just before sundown he came in sight of those whom he had so unweariedly followed. He had now, however, to proceed with greater caution, the more especially when he remarked that the men were all absent, and that the women only were preparing to camp. Surmising that the men were abroad hunting for their evening meal, he took every possible precaution to prevent discovery by his quick-sighted foes. Concealing himself in a cluster of bushes, he looked about cautiously, and then advanced to some other spot favourable for concealment. In this way he was gradually approaching the camp, his object being to get near enough to give Eumerella some signal of his presence. He had reached a small lot of scrub that he considered to be suitable to screen him, and was in the act of rising to give the cry that should warn his black ally of his presence, when he was startled by a sound behind him. Turning quickly round, he beheld Opara and another black close upon him. He leapt to his feet, but, before he could take any steps to defend himself, he was struck down by the heavy ironbark waddy of Opara, and fell senseless.

There was a brief consultation between the savages as to the expediency of at once putting their captive to death. They knew not that Jamie had come up whilst they were discussing this question, and that the first demonstration of violence would have signed the death-warrant of him who made it. But Opara was swayed, not by mercy, but because he thought that he might induce George, by the prospect of giving him his liberty, to use his influence with the white girl. He thereupon announced to his follower that the life of the prisoner was to be spared, and that he was to be taken down to the camp. With very little ceremony, they laid hold of the senseless body of George, and dragged it forward to the camp fires, where, throwing it down, they pointed it out with a grunt of savage satisfaction to the unfortunate Sophy.

The poor girl at once recognised her attached friend in the mangled heap that was thus heedlessly treated, and, at once rushing up to the body, threw herself upon it, and in wild terms bemoaned her hard fate that brought death and destruction to all who sought to succour her. Eumerella likewise approached the body, but it was only to heap upon it the most opprobrious epithets. She denounced the whites generally, and George more particularly, as the destroyers of the blacks of all tribes, and concluded by declaring that so great an enemy of the tribe should have no place near the camp fires of the present party, and the body of George was accordingly dragged beyond the line of light thrown by the fire. There he was left, and Sophy would have remained with him, had she been permitted to do so. This, however, Opara would

not allow; and Eumerella, in a few hasty whispered words, warned her to leave George, who was only stunned, to his own resources, since by stopping at his side she would only be directing more attention to him. "For his sake and for your own sake," said Eumerella, "we must take as little notice of him as possible."

"But he is dead," cried Sophy in despair, "and he can never do either you or your tribe any more harm."

"Dead! No!" answered the other. "Such a blow as that does not kill. He will not be long before he revives, and then, if we can throw the men off their guard, he can contrive for himself. Besides, he is not alone. His son is sure to be with him, and Eumerella knows how ready the boy is when work is to be done."

So saying, she brought Sophy back to the camp, scolding loudly at her sympathy with the white enemy of the tribe, and launching indiscriminate abuse upon all white-skins.

Everything was quiet in the camp, and sleep had to all appearance fallen upon all but a solitary watcher who sat motionless before his handful of fire, when George, who had hitherto lain as passive as if he were dead, cautiously raised himself and looked round. Consciousness had come upon him some time before, but he had remained quiescent until the silence of the camp assured him that he was no longer in danger of being watched. Carefully he looked round, and marked the position of the camp, and more especially the fire of the watchful sentry, whose whole attitude of attention showed that he was the only one from whom discovery was to be dreaded. He was still making his observations, when he felt something rub up against him, and the next instant the dog Blucher came fondling upon him in his usual noiseless manner. Having relieved his feelings by these endearments, he almost instantly retreated. Satisfied now that Jamie was not far off, George was enabled to take all his proceedings with far more confidence than he would otherwise have been able to do. His head still spun from the effects of the blow, and he lay back once more to recover himself and to ruminate upon what had best be done. With Jamie by his side there would be no difficulty now in rescuing Sophy, provided he could communicate with the boy without alarming the guards. As he lay thus, he saw the sentry rise and go out on his exploration of the track, and then marked him as he returned and came near enough to see in the darkness that the prisoner was still lying in the same spot. George now understood the whole proceeding; so, lying motionless until the sentry again rose and went out on his beat, he sprang to his feet, took off his coat and hat, and, laying them down in such a way as, in the uncertain light, to deceive the watcher, he stole away quietly and cautiously in the direction previously taken by the dog,—a direction directly opposite to that in which the sentry had gone. He had not moved away more than

twenty yards, when a faint chirruping, like that of the bush cricket, attracted his attention, and, going towards the spot whence the sound proceeded, the dog came out to meet him, and a few yards further on he encountered his son.

Jamie seized his father's hand and wrung it strongly, but no words passed between them. They were too near the camp, and they almost held their breath as they saw the sentry come into the circle of light thrown by his own fire, and thence proceed towards where the prisoner was supposed to be lying. George's thoughtfulness, however, had prevented discovery, for the sentry returned without suspicion and seated himself by the fire.

Having retreated beyond earshot, and considered the position of affairs, our two adventurers determined to make an immediate attempt to rescue Sophy Morrison. They accordingly stole noiselessly on towards the blacks' camp, and, when within a short distance, George gave a signal, by imitating the cry of one of the many night birds of the bush, that warned Eumerella that he was free, and that he was about to attempt a deed of daring. The black girl at once knew what this meant. Having a full confidence in George's resources, she knew that he would not long remain in the power of his captors, and, with Sophy, had kept constant watch, though pretending to sleep, as she leant over the fire. When the cry was heard, she rose and stirred together the expiring embers before her, so as to make a blaze for a minute or so. By this George was enabled, in the first place to know at once the spot he had to go to, and in the next, to perceive the exact positions of the women and Opara. Having done this, she again assumed her former position, complaining rather loudly at the noisy vermin of the bush that disturbed her. At the same time she grasped Sophy by the wrist, and with a significant gesture motioned towards the place whence the sound had come. Without precisely understanding her meaning, Sophy gathered from the conduct of her black friend that something in which she was concerned was afoot, and this had the effect of keeping her on the alert, although her own feelings at her disagreeable position prevented the possibility of sleep.

Allowing sufficient time to pass over to permit of the blacks getting again into sound sleep after the temporary disturbance of their rest by Eumerella, George stole onwards noiselessly and almost imperceptibly, now advancing on his hands and knees under shelter of a bush, now crawling along prone on the ground, until at last he reached the side of Sophy, who was sitting by the fire, her head supported by her hands, and these again resting on her knees, in anxious expectation of something, but what she knew not. With a motion that impressed upon her the necessity for silence, he took the shawl in which she was enveloped off her shoulders, and put it upon his own; then, pointing out the direction she was to go, he waved his hand as bidding her depart. When she rose, he took her place by the fire, and she had sense

enough to retreat in the same way that he had advanced, by keeping in the line of the shadow made by his body. Covering his head with the shawl as the girl had done, he sat silent and motionless, listening with intent anxiety to her somewhat laboured and noisy progress, and his eye fixed upon the sleeping savage near him. She had got some distance, when in the darkness she tripped over some of the dead timber that cumbered the ground, and fell. Her fall and the crash of the breaking timber made so much noise that Opara was at once awakened, and started to his feet. Sophy, however, had the good sense when she fell to lie perfectly quiet and motionless. Opara looked round, first to the spot where he had last seen his captive, and was reassured in that respect by the shawl-clad figure that sat there precisely as he had seen it on going to sleep; then he looked towards the sentry, and perceived him standing out from his camp fire, endeavouring to pierce through the darkness for an explanation of the noise he had heard. Satisfied in this quarter also, Opara exchanged a few words with the sentry, and the two expressed a mutual opinion that the noise had been caused by a dead bough falling from a tree. Opara again lay down, enveloped himself in his opossum rug, and in a few minutes was once more asleep. George sat quiet until the sentry had taken his distant turn, when, rising suddenly, with a few light steps he stood by the side of his sleeping foe. Then, bending down, with a firm grip he seized him by the throat, and in a harsh whisper exclaimed—"One word above your breath, and I'll strangle you as you lie!"

Opara opened his eyes, only to meet those of his deadly enemy bent down upon him in a way that there was no need of words to explain. The pressure on his throat, however, prevented his calling out; and he could only scowl back upon his foe as fiercely as his impeded respiration would permit.

"Listen, Opara," George hissed into the ear of the prostrate savage. "This morning I saved your life, and to-night you struck me down, but spared my life. We are therefore quits, and owe each other nothing on this day's score. But, to show how powerless you are in my hands, see how I take you by the throat in your own camp and in the midst of your warriors. The white gin your captive is away and safe, for it was I whom you saw seated at your camp fire. Your tribe, by my assistance, has been all but destroyed, and your time has nearly come. When the sun has risen fourteen times, you will have to pay with your life for the injury you did to me and mine twelve moons ago. Farewell till then. Attempt to follow me, and, though your life will be spared till the proper time comes, the lives of your comrades will be taken one after the other until you are left alone, to return without a warrior with you, utterly disgraced, to your tribe." All the time he spoke, he had kept just sufficient pressure on the throat of the black to prevent him from calling out; and now, having concluded, he gave an additional squeeze to the other's windpipe, and

then, relinquishing his hold, dashed away through the bush. It was some seconds before Opara could collect the senses that had been scattered by this semi-strangulation, but then he started staggering to his feet, and burning with rage at his discomfiture. One glance was sufficient to satisfy him that George had spoken the truth, and that Sophy was gone, and then, in the mad impulse of passion, he called loudly to his comrades to rise and arm themselves, and started off in the direction which he supposed George had taken. But the sound of the white's retreating footsteps was already lost in the distance, and before he had gone many yards, the uselessness of following the fugitive became manifest. So, sitting down by the fire, he passed the night in brooding over the ignominy he had suffered at the hands of the white, and in thinking over the best means of taking vengeance on his foe.

Chapter VIII The Traitor

SANDY and his companions, having lost all sign of the trail of those they pursued, returned to the spot where Jamie had turned off from the broad track. Here they found that the boy had here and there marked a tree, in order to guide them upon the path they had to follow. They had, however, gone farther than he had done, and at the same time they had not travelled so rapidly, so that they had not gone more than half the distance from the rocky gully to the camping-ground of the blacks before night surprised them, and they were compelled to camp. During the night, a scheme of treachery, that had been begotten during the day in the mind of Dick, was brought to full maturity, though as yet he saw not how the initiative step was to be taken. For this he had to trust to some lucky chance, and, as always happens to the rogue, the chance was soon offered him.

At daylight the next morning they again started on Jamie's track, but they had not gone more than a couple of miles, before Dick, who was the only one of the three who had any pretension to bush-craft, heard the sound of voices, and knew the voices to be those of blacks. Warning the others to keep silent and out of view, he advanced alone to reconnoitre. He had barely got beyond sight and hearing of his friends, than he came in view of Opara and his party. Dick concealed himself until the blacks had got within easy speaking distance, and then suddenly showing himself, and addressing them in their own language, he declared himself as a friend of the blacks and an enemy of the white men who were pursuing them. It was some time before he could induce them to believe that such was the case, but ultimately, after some parleying, the rogues seemed to recognise each other, and he and Opara entered into conversation.

"The white man says he is a friend of the blacks," observed Opara. "How is it that we see him armed and in company with those who seek our lives?"

Dick smiled as he answered, "I came with them to overthrow their arrangements, and even now I will, if the black wishes it, deliver my companions into his hand."

"Are those with him his enemies?" asked Opara.

"I hate them!" growled Dick; "but if I give you these, you must in return give me the white girl!"

Opara was rather posed at this. He expressed his regret that this could not be done, as the girl had been rescued last night out of his hands. He then narrated, of course in his own way, the escape of Sophy; and Dick almost foamed with rage as he heard, and in his heart cursed the ill watch that the blacks had kept, and the carelessness that had allowed the girl to get free. Putting as good a face on matters

as he could, he said, "Then we must take another course. The two whites with me must be made prisoners, but must not be injured—yet. They must be kept as a bait to lure the girl into your power, and I think I can manage it."

"And when in my power, she is to be given up to the white?" put in Opara.

Dick nodded acquiescence.

Opara seemed to muse, but after a time assented to the terms proposed. The two worthies in a very short period concocted a plan by which to arrive at the end they proposed. This settled, Dick returned to his companions to report progress, the blacks remaining until they received a signal to advance.

When Dick returned, he told his companions that he had come across a black named Opara, who belonged to a different tribe from those they were pursuing, but who knew the whereabouts of the band who had captured Sophy. Upon the pre-arranged signal being given, Opara emerged from his hiding-place, and, after much palaver and many promises of rum and tobacco, he agreed to pilot Sandy and the others to the camp of the marauders.

Taking over the ranges, Opara led the whites into a thick scrubby country. At one particular spot Opara halted about the middle of the day to rest and eat. Whilst they were taking some refreshment, two blacks suddenly threw themselves upon Tom, and the same number grappled with Sandy, and the whites, taken at a disadvantage, were soon overcome. Dick had withdrawn himself to a distance prior to the attack being made; for, traitor as he was, he did not desire that his companions should be witnesses of his treachery. The prisoners were soon bound, and were thus left under the guardianship of two of the men, whilst Opara and another went to consult with Dick.

"Are they secured?" asked Dick.

"The white man would make a great chief," replied Opara. "If he would join himself with the black men of the bush, his enemies would all fall down before him."

"It may come to that, perhaps," said Dick, "before very long; but at present I've a different game to play. What you have to do now is to keep them safe, and then, as soon as they are a bit reasonable, you must bring them up nearer to the mill. Be near at hand, to take advantage of anything that turns up."

"The white man is a very great chief, and his orders shall be obeyed. Opara is ready to seize upon the white girl and keep her for the great chief."

"Let us get her first," said Dick, "and we will settle ownership afterwards. Neither of us, to judge from your looks, are likely to quarrel about so paltry a thing as a girl." So saying, he left them; but Dick would not have gone away so contented or so hopeful for his scheme of villainy, had he seen the look of mingled malice and

revenge that appeared on the face of Opara as he raised his hand with a threatening gesture against his departing ally.

As Dick returned towards the mill, he weighed in his own mind the advantages that might be drawn to himself from this venture. Sandy and Tom disposed of, he might very well take possession of the mill. He could easily give it out that he had been directed to take charge until their return from searching after Sophy. But then Sophy—yes, that would interfere with his plan concerning her! Well, let the black keep her; she would never turn up then to denounce him. And George—he certainly knew too much, and might be dangerous; he must be handed over to the tender mercies of the blacks, who would be more than his match, now that they had fire-arms. Then—yes, then all would be made safe, and every evidence against him would be removed. This plan was much more feasible, and much more calculated to benefit him, than if he were to take Sophy for himself, and knock the black on the head, as he intended to do after that worthy had performed the same friendly office for Tom and the miller. Sophy might be troublesome, and it would be best to rid himself of her altogether by giving her up to the savages.

And Opara—what plan did he propose? He intended to use Dick in so far as he could be made useful to further his purpose of revenge upon the whites, and then he should share the same fate that he had plotted for the rest. He would dally no longer with the girl, but once in his power she should die.

And thus these two partners in crime schemed against each other, as well as against their proposed victims.

Chapter IX Retribution

JAMIE, having left his father and Sophie at the mill, started off at a rapid pace to cut the trail of Sandy and his companions. Making a shrewd guess from the position in which he had left them the preceding day that they would camp somewhere on the track upon which he had left them, he made for a point beyond that, in as straight a line as the features of the country would permit. He had gone about ten miles, when Blucher, who was scouting ahead as usual, suddenly stopped and pointed, thereby giving warning of the close proximity of the enemy, and, on coming up to him, Jamie perceived Opara and his three black followers, leading amongst them the miller and Tom, bound and captives. Some distance behind them the gins of the blacks straggled on, and last of all, lagging considerably in the rear of the others, came Eumerella. As she came in a line with the spot where the boy lay concealed, he gave a low signal, such as had been previously agreed upon between them to indicate his presence. Taken by surprise, the girl gave a start as she recognised the cry of her white friend, but, instantly recovering herself, she did not so much as turn her head towards the spot where she knew he was. She slackened her pace, however, and gradually dropped behind the others even more than she had done, whilst she edged off by degrees towards the scrub in which her ally had found cover. At last the rest of the party crossed a rise some distance ahead of her and were then out of sight. No sooner did she perceive this than she dived deeper into the scrub, and then halted till Jamie should join her. No great time was lost before he was by her side, and at once sought from her an explanation of the strange sight he had just seen. In as few words as possible she told him all that it was necessary for him to know, hurrying him on with her at the same time, so as not to fall too far behind the party. She made him acquainted with the treachery of Dick, with the foolish confidence of Sandy and Tom, and with the departure of Dick on his traitorous mission of endeavouring to allure Sophy into the toils of the savage. She concluded by pressing upon him the necessity of taking instant steps to release his friends, if he would save their lives.

“It'll be a ticklish job,” said Jamie; “but I'll try what can be done. But, I say, don't you think you could manage to give them a notion of what I'm doing?”

“Eumerella will do what she can, but she must be careful not to be too forward, and bring down suspicion upon herself. Opara has already looked doubtfully upon her.”

“I should have liked you to be handy, so as to cut their binders, and give them a chance when I have my go in; but I suppose I can't expect that, under the

circumstances,” he continued.

“All will depend on the chances Eumerella may have. She can promise nothing, but she will do her best.”

“Well, then, here's my knife,” he added; “use it to cut their bindings if you get the chance; and, if you don't, why, don't risk getting yourself into a row.”

She took the knife, and promised to make use of it if she got the opportunity, and hurried off to join her friends.

When Eumerella joined her party, she contrived, but with great caution, to give Sandy and Tom the information that something was about to be attempted on their behalf, and that they were expected to hold themselves in readiness to second any effort that might be made. Knowing that it would be useless to sever the bonds of the prisoners at that time, when Opara at any moment might take it into his head to examine the fastenings, she managed, unseen by the others, to slip into Tom's hand the open knife she had received from Jamie, cautioning him at the same time not to use it until the proper time. Tom had wit enough to perceive that time would be an object to whoever was about to rescue them; so, to gain this, he, and Sandy at his suggestion, complained of being weary, and walked at a slower pace, to the great annoyance of Opara and his followers, who did all in their power, even to using violence, to make them push on faster.

They at last reached a small creek that ran through a springy flat about sixty or eighty yards wide. The stream had cut out for itself a deep course through the rich alluvial soil of the flat, and was running down very heavily with the flood waters from the hills and gullies around. The flat itself was so boggy and wet as more to resemble a swamp or morass than anything else, and it was covered by a thick growth of long, tufty grass, whilst its edges were lined by clumps of low, close, scrubby undergrowth. In picking a road across the wet and spongy ground, the party necessarily straggled more than it had previously done; and, on reaching the muddy banks of the stream, they spread out even more than before, as each one searched about for a convenient crossing-place. One of the blacks found a narrow spot, and sprang across, but he had no sooner set his foot upon the opposite bank, than a shot was fired from a clump of bushes on the farther side of the clear ground, and he fell pierced with a bullet, to rise no more. Taken completely by surprise, the blacks stood for an instant undecided. They saw the puff of white smoke that curled up from the bushes whence the shot had been fired, but beyond that they could see nothing. They knew not what enemy they had to encounter, or what number of foes they had to meet. Opara was the first to recover himself, but he had barely time to speak a few words of encouragement to his two remaining followers, when there was again that report from the bush, again that small cloud of smoke, and then

another of his warriors fell by the deadly bullet of their unseen foe.

The instant the first shot was fired, Tom had cut loose the bonds by which Sandy was confined, and the miller soon did the same kind office for his man. When the second black fell, Tom knew it was time to make a push for it; so, telling Sandy to follow his example, he rushed upon Opara before the black was aware of the attack, and tumbled him over in true English style with a flash hit between the eyes. As the black was falling, Tom seized the gun he had been carrying previously with so much pride, and tore it out of his grasp. Sandy also ran up and took possession of the gun that had been held by the man who had first fallen, and, clubbing it, rushed upon the last remaining black. The savage stood his ground to await the attack, but Tom, seeing this, ran up to aid his master. The black, not fancying the odds against him, would not face the two whites, but at once took to his heels. It was evident that he would have distanced his pursuers, but he had not gone far before a shot was a third time fired from the clump of bushes, and the fugitive sprang into the air with a shriek, and fell dead upon the wet and boggy ground.

Their enemies now disposed of, Jamie showed himself from behind the bush, and came forward loading his gun. "We've done that well, anyhow!" he cried.

"Yes," replied Tom; "but we had better make sure of this one," and as he spoke he clubbed his musket and advanced upon Opara, with the intention of dashing out his brains.

"No, no!" said Jamie, running up and checking Tom. "He is not to be knocked over. That's the General's orders."

"Why, he's the leader, and the worst of the whole lot!" cried Tom, in astonishment at this sudden leniency of Jamie.

"No matter. It's the General's orders, and we must obey. Why, if you were to knock him over, the General would never forgive you."

"And for what?" asked Tom.

"Ask the General," responded Jamie tersely. "Look here! That's the fellow that gave me this cut here," and he showed his wounded head. "And don't you think that if he was to get a pill he wouldn't have been the first to take it just now? I've had him covered beautiful more than twenty times, and it's a'most made me wild, I can tell you, to let my gun down from the shoulder without pulling the trigger."

"Mightn't he still prove dangerous?" added Tom.

"No; I think we've pretty well drawn the teeth of the black snake. Besides," Jamie remarked, "you've given him a pretty tidy facer, and he don't seem at all to fancy it. But you mustn't do any more; and then, it's no great odds, neither, for he ain't got very much longer to run."

"Ech, Jamie, lad, remember yon's the scheming villain that beguiled us to our

destruction,” now put in Sandy, “an' it wud be a tempting o' Providence to let him gae scot free. D'ye ken, it's my belief he's murdered puir Dick.”

“Poor Dick, indeed!” sneered Jamie. “Poor Dick knows precious well how to take care of himself, I can tell you. Why, it's him you've to thank for all this. It's him that sold you.”

Both Sandy and Tom expressed surprise at this, and wished to know how Jamie had gained this information. Jamie, however, replied, “I'll tell you as we go along. We mustn't stop yarning here, and poor Sophy breaking her heart about the pair of you. And all because poor Dick, as you call him, has by this time carried her the news of your being taken by the blacks, with some little eloquent additions of his own.” And he moved off as he spoke.

“What!” they both exclaimed. “Is Sophy safe?”

“Yes, as safe and sound as you are,” he answered. “Me and the General took her home this morning, and they sent me back to bring you home again, and she'll be fretting her heart out at your absence. So come, hurry on, and I'll tell you all as we go along, if you'll only move quicker.”

The thought of poor Sophy anxiously awaiting them gave them renewed vigour, and they pressed on with hurried steps, Jamie detailing, as they went on, such of the circumstances that had taken place as had not come under their knowledge. Thus it happened that soon after nightfall Sophy and Sandy were clasped in each other's arms, and a general feeling of thankfulness pervaded the mill.

When the whites had retired, Opara, making a violent effort, rose to his feet, and though for a time he staggered like a drunken man, he started off for the spot where he had to meet his companion in villainy, making no reply to Eumerella's remarks, and seemingly unconscious of her presence.

Hurrying along at a speed that soon left Eumerella far behind, Opara reached the spot just as the last rays of the setting sun were gilding the tree-tops of the ranges with golden light. Here he found Dick comfortably seated at the foot of a tree awaiting his arrival. The news that his companion brought was in no way calculated to soothe the irritation under which he already laboured. Dick told him that there was no chance of inducing the girl to come within his reach, that, as far as this was concerned, their project must be abandoned, and some other plan must be hit upon if they wished to gain their ends. Opara, in answer to this, gave only a stifled guttural grunt that might mean anything, and Dick concluded, “You needn't keep your white prisoners any longer. If I were you, I should make short work of them, and at once, too!”

Opara, with this the last hope of vengeance taken from him, stood before the other fairly quivering with a rage, that, by a wonderful effort of self-command, he

managed to conceal. When he spoke, however, his voice was hoarse and trembled slightly. "The white man is very cunning. He gave the whites into the hands of their enemies to make them the victims of his own evil thoughts, and not because he is a friend to the blacks. Does the white man know that his foes have escaped?"

"Escaped! What do you mean?" roared Dick.

"The two whites who were placed in the hands of Opara have been set free, and three of Opara's best warriors are lying dead upon the spot where the whites were rescued," said Opara.

"Come, come! None of your gammon with me," Dick went on. "You would never have allowed them to be taken out of your hands in that way, and, besides, there's no one that can do it, for I left George at the mill."

"Opara says again that they are gone," asserted the black.

"Then, you black thief, you've sold me!" yelled Dick, seizing the other by the throat.

Opara gave a twist like an eel, and in an instant he was out of Dick's grasp; then, with an ominous smile, more threatening than the fiercest frown would be, he said—"Sold *you*, and what for? No; Opara is too eager to shed the blood of the whites to let any one escape him. They have taken away our hunting-grounds, destroyed our forests, driven off the animals that provided us with food. They have slaughtered our warriors in the bush, or made them as helpless gins with their burning water in the settlements. They have debauched our women, and made our children a useless mongrel breed unworthy to tread in the footsteps of their fathers! Should Opara spare them, then? No! He never spared a white but once, and never will he spare one again; so let the cunning white beware; Opara will not bear the hand of a white upon his throat."

"Well, well, I was perhaps too quick-tempered, old man; so don't get in a scot over it! But come now, what is to be done?"

"The white is very cunning," said Opara. "Can he suggest no plan?"

"They have no idea," Dick went on, "of the part I have taken in this little play, so I think it will be best for me to return and see how the land lays. It won't be difficult when we discover this to pitch upon something that will secure our ends. Are there any of your tribe still handy, or have they all cut and run?"

"Opara is now the only one of his tribe," replied the savage, "on the hunting-grounds of his enemies; but he is himself quite sufficient for all that his cunning tells him to do."

"And what does your cunning suggest to you in this fix?" asked Dick.

"It tells him to let the white man return to the mill, and wait patiently for the plan that his comrade shall propose. The white man shall be the head and Opara shall be

the hand, so long as it is white blood that has to be shed.”

“So be it, then. I shall come back again to-morrow night, and by that time I shall have hit upon something.” So saying he turned from the black to retrace his steps to the mill; but he had barely moved when he received a heavy stunning blow on the back of the head from the ironbark waddy of Opara. He staggered, and would have fallen but for a violent effort he made to restrain himself and to collect his scattered senses. Mustering all his strength, he closed and grappled with Opara, and then, that exertion made, his nerves, which had answered to the sudden demand upon them only for an instant, gave way. His grasp relaxed, his senses reeled, and Opara, with a savage laugh, held him out with one hand, whilst with the other he struck him a second blow, and felled the traitor to the earth. Blow succeeded blow, until there was neither life nor motion in the mangled carcase. Hastily possessing himself of everything upon Dick's person that he thought worth removing, Opara, now for the first time remembering his gin, called to Eumerella, who had come only in time to see the final scene of the tragedy. Making a bundle of the articles he had selected, he handed it to the girl to carry. Then, addressing her, he said, “This is the first of the accursed race that Opara has sacrificed to the vows he this evening made. From this time forth, every white that comes across Opara's path shall perish by his hand!”

The family at the mill did not retire that night until a full explanation had been given of all that had occurred to its different members since they had been separated. Dick's villainy in connection with the dollars was fully manifested by Sophy's discovery of his plant; whilst Jamie, who had already narrated to Sandy and Tom the part that Dick had taken in their capture, again related these events, as he had heard them from Eumerella, for the information of his father and Sophy.

On the following morning, finding that Dick had not returned, George and Jamie, accompanied by the dog, went to the well-known camping-ground to reconnoitre. They soon ascertained that further search for Dick would be unnecessary, for they found his mutilated body lying stiff and cold upon the grass. Jamie was sent back to the mill with intelligence of the discovery, and there arrangements were at once made by which, without loss of time, the body was interred, almost upon the spot where the murder had been committed.

Having thus seen everything set upon a straight-forward footing at the mill, George began to make his preparations for once more taking to the bush to watch the trail of the black. Sandy and Tom pressed him very hard to wait for another week, if only to be present at the wedding which he had been so instrumental in bringing about; for it need hardly be said that, after all that had occurred, Sandy had willingly given his consent to the marriage of his daughter and Tom. On being

much urged by Sophy to delay his departure, he answered—“No, I cannot. I wish you all well, and, were my time at my own disposal, I would willingly stop and see consummated the happiness you have so well deserved. But I have a solemn duty to perform that cannot be delayed. The time left me is now but short, and neither marryings nor givings in marriage must keep me. That duty once performed, we may perhaps meet each other again. Perhaps, however, we may not, for it is just as things may chance to turn, and there's no knowing the direction in which my task of duty may take me.”

Thus, then, with the expression of hearty good wishes on both sides, they parted, and George, with Jamie and the Marshal, dived into the forest in search of the track of Opara, leaving the miller and his daughter, with her promised husband, to make such preparations as they needed for the approaching nuptials.

As George had truly augured, it was many a long month before they all met again.

Chapter X The First Black Hand

AFTER Opara had clubbed the traitor Dick to death, he and Eumerella at once started to put as many miles as possible between them and the mill, fearing lest the whites might seek to avenge the death. Feeling himself discredited in the eyes of his own tribe by reason of his successive failures, and unwilling to undergo the ordeal of spears if he returned, he took counsel with Eumerella, whose strength of character had frequently impressed him. She, seeing an opportunity of luring him into the toils, proposed that he should offer his services to the men of her own tribe, at the same time assuring him that the warriors of Port Stephens would receive him gladly for her sake, and probably, in time, make him a great chief. So pleasing a prospect did she picture, that he at length decided to accompany her, and they forthwith set out on their journey towards the Port Stephens country.

Before leaving their last camping-place, Eumerella succeeded in leaving such signs as indicated to her white confederates the route they had taken, well knowing that George was ever on Opara's trail, and that the anniversary of the murder of his family was now close at hand.

Twelve days after the events at the mill, George and Jamie struck the hot trail, and, finding the message left by Eumerella, made all haste to overtake the fugitives.

Eumerella knew, from signals that were from time to time given during the course of the day, that her white allies were at no great distance, and, when she camped with Opara in the evening, she took an opportunity, before finally settling down for the night, to communicate with Jamie, who stole for the purpose as near to her camp as he dared venture, without alarming the suspicious chieftain. From her he learnt the route that she intended to pursue on the morrow, and more especially the points at which she purposed to cross the many creeks that now intervened so frequently on the path.

On the following morning they again pursued their way along the margin of a brush much heavier than any they had yet encountered, and Eumerella pointed out to the chief the smoke on the distant sand-hills, which she said arose from the camp fires of her brethren. Before long, however, they came upon a creek or inlet from the lake much broader than usual, and Eumerella, who had already magnified the dangers of the salt water by telling of the sharks and stinger-rays and other fish invented for the occasion, led the way into the heavy timber for the purpose of reaching a crossing-place, the only one, she said, within a considerable distance of the route they had to take.

This crossing-place was a spot where two trees had fallen upon opposite sides of

the creek, and, by interlocking their branches in the centre, had formed a natural bridge over the stream, which was here about fifty yards wide. There was a kind of rough track through the heavy timber, the underwood having been partially broken down, showing that it had been often used, and that the crossing place was well known. A few hundred yards brought him to the bridge, and he at once saw that the track led across it. Mounting on to the huge prostrate butt, which as it lay was somewhere about eight feet high, he proceeded to cross, and had already reached the centre of the stream, where the boughs of the two trees interlaced with each other, when he was brought to a halt by the appearance of George, who, starting from the bush on the other side, leaped upon the log, and, with his gun presented, confronted his foe. Without an instant's hesitation, Opara turned to seek safety by retreating on the road by which he had advanced; but Jamie, covering the black with his gun, had cut off all chance of escape in that direction. Opara cast a hasty look before and behind him, determined to trust to the tender mercies of the monsters Eumerella had spoken of, rather than to those of the grey-beard; but the many heavy boughs were so mingled together that a leap through them into the water was an impossibility. He saw that if the shot was to come he could not avoid it, for it would be a work of time to make his way through those twisted and interwoven limbs down to the water. And so he turned and faced his enemy with a kind of sullen, though savage, resignation.

“And now,” said George, “I have you at bay, and your time has come. Don't look down at the water, for the first move you make in that direction will be the signal for sending a bullet through you. I have you. I promised, and I shall keep my promise. You shall die, and I'll take care that your fellows in crime shall know how and where you have fallen—that your blood was shed by the man that you and they injured, and that your body went to feed the fishes of the salt waters.”

Opara stopped to hear no more. He had been measuring the distance in front of him as George was speaking, and with a powerful spring he made a tremendous leap to clear the enormous limbs of the two trees that stretched out for many feet before him. How far he might have succeeded, had he been left alone, could not be guessed, for the instant he took his spring, and whilst his body was still in the air, George fired. The bullet was truly aimed, and the black, pierced through the breast, fell into the midst of the branches, upon one of which that stood upright, and was partially broken by his weight, he was staked and held. No sooner had he fallen, than Jamie ran along the trunk of the tree on which he was standing, and then, scrambling out amongst the boughs in the middle of which Opara had fallen, he reached the place where the black was staked on the bough, mortally wounded, but still sensible. The boy had left his gun behind him, and carried only his tomahawk.

Seizing the right arm of the black, he drew it over one of the larger boughs within reach, and, with a smart blow of the tomahawk, severed the hand at the wrist.

Eumerella also advanced along the log until she stood opposite the dying black. As his eyes met hers, she laughed savagely. "Yes," she cried, "look at me. Look at your evil spirit. I swore to be revenged upon you and your cursed race of bandicoots, and I have kept my oath. And now, oh blind warrior, carry with you into the dark land the knowledge that it was I who threw down the mill dam and swept away your fighting men—it was I who gave information to the whites by which the white gin was taken from you—it was I who planned the rescue of your two white prisoners—it was I who cajoled you into being a traitor to your tribe, only to lead you here to meet your death! Know that it is to the young gin of Port Stephens that you owe your ruin and your death!"

Opara, with a groan of mingled anguish and rage, made a convulsive effort to free himself and reach the girl. His powerful contortions broke off the already partially-separated bough that had held him, and his body, no longer retained, dropped between the larger limbs of the trees and fell into the water. It sank at once, and was not seen to rise. A few bubbles struggling to the surface showed where he had gone down, but Opara was seen no more, nor was his name ever again mentioned in his tribe after the information of his death had been conveyed to it as George had promised.

The next morning, had a casual traveller passed by accident near that lonely grave at the deserted station, he would have been surprised to find nailed to the rude cross that formed its headpiece, a black right hand yet dripping blood, and showing that it had but recently been severed from the living body to which it had belonged.

END OF BOOK TWO.

Book Three—The Second Black Hand

Chapter I The Sawyer's Home

ON the banks of the Williams River, in the midst of what can only be described as a chaotic confusion of boughs and tree-tops, a small hut had been erected. It consisted of two rooms only, and had been built of the outside slabs from the sawpit, and roofed with bark. The timber of which it was constructed having been cut with the saw, there was a certain squareness and regularity about it, that gave it an air of neatness and finish not usually seen in such places.

Black Harry, the sawyer, was well known upon the Coal River. He had been working for the last five or six years in this and the neighbouring brushes, and, being a steady man and a good workman, had always found constant employment—that is, whenever he was provided with a mate to work with him. The prices obtained for sawing were very high, and the men employed in it made a great deal of money; thus it followed, as a consequence of the times, that Harry's mates insisted upon a spree whenever a settlement for work was made. These settlements brought them usually forty or fifty pounds a man, and until this was knocked down there was no work done. All this did not agree with Harry's arrangements. He was not only a good workman, but a steady man, never drinking strong liquors. Thus it happened that Harry, not being inclined to remain idle whilst his mate amused himself, had always, after every settlement, to look out for another man to work with him. He was an American-born negro, of powerful build and almost gigantic stature, standing some six feet four inches in height. He had been picked up at sea, on the bottom of a whaleboat, and almost exhausted, having been in the water six days. His strong constitution and powerful frame, aided by the skill of the doctor of the convict ship upon which he was taken on board, brought him through what appeared at first to be a hopeless case. His vessel, the Swordfish, an American whaling barque, had gone down one night suddenly, from no assignable cause in so far as Henry knew, for he was sleeping in one of the boats at the time. Roused up from his slumber by the plunge into the waves, he had seized almost instinctively upon an oar beside him, and thus became the sole survivor of forty-five men, the complement of hands on board at the time. The oar once more brought him to the surface, and after a time he discovered one of the ship's boats floating bottom upwards at no great distance from him. Striking out for this, he reached it, but, notwithstanding all his exertions, he was unable to right her; so, scrambling on to the bottom, he there remained until he was discovered by the vessel that picked him up, and which, luckily for him, had got somewhat out of her course. He was thus brought on to Sydney, and, having some knowledge of lumbering in his own native

State, he turned his attention at once in that direction upon his arrival, naked and penniless, in the new land. Being apt at learning, like most of his countrymen, he very soon picked up all the art and mystery connected with sawing, and soon after this set up in business for himself.

Harry was so well known for a good and steady mate, that he had never long to wait for an assistant when the retiring one had made up his mind for the inevitable spree. Of course, in the frequent change of mates, Harry picked up a good many queer customers. He had, however, so much knowledge of character as to save him from ever getting hold of a lazy one. As regarded anything else, he was utterly heedless, for he was well able to take care of himself. His gigantic build and immense strength made it a very simple matter with him to deal with any cantankerous customer that he happened to get hold of, and, as he stood no nonsense, but gave his mates clearly to understand that his word was law, and that all disputes were to be settled promptly there and then by an appeal to the arms that nature had given, he generally managed to get along smoothly with his fellows, who all seemed to have a wholesome dread of his prowess.

His mate at the present time was a tall, thin, wiry individual, only an inch or two shorter than himself. Though he had not the powerful build and the gigantic frame of the negro, yet he was by no means wanting in strength, for his muscles stood out like bars of iron upon his limbs when they were brought into play. He was a much more powerful man than he appeared to be at first sight, his sparseness being attributable only to the absence of all superabundant flesh. His face, with its deep-set indentations, had a hard, crabbed look, the hollows being not very much unlike the deep furrows on the outside of the ironbark tree. It was probably from this resemblance that he had received his name of Ironbark Jack, the only one by which he was known. Jack was a free man, although, as he himself boasted, he had "served his time like a man" to the Government. He was of a somewhat taciturn disposition, and his tongue, being nearly as ironbark as his face, did not wag very freely. When he did speak, his meaning was always conveyed in as few words as possible, and conveyed, too, in a bluff, honest kind of way that tended to impress one favourably towards him, and to lead one to believe that he was a man more sinned against than sinning. He was always cool and collected under all possible circumstances, and was never known to get excited, still less out of temper. He had been the only mate that Harry had ever had three months together without coming to blows with him. There had been one or two rows between them; but, whilst Harry had got into a towering passion, Jack had kept so cool that the coals of opposition being wanting to feed the fire of the negro's wrath, it had gradually burnt out, and matters had been made up without the usual appeal to blows. All the more readily, perhaps, that Harry

knew his mate's strength, was aware that he was not afraid of him, and respected him all the more on this account.

Such were the men who were associated together in the lonely cedar brush, far away from all their fellows.

Ten months had elapsed since the events recorded in our last book had occurred. The month of April had but just commenced, and the sun was warm and the weather fine, although the days were beginning to shorten rapidly. The shades of evening were already gathering in the sky when the two mates approached the hut. The evening meal was prepared and disposed of, and then the two men lit their pipes, and sat down to indulge in a yarn.

"I rather calkilate upon gwain home when we've done out our six months' work," said Harry.

"Going home! Where?" cried Jack in astonishment.

"Why, to the U—nited States, to be sure. To the old Bay State whar' I was reared, an' whar' I've an ole mother as loves me, though I am a man o' colour. I've been years away now, an' yet I think upon that ole woman, my mother, with thoughts just as fresh as they war' the day I left. Besides, it's the only place for a man to live in. Ain't noways such a miserable hole as this hyar, though a feller can make money hyar, that is a fact."

"Just as well work here as there, then, and better," Jack suggested.

"Thar's better pay hyar, that's fact; but there ain't the comfort, and money don't go so far. I calkilate that, with what I take with me, I can work to more advantage thar' than hyar," answered Harry.

"Ah, I see!" said Jack. "You've made your mouth up. Got a well-filled stocking, I suppose?"

"Waal," replied the negro, "by the time we've worked out our agreement, I reckon I shall have enough to set me up fust-rate in the old State."

"I recollect now," said Jack, who had been tempted into talking more than his mate had ever before known him to do by the interesting subject that had accidentally come under consideration. "You was always a steady-going cove, never spending nothink. Now, I suppose you've been saving up ever since you came into this bush?"

"Say ever since I've been in the country, and you'll be right, Jack," answered Harry. "From the first day I landed hyar I never spent a penny more than I could help; and what's more I never threw any away upon drink."

Harry gave a self-complacent chuckle. "I'm down to that kinder work. I've seen it done afore, and they don't serve me that way, I can tell you. I trust nobody with my money but myself." Jack's eyes glared, and he listened almost breathlessly to what

the darky was now saying. "I keep it myself, and then I know it's safe."

"Tain't always safe to have money with yer, when there's nothing else but prigs, and buzzmen, and cracksmen, and toby men round about you," and Jack, whilst he put on an air of unconcern, awaited the reply with special interest.

"D'ye see this hyar?" and Harry turned up the sleeve of his blue serge shirt, and exposed to view a black and brawny arm, with a large fist attached, powerful enough to knock down a bullock. "Where's the prig that'll bring his head in reach o' that? Where's the cracksmen that'll take a crack from this hyar plaything?"

Jack looked very coolly at it; then, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, said, in a tone of unconcern, "It's a good arm, there's no saying against that; but, lor, a pistol bullet fired by a kid would take all the stiffening out of the muscles in no time."

Harry darted a keen, suspicious look at the other; then, knitting his brows and speaking more ill-temperedly than he had yet done, he replied, "Even then, they'd be no nigher to my savings, for they'd have to find my plant, an' they'd have to be reglar teasers to do that, let me tell you. So that you see, matey, it ain't worth no man's while to rub me out, seeing as they can't make sure of any cash. Thar' now!"

"That's sensible," responded Jack, who had obtained all the information he was likely to get. "So long as you can keep your plant dark, you're right. But keep your weather eye open, Harry, for there's no end of buzz coves about, that'd skin you as close as an eel." So saying, and to avoid further conversation, seeing that the negro was getting fretful and uneasy, he stretched himself out at full length upon the bench or form upon which he had been previously reclining, and though Harry addressed several further remarks to him, he made no answer. The negro continued walking up and down the hut, talking partly to himself, partly to his mate, until at last he had to all appearance talked his mate fast asleep.

At last there came upon him a longing desire, that he found it impossible to overcome or conquer, to visit his hoard, and satisfy himself that it was safe. His mate seemed to be asleep. The negro listened, but, unsatisfied, he lifted the grease-pot from the table, and flashed its flaring, garish light across the eyes of his mate. There was not the slightest movement in the eyelids of the sleeping man. Once again he did the same thing, calling out, "Come, Jack, turn in, I'm off to roost!" The only answer was a sleepy growl, and the man made a slight move, and then composed himself to sleep more steadily than before. Harry stood and watched him for a few minutes, and was then apparently satisfied, from the deep, regular breathing of the other, that he was fast asleep. He put down the fat-pot, opened the door of the hut, and went out. For a few minutes he walked backwards and forwards in front of the hut, stopping now and again suddenly, and listening intently. All was still and quiet, and no sound reached his ear but that of the long, steady breathing of

his mate. He now moved further from the hut, and then went through the same ceremony of walking and listening, and at last, as if he had made up his mind that all was safe, he moved off quickly, though as quietly as was possible, into the forest.

Harry had heard the regular breathing of his mate, but he had not seen the pair of eyes that were noiselessly watching him, and following his every movement. In the slight alteration of position that Jack had made, when he had been supposed to be composing himself more comfortably to sleep, he had so placed himself that without moving he could see out of the open door of the hut. When the negro had moved further off, Jack had raised himself on his elbow sufficiently to allow him to listen as well as see, though in so doing he did not for an instant cease the regular respirations that had been so instrumental in deceiving his mate. When at last Harry moved off, Jack rose to his feet, looked out after the negro, and exclaimed to himself in a suppressed voice, "I knew it! I knew I should set him off at it! Now then, Jack, here's the best chance ever you had!" As he spoke, he glided out of the hut with a cautious, stealthy step, guided in his progress by the sound of the retreating footsteps of the negro.

Macomo and Atare, with six more warriors, were out on a plundering expedition similar to the one that had brought all their misfortunes upon them. Here, however, there were neither women nor children, nor would blood be shed, for, with the tribe reduced as it was to the seven braves who accompanied him, they could not afford to risk a contest. Macomo knew of the hut of the sawyer, Black Harry — knew, too, that this man, having lived here between two and three years, had gradually gathered many comforts round him, collecting plunder that was by no means to be despised. They had gathered information enough of the habits of the occupants to be aware that they would be absent during the whole day, and that the hut might be plundered, and the plunderers be many miles away, before the return of the sawyers from their work.

At the same time as the party of blacks were thus making plans, George and his son were encamped at a distance of not much more than a mile away. The tribe over whom they had exercised so strict a surveillance, having now dwindled down to the handful of fighting men that we have just left, the task of George had been made a comparatively easy one. Both George and Jamie had been fairly perplexed at the move the tribe were now making. They had watched and spied about, often running into danger by their visits to the native camps, but as yet they had been able to discover, either by word or sign, nothing of the intentions of the blacks.

In the morning they were out and abroad early, and posted themselves in such a way that they could see the direction taken by the blacks when they made their start.

Following them throughout the day, towards evening they became aware, from the route now taken, that the blacks were making for the cedar brush on the Williams. Once assured of this, the two scouts had nothing for it than to follow patiently on the track of the blacks, keeping as close to them as was possible, consistent with remaining undiscovered, trusting that, by the time the natives camped at night, some more definite clue to their ultimate intentions might be gained.

Chapter II The Murder Of Black Harry

WHEN Harry left his hut, he pushed his way with a rapid pace through the bush, over a path that seemed to be well known to him. At the distance of rather more than half a mile from the hut, he stopped at the foot of a huge tree, of which one of the lower limbs had been torn off by the wind or by a lightning stroke. In falling, the thick end of the limb had lodged in a lower fork, and there hung, whilst the outer end had reached the ground, causing the vast limb, as large in circumference as many of the ordinary bush trees, to recline at an angle sufficiently obtuse to allow of its being easily mounted by the many minor branches that shot out from it. Up this Harry now climbed for three-fourths of its length, and until he had reached a large hollow on what was now its upper surface. Putting his hand into this hollow, he drew forth a tin box about a foot square. It did not seem to be locked, for he opened it at once and looked in. That one look seemed to be sufficient. He gave a deep sigh of relief, and muttered to himself, "Waal, they ain't touched it yet, that's clear; an' I'll take care they sha'n't have it now; for it don't go back thar' nohow. I won't leave it here to make a ole woman of me no longer. I'll try a new plant, and next Saturday I'll take it off to the settlement and put it in the Major's hands." Even as he was speaking he descended the limb, bringing with him the box, which appeared to be heavy, notwithstanding its small size. He now stood for a moment, apparently weighing in his mind what to do next. But he did not stop long considering, for a smile suddenly lighted up his face as he exclaimed. "Yes, that will do! The very place!" He then struck off into what appeared to have at one time been a regular track, and, following this down for another half-mile, he came to an old sawpit, long since out of use. Into this he jumped, and, carefully removing from one corner the dry leaves that had accumulated in it, he made a hole large enough to hold the box, which he placed in it. He next covered this with the old and now decayed sawdust, and topped all up carefully with the dried leaves that he had previously removed and set aside with so much care. Having done this, he looked down with an eye of satisfaction at his work. "Thar'," said he; "if they knew of the old plant, they don't know of this; an' they'll be pretty considerable smart, I reckon, to find out that cache!" Considerably relieved, he now started off along the old footpath that had been worn by the frequent passages to and from the hut when the now-deserted pit had been in use.

Jack had followed closely, yet cautiously, upon the heels of his mate, and though he had not got near enough to see all that had occurred, he had still learnt sufficient to give him a good idea of what had taken place. When he saw the negro, with the

box under his arm, taking along the track to the old saw-pit, he at once gave a shrewd guess at what Harry was about to do; and, when at last he sprang into it and remained there some time, Jack was satisfied that the plant had been shifted, and that the money was being deposited in the old pit. Having stayed long enough to assure himself that his mate had not changed his mind, he turned towards the hut, and as speedily as he could made his way back to it. But quick as he was and hurriedly as he had proceeded, Black Harry, who was better acquainted than his mate with the bush in the immediate vicinity of his home, was very close upon his heels, so that as Jack entered the door he heard the footsteps of his mate crashing over the dead boughs that lay about the clearing. The dog, too, who had never been friendly with him, and would not become friendly, do all he would, gave, as usual, a low growl at him as he passed. He at once threw himself down upon the form on which he had previously reclined, and assumed as near as he could the same attitude as that in which Harry had left him; but the excitement he had undergone, and the hurried progress he had been compelled to make to reach the hut before his mate, had quickened, not only his pulse, but his respiration, and he found that he was altogether unable to assume that deep, heavy, regular breathing that had been so efficacious in deceiving the negro.

Harry, however, had heard the growl of the dog, and knew that was the way the animal had of expressing his invincible dislike to Jack, being the usual salutation to his mate on entering or leaving the hut. This, then, was sufficient to arouse his suspicion. Had Jack come out, or had he gone in? Harry asked himself. If he had come out, he would be outside, but if he had gone in, and then pretended to be asleep, he had been acting the spy. If he had been watched, and watched, too, by so cool and determined a villain as he knew his mate to be, then there was danger, and the man must be looked to at once. Filled with rage and alarm, he hurried up to the hut. The door was open as he had left it, and there was his mate lying sleeping, to all appearance, as soundly as when he had left. Harry smiled bitterly as he noted this. He strode up to the pretended sleeper, and, putting his ear down to the other's head, at once detected the short, quick breathing that hurried exertion invariably causes. He went to the table, seized the grease-pot, which still stood burning, and, bringing it forward, held it to his mate's face. Jack, by a powerful exertion of will, prevented the movement of even a muscle, although he knew that he was suspected, and that probably the powerful hand of Harry would at the next moment be upon his throat.

For several seconds Harry stood thus looking upon his mate. At last he gave a savage laugh as he cried—"It won't do, Jack! You play 'possum pretty well, but not well enough for an old lumberer. You can't come it right whilst you puff and blow like that—more like a grampus in shoal water than a man asleep. Get up; you an' me

must have it out now.”

Jack, thus addressed, could not avoid changing colour, as something like a fear of the consequences stole over him with a sickening feeling. He turned deadly pale, although he moved not.

The negro saw this, and knew its meaning. “Oh, that's it, is it?” he roared out. “You sneaking skunk! You've had thoughts of mischief, have you? You know what you deserve at my hands, an' what you'll get!” He took two strides to the table, laid the lighted greasepot upon it, and again turned to approach his mate, when Jack, perceiving that it was now time to take care of himself, for the moment of real danger had arrived, sprang to his feet and looked round with a well-assumed air of bewilderment, as if suddenly awakened out of a deep sleep.

“Hallo!” he cried. “Now then, matey, what's up? Is the hut afire?”

“What's up, you everlastinly darned sneaking catamount!” replied the other in a voice hoarse with rage. “It's you have been up! You've been a-playin' the spy on me, have yer? You've discovered my secret, have yer? It ain't going to do you no good, though!”

“Your secret! What secret?” asked Jack, in his most bluff and honest manner.

“What secret!” bellowed out the negro. “Well, now, ain't you innocent! I suppose you'll say that you didn't follow me just now.”

“Foller you! Certainly I didn't!” replied Jack, who was now fast regaining his ordinary coolness, disturbed for a time by the suddenness with which all this had come upon him.

“Then, I suppose, the dog growled because he dreamt you were going in just now? Weren't that it?” asked Harry.

“What have I got to do with his growling? I suppose he growled because he heard me move in the hut, as he always does—the useless varment!” answered Jack.

“He's an honest dog; an' if you was as honest a man as he is a dog, you'd do, you would. He growled as he always does when you come into the hut, an' you know it!”

Jack shook his head. “You're wrong. I ain't been outside the hut this blessed night.”

“Waal, when a man's a liar he oughter be a good one, and stick to it; an' you are about the most everlastin' confusened liar as ever I come across. Why, what were you pantin' and puffin' at when you gammoned to be asleep, if it wasn't at the hurry you'd been obliged to make to get in afore me?”

“Didn't know I was puffing,” said Jack. “Must have been something I was dreaming on. Don't recollect!”

“Dreamin'? Yes, dreamin' with your eyes open,” cried the other. “An' walkin' in

the bush in yer sleep, quite wide awake! Why, look thar'—thar's the dew on yer boots now.” Jack glanced down at the telltale moisture that had damped the front part of his boots, and as he did so he felt that now it must come to a struggle for life between him and his mate. “Ah!” continued the negro. “You can say nothing to that! You know my secret, an' I'll take care you sha'n't live to benefit by it.” And, as he spoke, he rushed to one corner of the hut, where the tools were lying in a heap, and, seizing upon a heavy axe, turned towards his mate.

Jack made no movement, but there was a flashing light in the eyes that he fixed steadily upon his mate, as he called out, “'Ware hawk, matey! You don't know me yet. My monkey ain't easy got up, but when it is I'm dangerous.”

“I'll soon knock the danger out of you! There ain't much danger in a dead man!”

Harry raised the axe and advanced towards him, whilst Jack, with the exception of thrusting his hand into his bosom, remained motionless, his eyes, glittering like steel, still fixed unflinchingly upon the negro.

Somewhat staggered by the attitude of immobility that his mate had assumed, Harry halted when almost within reach of his offending mate. “Look here!” he said slowly, and between his teeth, “I'm just about going to rub you out—that's what I'm going to do. But I won't knock you on the head like a dog without givin' yer a chance. Get hold o' somethin' an' defend yourself like a man!”

“I've no reason to defend myself!” replied Jack, still with his eyes fixed on the black. “I ain't done nothing!”

“You lie!” shouted Harry. “You've watched me off, an' you've discovered my plant.”

“Your plant!” and again Jack put on his air of extreme innocence. “Oh, then, it ain't far away. That's something to know!”

“It's somethin' you sha'n't live to talk about,” and Harry spoke with a tone of determination, as if he had made up his mind how to proceed. “There,” he cried, as he threw away the axe. “I'll meet you fair, hand to hand; an' if I don't put you past talking, you may have my swag, and welcome.” As he ceased, he made one spring towards Jack; but his mate was not so ill-protected as he had thought him to be, for before Harry reached him, he drew his hand forth from his breast, where he had continued to keep it, and with it brought out a pistol, which he presented at the negro.

“You see,” he said, “I wasn't so helpless as you thought. I told you I was dangerous, and so I am when I'm put to it. Why, if I'd been as peppery as you, you'd have been a dead man ten minutes ago.”

Harry answered with a wild exclamation of rage.

“Look here, matey,” Jack went on, “do you think, if I knew your plant, and

wanted your swag, I wouldn't have taken the chance you gave me just now?"

Beside himself with passion, the negro's countenance assumed a pallid hue, which is not describable by any known colour. "Oh, that's it, is it?" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Now then, I know you!" He turned, and once more possessed himself of the axe. "Fire, darn yer, fire!" he cried out; "an' be sure you don't miss, for, by Jehosephat, if you do, here's a popgun won't miss fire!"

So saying, he was about to launch himself upon his mate, when the door was dashed open violently, and George, who had heard outside the angry voice of the negro, rushed into the hut and threw himself between the men. He had already heard enough to tell him that a serious quarrel was going on; and now the fierce countenances of the men—the axe in the hands of one and the pistol in the clutch of the other—showed him that he had not come one minute too soon.

Being well known to Black Harry, and having considerable influence over him, George at length succeeded in patching up the quarrel, and then informed the sawyers of the intended attack upon their hut by the men of the Maroo tribe. But Harry was in no mood to be alarmed by the information, and treated the whole affair lightly.

"You will do as you like," George said, "but certainly the wiser course will be to clear out, and let the blacks have a trifle of flour and an old blanket or two. If you do this, the chance is you won't be troubled again, because they'll be sure to spread the report of your poverty amongst the tribe, and you won't be disturbed again for some time."

"That's right enough, George," said the other; "but then you see this coon don't choose to clear out of his nest for any such miserable varmints as them natives, an' he won't, neether. Why, I wouldn't do it for a real right-down band of Mohawks, and them's Injuns that can fight a few, I reckon."

"Well, Harry," responded George, "you know I never give unsound advice, and, if you are wise, you will do as I recommend."

"Thank you all the same. I know you mean well; but it ain't in me to run away from such critturs as them blacks."

"Then I'll say no more. And now I'll say goodnight," for George felt that further persuasion was useless.

"Why, you ain't agoing, surely!" exclaimed Harry in astonishment.

"Yes," replied George. "I must go and warn Tom Dickson and his mate, for the blacks might pay them a visit before they come to you."

"Now, you are a fust-rate chap, George, to take all this trouble. Well, if you won't stop, remember me to Tom."

"I will; and now good-night to the pair of you; and Harry, try and keep your

temper!” And with this parting remark, George once again strode out into the bush.

During the time that George and the negro had been holding their conversation, Ironbark Jack had sat upon one of the short junks of wood that served for stools, smoking his pipe, and looking into the fire. He had betrayed some signs of interest at first, whilst the projected attack of the natives was spoken of, but subsequently he relapsed into apparent apathy, and continued gazing into the embers that were fast dying out. What did he see there that so fixed his attention? Look where he would, there was always the same scene before him reproduced in the dull red of the smouldering coals. It was always that old saw-pit with the buried treasure that met his gaze, wherever he fixed it. Was this treasure to slip through his fingers just at the moment when he had made sure of grasping it? Ah! what did he perceive now in the fire to make him smile? Still the old saw-pit, but this time turned into a yawning grave! Just at that point his train of thought was broken off by the departure of George, to whom Jack nodded familiarly, wishing him good-night in his most bluff and honest tones.

Harry also sat and gazed into the fire, as his mate had done. Did he see there the same visions that Jack had seen? Not the same, though the old deserted sawpit was amongst them. From that, however, his thoughts flew away across the ocean to the great western land, and to the old black Obi woman—no doubt ugly as sin, but, in the eyes of his affection, more beautiful than the fairest daughters of the land. He thought and thought till his head dropped. He sprang up with a start. “Hullo! Dozing! That won't do,” he muttered to himself. “It can't be far off daylight now,” and he turned his eyes to where his mate lay sleeping. “Suppose I was to go now and clear out my cache, whilst he ain't thinking of it,” he said in his own mind. “I couldn't bring the dollars here to tempt him, but I might put 'em somewhere in sight without his knowing it, and then I could send him away whilst I cleared out for the settlement.” He again went out, and commenced another restless promenade in front of the house. At last he had made up his mind. He went up to the dog, patted him till he made the animal almost beside himself with joy at such unwonted attention, and then, pointing inside the hut to where Jack lay, he whispered sternly, “Mind him!” The dog seemed to understand the direction, for he bristled up his hair, gave a low growl, and crouched down as if ready for a spring, whilst Harry hurried off across the cleared ground in the direction of the old saw-pit. After sufficient time had been given for him to get well across the clearing, Jack threw the blankets off his head and listened. All was right, and he jumped out of bed. He had lain down as he stood, without so much as kicking off his boots; but, as his foot touched the floor, the dog gave forth a sound that was evidently an incipient growl. With a smothered curse, Jack went over to the corner of the hut, where the axe had been thrown down after

the quarrel, and where it still lay. Seizing it, he went to the door stealthily, and, by keeping out of the dog's sight, he managed to get in such a position as to be able to strike at him without being seen until the very last moment. The animal knew that his enemy was moving about the hut, and perhaps considered that, as that was legitimate, he had no right to enter a growling protest; but he lay crouched down at length with his head between his paws, and his savage fiery eyes fixed on the doorway, with the evident intention of disputing any attempt of Jack's to leave the hut.

Poising the axe, Jack made a sudden step forward as he struck, and the dog's head, with the first sound of a bark emanating from his throat, was almost severed from his body by the blow. "You won't growl at me no more!" Jack whispered between his teeth, as he threw down the axe by the side of the still struggling animal. "So much for the dog, and now for the dog's master. I hope I may have the same luck with him." Drawing out from his breast the pistol we have before seen in his hands, and from which he had never parted, he threw up the cover of the pan and examined the priming. Tapping it down into the touch-hole, he shut the pan, and then at a quick pace made off upon the same path that had previously been taken by Harry.

About twenty minutes after he had left, there was the sound of a shot in the direction of the old saw-pit; then all was still; and then, in rather more than half an hour afterwards, Jack returned to the hut, without his mate.

Chapter III By Whose Hand

IT was later than usual the next morning before Jack awoke; and it was then some minutes before the events that had occurred on the previous evening came back to his mind, and shaped themselves into realities. All came upon him at once, and then he leapt from his rude couch and looked round. Yes, he remembered now that the blacks were to visit the hut, and as he saw by the sun that the morning had well advanced, he knew that there was no time to lose. He made up the fire, boiled his quart pot, and partook of breakfast with as good an appetite as ever. "And now," he said when he had finished, "to make all square!" Going into the room of the murdered man, he brought out two guns, and putting a little powder into each, snapped them off, thus giving them the appearance of having been used. Then, putting the powder and some heavy buck-shot into his pocket, he took his way towards the old saw-pit. At last he stopped. Yes, there was the tree behind which he had stood, and there in that cluster of bushes the body must be lying. He had drawn it in there out of the pathway, and, though he had been so careful, he had got that one spot of blood on his sleeve while doing this. And wherefore had he done it? he asked himself. He could not tell why. Was it that the mysterious something within him told him that it was a deed that required to be hidden? He didn't know and he didn't care; and now he must do his best to fix the murder on the blacks. He walked up boldly to the cluster of bushes, parted them, and stood over the body of him who was yesterday his mate. It lay almost in a heap, just as it had been dragged in and thrown down, with no perceptible mark of violence upon it. Jack rested one of the fowling-pieces against a bush, and then, raising the other by the barrel, brought the stock down with all his force upon the head of the dead man. The stock was broken by the violence of the blow, and then, throwing down the barrel by the side of the body he had mutilated, he muttered, "There, that'll do for that part of the business. And now to go and look after the blacks. If they don't set fire to the hut, I must, and then the thing will be complete." So saying, he came out again into the pathway, and proceeded leisurely to load his gun. "Ah!" said he, as he came near enough to the edge of the clearing to see the hut, "the natives are there sure enough." He concealed himself as carefully as he could, but in such a position as to allow him to see what was going on. He watched the blacks as they came in and out of the hut with such articles as they intended to carry away, and endeavoured to fix in his mind the features and appearance of some of them, so that he might be able to describe them to the authorities, and to know them again if he were called upon to identify them. There was one tall, powerful, and well-made fellow whom he should

know again. He appeared to be the chief, and wore three eagle's feathers in his hair; but his attention was more particularly drawn to another native who had taken possession of an old pea jacket of Jack's own, and it was probably owing to this that the make, build, countenance, and general appearance of this man fixed themselves more firmly upon Jack's mind than did those of any other. Jack watched and waited, whilst the blacks went to and fro quickly, and with less noise than was usual amongst them, and at last he could hardly restrain a cry of exultation as he saw a large body of smoke rising from the hut, followed by a burst of flame, showing that the blacks, having secured all they wanted, had set fire to the house. Jack waited to see no more. The natives had done the work that he had expected to have to do himself; and, this having been taken out of his hands, he had nothing more to stay for; so, shouldering his fowling-piece, he took the track that led away to the settlement, revolving in his mind as he went along the tale that he should tell to the authorities of the murder of his mate by the blacks.

Before George started off to warn the sawyers of the intended attack of the blacks, he told Jamie on no account to lose sight of Macomo and his band, and this instruction Jamie had faithfully carried out. He witnessed the plundering and the firing of the hut, and, on his father's return from the outlying huts, whither he had gone after leaving Black's Harry's, the two of them began to unravel what appeared to be a very tangled web.

George explained to Jamie how he had been just in time to prevent a quarrel the previous night, and feared that, after all, his efforts had been useless. Making a careful survey of the various tracks that led from the hut, they came to the conclusion that Harry had last night gone twice from the hut, whilst he had returned but once; whereas the other man had gone twice each way during the night, and once each way that very morning.

The nearest point to which Ironbark Jack could go to give information of the death of his mate was a small settlement on the southern bank of the Hunter, a little below its confluence with the Williams. Here there was a public-house, a small store, and a blacksmith's shed, besides one or two huts in close proximity. But, chief of all, in so far as Jack's present mission was concerned, there was a constable stationed there. It was a long round that Jack had to take to reach this inn and settlement; but he had time during the journey to make up a tale that he thought would infallibly not only prevent anything like suspicion falling upon him, but would be calculated to enlist all sympathy in his favour. He weighed every point in his mind, dovetailing one in another, and so placing them as to be able to meet every objection that suggested itself to him. The tale he proposed was something after this fashion:—They had been set upon by blacks, as George had warned them, and Harry *would* fight it out.

They had driven the natives off, but his mate insisted on following them up. He had not liked to desert his mate, and had joined him. They had driven the natives before them, until, entangled in the brush, they had been separated; the natives had rallied in large numbers, and he had heard his mate calling out for assistance. He had heard nothing after that, and, fearing that his mate had fallen, without returning to the hut he had made the best of his way to the settlement to give information and procure assistance.

Arrived at the inn, he first saw the constable, to whom, in as brief terms as he could find, he imparted the above story. The first questions propounded by the official had, as a matter of course, relation to the personal appearance of the attacking blacks, and the possibility of Jack's recognising them; and in answer to these, Jack was able to give a very satisfactory description of two or three of them, whilst, with regard to Atare, his verbal portraiture was so exact that Mr. Staff, the constable, declared he should be able from it to recognise him anywhere. Without losing a moment's time, the constable started off to Newcastle, the head-quarters, to report the occurrence to his superior officer and to receive his instructions how to act. He desired Jack to remain at the inn, and there await his return.

When Jack told his story, with a number of attendant horrors that his imagination enabled him to depict, to the two or three loungers in the inn, he became at once the lion, for the time being, of the settlement. In the midst of the oft-repeated story, a small bark canoe, paddled by a blackfellow, stopped at the little wharf that fronted the inn. He had come down the river from the other side, and, having made fast his canoe, he entered the house and asked for a bottle of grog, at the same time presenting the money wherewith to pay for it. Whereupon Jack staggered up to the black, and, placing himself directly in front of him, endeavoured to assume an air of astuteness as he eyed him over to see, as he said, "if this had been one of 'em." The black, who was a very quiet fellow, well known in the district, and answering to the name of Jacky Nerang, stood the examination without flinching, although his restless eye rolled uneasily about from one to the other as he found himself closed in by this drunken and infuriated group.

Jack laid his hand on his shoulder, but the black gave his body a twist, and with the greatest ease slipped out of the hands of the drunken sawyer. In doing this, however, a large, single-bladed clasp-knife dropped out of his girdle, in the folds of which it had been concealed. This caught Jack's eye as he fell, and he immediately pounced upon it. The next instant he sprang at the throat of the black, and this time held him with a grip there was no shaking off. "What did I tell you mates?" he shouted. "He's got my very knife, that I left this morning in the hut. Look, there's my brand on it, as any of you may see!" On seeing this, as they imagined,

conclusive proof of Jacky Nerang's complicity in the murder, all in the tap-room fell upon the luckless black, and blows, kicks, and abuse were showered upon him to any extent. Just at this moment, the landlord, who had for some time been absent, attracted by the disturbance, entered the bar, and extricated Jacky from those who seemed to be desirous of becoming his executioners.

On being questioned by the landlord, Jacky explained that some blacks on the other side of the river had given him the knife as an inducement for him to come to the inn and buy rum with money they had produced. In order to test the truth of this tale, Constable Staff, who had just returned from Newcastle, proposed that Jacky should lead a small party to the camp of the blacks, who were awaiting his return with the rum.

Acting on this idea, the black was started off in his canoe, with instructions to sing and make as much noise as was consistent with gammoning drunk, in order to guide those who followed in the constable's boat, and who left shortly after him.

The native paddled his light bark canoe up the river and then crossed over to the other side, being followed at a respectful distance by the boat of the police officer. Arrived at Macomo's camp, Jacky soon had the liquor flowing, and, under cover of the noise made by the half-drunken natives, Staff and his companions stormed the rendezvous. Macomo and his followers sprang to their feet, and made a dash for the bush; but Atare, partially overcome by the rum, was pinned to the ground and made prisoner. He was secured by putting his hands behind his back and then locking handcuffs on to his wrists. This done, Jack was brought face to face with him, and was again asked by Staff to look closely at the man, and say if he was one of the blacks of whom he had spoken.

"Haven't I told you that he's the man?" said Jack somewhat testily; "and didn't I describe him well enough for you to know him? And, besides that, he's got on my pea jacket that he prigged from the hut. There now!"

On reaching the inn, Atare was questioned by the constable, but, when it was found that he understood, or pretended to understand, nothing of the whitefellows' talk, Jacky Nerang was brought forward as an interpreter. He soon conveyed to Atare the information that he had been arrested for the murder of Black Harry.

He was then lodged in a portion of the stable of the inn, this being made to serve, when occasion required, as a temporary lock-up. Having taken every precaution against his prisoner's escape, the constable returned to the bar of the inn to reward himself with a drink after his night's work.

The next morning, soon after sunrise, the constable, taking Jack and two men with him, started off to the cedar brush to search for the body of Black Harry, with the intention, if it were found, of bringing it in, so that it might be examined by the

medical man attached to the penal establishment at Newcastle.

Following the tracks from the still smouldering hut, Staff and his assistants soon came upon the body of Black Harry, and, after making a careful examination of the surroundings, and securing the broken gun, they carried the corpse down to the boat, and thence to the settlement, to await the arrival of Major Blank and the doctor.

Chapter IV. The Examination

MR. STAFF, the constable, having forwarded to Newcastle a report of the capture of the ringleader of the blacks, the Commandant, Major Blank, sent back directions to have all the evidence obtainable ready by the following morning, when he would visit the settlement, examine the prisoner, and take such other steps as might be found necessary for striking terror upon the blacks, and putting a stop to the murders and robberies that had become so frequent.

The Commandant had appointed the inquiry to be held at Larkie's, being the nearest available spot to where the murder had been committed, should he find it necessary to visit it. The inn parlour was turned into a justice room for the time being, and was duly arranged with much fussiness and a wonderful increase of importance by Staff, aided by the landlord. The circumstances of the murder having by this time spread far and wide, up and down the river, a large number of persons assembled from all parts within reach, to listen to the interesting details. Major Blank arrived at an early hour to conduct the inquiry, although, from what he had heard, the case appeared to him to be a very simple one. The court having been opened, Atare was brought in to listen to the evidence against him; but, seeing that he could not understand the whitefellows' talk, and that he knew nothing whatever of whitefellows' law, he might just as well have been allowed to remain comfortably sleeping in the stable in which he had hitherto been confined. Before proceeding, therefore, the Major asked if there was any there who could speak the prisoner's language sufficiently well to make him understand. No answer was given, although the request was made more than once. At last, when it was thought to be hopeless to attempt to silence the prisoner's wild yells, the stout figure of Jamie came limping forward, with the dog Blucher at his heels.

“Can you interpret to the prisoner, my man?” asked the Major.

“I don't know about interpreting,” said Jamie, “but if you want the prisoner to know anything I can tell it him.”

“Thankye, my man—thankye! Tell him, then, that we are going to do nothing to him, and that we are but taking evidence concerning the murder.”

Jamie explained this to Atare in his own way, and ultimately succeeded in calming him down, so that he remained silent, although his eye wandered restlessly as if in search of some outlet by which to escape from that crowd of white faces. The boy was about to fall back again into the position he had occupied before he answered the Major's appeal, when the magistrate said, “Stay! You will be useful to translate to the prisoner the evidence that is given against him. Tell me now, who are you?”

“Don't you know me, Major?” asked the boy, grinning in the most complacent manner at the magistrate.

“Your face seems not altogether unfamiliar to me, but I cannot say I recollect you.”

“I'm Jamie Maxwell,” he said.

“Who?” asked the magistrate in some doubt.

“Jamie Maxwell, son of Sergeant-Major Maxwell as was,” replied the boy, grinning more than ever.

The Major looked at the boy, and now recognised him; but he had also heard of the lad's mental weakness, and he doubted how far he would be justified in employing him as an interpreter. However, as there was no one else capable, the magistrate resolved to avail himself of the boy's services. Making Jamie sit down by his side, he told him to remain there, and that he would tell him what to say to the black, and when to say it.

The first evidence taken was that of the constable. Mr. Staff stated: “The day before yesterday, in the afternoon, I received information of the murder that morning of Black Harry by a party of native blacks. The information was brought in by the mate of the murdered man, one Ironbark Jack, who said that a mob of wild blacks had murdered his mate. He said they were wild blacks, not belonging to the river tribe; and one of them he described to me very particularly. He told me how the blacks attacked the hut, and killed his mate, as he thought, in the bush. I went to Newcastle and reported the murder, and on my return I was told that there were blacks, answering the description Ironbark Jack had given, camped on the north side of the river, above the junction of the Williams. I went there with Jack and others, and took the prisoner into custody, but the other blacks escaped. The next morning—that was yesterday morning—I went also with Ironbark Jack and two men to the cedar brush on the Williams. Jack showed me where he had last heard his mate's voice, and, on going to the spot I found the body of Black Harry, lying in a lot of bushes, as if it had been dragged there for concealment. It was lying on its back, with a wound in the forehead that seemed to me to have been inflicted with his own gun. I say with his own gun, because I found the gun broken in two pieces lying beside the body, the stock part at the head, just as if it had fallen when broken with the blow. Whilst I was searching the body, I found that there was another wound in the chest. It was a gunshot wound, and the shot must have gone through the heart. I say the shot, because the guns were loaded with buck-shot. Ironbark Jack told me so when he lodged his gunpowder and shot with me. He is not a free man, and not allowed to carry arms. He told me it was Harry's gun and ammunition, and that they had been given him by his mate to defend the hut. I examined the spot all

round, but could find no evidence of a struggle. Black Harry was a very powerful man, and would not have allowed his gun to be taken from him without a struggle. A dozen blacks would never have been able to get it from him without first disabling him, and he had no wounds except the one on his head and that in the breast. He may have been knocked down first and shot afterwards; but I think he was shot first, from the way the stock part of the gun lay just as it fell when broken on his head. I found nothing in his pockets—no powder or shot, or money. The pockets did not appear to have been disturbed as if they had been rifled. I found nothing at the place except the broken gun. It had been fired off. Jack told me that he and his mate fired about twenty shots apiece, and that he was sure they must have peppered some of the blacks. I saw no dead or wounded blacks; their comrades would perhaps carry them away.”

“You are sure there were no other wounds on the body besides those you have mentioned?”

“Quite sure,” answered the constable.

“And that buck-shot was used?” asked the Major.

“So Jack told me.”

“That will do,” said the Major.

“D'ye want me to tell him any of that?” asked Jamie of the magistrate.

The Major considered. “No, I think not. There is hardly anything to answer yet.” He was busy making notes of points that had struck him during the constable's evidence, and there was a pause of a few minutes, during which the most profound silence reigned. This was broken by the Major calling out—“Bring up John Battle!”

In answer to this name, Ironbark Jack presented himself before the magistrate. The Major eyed him closely as he came up, for his character was known to the official, who, as commandant of the penal settlement, was well acquainted with the men who had been under his supervision, and had carefully read their different characters. He made no remark, however; but, when Jack had taken the oath to tell the truth, he bade him narrate in as few words as possible what he knew of the death of his mate.

“Well,” said Jack, “if that's all you want, I don't know anything about it!”

“Not know anything about it?” asked the Major in some surprise.

“No,” replied Jack; “I didn't know as he was dead till I saw his body when I went with Mr. Staff.”

“You mean to say that you did not see him killed?”

“Of course, that's what I mean!”

The Major's lip curled, and he darted a quick, searching glance at Jack, whose countenance, however, remained immovable. “Well, then,” the Major continued, “let us have the tale that you told the constable.”

“They came down upon the hut——” commenced Jack.

“Who came down?” asked the magistrate.

“The prisoner and his tribe.”

“How many of them?”

“I should say a hundred, more or less. They came down on the hut, and, thinking we were at work, got on to the clear land. Then we let drive at them. We fired a good many shots, until they bolted. When they'd cleared out, Black Harry would go after them and give them a lesson, as he said. I wanted him to stay, but he wouldn't; so when he went out I followed him, as I didn't want him to go alone, and say I was afeard. They were planted in the brush, and threw their spears at us; but we kept firing and driving 'em on; until at last me and Harry got separated. We were about a mile from the hut then, and I heard the black devils all around me. I was in a thick scrub, trying to get through the vines, when I heard Harry call out for help; then I heard him fire, and after that I heard nothing, till the blacks set up a yelling and jabbering; and then, as I thought Harry was done for, I planted under a log, and stopped for a bit till everything got quiet. After that I got up, and made my way down to the settlement, and told the constable that I thought my mate was murdered.”

“Did you see any of the blacks that attacked the hut?”

“Of course I did! Didn't I fire at 'em?”

“Any that you would know again?”

“Yes. I saw the prisoner and described him to Mr. Staff, so that he knew him when he saw him.”

“And you can swear positively to him?”

“Yes, to him, and to my jacket that he took out of the hut, and that he has now got on him.” but with regard to the Major their effect was to make him look all the more suspiciously at Jack, and to ponder over the circumstances that had come to light. He motioned to Jack to retire, and the witness, nothing loth, took a seat in the front rank of the spectators close to where Jamie was placed, with Blucher at his side. As he sat down the dog smelt at him uneasily.

“Shall I tell him,” asked Jamie, pointing to Atare, “anything of all that?”

“Yes, yes!” said the Major; “as much as you can remember. And be sure to tell him as correctly as you can.”

Jamie then called upon Atare by name, very much to the black's astonishment; and, as he commenced to interpret to the prisoner, Jack leant forward to listen, resting his left elbow on his knee, and dropping his right arm down by his side. As he did so, Blucher, who had continued his uneasy sniffing, smelt at Jack's sleeve, and then delivered himself of a doleful howl. Jack sprang to his feet hastily, turned

as pale as death, and plunged his right arm into his bosom, as though to conceal it from sight. The event caused some little stir in the court, but, as no one had seen the circumstance that had caused the dog to commit this breach of decorum, he was ordered to be removed. Jamie interfered in his behalf, and, by telling the magistrate bluntly that if the dog left the court he should do so likewise, he contrived to carry his point. Blucher was left under his master's seat, where he continued to snarl and show his teeth at Jack, and was only at last quieted by the offensive individual removing to a seat at some distance. Jamie then continued to detail to Atare as accurately as his memory would permit the substance of the evidence just given by Jack. As the narration progressed, the eyes of the black opened wider and wider in wonder; and more than once during the narration he burst out into exclamations of incredulity or disgust. The lad concluded by asking, "Is that all true, Atare?"

"No!" said the black. "It is all lies! Atare and his brothers robbed the hut of the big sawyer, but they never saw the big sawyer, nor that framer of lies. The hut was empty when they reached it; the dog was killed, and the men were away. The framer of lies has murdered his mate, and, because the Maroo men robbed the hut, the coward tries to fix the murder on them."

"I know all that, Atare," replied Jamie; "but I only tell you what the lying hound has said."

"Don't talk to him, Jamie," said the major, "but tell me what he says."

Jamie then, as briefly as the black himself had done, stated what the black had first said to himself.

The Major shook his head. "It is useless to question the witness upon such a statement as that. It must be borne out by other evidence than that of the man who has just sat down."

Jamie leant forward and whispered a few words to the Major, that seemed to give him the greatest surprise. He asked a few questions hurriedly and in a low tone from Jamie, and these were answered just as hurriedly by the boy. Then the magistrate resumed: "There are some points in the case that require to be cleared up, and upon which you will have to get some further evidence. The testimony of Jack is clear enough as far as it goes, but before the prisoner is sent to Sydney the whole must be made complete. I will have a little talk with you by-and-by on these points, Staff; and in the meantime the examination is adjourned to the day after to-morrow. You can let the body be buried, Staff; and you, Jamie, tell the prisoner that the inquiry into the charge will be gone on with again in two days."

Jamie conveyed this information to the black, who gave a grunt and made a motion of the head, as though he did not comprehend, and but very little cared for the roundabout customs of the whites. He was then removed, and as the boy was

about to follow, the Major called out, "Let me have five minutes' talk with you before you go."

The lad nodded assent in a familiar manner, and then left the room to carry out an order he had received from his father not to lose sight of Ironbark Jack.

Chapter V In The Toils

As to Ironbark Jack, the desire to revisit the saw-pit was so strong within him that he determined at last to have just one more look at the shiners, and accordingly he set out in the first boat he found handy on the river, and pulled vigorously up the Hunter and into the Williams, followed afar off by the faithful Jamie and his dog Blucher.

On reaching the spot where the body had been discovered, Jack could not resist the temptation of looking down upon it. "No," he thought to himself as he gazed, "there is nothing there to tell against me. The earth cannot rise up and bear witness against me. Ah! it's a fine thing to do work where there is nothing that can either hear, see, or tell." And then he went to the old saw-pit, and, jumping in, brought out the box that contained the money hoarded up by the unfortunate negro—hoarded for the pious purpose of buying a mother's freedom, and of rendering her remaining days peaceable and easy. He plunged his hands in the box, and leisurely proceeded to count the gains of his crime. "My word!" he said, when he had concluded, "nine hundred and forty dollars! Who'd ever have thought the darkie had saved so much? I thought a couple of hundred would have been the outside. I'll bet something that he was wanting to make up the round thousand! Well, he was a close one, and no mistake. So much the better for me, for if some of the bright boys had known about such a lob as this, my chance of getting it would have been very small. It's a rare fine haul to make!" And he continued to speak aloud in his excitement. "Why, it's a regular load I shall have to take away with me." He took off a blue cotton kerchief that he wore round his neck, and proceeded to stow away in it the dollars that he had removed from the box. Then he raised the box, and was about to take it back and re-bury it in the pit, when he paused and considered. "Yes," he murmured, "it will be safer there than carrying it about with me. There's no knowing what might turn up!" As he spoke he drew from his breast the heavy horse pistol which he had presented at his mate on the night of their altercation. This, together with some powder and bullets tied up in rags, he consigned to the box, which, jumping into the saw-pit, he buried more carefully than he had previously done. This being settled to his satisfaction, he obliterated some of the tracks on and near the margin of the pit by sweeping the ground over with a branch. "There!" he cried, when he had done. "That will take some of the down off." He took up his bundle of dollars, and looked round. "This blessed brush don't see me no more. If I've any luck I'll be back in the old country before next year!" He now retreated hastily upon the track by which he had come, and, without making any stoppage at the ruined hut, went direct to where

he had left his boat, jumped into it, and pulled away leisurely down the river.

Jamie, who had secreted himself in the bush, and been a silent spectator of all that had occurred, came forward to inspect the spot that had been the scene of Jack's recent manoeuvres, as well as to secure the articles, whatever they were, for he had not perfectly seen them, that the other had deposited in the box; but he had not taken a dozen steps before he encountered his father.

"So," said George, "you have done your duty well, and have followed close at his heels, I see."

"Yes. I never left him after once I got sight of him in the settlement," replied Jamie, "and I think we've got him safe enough now."

"I had him safe enough before this!" responded George.

"Then why did you send me off?" asked Jamie.

"It has been since you left that I discovered the most conclusive evidence against him," said his father. "I'll tell you all about it by-and-by. Has anything occurred in the settlement?"

"Occurred! My word there has!" And then Jamie narrated the particulars of the inquiry that had taken place, and the charge of murder that had been made by Jack against Atare.

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed George, when his son had concluded; "and so he endeavoured to shield himself by fixing the crime upon an innocent man?"

"It looks very much like it," put in Jamie. "I could have put a stop to it if I liked, but I wouldn't say anything until I got your orders."

"And you did right," continued George. "Even if the black were guilty, he would have to be saved, for he must die by no hand but mine, and at the appointed time. But now justice demands that the guilty should suffer, and that the innocent should be rescued."

"Of course it does, General, and we'll do it!"

"Jump down into the pit and get up the box," said George, and his order was immediately complied with. The box was brought up, the pistol and the parcels rolled in the rags were examined and returned to the box, and then George resumed, "We will take the whole of these, just as he left them, and as we have found them. And now it is time that we were moving, so that we may watch where this villain lands."

"But you haven't told me what you have discovered to fix him."

"Let us be moving, and I will tell you as we go on," answered George. So Jamie shouldered the box, and they moved off in the direction just previously taken by Jack. As they went on, George narrated to his son the discoveries he had made, a full account of which will appear further on in our story.

On his way back to camp, George passed by the stable or lock-up, and, knocking at the slabs near to where he imagined the black prisoner to be, called out, "Atare! Atare!"

The black gave a grunt in reply, equivalent to saying that he was listening, and did not thank the speaker for disturbing him.

"Does Atare know who it is that now speaks to him?" asked George.

Atare thought he remembered the voice somewhere or other, but, not being quite sure about it, contented himself by giving another grunt, that might mean anything.

"Does Atare remember the hut on the Paterson that he burned down, and the mother and three children that he and his comrades murdered there?"

Atare knew the voice now. "It is the Greybeard," he said. "What does the enemy of the black men of the hills want with Atare? Has he come to rejoice over Atare's misfortune?"

"You are right. It is the Greybeard, But he has not come to triumph over you."

"The Greybeard said that he would never come without misfortune following him. Atare is ready."

"He said also that Atare should die by no hand but his; that he would guard the life of Atare like his own until the day and hour came for taking it. Listen, Atare! You are charged with a murder you have not committed, whilst you have not yet been accused of the four murders that still leave the stain of blood upon your hands. The Greybeard has watched over the safety of Atare, and has tracked out the real murderer. He can speak words that will set Atare free. Shall he speak them or shall he remain silent?"

Atare in voluble terms professed his innocence of the murder, and called upon the Greybeard to declare before his white brethren that the black was innocent.

"Let Atare fear nothing," George answered. "The Greybeard will be at the court, and will take care that the guilty only is punished. Let Atare remember this, and sleep in peace. His life is safe from all hands but those of the man he rendered desolate." As he said this he turned away, leaving the black to pass the night as best he could. He reached his camp without any further incident, and lay down to snatch a few minutes' sleep whilst awaiting the return of Jamie, who had been told off to keep his eye on Jack.

In the meantime, Ironbark Jack lay by until dark, and then, pushing off from the shore, pulled vigorously on for Larkie's, which he was not long in reaching.

Early on the following morning, the Commandant, Major Blank, arrived at the settlement. Mr. Staff met him with a face of very great importance, evidently fancying that he had information that would stagger his superior officer when he heard it. How great was his astonishment when the Major smiled and answered,

“Ah, I see. George is a long-headed fellow—he hasn't told you all. But let me see him the instant he comes up—or, what is better, send down to his camp and let him know I have arrived.”

The constable was spared this trouble, for George, opening the back door of Mr. Staff's hut, found himself in the presence of the Major before a messenger could be sent for him. The Commandant had been an officer in the same regiment as George, and, knowing him well and being acquainted with his misfortunes, received him most kindly. The constable was dismissed, and then a long private conference was held between the two old soldiers. To this, at one stage, the doctor, who had returned with the Major, was called in to assist, and it was some time before matters seemed to have been fully discussed.

When at last the constable announced from the inn door that the public court had been opened, Ironbark Jack, who had drunk heavily the previous night, and was in no very amiable mood this morning, walked up with the intention of having it out upon somebody, and, as there was nobody else to hand, he determined to sheet it home to the black.

At last the Major opened the court, and Jack entered with the little crowd of persons who had assembled to listen to the proceedings. Somehow all eyes were turned upon him when he entered the justice room. Why, no one could have very well said; but so it was, and Jack felt proportionately uncomfortable. He looked round the room, however, boldly. There was the prisoner, looking round the room like himself, but anxiously, as if he expected to see someone. Had he any evidence? thought Jack. Psha! Who'd care for a blackfellow's evidence, and only blacks had been with them! And there was that boy, too, standing by the side of the Major, ready to interpret; what the blank did he want to be coming and interfering with the matter! And there was the doctor sitting by the side of the Major—was it possible that he could have poked and picked something out of the dead body that would tell against him. The other faces were those of men who had been drinking with him last night and this morning, and a look at them reassured him. He was rather astonished, however, when he heard the Major order that John Battle should be brought forward for additional evidence.

“Have you told all you know of this matter?” asked the Major, after Jack had taken his place at the table and gone through the usual preliminaries.

“Yes,” answered Jack. “But I'm quite sure about the prisoner having been amongst the blacks; and, on thinking the matter over, I fancy I saw something in his hand that might have been a gun. I wouldn't like to swear to it exactly, 'cos it's only a kind of fancy.”

“Never mind about it, then,” said the Major. “And now let me ask you a question

or two, though you need not answer them unless you like. Had you had breakfast before the blacks came upon you?"

"Of course we had. Two or three hours before they came!"

"Did you have breakfast alone, or did Black Harry breakfast with you?"

Jack hesitated. He remembered his solitary breakfast; and remembered, too, as distinctly as if it had been that very morning, that he had left the quart and the one pint pot on the table when he went out. Then came once more the Major's caution—"You need not answer unless you like."

Jack turned round fiercely. "What do you say that for? I'm here to tell the truth, and nothing else!"

"And can't you remember so simple a thing as whether you and your mate breakfasted together?"

"Yes, we did—of course! What else!"

"And three hours before the blacks came?"

"Two or three hours."

"But not so immediately before that the tea in the pot left upon the table would be warm?"

Jack turned towards the black. Had he noticed this? Very likely. But what was a blackfellow's word? "No, certainly not! There weren't none left on the table; for we cleared up everything in the hut out of the way for the scrimmage."

"That will do as far as that is concerned. Now, tell me—where was the falling axe that morning?"

"That blank axe," thought Jack. "I guessed something of this!" And he could hardly prevent himself from clothing his thoughts in words. But then he recollected that he had searched for the axe and had not found it, and that neither the constable nor anybody else had seen it; so he answered boldly enough: "Well, I don't remember. Sometimes it's at the hut, sometimes at the pit."

"Was it at the hut that morning?"

"Perhaps it was, but I can't remember." Then he recollected that George had seen it in the hands of his mate on the night of the murder. "Stop!" he cried. "I recollect now; it was in the hut."

"Did you use it that morning?"

"Well," thought Jack, "that's the blackfellow again. He saw the dead dog, and that blessed interpreting youngster has been putting the Major up to all this. Only wait till this is over, and if I don't quiet him——" but aloud he replied—"No, of course I didn't; what should I use it for?"

"The dog was a very troublesome animal, and used to growl and snap at you, so you might have knocked him on the head."

“How did the Major know that? The black could not have told him that,” thought Jack. He remained silent, however.

“You didn't kill the dog?”

“No. What should I kill him for?”

“How was it you came to remember so suddenly that the axe was at the hut?”

Jack paused to consider. How far would it tell against him if he confessed to the row of the previous night? Well, George knew of it, and it might go in his favour if he told this. “I recollected that my mate, poor fellow, got into one of his pelters the night before, and was going to chop at me with it.”

“How was he prevented?”

“I quieted him. Talked him over a bit.”

“And did you keep him off with talk only?”

“Yes; and then George came in, and then he came round all right again.”

“George was present then—and you still affirm that you kept him off with talk, and nothing else?”

George had seen the pistol, and Jack ground his teeth with rage, though he answered to all appearance quietly enough. “Well, I bounced him with a pistol!”

“A pistol! This is the first we have heard of that. Where is it now?”

“I lost it in the bush when we were skirmishing with the blacks.”

“Did you use it at all that morning?”

“No, I didn't.”

“Was it loaded when you lost it?”

A sudden idea seemed to strike Jack as this question was asked, and he answered rapidly, “Yes; and now that accounts for Black Harry being shot. Some of these fellows must have picked up my pistol after I dropped it, and settled my poor mate with it.”

“Very likely!” said the Major drily. “You and your mate had nothing but buck-shot—Harry never kept bullets?”

“We had buck-shot. I gave mine up to the constable when I came into the settlement.”

“So that if Black Harry was shot by a bullet, it must have come from your pistol?”

“Yes, that's it. I'm sure now. The blacks must have got hold of the pistol somehow in following my tracks.”

“What have you done with the powder and bullets that remained—I mean that which you used for your pistols?”

“I hadn't any. There was only the one charge in the pistol, and that was given me.”

“I think you said before that you didn't know where Harry planted his money?”

“Yes, I did say so.”

“But Harry accused you of following him to his plant, and wanting to rob him; and that was what he was going to chop you down for.”

So the Major had been talking with George, he thought. He must mind his answers now, and it was well that he had told what he had done previously. He replied in the most straightforward manner, “Yes; that was what the row was about. He was almost mad, and if it hadn't been for George he'd have settled me, I think.”

“And now only one more question. Was Black Harry killed by the natives that morning, or was he shot the night before by somebody else—shot so as to be stiff and cold when the natives arrived?”

Jack glared upon the Major for a few seconds, almost paralysed by the question, for which he could find nothing to account. The blacks had not seen the body, for their road lay a different way; but then it had been covered with boughs, he remembered, and the officious meddler who had gone out of his way to do this had been talking to the Major. Well, he must brazen it all out now. He answered sturdily enough, and with a half-laugh of well-assumed easy merriment, “I only know that he went out of the hut with me that morning, so that if he was killed the night before, it must have been his ghost that fought the blacks.”

“That will do!” said the Major, very sternly “Sir down there!” pointing to a seat upon which two very obtrusive friends of the night before were then sitting. They seemed delighted to have his company, and made room for him between them.

Doctor Lancet was the next to give evidence. He had examined the body of the murdered man very carefully, he said, and found only two wounds on it—one on the head, inflicted by the butt end of a gun, the pieces of which were found lying by the body, and the other a gunshot wound in the breast. The latter had been the cause of death. A bullet had entered the chest, and, severing one of the vessels communicating directly with the heart, had caused almost instantaneous death. He had traced the course of the bullet in at the breast and out at the back (Jack began to breathe again). The bullet had passed through the body, and of course he had been unable to find it. The other wound had nothing to do with the death. It had been inflicted when the body was dead and cold. He stated his reasons for coming to this conclusion, and added that the bullet must have been fired from a rifled weapon, and at no very great distance.

The Major beckoned to Staff, the constable, who, having received his officer's orders, left the court, to return almost immediately with a pistol in his hand.

The production of the weapon produced an immense sensation amongst the onlookers, and there was a general craning forward of heads to get a sight of the instrument by which a fellow creature had lost his life.

The doctor, having examined the pistol, deposed that it was just such a weapon as

he should imagine the ball to have been fired from. It was rifled, and would carry a long distance, being what was called a duelling pistol.

In answer to questions from the Major, he now went on, "I am surgeon to the — — regiment. I have seen a great deal of guns, as well as of gunshot wounds. I know the effect that repeated firing has upon guns. They become what is called 'leaded.' " He was then shown the gun given up by Jack, and also the barrel of the broken gun. "I see no trace of leading in these barrels. The guns have been fired off, but only with powder, and with a very small quantity, too, for the barrels are scarcely blackened. No leaden shot of any kind has been fired out of them."

No further questions were asked.

"And now," said the Major, "we will take the evidence of George Maxwell."

Chapter VI The Net Closes

GEORGE commenced by narrating how he had visited the hut on the previous evening to warn Black Harry and his mate of the projected attack of the natives, and how he had found the two men quarrelling and about to attack each other, Jack protecting himself with a pistol, which he, George, had noticed to be rifled. He then went on to tell of his visit to the hut on the following morning, prior to the arrival of the blacks; of his finding only one pot of tea on the table, the remains being still quite warm; of the discovery of the dog, killed the previous night, for he was cold and stiff, and knocked on the head by the falling axe that then lay beside the carcass; of the arrival of the blacks, and of the watch he had kept on them till they had left. Then he went on to speak of what he had done after he had assured himself that the blacks had got to a safe distance. How he had followed upon the tracks of Black Harry and his mate, until he had come to the dead body of the former, killed as the poor fellow's dog had been on the previous night, and with no other track than that of his mate anywhere near it. Then he concluded by producing a bullet he had cut out of a tree, just behind where Black Harry's body had been found, and the axe he had found by the dog's side.

There was a thrill of mingled curiosity and horror as these articles were laid on the table, almost within reach of the cool ruffian in whose hands they had been so effective for evil. Jack's effrontery, however, did not desert him. On the contrary, now that he saw that things were looking black against him, and that the net which George had been so carefully weaving was fast closing in upon him, he resumed all his native hardihood, and bore himself much more bravely than when there were mere doubts and surmises to contend against.

"It's all very fine to swear away an innocent man's life that way," exclaimed Jack; "but I know I can't get no justice here. Only wait till I come before the judge, and he'll find it all out for me, I know! He won't let a poor fellow be swore out of his life this way!"

The Major smiled—a bitter smile, which those who knew him well understood. "You had better save your remarks, for there is other evidence," he observed.

And then Jamie came forward, and told how he had watched the prisoner. After the court was over on the first day, he had seen Jack come down and examine the boats lying at the wharf. As Jamie went on with his narration, Jack became more and more bewildered at having been thus outwitted "by a mere kid," as he said; but when he heard the boy tell how he had followed him up the river in a bark canoe borrowed from the blacks, how he had watched him all night, whilst he had camped

at the burnt hut, and seen his visit to the old saw-pit; and how he had marked the boat taken by Jack drawn up under the trees near to the spot where the money had since been found, Jack gave vent to a burst of blasphemous oaths.

“And what's more,” continued Jamie, when the other had been quieted, “my dog knows him as well as I do. He smelt Black Harry's blood on the coward's sleeve the other day, and called upon the court to do justice, though nobody didn't understand him except me. Look on the blood-hound's sleeve, and if you don't find a spot of Harry's blood on it, then don't believe a word I say.”

“There, there, that'll do!” shouted Jack. “I've been planted on and watched off—and by a bit of a kid, too—and wasn't wide enough awake to see it, and I deserve all I get. Take me away, and hand me over to the scragman.”

The case was considered to be so complete without this tirade of Jack's that the Major sent him off in custody to undergo his trial at Sydney for the murder of his mate. After Jack had been removed, the Major asked if there was any charge against the native Atare. As there was no answer to this, and as the charge of murder had most certainly broken down as regarded him, the Major directed that he should be set at liberty. The black had throughout regarded the whole proceedings with wonder, not being able to understand a word, and having no one to tell him, as on the first occasion, of what was going on. It was only from a few words of explanation that George vouchsafed to him that he was made to understand he was free; though why, he was at a loss to know, except only that he could perceive that he had been saved through the exertions made on his behalf by George.

No sooner, however, was he set at liberty than he darted out of the house and through the assembled crowd, and with the speed of a kangaroo bounded down to the river, plunged into the stream, and swam across to the other side. Arrived there, and not till then, he turned round to where he had come from, shook his fists, with an accompaniment of aboriginal Billingsgate, danced defiance to the whites, and then, dashing into the bush, disappeared from view amidst the hearty laughter of the numerous onlookers who had witnessed his hurried departure and his energetic mode of procedure.

Six weeks had passed over. Ironbark Jack had been tried for the murder of his mate, had been found guilty, and had suffered the extreme penalty provided by law for that dread offence. Much to his annoyance, George, with his son, had been compelled to proceed to Sydney to give evidence against the murderer; but no sooner had the trial ended than he returned to the Coal River, and, taking at once to the hill country, endeavoured to pick up the tracks of the foe that had been so long out of his sight. It was exceedingly difficult to ascertain their whereabouts, and, although aided by Jamie and Blucher, George had been nearly a fortnight vainly

employed in endeavouring to find traces or to hear tidings of those he sought. He had come to the conclusion that he would carefully search a certain patch of scrubby country, as he felt assured that the last remnant of the hill tribe must lie hid in it. His eyes were turned in the direction in which Jamie had disappeared on a scouting expedition, and he was little dreaming of interruption, when he was startled by hearing a low coo-ee coming from no very great distance behind him. He sprang to his feet, and instantly faced to the spot whence the sound had come. There, to his surprise, the man of whom he had been so long in search stood before him.

Atare had, according to custom, given the warning coo-ee before approaching the man who had been so dire an enemy of his tribe, and he now stood waiting the permission to advance. George by a sign invited him nearer, and then the two were face to face.

“The Greybeard is far from his people,” said Atare. “Atare never thought to look upon his face again, or to be able to thank him for what he did for the black two moons ago, by the side of the big river of bitter waters.”

“The Greybeard wishes no thanks,” replied George. “What he did, he did for himself, and not for Atare. Atare might have perished for all the Greybeard cared, had it not been that the Greybeard had sworn an oath. Has Atare forgotten what the Greybeard told him and his fellow-murderers when he held them prisoners at the hill-side. Atare has seen the eagle attack the crane that has just captured a fine fish? It is not to rescue the fish that the crane is attacked, but that the eagle may feed on it himself.”

“The Greybeard is very cunning. He can blind the eyes of his white countrymen, but with the blacks he is no more than an opossum in the sunlight. He saved the life of Atare, and Atare thanks him,” and the black drew himself up proudly, and gave his thanks almost as if they had been a defiance.

George smiled bitterly. “And does not Atare know why he was saved? Does he not remember the words that were spoken by the hill-side, or did the black girl give false words to the ears of the chiefs? The Greybeard was then unable to speak with the tongue of the black, and he had to trust to the dull wit of a gin. But he said then that Atare and his two fellows should perish by no hand but his. And how has he carried out his words? Look round at your tribe. Its warriors can now be counted on the fingers. By twos, by threes, and by dozens its men have perished, whilst, upon all occasions, Macomo and Atare have been preserved. Has the tribe ever suffered a loss that the Greybeard did not show himself before it happened, and was not present to witness it or to aid it? Have Atare or Macomo ever been in danger that the Greybeard was not there to save them? Can Atare not see why this is? Does not Atare's own mind tell him why the Greybeard tracked the murderer of the sawyer,

and gave him instead of the black to the vengeance of the law?"

Atare returned, with unflinching eyes, the stern gaze that George bent on him, though he made no remark.

"Atare will see," continued George, "the Greybeard saved him from the whites to keep him for himself. Atare's time has almost come, and then he, like Opara, will have to pay the penalty of his crime. Before another moon has gone, the body of Atare will feed the warrigals in some lonely gully, and the hand stained with innocent blood will be offered as a sacrifice upon the grave that it helped to fill!"

He had barely concluded, when the quick ears of the black, which had been on the alert all the time George had been speaking to him, caught a sound from the direction whence he had come. Turning instantly, to his astonishment he caught sight of the dog Blucher running along rapidly with its nose down upon his track, and followed at some distance by Jamie. When the boy reached his father's side, he was astonished to find him standing there fully prepared, and with his musket in his hand.

"I say, General," he cried, in a tone of annoyance, "what made you let him go off like that, when you might have had him as nice as you like?"

"Because his time has not yet come," replied George moodily.

"And what's the odds," the boy went on eagerly, "of a week or two more or a week or two less, when you might have had him comfortable. You've gone and let him off again into that precious scrub, and the chances are that we don't see him again for the next month."

"Don't be afraid of that," said the father. "Having one end of the trail, it will be hard indeed if we can't get the other."

"He didn't surprise you?" Jamie asked. George shook his head. "Nor attempt to play any of his tricks?"

"No, no! He came to thank me," and George laughed grimly, "for saving his life."

"Well, now, that is good, that is!" said Jamie, highly delighted. "And what did you tell him?"

"Tell him!" answered George. "Why, that I saved him because he was my property, and because I should want to lay claim to him before very long."

Shortly after, they made their fire, and ate their meal, to all appearance as if they had camped down for the night. Then, as soon as darkness had closed in, they shifted to a spot some considerable distance off, and there, making themselves as comfortable as they could in the absence of a fire, they lay down and were soon sound asleep. With the first light of the following morning they separated, George to return to meet a war party he had encountered a day or two previously, and Jamie to follow through the scrub the trail of the retreating blacks.

Chapter VII Pursuers And Pursued

IN his pursuit of Macomo and Atare, George had on various occasions received valuable aid from the men of the Port Stephens tribe, with whom he had always been on friendly terms, and, at the present juncture, a picked party of twenty braves was out upon the trail of the men of the Maroo. This party had encamped in a deep dell, completely shut in by the vast, heavily-timbered mountain ranges that enclosed it in their circling curve. The men wandered listlessly about, or lay idly on the ground, although, in whatever way they might have chosen to pass the time, each man kept his weapons in his hands, as though expecting at each moment to be called upon to use them. Ever and anon a glance would be given towards the lower part of the gully, as if the arrival of some messenger was looked for in that quarter.

When they had thus got together, George made his appearance, turning a projecting point of the range that had hidden him previously from sight. There was a wild light in his eyes as he approached, and when at last he was eagerly questioned as to the intelligence he had brought, he exclaimed in a hoarse, harsh voice, "You have the whole brood of vipers under your hands. It is as your scout Bundaradin has informed us. The Maroo men have already camped upon the broad flat, and their women are making the fires to cook the game that the men are busily seeking. The hunters are now scattered through the forest. In an hour at the farthest they will have returned, and will be busy over their meal—the first good one they have had for many days."

The natives laughed at the thought of their hungry foes, and requested to be led at once to the camping-ground.

George shook his head. "The forest is very open," he said, "and the Maroo men have been hunted until their ears are as sharp as those of the wallabi and their eyes as piercing as those of the hawk. Let my friends wait until the Maroo men have gorged themselves with food, and then their ears will be dull and their eyes will be drowsy, and they will fall an easy prey."

The elder warriors expressed their satisfaction at the plan proposed by the Greybeard, but the younger grumbled somewhat at the additional delay that they were made to undergo.

"To attempt anything now," George explained to the latter, "would be to lose the chance you now have of altogether crushing out this viper brood. In another hour Bundaradin and the young white, my son, with the three warriors that have been sent to him, will have closed in upon these dogs on the far side, and will have cut off every chance of escape, should any but the two I have stipulated for slip through

your fingers. But remember our agreement—Macomo and Atare are to be uninjured.”

There were dark flashing eyes that shot out vengeful looks, and there was a dubious smile upon more than one mouth, that did not escape George's notice, and the meaning of which he well knew. Speaking now in a stern decided tone that there was no mistaking, he exclaimed, “Let my black friends remember, so that they may not suffer from ignorance. The man who raises his hand against either of the two I have named I will assuredly shoot down, even as I would my deadliest foe. Let my friends not forget this, nor forget that this was the agreement made before I brought them upon the track of their foes.”

Under the spreading boughs of a large tree the little party of fugitive Maroos was encamped. Worn out by fatigue and enfeebled by privation, for the days of travel through the scrub had been days of short commons and nights of watchfulness, it was not to be wondered at that the weary, hungry wretches, upon coming into a land of plenty, with the trees full of opossums and the flats alive with wallabi, should have indulged first in that most supreme of all aboriginal pleasures, a “tightener”—the expressive name they give to a really plentiful feed; and next, as the natural consequence of a heavy meal and a weary frame, a worn-out and utterly reckless and determined sleep.

The foe who stole upon them noiselessly, darting from tree to tree or shrub to shrub, might have almost walked upon them bodily and openly without disturbing their slumbers or causing an eyelid to open. On and on came the pursuers, until now they had the sleeping band encircled, and then, with a wild shout, a shower of spears was thrown at the helpless sleepers, and the assailants dashed in, tomahawk in hand, to complete the work of destruction that their missiles had commenced.

With the first shout of their foes, Macomo and Atare sprang to their feet. One glance was sufficient to show them they were surrounded; another look, and Atare had sprung forward to where he fancied there was a break in the line. More than one spear was levelled against him, and his chances of escape would have been small indeed, had it not been for the threatening gestures of George, who, with his gun raised and his fingers on the trigger, was most unmistakably prepared to carry out his threat of immolating the first man who dared to step in between him and his enemy. In a few bounds Atare was out of reach of the hostile missiles, and before pursuit could be attempted, if it were thought of, the black was out of sight. Macomo also had darted off in another direction, for he had not observed, as Atare had done, that the point at which he aimed was covered by an advancing band with Jamie at its head. He had seized upon his tomahawk almost instinctively when he leapt to his feet, and with a bound cleared the bed of the creek. A few more paces,

and then he came in view of the party who cut off his retreat. He shrieked out a wild yell of rage and disappointment, as he halted for an instant to look round in search of the least-beleaguered route. As he looked, his eye rested upon the advancing figure of Bundaradin, the fleet-footed, whose speed had placed him ahead of his fellows. A cry of savage satisfaction broke from Macomo as he saw him, and, without an instant's hesitation, dashed forward against his enemy. Bundaradin perceived that he was singled out for a contest with the great chief of the Maroo. Halting immediately, he raised a spear, poised, and without fitting it to the womera, threw it. Checked suddenly in his full speed, and poising and levelling his spear too hastily, the weapon missed its mark, and before he could level another, Macomo was in front of him. One or two blows only were exchanged with the tomahawks, for before the rest had time to come up, Bundaradin had fallen brained and lifeless at the feet of Macomo. Uttering a shriek of triumph for his victory, Macomo turned and ran off at right angles to his previous course, and it was only with great trouble, and after knocking down with his musket the most persistent of his allies, that Jamie could induce them to allow the fugitive to pass unscathed. The death of their comrade before their eyes, and at the hands of Macomo, had rendered them almost too furious for control.

Of the remainder of that massacre, for fight it was not, we shall say nothing, the particulars being too horrible for narration. Suffice it to say that, with the exception of Macomo and Atare, not an individual of the tribe escaped. Their women and children shared one common fate, their bodies being mutilated according to aboriginal custom by their blood-maddened destroyers.

And George, when he had seen Atare and afterwards Macomo clear out of the reach of the bloodhounds that had been let loose upon them, turned away with something like a feeling of horror from the fearful work that was going on around him. With hasty strides he moved away to get out of the sound of the shrieks of the women and the cries of the children, and, calling Jamie to him, he hurried off in the direction that only a few minutes previously had been taken by Atare.

Chapter VIII The Second Black Hand

TWO days after the massacre of the Maroo tribe, George and Jamie struck the trail of Atare. As they had passed along, George pointed with his finger to one particular spot, thus calling Jamie's attention to something there worthy of notice.

The boy nodded, and observed in a low tone, "Not more than an hour ago. He must be dead beat, for it looks more as if he had fallen than if he had sat down to rest."

George made a sign in the affirmative, but gave no verbal reply. He raised his head, however, and looked forward in the direction the track was taking, as though seeking the spot in which he whom he was now following was finding shelter. This he did without halting for an instant, or even so much as slackening his pace. Forward they went for another half-hour, and then on a sudden the Marshal came to a dead halt, raised his nose in the air, sniffed repeatedly, and then crouched down at full length amongst the tall ferns. George immediately sought shelter behind the trunk of the nearest tree, and, Jamie, coming to his side, seized him by the arm and pointed to a spot some four hundred yards away, where a solitary black was standing at the foot of a gum tree, the bark of which he was examining with too much interest to allow of his seeing those who were following on his track.

The black, unaware of the hostile eyes that were watching his every movement, appeared to be satisfied with his inspection of the bark of the tree, and then turned his look upward to the branches. He seemed to be satisfied with what he saw in that direction also; and he now commenced preparations for ascending it. The tree was a flooded gum, with a trunk about three feet in diameter, running up without a break or a bough to a height of fully one hundred feet. As it stood perfectly straight, it would have been a work of great labour, besides one of difficulty and danger, to have ascended it in the ordinary method by cutting footsteps in the bark with a tomahawk, the more especially as the rude stone tomahawks which were then used by the natives were not handled with the same rapidity and precision as the lighter steel implements that were in after years possessed by the blacks. Atare, for it was he, though so worn down by fatigue, watching, and hunger as to be scarcely recognisable, never for a moment thought, in his then weak and exhausted state, to mount by the ordinary method in search of the opossum which he knew by the signs on the bark was then in the hollow limb that he saw above him. He proceeded to search about amongst the thick tangled growth of the watercourses, until he at last procured a long runner of a species of wild vine about eight or nine feet long and about an inch in thickness. Bringing this in his hand, he again came to the foot of

the tree he had recently examined. Passing the vegetable cord round the tree, he twisted and knotted the two ends firmly together so as to make a kind of hoop, of such a circumference that, with him standing within it and the cord passed under his arms, it would be drawn perfectly tight when, with his feet against the tree, he threw his body out from the trunk at an angle of about thirty degrees. This done, he prepared to ascend the tree. First jerking the stiff vegetable rope by a sharp motion of the hands that grasped it on either side near the trunk, he pressed his feet firmly against the tree, whilst he threw his body backward until the rope was perfectly tight. With the rest he thus obtained for his body, he was enabled to take two upward steps with his feet. Then, drawing himself in by the rope towards the tree, he took the weight of his body off it for an instant, and in that instant, with a quick motion of his hands, he again jerked the rope upwards. Again the feet took two upward steps, and again the body was drawn inwards, and the rope jerked up at the moment the weight was off it.

In this way he had ascended three-fourths of the height of the trunk, when suddenly his attention was attracted by the sound of advancing footsteps. One look in the direction whence the sound had come was sufficient to tell him everything. He gave a wild shriek of fear and deadly agony, and then, losing all presence of mind, his trembling knees no longer kept the rope out at the tension necessary to support him. The rope slipped, but his feet giving way at the same time, his body came down with violent and stunning force against the tree, and by its weight jammed the rope fast as he had been caught under the arms. He was thus pressed against the tree, unable to move, for he had been too much exhausted, previous to attempting the ascent, to be able now to put forth the great muscular exertion that would be necessary to extricate him from his dangerous position.

George came up to within about twenty paces of the tree, and, as Atare looked down upon him with pleading eyes, for the lips of the black evidently refused at this time of need to utter the sounds that his will would have dictated, George raised his gun, took steady aim for an instant, and then fired. The ball went true to its mark, and Atare, shot through the heart, gave one convulsive bound, that brought his body three or four feet lower down, and then hung dead and senseless. George, who had uttered no word either as he advanced or as he fired, turned away his head when his bullet had sped upon its errand of death. Making a sign to Jamie that the boy seemed to understand, he turned slowly from the spot, still without speaking a word.

Jamie, in pursuance of the direction that his father's sign had given him, walked round the tree and examined scrutinisingly the vegetable rope that still retained the body of the black far up above reach. As if he had found the spot he wanted, he took up his position upon the opposite side of the tree to that from which his father had

fired. He had noticed that a portion of the vine had been somewhat abraded by the jerks it had received, and now, taking a steady aim at this spot, he struck it with his bullet, and so far severed it that the weight of the body did the rest. The rope parted, and the now lifeless corpse fell with a heavy thud upon the ground. Jamie approached it and looked down upon what had once been his enemy with the most inveterate malignity, a malignity that even death did not seem to satisfy. Dragging the body over so as to bring the wrist of the dead man on to a projecting root, he severed the right hand with one blow of his tomahawk. Holding it up before his eyes, he indulged in a wild laugh of glee.

His father, who had remained leaning upon his gun, and with his back turned to that which he had made what it was, apparently buried in thought, looked round as he heard the insane joy of his son. As his eye fell upon the bleeding trophy that Jamie held up so triumphantly, a shudder seemed to pass over him, and, again turning himself away, he was moving slowly and sadly from the spot.

Jamie, however, in his idiot glee, desired to obtain some token of approval from the General. Running up to his father, and dandling in his own the recently-severed hand, he cried: "We've done it well, general, ain't we? Only one of the whole breed of snakes left, and, oh, don't I long for the day when I shall serve him this way!"

George looked for an instant upon his son, with eyes in which sorrow was most unmistakably depicted; then, raising his one unoccupied hand and smiting himself on the breast, he exclaimed in all the fervour of mental disquietude, "May the Lord forgive me!" and then continued the way from the spot.

Two days after this, a second black hand, fresh from the body whence it had been reft, might have been seen nailed to that rude cross on the lonely grave, making the now shrivelled and weather-worn effigy with which it was made to keep company look still more weird and fearful by its freshness.

Book Four—The Third Black Hand

Chapter I The Scrubbers

IN the midst of the mountain range that formed the watershed between the Hunter and the Hawkesbury, a party of four men were encamped just at the opening of one of the densely-timbered gullies, but sufficiently within shelter of the heavy growth to secure them from observation.

The most prominent amongst these men was a burly dark-complexioned ruffian of middle age, fully six feet in height, and of correspondingly strong build, with brawny limbs, heavy shoulders, and deep, powerful chest. His head, however, was extravagantly large, even in proportion to the massive body which it surmounted; and his features, naturally large, coarse, and hideous, were rendered still more repulsive by crime and by the brutalising effects of the then system of convict coercion. A deep scar which traversed his cheek and forehead, extending over the orbit of the left eye, and depriving that organ of sight, gave anything but a charm to his original unsightliness of visage, and rendered still more ruffianly features already villainous enough in themselves.

Lanty Maher had been a petty leader in some one of the many secret societies that were the bane of Ireland at the commencement of the last century. After a career of villainy that was but little respected by the legal authorities of his native land, but of which he boasted when in company with his fellows in crime, Lanty had been cut down in an attack made by the Yeomanry cavalry upon a band of insurgents with whom he was acting, had been made prisoner, and had been tried and sentenced to death. By some lucky accident he had been one amongst a number who had been reprieved, and to his great astonishment he had subsequently found his sentence commuted to transportation for life.

He was standing up in the full light of the fire, endeavouring to repair some damage to the lock of his gun, an old Tower musket much the worse for wear. This he manipulated in such a way as to show that he was by no means unaccustomed to handle such weapons. This was the accepted leader of the present gang of outlaws, and the character of the rest of the men might very readily be surmised from that of the ruffian whom they had selected as their chief.

Next after the chief, the one most worthy of notice, taking villainy of aspect as the criterion of merit, was a short, thick-set, and square-built individual. He also was dark-complexioned, with black, close-growing whiskers and beard, that nearly covered his face, and left very little of his countenance visible. His forehead was low, with heavy, overhanging eyebrows, from which the hair hung down in heavy tufts, and almost joined that which clad his high cheek-bones, thus barely leaving

room for the brown, bright, and restless eyes, diminutive as they were, to make themselves seen.

Roger the Rough had led a life of villainy from his boyhood, and had received his name in consequence of having, years prior to his getting into the difficulty that had ended in his transportation for life, made his living by following that peculiar branch of roguery known amongst the cross men of the day as “roughing,” or robbing by means of violence in some way. In the friendly intercourse of the scrubbers' camp, or in the enforced seclusion of the stockade, Roger had no hesitation in letting his mates into the secret of many an act of bloodshed and murder that still remained a mystery to the law and its myrmidons, but the details of which were narrated with great zest to such of his mates as he knew to be as criminal and as bloodstained as himself.

Ted Sullivan, the third man, was a long, thin, fair-complexioned man, of not more than perhaps thirty years of age. There was a light twinkle in his blue eye, and a lurking humour about his laughing countenance, that would have led the casual observer to fancy that Ted was nothing more than the light-hearted Irishman, without care as without guile. He had received his sentence of punishment for complicity in a bank robbery at Cork. The robbery had been very cleverly planned, and would probably have been successfully executed, had it not miscarried through the treachery of one of the accomplices. Ted had long had the reputation of a most determined housebreaker, and his last exploit sent him out of Ireland for life. He never ceased to bewail the failure of his well-devised scheme or the loss of the magnificent plunder that had been for a few minutes in his grasp; but he never gave utterance to his regret without growling out a vow of vengeance against the informer, if ever chance should throw them together.

The last of the four outlaws here assembled was altogether a different kind of personage to the rest. He was quite a young man, not being more than four or five and twenty. He was of medium height, and of slight and what would be called genteel make; at the same time, he was not so slim as to prevent him from being well built, active, and sinewy. His hands, which were remarkably small and white, were washed clean, and his face gave similar evidence of cleanliness. His hair, though short, was carefully combed and brushed, and a black silk neckerchief was tied daintily round his throat. Owing to these peculiarities, he had received from his fellow-convicts the name of Jack the Gentleman. He was a young man of good family, and had received sentence of death for a murder committed under strange, and, as it appeared, most horrifying, circumstances. One or two links in the chain of evidence against him had been weak, and on this ground numerous and influential friends had based their intercession for his life, and had succeeded in procuring a

commutation of sentence to transportation for life. He was armed with a light double-barrelled fowling-piece that lay against a log by his side. It was apparently all but new, and of a very superior description. The possession of such a weapon by an escaped convict—for it was one of far better workmanship than was usually seen in those days—would have at once given rise to astonishment on the part of persons unacquainted with the working of the convict system in the olden time, and unaware of the easy way in which criminals from a certain class of society were enabled, even under the severe penal code then in force, to indulge themselves in many things that were not only prohibited, but were absolutely impossible to prisoners from the lower ranks of society.

Chapter II The Last Of His Tribe

THE homestead of Mount Pleasant was far more complete in every respect than the generality of the country residences of the time of which we write. It was situated at the base of the ranges mentioned in the previous chapter, and on the edge of the beautifully-undulating country then known by the general term of Wallis' Plains. The owner, Mr. Marcomb, had not been more than a few months in the colony. He was a man of what is termed middle age, having passed his fortieth year, the sole representative of a well-to-do English family that had always held a high position in the country in which it had been settled for centuries. He had, after remaining single for so many years, suddenly taken unto himself a wife some eighteen months prior to his introduction into this narrative. The world—that is to say, the country world, being all those to whom the name of Marcomb had been familiar from infancy—were astonished, not only that Squire Marcomb should marry, but that his choice should have fallen upon a widow, and that widow with two grown-up daughters of her own. The cup of astonishment, however, was fairly filled to the brim when it was known that Mr. Marcomb had broken up his pleasant English home, had sold the manor that had been owned by a Marcomb for the last five centuries, and for the purpose of emigrating, and emigrating, too, to Botany Bay. Why he should do this, and especially why he should do it so soon after his marriage, was a nine days' wonder in the country; and somehow or other the gossips, in talking over the marriage and the departure, shook their heads knowingly, as if there were some connection between the two, though what that connection was they were unable to fathom.

On reaching the new southern land, Mr. Marcomb, no longer the Squire, had preferred to purchase a property ready to his hand rather than go through the delay, inconvenience, and annoyance of clearing and preparing an estate for himself. For some cause that may perhaps be explained as the story progresses, he had fixed upon the Hunter River as the district in which to settle; and, finding the owner of Mount Pleasant willing to come to terms for its sale, he had purchased it as it stood, had put it into a fit state to receive his family, and had then brought them up to reside upon it.

Margaret and Beatrice Marcomb were of the respective ages of twenty and eighteen. A dark, almost Spanish complexion, black sparkling eyes, and glossy raven hair were common to both sisters. They were nearly of the one height, and had the same tall, graceful figure. Both were of a quiet, reserved, but eminently affectionate disposition. They showed no noisy or even demonstrative gaiety, not

even indulging in the ordinary playfulness of temper natural to the young; at the same time, they were soberly cheerful, though at intervals a pensive sadness would seem to steal over their features.

Their mother had certainly not given her features to her daughters, for she was fair—as fair as they were dark. She had the light blue eyes, bright flaxen hair, and soft transparent complexion that has been everywhere accepted as the type of feminine purity and gentleness, and as the mark of a soft, yielding disposition. In the case of Mrs. Marcomb, this generally received idea was utterly at fault, for there was an amount of unbending determination in this lady's character, for which very few would have given her credit. Gentle and pleasing in manner, she was lively in society, but subduedly so, as became a lady of her years. Like her daughters, she would at times show upon her face that look of pained remembrance, but only for an instant, for, if she combated with the regret that perhaps in her inmost heart she felt, she would shake it off with an effort, and throw into her features a proud, angry, and defiant air.

Mr. Marcomb himself was a quiet, easy-going countryman, with a fresh, happy, and contented-looking countenance. His only care in life was to watch over the happiness and comfort of his wife and his adopted daughters. For his wife he entertained the most chivalrous devotion, whilst his manner towards the young girls was of that respectful and considerate character so peculiar to the gentlemen of the past generation. Thus this little family lived together in the greatest unity, and, but for the occasional clouds of pensiveness, in the greatest happiness. The girls vied with each other in their attention, not only to their mother, but to their mother's husband. They were most warmly attached to him, and never addressed him except by the endearing name of father.

It was the month of April, and the day which was then drawing to a close had been unusually hot. Mrs. Marcomb and her daughters were sitting in the front room of the house, the French lights which led into the verandah being thrown wide open to court the admission of the cool breeze that had just commenced to set in fresh and invigorating from the sea shore. They were engaged in various feminine occupations, and, though alone, but little conversation was passing between them, for that unhappy remembrance that has been alluded to had evidently fallen upon them, and was exercising its sombre influence over them. Such, indeed, was invariably the case whenever the mother and daughters chanced to be left together without other companionship.

There had been a long pause even in the trifling conversation that had been held, when Beatrice, in a pleading voice, as though she deprecated in advance the stern answer that her mother might probably make, asked in a low tone, “And has nothing

since been heard of him?"

A look of pain passed over Mrs. Marcomb's face, but, instantly shaking it off, she answered in a voice from which all trace of emotion had been banished, "Nothing!" The eyes of the mother were fixed, hard, and stern, whilst those of the girls were suffused with tears.

"Unhappy boy!" said Margaret, as the tears found their way down her cheeks. "When a few months more might have——"

"Silence!" cried Mrs. Marcomb harshly. "Let us say no more upon a subject that cannot but be painful to the whole of us."

The girl brushed the tears hastily from her eyes, and, putting down her work, she rose and went over to the piano that stood at one end of the room. Seating herself before the instrument, she had struck only a few mournful chords upon the keys, when a native black, who, with a noiseless step had stolen round the corner of the house, suddenly presented himself before the window, where he stood silent and motionless, waiting until one or the other of those within should accost him. His dark form obscuring the light at once drew all eyes upon him, and no sooner was he seen than Beatrice sprang towards him and asked eagerly, "Well, Macomo, have you been successful?"

Had he not been called by name, few would have recognised in the miserable aboriginal who now stood before the window the proud war chief of the Maroo, who three years ago had led that fierce tribe on to battle. The three plume feathers of the eagle no longer decorated his head, but instead of them his hair stood up, coarse and untended, in wild confusion. His eyes, so lately bright and sparkling, flashing out fierce defiance, were bleared and dull, with that heavy vacant look that showed that Macomo had become still more degraded by having fallen into the vices of the whites, and that he was now an habitual drunkard. Even as he stood there he was partially intoxicated, and this more than anything else gave him that appearance of abject misery that was now his most distinguishing characteristic. His weapons formed the only exception to the utter neglect that marked all else about him. They were still of the best materials, were carefully selected and well tended, whilst a small steel tomahawk decorated his girdle.

When addressed by the girl, he stood for a few seconds, as if considering his answer, or gathering the full meaning of her question; then he answered her in the English jargon of the aborigines, which we shall not follow, "The horse of the young Bright Eyes is in the paddock. Macomo is no longer the chief of a great tribe, but he has no yet lost his power of tracking. He followed the horse of the Bright Eyes through many tracks, and brought it home at last, as he said he would."

"You don't know how much I am obliged to you, for the horse was a gift from

dear papa, and I would not have lost it for anything. Go into the kitchen now and get something to eat; and when papa comes home he shall give you what I promised."

Though he was thus virtually dismissed, Macomo made no movement towards retiring. Mrs. Marcomb, after waiting for a time and finding that he did not leave, spoke to him: "You must be hungry, Macomo; go and get some tea and meat in the kitchen."

Macomo still stood looking at the three ladies, but without speaking or without giving any sign that he was about to follow the directions given to him.

"Have you anything more to say to us?" asked Mrs. Marcomb.

Macomo regarded her vacantly, and after a pause answered, "Macomo passed many tracks in looking for the horse."

"Yes," responded the lady; "more are going backwards and forwards through the country than there were ever since we first came here."

"Does the Fair Hair never fear a visit from the croppies?" asked Macomo.

Mrs. Marcomb, who knew that this was the name usually applied by the blacks to the escaped convicts who prowled about the bush, and lived by plunder, asked with some anxiety, "Has Macomo seen any tracks that he thinks are those of bad men?"

"Macomo has seen the tracks and has seen the men," he answered. "So many," he said, holding up four fingers. "Three with big guns, one with young fellow guns."

"And you went near enough to them to see them?" exclaimed Mrs. Marcomb with much astonishment, for she had never given Macomo credit for so much spirit.

Macomo drew himself up proudly, and something of his old fierce defiant air came over him as he answered, "Macomo saw them and listened to their talk. The Fair Hair does not think that Macomo was a great chief, and that not many moons ago he led his tribe in many and fierce battles. He was always first in the fight when the foe was there to meet him, or if he wished it he could steal upon his enemy by day or night, no matter how keen the sight or how sharp the hearing of the man he followed. Macomo could do this with the fierce warriors of Port Stephens, and it was but a small thing to steal down upon four dull-eared whites."

"But why do you tell us this? What is it to us that you have met four bad men in the forest?"

"Macomo tells the Fair Hair, that she and the young Bright Eyes may speak to the master, and tell him that when the warrigals are abroad the kangaroo shelters her young, and that when the eagle is soaring in the sky he has always his eye upon his prey. The master will listen to the Fair Hair, though he will not mind the voice of Macomo."

"Do you mean to say, then, that these bad men are likely to come here?" asked Mrs. Marcomb, with considerable anxiety.

“One has been here already, close up. The master has bad men in the huts, and one of them has had a talk with the croppy. Let the master keep his doors fast and his eyes open, or he may be in danger.”

“I can hardly believe it,” asserted Mrs. Marcomb. “These miserable wretches would never dare to attack such a dwelling as this, where there are so many servants to protect us.”

Macomo smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “Those servants no good,” he answered. “Let the master not mind the servants, but look out himself.” Then, as if he had said all he intended, and did not desire to be questioned further, he withdrew from the window at which he had been standing, and was retiring, when Margaret ran out to him.

“Oh, Macomo,” she said, laying her hand upon his arm in order to detain him, “you know something more than this! Let me beg of you to tell us what you know and what you think.”

Macomo only repeated the caution he had given previously. “You tell the master to keep a good lock-out.”

Margaret was not satisfied with this. “You think, then,” she said, “that these bad men intend to visit the farm?”

Macomo nodded his head in acquiescence, and the young girl wrung her hands in her momentary dread. Macomo looked upon her uneasiness, and a look almost of pity stole over his features. “Let not the Bright Eyes fear,” he said. “She and her family were good to Macomo when he had no friends. Macomo will keep watch over the Bright Eyes, and over those whom she loves, and no injury shall come to her before Macomo has warned her.”

Chapter III The Tracker Tracked

WHEN Mr. Marcomb was informed of Macomo's story of the "croppies," he was more perturbed than he cared to confess, and immediately set about making such preparations as would tend to frustrate the intended attack upon his homestead, Macomo, meanwhile, had gone out to watch the camp of Lanty and his gang, and had succeeded in reaching unobserved a spot from which he was able, not only to see them, but to overhear much of their conversation; for, believing themselves to be entirely screened from observation, they were careless as to their manner of speech. The black had not lain long in concealment before the leader of the gang returned from reconnoitring the position of affairs at the farm, and it was at once apparent that he was not in the best of temper. Turning to his companions, he said:

"What will yeez be saying, then, when I tell yeez that we've been spied upon and sould?"

"Sold!" they exclaimed almost as one man.

"Shure, thin, it's sould I said," replied Lanty. "There's a black shnake, that does be tracking us and spying on us an' listening to every word we do be spaking to ache other."

"Who is it?" asked Roger, with a grim voice and a significant fingering of an old long-bladed knife that was stuck in his girdle.

"Faix, thin, it's nather more nor less than one ov them black nagurs ov natives. It's meself would like to mate him jist to say 'good-morning,' and to give him the contents of this purty plaything here, even if it wor the last charge I had."

"Then I suppose it's to be all off now with the farm," said Jack.

"Off, is it?" replied Lanty. "Divil a off. It's too good a thing, alannah, to let slip off so aisy as that."

"And how do you suppose we are to manage it in the face of all this preparation?"

"Preparations is nothing, me boy," said Lanty. "What's the use of preparations when they do be taken by surprise? Guns and powder do be no good when they do be in one room and the min in another."

"Are they to be surprised, do you think, with a sentry always on the look-out?"

"Shure, thin, an' haven't I made that right wid Mick? As soon as it's dark to-night we are to be at the farram. He will make the sintry safe, an' thin up we go to the house onknownst to anyone."

"It looks feasible enough," said Jack, after pondering for a while.

"Faseble, is it? Shure, we have it all our own way. The guns do be kept in a back room, so as not to frighten the wimin; an' if——" Lanty was going on.

“Women!” exclaimed Gentleman Jack. “Are there women?”

“Wimin? Arrah, thin, an' shure there are. Two as purty little girleens as iver yeez sot eyes on. As ye're the jintleman, Jack, ye shall have first choice ov thim, an' I'll coort the other.”

“And do you think,” struck in Roger, “that you'll be able to do the business quietly with two gals in the house? I know that kind o' cattle better. There's no stopping 'em when they begins a-screeching.”

“It is to be stopped, Raffy avich,” quietly suggested Lanty.

“I don't know,” replied Roger. “I've always found them do more squalling and noise than a whole houseful of men.”

“It is to be stopped, Raffy avich,” quietly suggested Lanty. “Ye have a very nate and pleasant way wid ye of making pable quiet, whin ye like.”

“Look'ee here!” Jack burst in. “Let us have a fair understanding over this. Deal with the men as you like, but only with them in case of their resisting; but lay a hand upon a woman, and I'll send a ball through the man who does it.”

“Whisht to him now!” said Lanty, with an ominous curl of the lip. “Isn't he more like the captain than that poor divil Lanty Maher, an' he won't have the girleens hurt at all, at all. Faix, he's the gentleman every inch ov him.”

“What I say I mean, and so I gave you warning.”

“Thin, they sha'n't be hurted at all, alannah; we'll smodder 'em with kisses an' nothing else,” cried Lanty with a grin, made more hideous by the rage it was meant to cover.

“Laugh if you will,” replied Jack, “but understand me fairly. If there's the least violence to the women, I drop out of the gang, and, what is more, I'll make a corpse of the man who does the injury.”

“Faith, thin, it wouldn't be the nate thing for an Irishman to stand by and see ill-usage to the ladies, so I'll stand by you, Jack, darlin', to the last dhrop,” put in Ted.

“An' it's the purty pair ov ladies' boys ye are,” growled out Lanty, barely able to restrain his wrath. “Maybe ye'll be telling me how long it is since ye did be making it all up this a-way.”

“That is not to the purpose,” responded Jack. “It must be understood that there's to be no roughing except to the men if they use violence. If it is not, I may as well drop out at once.”

“Dhrop to ——!” burst out Lanty in his rage. “It's frightened ye are, and ye're afraid to face the men.”

“No. If the men resist, I'll stand by you with my life; and you know I will, for you have seen me do it before. But if a hand is laid upon a woman, that moment I take her part.”

“An' here's another will help ye, jewel!” said Ted.

Lanty's passion once more got the better of him; but, having given vent to two or three fearful oaths, he managed to recover some of his equanimity, and was ultimately led to promise, though with a very bad grace, that no harm should happen to the ladies. This difficulty settled, they proceeded in a more amicable manner to discuss the business of the night, and the different parts that each was to take in its performance.

Macomo, who had now heard enough for his purpose, stole away from his dangerous propinquity to the ruffians who had threatened his life, in as noiseless a manner as that in which he had reached it. Once clearly out of hearing of the outlaws, he began to make his way straight towards the farm. As he was thus proceeding at a rapid pace, some sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he diverged from the direct homeward path, and sought for the track by which he had gained the hill-side. His perfect knowledge of the ground and his quickness of sight soon enabled him to do this; but, no sooner had he reached it than, casting his eye upon the ground, he stood transfixed and immovable, for there, following along upon his own tracks, and made since he had gone that way, were the footmarks which he knew so well—the footmarks of his inevitable and unwearying foe!

That same morning two men, one to all appearance an exceedingly old man and the other a very young one, were standing on the crown of one of the long sloping ridges that ran down into and joined the broad expanse of level land out of which the Mount Pleasant property had been taken. The elder had long spare locks of grey hair that hung down almost to his shoulders, whilst his white and untrimmed beard rested upon his breast. His face was pinched and meagre, his brow furrowed with deep wrinkles, and his countenance wore a look of pained and settled melancholy—a look in which regret seemed sometimes to be driven to the verge of despair, and in which was hidden the nameless horror of some secret thought. His dress was old and patched, having seen many months of service; at the same time, it was scrupulously clean. It was George Maxwell, much altered from what he had been nine months before. That ominous flash, the light of incipient insanity, had passed away from his eye, and had left behind it but the subdued expression of some deep mental regret. His manner also was altered, for he had no longer the smart active movements that bespoke the soldier, but seemed to go his way wearily, as if a burden too heavy for his strength was weighing him down—a burden that no human effort could shake off. Thus he moved about hopelessly, almost aimlessly, as though he were a penitent doomed to undergo a life of terrible punishment for some crime of so fearful a nature that no amount of penance would ever atone for.

Jamie, on the other hand, had changed for the better as much as his father had

changed for the worse. He had rapidly sprung up into a man, and though there was at times a strange and startling wildness in his eyes, those times were much less frequent than they had formerly been, whilst upon ordinary occasions none would have questioned his sanity from his looks. He had become not only stronger, but bolder and more resolute as he grew older. He was exceedingly stoutly and squarely built, and a few years had changed him from a boy to a man. His features ordinarily wore a look of open fearlessness, and though under strong excitement they would assume one of wild ferocity, or in moments of difficulty one of shrewd and elfish cunning, those times but seldom intervened. He was not only bold, but decisive, and he was now the leader rather than his father, whom he regarded as a poor, decrepit, broken-down man, entirely unfit for the great task that was still to be performed.

“There's where I saw the camp fire last night,” said Jamie, pointing downwards to a spot far below where they stood; “just there behind that rise that has the clump of wattles growing at the end of it.”

“And you have seen nothing of him this morning?” asked George.

“No,” replied Jamie. “He's shifted, and mayhap gone clean off. I expect there's been a split up between him and that new cove at the farm, or he wouldn't have cut away like that after dark.”

“God send he would go clear away from this part of the country,” George fervently ejaculated.

“There you are again, now!” cried Jamie. “And suppose he does, a nice tramp we would have to take after him. But of course that's nothing. I don't know what's coming over you, General. You forget what the both of us swore to do; and done it shall be—it it ain't by you, it shall be by me.”

“More blood! More blood!” groaned George, raising his hands piteously. “When we have already been the means of shedding enough to drown us down to hell!”

“It seems to me, General, that you ought to have thought of that a long time ago,” argued Jamie; “but we're in for it now, that's certain, and as there's only one of the devils left, go he shall after the others—that's fixed and certain.”

When he had concluded speaking, he gave a low, short whistle, and Blucher, who had been reposing out of sight on the sunny side of a bush, rose from his lair, shook himself, and came forward wagging his tail.

“Now, Marshal,” said Jamie, “we are going to look out for an old friend of yours.”

Blucher gazed steadily at his master with his intelligent eyes, remaining perfectly quiescent, as if unwilling to commit himself in any way until he had received some further information.

“You recollect that black thief, Macomo?” asked Jamie, still addressing the dog.

Blucher would have growled, had such a thing been permitted to him; but as it

was not, he contented himself by showing his teeth in anything but an amicable manner.

“Well, you see, Marshal, we're going to look out for his tracks, and if you can help us in it, just try and do it.”

The dog jumped up joyfully, sprang ahead of his master, and began sniffing the ground vigorously all round.

“That's it!” exclaimed Jamie. “That's what I like to see in you, Blucher. Now, if the General was only what he used to be, we'd have some of the old sport again in a very little time.”

Following along the top of the ridge, they came in sight of the outlaws, during the time they were quarrelling on the hill-side. They remained looking on in amazement at the extraordinary scene, sufficiently explained by the expressive actions of the men. When at last the quarrel had been patched up, and the men moved away towards the less open ground, George and his son were rewarded for the patience with which they had maintained their watch, by seeing the black whom they sought steal out from his place of concealment and follow upon the tracks of these ruffians. Silent and watchful they remained, never losing sight either of the black or of the scrubbers, until at last Macomo, having obtained all the information he required, stole away from the spot and made off in the direction of Mount Pleasant.

“It strikes me, General,” whispered Jamie in his father's ear, “that them fellows is up to mischief, and that the black has found it out and gone off to tell all he knows to them at the farm below.”

“Can there indeed be that much good in one whom we have deemed to be all evil!” answered George in the same low tone.

“Well, I suppose he hopes to make something out of it,” suggested Jamie, “and will give just as much information as he considers to be worth what's given him. That's about the way with the serpents.”

“And they seem to be well armed, too,” said George.

“Yes, those fellows will give them below all their work to do,” added Jamie.

“They certainly have the appearance of resolved and desperate men. As we are now satisfied in regard to the black, we will remain and keep an eye on these ruffians.”

“I'm agreeable, General,” answered Jamie. “Anything for a little amusement, and it's a change to be at this work again.”

“Go, then,” George directed. “Sneak as near to them as you can without risking discovery, and learn what they are about to do.”

“All right, General,” responded Jamie joyfully. “Them's the orders. Why, it's getting quite like old times, and I shall see you as fresh and lively as ever before

long.” So saying, and in high good humour, Jamie commenced the arduous task of stealing down unperceived within hearing distance of the scrubbers.

By the time, however, that he had effected this object, almost everything of importance had been settled upon between them, and all that he was able to gather from the conversation he heard was that some expedition was on foot, and that some robbery was that night to be committed. Finding that with all his waiting nothing more was to be learnt, he came back to his father in the same stealing, noiseless manner as he had quitted, and made him acquainted with the substance of what he had heard. Nothing definite had been gathered from their talk, and they therefore resolved to lie by in their present place of concealment, to keep a close watch upon the scrubbers, to follow them whenever they made a move, and to do their best to thwart whatever scheme of villainy was contemplated.

Chapter IV The Bailing Up

WHEN Macomo presented himself at the glass door of the sitting-room, as described at the conclusion of a former chapter, Mr. Marcomb was at first so overcome with surprise and anger that he sat for some seconds unable to find words in which to address the errant black; but, recovering himself, he started up from the chair on which he was sitting, and commenced in a tone far louder than what he usually employed, "Why, you da——" Then, stopping, as if horror-struck at what he had been about to do, he turned to his wife and daughters: "I beg your pardon, my dear, and yours also, young ladies," he apologised, with a bow that Sir Charles Grandison might have acknowledged with pride. "My ill-temper nearly made me forget that I was in the presence of ladies." Then, turning to the black, he continued, "Now, you black rascal, where have you been to at such a time, when you knew you were wanted here?"

"The master has too much talk," quietly answered Macomo. "There is no time for talking now; it is time to do when the croppies are at the back door."

"Croppies at the back door!" ejaculated Mr. Marcomb, whilst the ladies gave a simultaneous cry of alarm. "What do you mean, you vagabond, by going away in this manner, and coming back with your cock-and-bull stories to frighten the ladies?"

"Macomo does not indulge in talk like a young gin," responded the native; "and he now tells the master that if he does not get his arms at once, the croppies will be on him before he can reach the weapons!"

"Stop, stop!" he said, as the ladies pressed round him, and urged him at once to do what the black suggested. "How do you know this, Macomo?"

"Macomo saw them crossing the back fence as he came round to the front of the house."

"Heaven help us!" cried Mrs. Marcomb in accents of agony. "Are they so near?"

"And what made you stay so long away, that you only come now at the very last minute to warn us?" asked Mr. Marcomb, still doubtful of the correctness of the black's news.

"The master has no time to listen to Macomo's talk. Macomo has brought the news in time if the master would act instead of standing talking like a woman. Let him get his guns before it is too late!"

"Too late! Gracious Providence! I hear footsteps even now at the back door!" cried Margaret.

Almost before she had done speaking, the back door of the house was heard to

open, and heavy footsteps sounded in the passage. Mr. Marcomb at once rushed to the door of the sitting-room, but before he could reach it, it was pushed violently open, and Lanty Maher entered, followed by Roger. At the first sound of the footsteps, Macomo had glided noiselessly away from the open door at which he had been standing; and Margaret, with a kind of crude idea that perhaps she might be able to render more service outside than if she allowed herself to be penned up in the room with the rest, resolved to follow the example of the black, and, passing through the open door, she closed it after her to remove any suspicion of her retreat. There remained then in the room, when the robbers entered, Mr. Marcomb, who met them at the door, and his lady, who had risen to her feet and was standing in another corner of the room supporting her daughter Beatrice, who, in an agony of fear was clinging to her mother.

“Good-avening to yeez all!” exclaimed Lanty, as he entered the room. “Shure, it's happy I am to make the acquaintance of such company!”

“Villains!” cried Mr. Marcomb, boldly facing them.

“There, there,” said Lanty, coolly thrusting him on one side with his powerful arm; “sit down, ould jintleman, and don't be making yeerself onaisy. It's the money ye have that we bees come afther, an' mayhap a few bits of aitable. An' shure a jintleman like you wouldn't be grudging that much to poor divils such as we do be.”

“What do you mean by coming here, you rascals! Go outside at once! Don't you see there are ladies in the room?”

“Faix, thin, I do see it,” replied Lanty; “an' a purty pair they be. I'll be talking to thim by-and-by.”

“This is outrageous!” Mr. Marcomb exclaimed. “Do you know what the consequences are of the act you are now committing? Are you aware that death is the punishment of the crime of which you are now guilty?”

“Faix an' aisy, ould jintleman,” the ruffian answered, “we know all that long ago. Our nicks have been in the noose these last three months, an', ye see, one offince more nor less don't make much differ.”

“I shall take care to inform——” Mr. Marcomb was commencing.

“Inform, is it!” cried Lanty, seizing him by the throat. “Take care, ould fellow, or we'll not be laving ye breath enough in yeer ould carcass to inform wid.” Then, turning to Roger, who had been standing with his finger on the trigger of his piece, ready to obey any order that might be given, “Tie him to the chair beyant,” he directed.

“There ye are, now, plasant an' comfirtable,” added Lanty; “an' now thin, mistress, ye'll be afther taking us to where's the goold.”

“No, no, Rachael! I forbid you to do anything of the kind!” cried Mr. Marcomb.

Lanty turned his eyes from one to the other, and, seeing that Mrs. Marcomb hesitated on being thus exhorted by her husband, he raised his piece, coolly opened the pan and examined the priming, then, shutting the pan and cocking the musket, he said, "Ye'll show us, or by the mortal, I'll shoot the ould omadhaun where he sits!" And he deliberately raised the gun to his shoulder and presented it at Mr. Marcomb, as he asked, "How is it to be?"

"Forbear! Forbear!" shrieked Mrs. Marcomb. "Put down that fearful weapon, and I will give you all you want."

"Shure, thin, it's the darlint ye are intirely, an' it's good friends we'll be in time."

"No, no, Rachel! They only do this to terrify you. They dare not carry out their diabolical threat."

"Dare it!" interposed Lanty, with a fiendish laugh. "Shure, thin, it's little ye know us, that's certain, or ye'd know that it's small care we take whether it's one more or less that we lave without brains."

"Anything, anything!" cried the lady, "rather than that danger should come to you!"

"Throth, ye're the jewel intirely; ye're the sensible woman. So I'll jist take a kiss from the girleen here, an' shure it's the colleen dhas she is; an' thin I'll attend to ye, alannah." As he concluded, Lanty made a step towards Beatrice, who, already alarmed beyond measure, now ran screaming with horror from the approaching ruffian, and threw herself into her mother's arms. "An' is it frightened ye are?" he exclaimed, as he seized her round the waist and endeavoured to drag her from her mother's embrace. "Shure it's nothing at all whin ye're used to it."

Roger now came to the assistance of his mate, and, seizing Mrs. Marcomb, the two ruffians, by their cowardly strength, succeeded in separating the mother and daughter. These raised a piteous cry of despair when they found their resistance vain, and Beatrice, immediately on giving utterance to it, fell back fainting and senseless into Lanty's arms. But hardly had the cry been raised than the French light of the front was dashed violently open, and Roger received a blow that stretched him insensible upon the floor.

Jack the Gentleman, in obedience to his orders, had taken up his position in front of the house; but, owing to his being unacquainted with the locality, he had reached his post too late to stop the egress, either of the black or of Margaret. In fact, so rapidly had the different events, which it has taken so long to describe, occurred in reality, that Jack arrived only at the moment when Mr. Marcomb was about to be bound. Margaret, after giving her warning, was returning towards the house, when she heard the sound of the struggle that ensued on Mr. Marcomb being seized. She could no longer restrain herself when the piteous cries of her sister and the

intercessions of her mother met her ear. She rushed eagerly forward, and had almost reached the glass door, through which she would have entered, when she was seized and held back by a powerful grasp, and then for the first time became aware of the fact that she had fallen into the hands of the robbers.

“Oh, let me go, let me go!” she cried in deep distress. “Do not detain me, do not keep me at such a moment!”

“I am very sorry to disoblige a lady,” said Jack; “but no one can go in there just now. But a few minutes will do our business, and then you will have the whole house to yourself again.”

On hearing Jack's voice, Margaret started back in fear, and whilst he continued speaking she stood as if stupefied with alarm. “Merciful powers!” she exclaimed when he had ceased, “Is this real, or am I dreaming? Oh, no, no! Such a reality would be too horrible!” Then, turning her head from him and endeavouring to extricate herself from his grasp, she again appealed to him, “Oh, let me go, let me go!”

“No! Impossible!” replied Jack in a deep, determined tone.

“Great Heaven!” she almost shrieked. “It is he!”

“He! What, do you know me?” cried Jack, in no small surprise. “And who may you be?” And he dragged her forward to where the light from the candles within fell through the glass of the closed door. He took but one look at her face, and then started back in amazement, as he uttered the girl's name, “Margaret!”

“Frederick, Frederick!” she moaned out. “This is too, too terrible!”

“How came you here?” asked Jack, stamping with rage, either at his position or at his having given way to such weakness.

“It is too long a tale to tell you now,” she answered. “But oh, Frederick, fly, fly at once! If ever you loved us, if you would not break all our hearts, do not you be found in league with these ruffians!”

“All your hearts!” he repeated after her in a bewildered manner. “What do you—can you mean?”

Before she could give him any answer, the piercing screams of Beatrice came forth from the room, and stopped all further colloquy.

“Oh, Frederick! It is Beatrice! Save her from these monsters!”

The appeal of Margaret was not lost upon Jack; for, grinding out the words, “The hound shall pay for this!” he dashed open the door and stood within the room. The first object that met his eye was Roger forcibly dragging Mrs. Marcomb from her daughter. Without stopping to look further, he raised his fowling-piece by the barrel and brought the stock down with all his force upon Roger's head and shoulders. The ruffian fell as if shot, and the lady, thus released, turned her eyes upon her preserver.

Gratitude and thanks spoke in her eyes as they were raised, but the moment they reached Jack's face the expression instantly changed to one of despairing horror. Raising her hands to Heaven, as if appealing there for support against this last bitter drop in her cup of misery, she uttered one wild, heartrending wail, rather than scream, and fell senseless to the ground. Jack in his turn had recognised the lady, and, meeting her eye, stood as if turned to stone, his gun, with which he had been about to attack Lanty, still raised in the air, his face pale as death, and every nerve and muscle refusing to do its office. It was only when that terrible wailing cry of Mrs. Marcomb met his ear, that the spell which held him was broken. Letting his gun fall to the ground, he dashed his hand upon his forehead, as he groaned in agony, and then rushed frantically from the house, through the window by which he had so recently entered.

Lanty, who had stood as much amazed as all the rest at the strange proceedings they had witnessed, burst out into a hoarse laugh when he saw the denouement of what he rightly guessed to be some secret domestic tragedy, but of the plot of which he knew nothing. Taking a firmer grasp of Beatrice, for he had partially released her in order to defend himself from the anticipated attack of Jack, he laughed out in a jeering tone: "Nivir mind, darlint; ye are only in the fashion wid yeer screaming and dropping off. Faix, it seems, jewel, we'll be soon left to ourselves intirely."

Margaret, who had hitherto remained unperceived by the ruffian, and had been utterly unprepared for the scene that had occurred, now ran forward to assist her sister. In so doing, her foot struck by accident against the gun that Jack had thrown down. "Thank Heaven!" she fervently ejaculated, as she stooped and picked up the fowling-piece, "that has not deserted me in the time of need!" Then she cried, "Cowardly ruffian! Loose your hold of my sister, or I will send this charge into your black heart!"

"Aisy, aisy," said Lanty quietly; "do ye put down that thing, or maybe ye'll be hurting the colleen dhas. Och! Sure thim wimen is divils intirely. She's kilt now, an' ye'll be shooting her as dead as Brian Boru."

"Better to be dead than suffer the contamination she now endures," answered Margaret, advancing closer to Lanty, who took care to keep the senseless form of Beatrice between him and her irate sister.

Mr. Marcomb, seeing that Margaret in her inexperience could make no hand of the weapon, which she continued to hold levelled at Lanty, made the most violent attempts to free himself from the bonds which held him. "Give me the gun, Margaret!" he cried. "Even bound as I am I can make sure of hitting the villain!"

"Can ye, though!" and Lanty laughed out sardonically. "But not widout hitting the girleen, and ye wouldn't be doing that." Then, giving a savage kick to the prostrate

form of Roger, "What's up wid ye I dunno. Is it dead ye are, or are ye only kilt? Is it lying there all night ye'll be?"

Roger, thus admonished, seemed to have some portion of vitality restored to him by this novel though violent remedy, and, opening his eyes, he raised himself on his elbow and looked stupidly around.

"Anna man diaoul!" shouted Lanty. "Take yeer gun, man; an' if that colleen there don't put the gun down, dhrive a bullet through the old man's skull!" Then, as Roger looked vacantly about him, he added, "Wake up, man alive! Shoot the ould sinner, or we'll be taken like rats in a trap!"

Roger only partly understood what was said to him, but he comprehended enough to know that he was to shoot Mr. Marcomb. Rising to his knee, he fixed his eyes upon that gentleman, and was proceeding to bring his weapon up to his shoulder, when Margaret, in alarm, let fall the gun she held, and with a scream of terror dashed forward and threw herself upon Mr. Marcomb's neck. At the same moment the door opened, and the overseer, followed by George and Jamie, rushed into the room.

With a savage oath Lanty let fall the senseless form of Beatrice, struck down the arm of Mr. Robinson, which, with a clubbed gun, was raised to fell him, plunged past Roger, and made his escape. In passing his fellow-scoundrel, he knocked up the carbine presented at Mr. Marcomb, just as Roger had pulled the trigger, and the shot, instead of piercing as it would have done the body of the self-sacrificing Margaret, shattered a picture that was hanging against the wall, and buried itself in one of the studs of the building. Before Roger had time to recover himself, he was seized and secured by Jamie and the overseer, whilst George, perceiving the position of Mr. Marcomb, released him as quickly as possible. Margaret was now able to give the attention that was so much required to her mother and sister. The female servants were called in, and, with the assistance of Mr. Marcomb and Margaret, the mother and daughter were borne, still insensible, to their apartment.

Roger the Rough was taken away bound as he was to an out-house, which, being built of heavy slabs, was considered to be sufficiently secure to keep him till the morning; and, two Government men being placed on guard over him, he was left there for the night. It was only when he had been thus provided for that the party, in returning to the house, came across the prostrate body of Mike the ostler. Much to the horror and regret of Mr. Marcomb, life was found to be utterly extinct, and the mangled remains of the unfortunate groom were carried into the stable in which he had only so recently performed the duties of his avocation, and there left until a communication could be conveyed to the authorities.

George and his son, refusing the earnest solicitations of Mr. Marcomb that they

would pass the night under his roof, left for their lonely camp in the bush, soon after the removal of Mike's body. The residents of the farm were thus once more left to themselves; but, oh, how different were they now from the happy family they had formed only two days previously.

It was near upon midnight before Mrs. Marcomb regained perfect consciousness. Looking round the room with an air of doubt as to where she really was, her eye fell upon Margaret, who was keeping a lonely watch over her mother and sister. Then the whole recollection of what had occurred swept over her, and in agony of spirit she moaned aloud. Margaret instantly hastened up to her mother's side to render whatever assistance might be necessary.

"Oh, Margaret! Margaret!" she exclaimed. "It was not, then, a dreadful dream, as I hoped it might be."

"Alas!" sighed the daughter, "I would I could tell you that it was! But calm yourself, dearest mother; think no more of it at present, but try and rest."

"No, no!" answered the lady. "I cannot rest whilst any doubt remains upon my mind. Tell me—has—was—has *he* escaped?"

"He has, dearest mother," responded Margaret. "Do not alarm yourself on his account. Conscience-stricken, when he met your sight, he rushed from the place before assistance reached us."

"Thank Heaven for that at least!" ejaculated the lady. "And he was not recognised?"

"Only by you and me, dear mother. My father, you know, has never seen him; and poor Beatrice was insensible when he entered."

"And the robbers?"

"They have escaped, all but one man, the man whom Frederick—whom *he* knocked down in order to rescue you, dearest mother, from violence."

"All but one! And what of him?"

"He remained half-senseless from the blow he had received, and when Mr. Robinson came in with assistance, he was secured, and has been placed in confinement until to-morrow, when he will be handed over to the constables."

"In confinement!" cried Mrs. Marcomb with the greatest agitation. "That must not be!"

"Calm yourself, mother dear," said Margaret. "I heard my father and Mr. Robinson talking together, and they said that, as murder had been committed, this man must be handed over to the authorities."

"Murder! Too true, too true! And *he* was one of the parties, Margaret. He who has already stained his hand with blood, and brought misery, degradation, and almost ruin upon us. He was one of the murderers!"

“No, mother, no! He had no hand in the deed. He was away from the place when the deed was done!”

“Simple girl! Do you not know that, being one of the party, he is considered in law to be equally guilty with the rest?”

“Merciful Heaven! I never thought of that!”

“Listen, Margaret, for we must act, and act at once. You know how I induced your good father to leave his happy home and to come to this half-savage land. You know that it was only on condition that he would do so that I consented to accept his hand; and you know, too, that, laying aside all our wrongs, I took this step solely in the hope of benefiting that ruined man and of saving him from absolute destruction. Remember, that if this man is given up, nothing can save *him*.”

“What is to be done, dearest mother? Oh, suggest something! I will do anything to save him if it be possible!”

“It is for you to act. You must contrive some means of setting the prisoner at liberty before morning.”

In her extremity, Margaret bethought herself of Macomo, and, going to him, she said that, for reasons that need not be explained to him, her mother wished the imprisoned croppy to be set free. Macomo held Margaret—or Bright Eyes, as he called her—in such esteem, that he obeyed her with dog-like fidelity. That she should ask him for a favour was sufficient for him, so, without another word, he set out to perform her bidding. He had nothing more to do than to insert his tomahawk between two of the slabs, and by prising on it to wrench out the nails by which they were held at top and bottom. This was a comparatively easy task, and, being performed cautiously, was executed without giving the alarm. Entering the building, he found Roger sleeping in one corner of it. Cutting the cords that bound the ruffian, he next endeavoured to wake him as quietly as possible, so as not to elicit any cry of astonishment from the prisoner. Roger, however, nearly spoilt all by the noise he made upon being awakened. Luckily the guards slept too soundly to be disturbed, and the black, hastily whispering a caution in his ear, he was quieted, and then made to understand that he was no longer bound, and that the road for his escape was open to him.

He was not long in availing himself of the opportunity that had been given him, and, in passing through the slabs out into the open air, guided by the black until past the buildings and out into the open bush, he halted for an instant whilst he examined Macomo scrutinisingly. “You've done me a good turn to-night, and have saved my neck from making friends with a rope. I sha'n't forget it, nor you neither! What name are you known by?” he said.

“Macomo,” the black answered.

‘Good, Macomo! I shall remember it, and if I can do you a turn, I’ll do it with my life!’ So saying, he made his way into the bush, and was soon beyond pursuit, even if his escape had been discovered.

Macomo returned to Margaret, and reported to her the success that had attended his enterprise, and, having received her warmest thanks, laid himself down to rest at his former post under the verandah. Margaret at once re-entered the house, anxious to relieve the mind of her mother with the intelligence that the danger apprehended from the capture of Roger was no longer to be feared, since the prisoner had been set at large.

In the morning, great was the surprise and consternation, and many the expressions of anger, when it was discovered that the prisoner had escaped, and that a slab had been removed from the out-house. The two unfortunate Government men who had been on guard were, of course, accused of complicity with the criminal, and were placed in irons, preparatory to some other and more serious punishment. Terrible were the vows of vengeance uttered by Mr. Marcomb against them; but, after all, they were released before night, through the intercession of Mrs. Marcomb, and by that lady’s influence it also happened that no further notice was taken of their breach of duty.

Gentleman Jack, when he escaped from the house, fled towards the bush, where, shortly after, he was joined by Lanty and Ted, and later in the evening by the newly-released Roger. Recriminations were the order of the day, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the Rough was restrained from plunging his knife into Jack for having floored him as he was about to molest the women. Lanty, on the other hand, while he wished to get even with Jack, decided to postpone his revenge till he made sure of a suspicion that had taken hold of him; for, having noticed the look of recognition that came into the faces of both Mrs. Marcomb and Jack when they met in the house, it had flashed across his mind that the circumstance might be turned to account, and a heavy price paid for his silence. Accordingly he turned to Jack, and said:

“But, shure, Jack, jewel, ye nivir told us ye were married.”

“Married!” exclaimed the other in the greatest astonishment.

“Shure, thin, it’s married I said. What for did ye be kaping it sacret? Faix, an’ we found it out in spite of ye.”

Jack still continued gazing on him in stupefied amazement.

“There, there, man alive!” resumed the other. “There’s shmall need for ye to be making that face at all, at all. Don’t we all know that it’s yeer wife an’ mother that’s down at the farram beyont?”

“My wife!” cried Jack, with a bitter laugh. “In Heaven’s name, or rather in the

name of all the fiends, how have you got this idea into your head?"

"Is it how? Faix, thin, it's by using my eyes and keeping my ears open!" Jack smiled sarcastically and shook his head. "What for was it that the ould lady did be fainting off that way whin ye did be coming up; an' what for was it that the young one did be coming into the room wid ye so cozy like?"

Jack looked bewildered and alarmed as he answered, "Oh, no, no! I know nothing of them—nothing!"

"There, there!" said Lanty in his most insinuating tone. "Don't be afther making yeerself onaisy. We'll be having it all by-and-by; an', faix, Jack, we're the boys to see ye righted!"

"See me righted!" cried Jack, more bewildered than ever.

"Shure, an' we will do that same. Put ye alongside yeer rightful wife, an' in possession av yeer lawful property, that the usarpers, bad cess to them, do be kaping ye out av."

"I tell you again," ejaculated Jack, who appeared to be fast losing his temper, "that I know nothing of them nor they of me. I have not the most amiable temper at the best of times, and just now if you are wise you will drop the subject."

By this time Jack the Gentleman and Ted had taken up the few articles they had to carry, and had gone some distance, where they stopped and made signals to the other two to join them. Hastily snatching up their loads, Lanty and Roger followed, the former telling Roger that he would at some other time make him more fully acquainted with all that he purposed doing.

Chapter V Captured

THE same morning also, an interview took place between Margaret and Macomo. She had been walking in the garden with a nervous, anxious air, as if looking for someone, and as soon as she saw Macomo she hurriedly beckoned him to come to her. When he had reached her side, she thus, with some hesitation in her manner, addressed him: "Macomo, you said last night that you noticed that I took an interest in the young man who was with those who attacked the house."

Macomo bowed his head in acquiescence.

"My mother takes an interest in him as well as myself, and we are desirous, if possible, of communicating with him."

Macomo again nodded, but still maintained silence.

"You have often told us, Macomo, that you were a great chief in your tribe, though that tribe has now perished from off the face of the country."

The eyes of Macomo flashed for an instant, but as yet he spoke no word in reply.

"We know your skill in tracking, for you have given us many proofs of it, and your courage none can doubt. Will you—" and she hesitated more than ever, now that she came to the absolute request she had to make—"will you undertake to find out the young man who—who—who was here last night, and deliver him a letter that I will give you!"

The native now found speech. "The life of Macomo," he said, "is in the hands of the Bright Eyes."

"You will do it, then?" she asked.

"If Macomo lives to meet the young croppy," the black answered, "he will deliver the writing of the Bright Eyes."

"If you live!" she exclaimed in surprise. "You surely do not think that this service would be one of danger?"

Macomo shook his head in negation of the spirit rather than of the words of the answer. "Macomo was looking at their tracks this morning," he said. "They all lead away towards the pointed mountain. The croppies are afraid, and are off to shelter themselves in the swamps and scrubs of the country of big waters. But where they go to seek shelter is a land filled with warlike blacks. The men of Colo are warriors fit to meet even the fighting men of the Maroo in battle. They never make peace, but are the enemies of all of their own colour that come in their way, and spare none out of their own tribe. Macomo has met them in fight, and from them received the wounds that the Bright Eyes cured. Macomo is not afraid, but he is alone, and the men of Colo are many. He may never go far enough to meet the young croppy."

“Heavens!” cried the young girl. “I had no idea that it would be a service of so much danger. I would never have asked you had I thought it. I would not wish you to undertake anything that would imperil your life.”

“Macomo fears not for his life. He fears only that he may not be able to do the will of the Bright Eyes. Let her give Macomo the paper, and if he lives it shall be delivered.”

After what she had heard, Margaret was somewhat loth to place the life of the black in jeopardy; but, as he persisted in assuring her that he had no fear and that there was no danger to himself, whatever doubt there might be as to the letter, she entrusted him with the few lines which, not foreseeing any obstacle to their delivery, she had written beforehand, and had them with her.

Well provided in all respects, Macomo departed on the errand upon which Margaret had despatched him, though, instead of taking up the hills to follow upon the track of the scrubbers, he struck off upon a line of his own, making direct for the point to which, no doubt judging from the conversation he had heard when watching them, he had imagined the fugitives were directing their steps.

The part that Macomo had played in warning the Marcombs had made Lanty and his two henchmen determined to shoot him on sight, but, knowing their inability to follow his tracks, it struck Lanty that he might make a bargain with the men of the Colo tribe, who had a natural grudge against Macomo, either to deliver him into his hands or compass his death in their own way. The bribes he held out were tobacco, flour, and fire-water, and the bargain was speedily concluded.

Intent on delivering Margaret's message, Macomo hovered round the camp of the croppies long after sleep had closed their eyelids; but while Gentleman Jack slept, Roger kept watch, determined to allow him no opportunity for escape. So Macomo had perforce to retire, and seek some other means of delivering the letter; and, being in the territory of the Colo tribe, he had to move warily.

Next morning, as he crept along the bank of one of the salt-water inlets known as the Deep Creek, he espied two girls of the Colo tribe fishing from a bark canoe, and thinking that he might induce one of them to deliver the letter, he approached them, so stealthily that he was quite near them before he was observed.

Quick as thought the young girl who used the paddle reversed its action and sent the canoe backwards, and Macomo, seeing this, raised his gun to his shoulder, presented it at the girls, and desired them in a keen voice to draw closer to the shore.

“Who is the stranger,” asked the girl, as she held the canoe stationary by a gentle motion of the paddle, “that calls upon Coolamie to stop? She knows him not. He is not a man of the tribe; nor is he a friend of the men of Colo.”

“He is the chief of a far-away people. Let not the girl of Colo be afraid. Macomo

has slain many warriors in fight, but he has never shed the blood of women, even when they were his foes.”

The girl pointed with a half-laugh of contempt at the gun which Macomo now dropped from his shoulder. “The chief who does not injure women pointed his gun at the breast of Coolamie!”

Macomo shook his head. “Macomo desired to frighten Coolamie and make her stay. He wishes to speak to the young girl of Colo, and held out his gun to prevent her flight, not to injure her.”

“Is Macomo the name of the stranger?” asked Coolamie.

The native nodded in sign of affirmation.

“Let Macomo say what he wishes. Coolamie will listen.”

“Does Coolamie know the croppies who are camped in the bush near her friends? There are four of them.”

Coolamie gave a petulant toss of her head, as if that had not been the kind of communication she had expected. She answered with some spice of ill-humour in her speech. “They are bad men. The young girls of Colo never go near them.”

“But Coolamie knows them,” he persisted in asking.

“Coolamie has seen them,” said the young girl coldly.

“There is one who is young and better-featured; has Coolamie remarked him?”

The young girl raised her head angrily, as if to ask what this question meant; but, seeing the calm and somewhat sad aspect of Macomo, she restrained herself and answered, “His face is not so bad as the faces of the rest, but his heart is more wicked than all the others.”

“Now, listen, Coolamie,” he continued seriously. “This young croppy has friends—white women—one, pale-faced and grey-haired, like the mother of many children; two beautiful as the young girls of Colo, and with eyes as bright as those of Coolamie. They love this croppy and wish to have him with them, to save him from the death that the white man's law condemns him to for his crimes. They have sent him a paper writing, and Macomo is the bearer of it. But the young croppy is closely watched, and the men who are with him have sworn to take the life of Macomo. Will the young girl of Colo give the paper to the croppy?” Macomo paused to receive the girl's answer; then, seeing that she hesitated, he continued, “Coolamie will one day be the wife of a chief. She may have many children. If she wished to send a death message to one of them, what would she say to the young gin who refused to carry it, in order to save the life of the messenger by whom it was sent and to ensure its being received?”

The girl was evidently moved by this appeal, but, masking her feelings, she replied, “Macomo is a great chief. Has he not many maidens in his tribe to whom

this task might have been entrusted?"

Macomo bowed his head in sorrow, as he replied sadly, "The maidens of Macomo's tribe have long since passed away into the silent land, or live as prisoners to the foes of the Maroo. All his warriors have perished before the spears of his enemies, or before the deadly bullets of the white. All the women have fallen before sickness, famine, and slaughter. Macomo is left alone, the last of the Maroo, with none to aid, none to solace, none to guard him. He knows the full wretchedness of loneliness, and how the heart grieves for the presence of those who are loved but absent; and he can feel for the misery of the poor white women whose hearts are breaking for the young croppy who rushes blindly on to death. He felt for them, and undertook to deliver the writing; but if he shows himself to the others they will sacrifice him, and the writing will perish with Macomo. He has none of his own tribe to help him, and in his folly he thought the maidens of Colo might have tender hearts and do something for women like themselves."

Coolamie was moved, and it was with a quiver of emotion in her voice that she inquired, "Does Macomo speak the words of truth, or does he only whisper idle tales to the ears of Coolamie?"

"Macomo is a chief. He can have no object in deceiving Coolamie."

"True, there can be no object." Then, as some thought came into her head, she exclaimed in a disturbed tone, "Oh, why did Coolamie not know this before! Quick, give Coolamie the writing, and she will deliver it. And, oh, chief, whatever may happen to yourself, think well of the maidens of Colo!"

"If Macomo escapes, and gets back safe to the white women who sent him, he will tell them that he owes any success he may have to the young girl, Coolamie." So saying, he sprang up the log, and was for a few seconds lost to sight.

During his absence the companion of Coolamie commenced singing a native song, in no very measured tones, evidently to the great dissatisfaction and uneasiness of Coolamie. She made her companion signs to desist, and went so far as to threaten her with the paddle, but the other continued to sing on in the same tone, until Macomo once more appeared and descended the log, this time without his gun and bearing a letter in his hand. Hastily Coolamie pushed the canoe in shore and took the letter. As she received it, Macomo took her hand, as he said, "May Macomo see Coolamie again?"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, half in terror. "Let Macomo think of himself. When the kangaroo is surrounded by warrigals, his only safety is in flight." Macomo let go her hand, and looked round with an uneasy and suspicious glance, and she went on, "Let Macomo think that he is the kangaroo," she whispered, "and that the warrigals of Colo have surrounded him." With a look in which pity and regret were mingled,

she pushed off from the tree.

Macomo now knew all. He made but one spring from the tree to the bank, but he was too late. The companion of Coolamie had given a signal previously agreed upon, and this had brought a crowd of enemies to the spot. No sooner had he reached the spot than a powerful black sprang upon him from either side. By a violent exertion of strength he threw them off for an instant, and prevented their closing with him. Others, however, were there, ready to throw themselves upon him. Turning round suddenly, he ran out upon the tree he had recently left, and sprang into the water, swimming lustily for the other side. A spear was raised to strike him as he rose, but the chief Naarandeet caught the arm of the native who would have thrown it. "No," he said; "he must be taken alive."

Macomo's body had hardly parted the waters before some half-dozen of the Colo men leaped in after him. To these, water was almost as their native element; whilst Macomo, being a hill man, was no match for them in swimming. He was caught before he could reach the other side, was seized and dragged, half-drowned and partially insensible, to the shore. There he was secured, and was led up bound to the camp of the Colo men, was thrown down upon the ground, secured by pegs driven into the earth, and covered over by ferns and bushes, in order to keep him out of sight, for some particular purpose the blacks had in view.

Chapter VI The Ordeal

BOUND and helpless, Macomo was left to ponder over the ill-fortune that had thrown him into the hands of his enemies. He had now no difficulty in discovering that he had fallen victim to a plot, in which the young girl Coolamie played a not unimportant part. When, however, he came to think over all that had taken place—the manifest uneasiness she had displayed, her openness of manner, and, last though not least, the tardy warning she had given him, he felt that he might trust her to do what she had promised, and his friends at the farm would have their wishes carried out.

The men of the tribe took their morning meal, and, a guard having been appointed to keep watch over the prisoner, the greater part of the others followed the chief Naarandeet, who had arranged to meet the scrubbers.

The scrubbers were lying listlessly about their gunya, endeavouring in vain to kill the time that hung heavy on their hands, when the noisy talking of the blacks as they approached warned Lanty that his expected visitors were near. Lanty, who did not wish Jack to be present at the colloquy between himself and the chief, went out to meet them, and, at his suggestion, two of the tribe were appointed to fix themselves on Jack, and to keep him in conversation until the matter in hand was decided upon between the two leaders. This was no difficult task, for Jack took but little interest in Lanty's manoeuvring, and preferred to talk with the blacks upon shooting or fishing.

After the usual parleying, it was arranged that Lanty and Roger should hand over the flour and tobacco to Naarandeet, the Colo chief, and then accompany them to the camp where Macomo lay bound.

Lanty and Roger had been gone rather more than an hour, when Ted, who was looking out and about him, expecting the return of his comrades, whilst the Gentleman lay stretched out upon the ground as listless as ever, called out, “Faix, thin, Jack, jewel, if there isn't one of the purtiest bits av dark skin as iver I sot eyes an! By this and by that, but she's coming clane into our camp!”

“What do I care?” grumbled Jack.

“Is it care?” Ted answered. “Shure, isn't it a young black female, an', if it's a jintleman ye are, ye ought to be up, an' paying yeer respects to her.”

Jack gave a discontented grunt for reply.

“Faix, thin, if the Jintleman won't be after intertaining her, I wouldn't be a true Irishman if I couldn't be saying a soft word or two to her.” And, so saying, Ted rose to meet the girl, who by this time was close upon the camp.

“Where is the young croppy?” she asked as she came up.

“Is it the Jintleman ye want? Faix, he's there in the gunya, and won't move an inch, not even to look on yeer own two bright eyes, though meself tould him ye were coming.”

“Coolamie wishes to speak to him,” she said.

“Divil a spake he'll spake aven to me, alannah!” replied Ted. “Shure, yee'd better see if meself won't sarve yee're turn.”

She took no notice of Ted's words, but, going up to the gunya under which Gentleman Jack was lying, she called out, “Coolamie has a letter for the young white—sent to him by his friend.”

Jack started up with an exclamation of surprise.

“It is well that the young white can waken. Let him rouse himself quickly, or he who brought that letter will be slain,” she added in a quick, excited voice.

The Gentleman was on his feet in an instant, and, taking the letter from the girl, held it before him with a half-incredulous stare.

“Quick, quick!” cried Coolamie, in a tone of wild desperation; “if the young white wishes to save the life of him who has gone through much to bring that letter.”

At last comprehending the necessity for haste, Jack recovered from his surprise, and tore the letter open. One glance was sufficient to satisfy him as to the quarter whence it had come. “Who brought this?” he asked.

“Macomo, the messenger of the young white's friends.”

“And he is in danger?”

“He is a prisoner in the hands of the men of Colo, who are going to put him to death.”

“How came you by the letter?”

“Macomo gave it to Coolamie to deliver, for the croppies would have killed him if they had found him. The big croppy has paid the men of Colo to slay Macomo; and, if the young white is not quick, we will be too late to save him.”

“If too late to save, not too late to avenge him!” cried Jack, as he seized Ted's gun and hastily put a handful of cartridges in his pocket. “Lanty, Lanty, you have a heavy score to settle with me, and we may as well make up the account at once!” Directing the girl to lead him by the shortest road to the spot, he called out to Ted that he would be back in half an hour, and then with all speed he hastened after the girl, who was already far on her way to the relief of him in whom she had taken so sudden and so great an interest.

Lanty accompanied the blacks to their camp. This reached, the flour was deposited with much ceremony, and amidst wondering ejaculations from the women of the tribe in the gunya of the chief Naarandeet.

“The flour and the tobacco have been already earned by the men of Colo,” said the

chief, addressing Lanty. "The black whom the big white feared is already safe in their hands. They took him whilst the whites were sleeping."

"Dhoul!" exclaimed Lanty. "Your news almost deserves that I should pay ye double, an' only that ye overrached me, it's double I would be paying ye. An' now, where is he?"

"Here," answered Naarandeet, as he led Lanty to the spot where the prostrate form of Macomo had been bound and pegged down securely to the earth.

"An' this," cried Lanty in savage joy, as he gloated over the helpless form of his enemy, "this is the dog that did be follying and spying on me, an' sphoilt the best night's work as iver was planned! Spake, ye hound!" and, with a savage oath, he kicked the defenceless black. "Spake, an' tell us what for ye did be follying us!"

"The big croppy is a coward," was Macomo's answer. "If Macomo were free, the big croppy dare not meet him face to face!"

Lanty gave a fierce laugh of scorn. "Why did ye be follying us? Tell me, or, by the mortal, I'll kick yeer black heart out!"

"The big croppy will soon know. Macomo has done all he wished."

Uttering a terrible Irish oath, and altogether beside himself with passion, Lanty was about to raise his piece to brain his prostrate foe, when his arm was seized with no weak grasp by Naarandeet. "No," said the chief. "The stranger must die by the hands of the men of Colo. Brave men do not strike the foe that is bound and lying at their feet."

For a moment the scrubber's rage was so excessive that he would have brained Naarandeet, preparatory to taking vengeance on Macomo; but the other blacks of the party had gathered round, and their wild and angry looks showed him that it would be dangerous to go farther. Subduing his passion by an effort, he replied, "Good! But let him die. Die he shall, for, divil resave me if I lave this spot till I can spurn his lifeless carcase!"

"The big white will not have long to wait," said the chief, whose quick eye had never left Lanty's countenance, nor failed to read there every black thought that had passed through his mind. "Look! My young men are even now all but ready for the work," and he pointed to where some of the party were busily engaged in preparing for the trial. They had selected a spot that was rather clearer of timber than the rest. In a few minutes the cry was raised that all was ready, and then Macomo was unbound and raised to his feet.

"Ye don't mane to lave him loose," growled out Lanty. "Shlippery divil as he is, he'll go through yeer fingers."

Naarandeet smiled grimly. "He will be at liberty to defend himself. The men of Colo do not kill their enemies like the white man does his sheep—bind them and cut

their throat.”

Macomo was led to the spot where all the preparations had been made for the ceremony in which he was about to take a leading part.

Naarandeeet now stood before him. “The name of the stranger is Macomo?” he asked, not without a touch of courtesy in his tone.

“Macomo has never been afraid to answer to his name,” said Macomo proudly.

“Listen,” Naarandeeet went on. “Six moons ago Macomo came upon the hunting-grounds of the Colo, and slew three men of their tribe.”

“Macomo slew them in fair fight, but they were boys in the hands of Macomo.”

“Macomo is a good warrior,” answered the Colo chief. “Naarandeeet has met him in fight. Naarandeeet has nothing to say against Macomo. But the relatives of the three men whom Macomo sent upon the long, dark journey, demand the blood of Macomo in payment for that of their friends shed by him.”

Macomo bowed his head sternly, as if acquiescing in the perfect right of these men to call him to account.

“Take this heileman,” continued Naarandeeet, handing Macomo the small solid shield used by the blacks. “Macomo knows the law of the tribes. With this he will have to defend himself against three spears thrown by the nearest kin to each of those he has slain. Go! My young men will place Macomo on the proper spot.”

The Maroo chief took the weapon with a smile of contemptuous defiance. “Macomo will defend himself,” he replied; “not because he loves life or fears death, but to show the men of Colo that they are but boys in fight when they are put face to face with a warrior of the Maroo. The boys of the Maroo would have laughed at those who call themselves the warriors of Colo.”

There was a murmur of anger at this speech, but Macomo took no notice of it, and continued: “Why do the men of Colo think to deceive Macomo? He knows that they are thirsting for his blood. He knows that they have received the price of his blood from the pale-faced coward, the big croppy that stands near. He knows that nothing but his life will satisfy his enemies. Let the men of Colo take it. Here is his breast. Let them thrust their spears through it, and they will see how the men of Maroo can die. Let them kill him as they intend to do, but let them not try to deceive him as if he were a woman!” As he concluded, he drew himself up to his full height, extending his arms so as to bare his breast, as if courting the spears that his taunting words might provoke. At the same time he looked disdainfully round upon his foes, every trace of sadness vanished from his countenance, no other signs being there but those of stern resolution, and bold, daring an indomitable courage.

“We doubt not Macomo's bravery,” said Naarandeeet coolly. “He is brave, and he knows what is done in the tribes. If he is prepared to abide by the trial, let him stand

out and defend himself.”

“And look ye, Macomo,” was uttered in the deep, hoarse voice of Lanty, “make but the laste offer to run, an' I'll send a bullet through yeer black carcase.”

“The croppy speaks big words,” replied Macomo; “but let him look to himself. His days are numbered; and if Macomo falls, the big croppy will not be long after him on the dark journey.”

Macomo was placed out in the midst of the clear ground. The men, women, and children of the tribe, who were looking on, stood in a half-circle round him. Directly in front of him, and at about forty yards distant, were three men—Wahngagan, Barcoo, and Marramutia. Each of them held in his left hand three of the large war spears of the tribe, and in his right the woomera by which the spear was propelled. Behind him there was a wide space of clear ground, with no shelter near enough to avail himself of it in time to escape the weapons of his enemies. These, as they stood round, were all armed, and were fully prepared in the event of any attempt at flight. His character for bravery, however, was well known, and any attempt of the kind was not anticipated—at all events, not until after the trial of the spears had been gone through. Thus it was that they were grouped almost negligently, as they waited anxiously for the exhibition of their enemy's skill at defence.

Wahngagan stood out first, and, regarding Macomo with a savage mien, as though to cow him by a look, he poised his spear and measured his distance. Macomo held himself erect, hardly returning the fierce gaze of the other, and apparently so utterly regardless of him that he seemed to be the least interested person in the ceremony of the whole assembly. His heileman was hardly raised into position until the body of the other was thrown back; then, as the shoulder was drawn back to give force to the cast, the shield of Macomo flew up into guard. The spear was launched with all the force that the practised arm of the warrior could give it, but it was launched in vain. Macomo, with a quick, gentle turn of his wrist, caught the weapon on the side of the shield, and sent it glancing off at an angle far away to his left.

Barcoo next stepped forward, and with compressed lips searched Macomo's face with a sharp, steady gaze. Fitting a spear into his woomera even as he gazed, he raised his arm suddenly, and, without waiting to poise the weapon, cast it full against his enemy. Macomo, however, caught it easily, as he had the former one, and caused it to glance on one side.

Marramutia now claimed his turn. He carefully poised and aimed his spear, but with no better result than had followed the casts of his comrades.

Again Wahngagan and Barcoo threw in turn, but Macomo turned the weapons on one side with an air of almost scornful pity, as if he regretted the little skill of the throwers, and desired to be matched with worthier foes.

For some time Marramutia had been working himself into a passion, and, as he now took his place, he fairly ground his teeth with rage. Placing himself in the position of throwing, he made a feint of launching the spear, but, instead of doing so, he again drew back his arm, and, thinking he had put Macomo off his guard, threw the weapon. There was a general cry of disapprobation at this unworthy manoeuvre; but, in no way disconcerted either by the cry or by the feint of his adversary, Macomo was prepared to receive the spear. Instead of coming straight towards him, however, the weapon, owing to the aim being unsteadied by the check, flew to the left, and would have passed without touching him. Instead of allowing it to pass thus, Macomo rapidly dashed out his left hand and caught the weapon, and, still with his left hand, threw it back to Marramutia. It was sent with so true an aim, and with such well-regulated distance, that it stuck quivering in the ground at the very feet of him who had first thrown it. A cry of admiration at this feat rose from all around, Marramutia being the only one who did not join in it. On the contrary, this last action added tenfold to the rage that already filled his bosom. Thinking only of the gratification of his vengeance, he seized the spear which Macomo had returned to him, fitted it unseen into his woomera, and stood with it in his hand ready to throw, whilst Wahngagan came forward in his turn. Just at the moment the latter was about to throw, Marramutia raised his hand also, intending to launch his spear immediately after that of the other. The treacherous cast would certainly have been fatal had it been made; but, just as the hand had been drawn back, a sharp crack was heard, a small puff of white smoke rose from behind a tree trunk to the right of where the party was grouped, and the arm of Marramutia dropped to his side broken and useless.

At the first sound of the report, the women and children of the tribe, uttering wild shrieks of terror, took themselves off in an opposite direction; whilst the men dashed off to seek the nearest cover, not knowing what the foe was that they had to contend with.

Macomo was not slow to profit by all this confusion, and, without a moment's hesitation, he turned his back upon his enemies and ran off at full speed towards the dense cover of the creek bank. The young black, Barcoo, who alone saw this movement, in the eagerness of hate pursued the flying chief, undeterred by the terrible sound of the hostile gun. Another also had been a witness to Macomo's flight. Lanty, more used to the sound of fire-arms, had all his wits about him, and, the moment he saw Macomo start off, he cried: "You black hound, I'll bring ye down!" At the same time he cocked his gun, and was bringing it to his shoulder, when a sharp voice called out: "No, you won't! Raise your gun an inch higher to your shoulder, an' I'll swear I'll wing you as well as the General did the black 'un!"

These words came from behind a tree at no great distance, and were spoken in a tone that left no doubt but that what was threatened would be done.

“An' who the blazes do ye be?” asked Lanty.

“Me?” exclaimed Jamie, poking his head out from behind the trunk and nodding at Lanty; “why, I'm Jamie; and him as winged the black snake so prettily—and a good shot it was, wasn't it?—he's the General.”

“Jamie and the General! Divil a one av me knows yeez!”

“Don't you? Well, that's your misfortune. But you'll know us better by-and-by.” Then, turning in the other direction, the youth called out: “He's clear off now, General, and them black varmints is getting courage again. How's it to be—give 'em a volley?”

“No, no,” answered George. “Enough has been done. We will retire as we came. Our end has been gained.”

“Has it?” roared out Lanty. “But mine has not! By all the fiends, I'll see who an' what yeez be!”

So saying, he rushed wildly forward to the tree from behind which he had heard George's voice; but, before he could reach the spot, Gentleman Jack came running madly up and seized him by the throat.

The rush made by Gentleman Jack came so unexpectedly upon Lanty Maher that for the moment he was staggered, and, notwithstanding his great strength, he was held in check. Very soon, however, he recovered himself, and then, perceiving who his assailant was, he cried in a voice hoarse with passion, “Let go yeer houl! Is it mad ye are?”

“Mad?—No!” replied Jack. “I have been mad, but I am sensible now. I know all your villainy now, and it is you and me for it!”

“Let go yeer houl, if ye're wise!” Lanty ground out in a low, suppressed voice. “Let go, or, by the mortal, it's not playing wid ye I'll be!”

“I'll let you go when I've torn that traitor's heart out of your breast and shown your mates how black it it!”

Lanty, who had been collecting his strength for one great effort, growled out a fearful oath; then, exercising all his force, shook Jack off as if he had been an infant, and sent him staggering back half-a-dozen paces. At the same moment the hands of both men were on their triggers, but, before either could raise his weapon to his shoulder, the Gentleman received a blow on the head from behind, and fell back deprived of sense. The chief Naarandee, who had seen the struggle, came to the assistance of his ally, and, stealing up behind Jack, had summarily settled this dispute before his presence had been known or his footsteps heard by either party.

“Faix, ye've kilt him intirely!” said Lanty, as he looked down with a malicious

grin upon the prostrate form of Jack. "Ye've saved me the throuble of wasting a shot on him; and, shure, powder doesn't be plenty wid us!"

Naarandeet shook his head as he replied, "Not dead."

"Dead? I should hope not! He's only kilt, an' all the better. I wouldn't be after shooting him dead, for it's not done wid him I am. Ye've done it very nately," he continued, as he examined Jack; "a rale Donnybrook touch that does be a credit to ye. It'll be aisy to kape him now, for it's not much run there'll be in him for a day or two, an' that'll give us time. But may the divil fly away wid him for stopping me from having a bit of talk wid that ould sinner! Did ye see which way he wint?" he asked of Roger, who had come up.

"Not a bit," answered that worthy. "I was watching him to get a shot at him, and he seemed to me to go right down into the ground. I saw him sink down, and then he was gone."

On the morning of Macomo's capture by the Colo men George and his son had run down the track of the black, until they came to the spot at which he had been made prisoner. The signs of what had occurred were too evident to allow of a moment's doubt as to what had taken place, and George, without knowing whether he was moved by a feeling of compassion for the black, or by one of anxiety lest his sworn revenge should slip through his fingers, followed down the broad trail that had been made, and found himself before long within sight of the blacks' camp. Jamie had no other idea beyond that which had hitherto actuated him, which was to allow no hand but that of his father or himself to touch the life of Macomo.

Chapter VII The Hut On The Big Swamp

AS soon as Macomo had time to collect his senses, he bethought himself of his gun and ammunition, and immediately made his way down the creek to where he had concealed them. Arriving at the spot, he was astonished to find Coolamie there before him. In a few words she informed him of the contract that had been undertaken by the young men of her tribe to hand Macomo over to the scrubbers, and, in sorrow for having betrayed him, and out of a new-born sympathy for the hunted chief, she told him of a place of concealment on the Big Swamp, and urged him to lie there until the pursuit should be abandoned.

At the same moment her father, Naarandeet, was giving similar instructions to Lanty and Roger, who, since their discovery by George and Jamie, were in constant fear of being pursued and handed over to the police for their share in the Marcomb affair. Guided by one of the Colo men, the scrubbers reached the hut on the swamp just as Macomo, utterly worn out, had sunk into a deep slumber.

Surprised in his sleep, the black started to his feet and gazed stupidly around, his senses not yet fully awakened to what was going on. Before he had fully ascertained who they were that had disturbed him, Lanty had recognised him. Macomo's first impulse had been to rush for escape to the door, but Lanty had recognised the black before the latter was fully aware of his danger. Calling loudly to Roger to aid him, he threw himself upon Macomo, but by a quick turn the black managed to avoid him. The next instant, however, he was seized in the powerful arms of Roger, who, warned by Lanty's cry, had closed with the native. In another instant, Lanty came to his comrade's aid, and in a very short time the struggle was over, and Macomo, for the second time that day, was bound securely and thrown upon the floor, panting and almost exhausted from the efforts he had made to escape.

"It's only short reckoning ye'll be afther having this time!" cried Lanty, almost breathless from his recent struggle, and from the rage which burnt in his heart. "There will be no more get away now, alanna!"

As he said this, he raised his gun and took one step towards Macomo; but, before he could take another, the light that came in at the door was obscured, the gun was dashed out of his hand, and he himself was hurled to the earth, and kept there by a powerful hand. Roger, alarmed, and fancying that they in turn had been surprised, and by their worst and most dreaded enemies, the police, would have fled, but one glance at the door was sufficient, for another figure stood there with a gun at his shoulder completely covering him.

"Don't try it on," said Jamie—for he it was who was in possession of the doorway;

“don't try it, for if you do, I shall be obliged to pull trigger, and I don't miss, I don't!”

At the same time, George—for he it was who had borne Lanty down, held his opponent firmly to the earth. His hand grasped the throat of the scrubber with a firm grip, so powerful that Lanty felt it was useless to struggle against it. “Lie still!” cried George, “and no harm will be done to you! Make only an attempt to move, and I'll put you past praying for in three minutes!” This admonition, backed up by an extra squeeze upon the windpipe, was sufficient to render Lanty more quiescent than ever. “Secure his gun, Jamie!”

“All right, General,” answered his son. “Get you up in the other corner, you, sir!” he said to Roger. “I ain't going to have none of your dodging out, you know; we want you a bit, you see. I've got it, General!” he cried, as he pounced down rapidly upon it, when Roger, with a growl, had retired as directed.

George now rose to his feet, leaving Lanty to recover as best he could from the rough handling he had just received. Picking up Roger's carbine and giving it to Jamie, he said: “Take the guns of these vagabonds and give them a dip in the lagoon; that will keep them harmless for the present, at all events.”

Jamie obeyed, and during his absence, which was only very brief, George kept guard over the scrubbers. When Jamie had returned, George unbound Macomo. “Arise and depart,” he said to him; “and, if you would preserve your life, leave this part of the country, for here your enemies are too numerous for you, great warrior as you may be. As for you, ruffians as you are”—and he turned and addressed himself to Lanty—“let me warn you that any attempt upon the life of this black will be met and frustrated, but not always with the same consideration you have received to-day. Let me come across you again in the same manner, and I'll shoot you down as I would a warrigal. Beyond this I have nothing to do with you. I am no thief-taker, but I will tell you, for your information, that a description of your whereabouts has been sent to the authorities of the penal settlement. By this time the constables are on your track, and you would do better to look after your own safety than to pursue this black, who has never injured you.”

“That's a lie for ye!” exclaimed Lanty, who had but just recovered his voice. “Didn't he spy on us, an' inform on us; an' shure, didn't he shpoil our plant on the farram?”

“He did no more than his duty, in the same way that it was my duty to give the authorities information of your presence here.”

“It's aisy to be an informer when it's in the blood, it is!” said Lanty.

George smiled grimly. “As I told you before, I am no thief-taker, or I might have had you any day since you have been here. More than once have I been in your

camp when you were all sleeping; but it is the duty of every honest man to rid the country of such ruffians as you and your companions. So now beware; make any further attempt upon this black, and I will hand you over bound and defenceless to the constables, who are now close upon your track."

Lanty stamped his foot with passion. "Shure, it's aisy talking, an' you wid the best of it; but aisy, jewel, aisy! It's aven I'll be wid ye before there's a rope ready for me. It's wid yeer own blood ye'll pay for this day's work."

"Threatened men live long," George answered, and then, turning on his heel, he made a sign to Jamie and pointed to the door through which Macomo, having collected his weapons, had already passed. Jamie went out, and George followed, leaving the scrubbers behind to digest at their leisure the mortification of the defeat they had sustained.

Macomo regarded George with a countenance in which a number of varied emotions strove for mastery. He tried in vain to give expression to the many feelings that thronged upon him, for words failed him. He let his weapons fall to the earth, and, throwing his arms wide open, whilst his countenance assumed a look of mournful resignation, he at last found words to say, "Let the Greybeard shoot. There is the breast of Macomo. He has injured the Greybeard more than fifty lives can repay. Let him die!" Then, when George shook his head, he continued: "Twice to-day the Greybeard has saved the life of Macomo. Many times since Macomo shed the blood of those whom the Greybeard loved has Macomo been preserved from death by the hand of the Greybeard. Macomo is alone—the last of the Maroo. He is weary of life. Let the Greybeard shed his blood, and blot out the Maroo from the face of the country!"

George had been much moved by this address of Macomo, and struggled in vain to maintain the semblance of sternness he had put on when first addressing the black. Giving way to his feelings, he at last spoke: "Macomo is brave. He has suffered much. The Greybeard would willingly give his life if he could blot out the past. But there is no recalling that which has been done. Let Macomo listen. He is a brave chief, and the Greybeard will trust him. Let Macomo come when the next moon is at the full, and meet the Greybeard at the lonely grave where lie the victims of his crime. Let him promise to do this, and the Greybeard will promise to leave Macomo unwatched, unguarded, until then, so that the chief of the Maroo may have one month of peace to prepare himself for joining his warriors on the dark way. Will Macomo promise?"

The black shuddered visibly when allusion was made to that spot which had been the scene of the crime that had been attended with such terrible consequences to himself and to his tribe. Then, after a brief pause, he rose to his feet, and drew

himself up proudly. Folding his arms across his bosom, he answered resolutely, and as if his mind had been completely made up, "Macomo will come!"

"I trust you fully and unhesitatingly," said George. "From this time I leave you free and unwatched, to follow your own course as you will."

The black merely repeated the words, "Macomo will come," and George, bowing his head by way of expressing that he was satisfied, beckoned to Jamie to follow, and strode off rapidly through the bush.

Jamie had looked on and listened to all that had taken place, with no small amount of astonishment. When they had got to some distance, he could no longer restrain himself, but called out, "Look here, General, you ain't flat enough to fancy that this fellow will come as he promised?"

"He will come," replied George. "Take my word for it that he will, and I am not often deceived."

"You're all abroad here, General. D'ye think it likely now he'll come, when he knows it's only to have his throat cut. It ain't in reason, it ain't!"

"You know very little, my boy, of the feelings by which men are actuated. Macomo is weary of life, and would almost hail with satisfaction the bullet that took it away. Thus, I say, he will come."

"And I say he won't. Who ever heard of one of these black hounds ever keeping a promise? They can't do it—it's against their nature; so, if you don't look after him, I will!"

"We are in the hands of Providence!" exclaimed George. "Oh, would that we had left our vengeance in the hands of Him who has said, 'I will repay,' instead of sinfully taking it into our own."

"There's no use grumbling, General!" cried Jamie in a hurt tone. "We've done it well enough, that's certain; and if them we knocked over don't complain, I'm sure we hadn't ought to!"

An expression of deep pain passed over the countenance of George, but he made no reply, and passed on in silence. Jamie, before he followed him, put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. A few seconds after the sound had been sent out, Blucher came running up to him, and then he pushed on to rejoin his father.

Macomo had not gone far when he heard the sound of footsteps as they crashed through the scrub, and were evidently coming towards him. His first thought was to conceal himself, but one glance at those who approached satisfied him that concealment was unnecessary. They were not enemies, but friends, and friends, too, whom above all others he desired to see—Coolamie, and the young white to whom he had brought the letter. Springing forward in all haste to them, he was brought to a sudden halt by the movements of Gentleman Jack. Jack was unacquainted with

Macomo, and evidently took him for one of some tribe hostile to the whites. His gun was at once raised to his shoulder, and he would no doubt have fired upon his best friend, had not Coolamie, observing the motion, hastily laid her hand upon his weapon.

“No, no!” she cried; “do not fire. It is a friend. It is Macomo!”

“Macomo?” asked Jack. “And who is he?”

“The young white—the friend of the white women at the farm, who have been so good to Macomo,” the black answered for himself—“knows him not. But Macomo knows the young white; for Macomo has watched him long, and followed on his track for many days to give him the paper writing from the white women.”

“Ah! You were the bearer of that letter?”

Macomo made a sign of assent.

“And you were to take an answer back?”

“It was for that Macomo waited here. He would not have now been here alone in the midst of enemies eager for his life, had he not promised the white women to bring back the young man's reply.”

“And you have been risking your life to take back an answer, whilst I have not so much as read the letter. But wait. I will repair my negligence, and give you an answer now.”

“No, not now; the croppies are too near. They are angry with Macomo because he wishes to take the young white from them. They will be sure to follow on Macomo's track, now that they have no longer the fear of the Greybeard's gun.”

“The Greybeard! What do you mean?” asked Jack.

Macomo in a few words described how he had been made prisoner by the scrubbers and rescued by George, and warned his companions that the robbers, burning with rage, were still within a short distance.

“And Macomo did not say hard words of Coolamie for sending him to a place which she said was safe, when it was the most dangerous one he could have gone to, though Coolamie did not know it,” the young girl murmured in a soft, pleading voice.

“Macomo had no thought of Coolamie but as a friend who had given him good counsel. His heart has no place for evil thoughts of Coolamie.”

“Macomo is a brave chief,” she answered in a low tone. “He believes others to be as noble and as true as himself.”

Jack had drawn the letter from his pocket, and was about to open it, when Macomo placed his hand before it. “No, not here!” he said. “Let us seek some safer spot in which we can hold council, and where the young white may be able to consider calmly and well the answer he will send back by Macomo.”

“Well, perhaps it would be as well,” responded the Gentleman. “I don't know that I could calmly consider the matter with that wretch Lanty so near. Should he come in sight, I should forget everything to secure my vengeance. Either he or I should never leave this spot alive!” Then, putting up the letter, and again shouldering his fowling-piece, he added, “Lead the way, Macomo; let us quit this neighbourhood, for whilst so near that villain, I have no thoughts but those of vengeance.”

Macomo moved away, and Jack followed him, whilst Coolamie stood still, dejectedly looking after them, but making no motion towards keeping company.

Macomo had only gone about a dozen paces, when he stopped and looked back, saw that Coolamie was still on the same spot, and asked, “And Coolamie?”

“Coolamie will return to her people,” she answered with a sad smile and a dejected air.

“No, no!” interposed Jack. “You must not go until I have given you some present by which to remember the wild and vagabond scrubber whom you in your woman's kindness tended, succoured, and set free!”

Macomo opened his eyes in wonder. “Was the young white in danger, and did Coolamie set him free?”

“Yes; at the suggestion of Lanty, they intended to keep me prisoner, to prevent my communicating with you; but, when Coolamie heard that the two villains were going off to the Swamp Hut, she brought me to my senses, for I had been stunned by a blow, and then not only set me at liberty, but, in order to provide for your rescue, guided me herself on the path, to prevent me from losing my road.”

“And Coolamie did this for Macomo; and yet Macomo is the enemy of her tribe?” he asked, as he went up to the young girl and took her by the hand.

Coolamie hung her head in womanly bashfulness, and made no answer.

“Does Coolamie not fear,” Macomo continued, “to go back to her tribe? Coolamie's father and the young men of her tribe will be very angry when they find she has helped their prisoner to escape.”

“Coolamie has no fear. Macomo and the young white will be safe; they will be far away where no danger can reach them, and Coolamie will be content. She is ready to meet the anger of her tribe.”

Macomo turned to Gentleman Jack, and asked, “Does the young white know that if Coolamie returns to the camp, Naarandee and the men of her tribe will put her to death for her part in this day's work?”

“Put her to death!” exclaimed Jack. “I never dreamt that they would think of such a thing. No; now that you are safe, I would return and put myself in the hands of the tribe, rather than any harm should come to the poor girl.”

“My young friend speaks well,” rejoined Macomo. “Coolamie has done well. She

has saved the life of the young white and the life of Macomo. She must not perish. Let Coolamie follow on the path with Macomo. His heart is lonely, but the Young Flower of the Lakes will give it joy. His camp is very dull, but she will make it more pleasant for him than it has ever yet been.”

Coolamie made no reply, but she continued to gaze wistfully upon the Maroo chief.

Macomo took her by the hand, and, raising the woomera which he still carried with him, he struck her a no very gentle blow with it over the head. “Macomo takes possession of Coolamie,” he said. “She is his wife!”

Jack looked on with astonishment at this singular ceremony, but he was still more surprised when, after this brief and novel kind of wooing, and this rough performance of the marriage service, Macomo started on at a brisk pace, and Coolamie followed at his heels as passively and contentedly as if she had been accustomed to do nothing else all her life.

Chapter VIII The Prodigal's Return

WAKING with the first light next morning, Jack drew forth the letter brought by Macomo, and with some difficulty read its contents:—

“Dear, dear Frederick,

“This last terrible affair has been more than we can bear. It has filled our cup of misery to overflowing. There is one here to whom last night's work will give a death blow, unless some means can be devised for saving you from the consequences of your dreadful crime. Think, oh think, what her feelings must be. You will save her—I know you will. You will not have her death on your soul to answer for at the last dreaded day. Say you will at once quit the band of ruffians with whom you are now connected, who are leading you on the way to an ignominious death. But I know that you will do this. I have sent this by a trusty messenger, in whom you may place the most implicit confidence. He will lead you to us, and, once with us, we will manage to keep you concealed until arrangements can be made for getting you safely out of this country, where your life is no longer safe. Then, with means at your disposal, with the frightful experience you must have already gained, you will be able to seek in some other land that peace which you will never be able to attain here. May Heaven bless you, Frederick, and beget in your heart a desire for a better life, and a disposition to do what we earnestly require, for your sake more than for our own! This is the earnest prayer of us all, but of none more earnestly than your ever-fond, but heart-broken MARGARET.”

Long did Jack sit pondering over this epistle. At last he muttered to himself, “Yes, I will see her and follow her advice. Dear, dear Margaret, your strong-hearted affection has never for a moment swerved from me, and now I will repay it. And she, too, who will not permit herself to be named to me”—and he pressed his hands in agony upon his forehead as he thought of her—“I have already cost her enough of misery! She shall be saved, no matter what the risk to myself.”

He had decided now, and, springing to his feet, he called upon Macomo to rise, for the sun was just on the point of showing himself above the horizon. Almost instantly upon receiving the summons, Macomo joined him, and Jack informed him that he had read the letter, that he was about to return with Macomo to the farm, and that he would himself take the answer to the letter that the black had brought.

Not at all surprised at this, for he had expected something of the kind, Macomo made instant preparations for departure. Once more they took to the canoe, and paddled round to the farthest point that their frail barque would take them on their journey. Then landing, they took to the bush, and, by devious and little-frequented

paths, they struck out a track upon which there was no chance of their being interrupted, and but small probability of their being overtaken if followed. In this way they arrived, at the end of the second day after leaving the lake, within sight of the homestead of Mount Pleasant.

The nearer they approached the farm, the more gloomy and desponding had Jack's manner become, until now that he was within reach of those who so much loved and cared for him, he appeared almost to dread to come within view of the establishment, lest he should be seen and shunned by those whom his heart told him now that he truly loved. So he told Macomo to go forward to the farm and inform Bright Eyes of his arrival, and endeavour thereafter to bring her out to meet him.

In the shortest possible space of time, both Margaret and Beatrice met their misguided brother, and then ensued a scene of such a painful nature that we mercifully forbear to describe it. Suffice it to say that, after Margaret had explained to Jack how they happened to be in Australia, when all the time he had been thinking of them as in England, it was arranged that negotiations should be opened up with a friend of the family, who was a shipowner, to smuggle Jack out of the country, and place him on board the first homeward-bound ship they encountered.

The chief difficulty in the carrying out of this scheme lay in the lack of a trusty messenger to carry a letter to Newcastle; but, after consulting George, it was agreed that no one more faithful could be found than Jamie, who accordingly set about making such scant preparation as occurred to one who was always more or less ready for action.

Chapter IX White Savages

WHEN Coolamie returned from Mount Pleasant, she found Macomo downcast and depressed at the thought of having to leave her at the advent of the next new moon. But the girl could not understand his despair, until he told her the story of the Greybeard's vengeance, and of the promise he had made to appear before the white man at the appointed time. Turning the whole thing over in her mind, Coolamie determined to make a personal appeal to the Greybeard, and plead for her husband's life—although she knew that such a course of action would be abhorrent to the mind of a great chief like Macomo.

Accordingly she set out to track the General, and, finding him alone, pleaded with all the rude eloquence peculiar to the native tribes for her husband's life. As she went on, George would fain have granted her wish; but, in his moments of weakness, the memory of his oath and all it stood for rose up before him, and he steeled himself to deny her. Again and again she returned to the attack, her love for Macomo causing her to use every means towards success, while her proud spirit revolted at the ignominy of the procedure. But the heart of the settler was adamant, and at last, baffled and beaten, she turned her steps sadly towards the home she had helped to brighten during her brief sojourn with Macomo.

After she had left him, George remained for some moments buried in thought; then, clasping his hands wildly and wringing them in agony, he exclaimed, "Heaven help me and teach me what to do! It was a sinful oath—sinful in the making—still more sinful in the keeping. But it was made to the dead, and only they can release me from it. Why, oh why, is it that it is only now that my soul begins to revolt at these scenes of blood? Why is it that, instead of longing as I once did for the hour of vengeance, I now dread its approach?" He paused to consider. "Is it that I was mad? Yes, I must have been mad—mad—or I should never have sworn to do that which was so very foreign to my nature. And Jamie—poor Jamie! Nothing can ever turn him! Alas! come what will, the fate of Macomo is sealed!"

"And by the mortal! so is yours—signed, sealed, an' delivered!" And, with the first words uttered, George found himself seized and held in the powerful arms of Lanty Maher and Roger. "It's a long score we hev agin you, alannah, but we'll be afther heving a settlement now!" continued Lanty, as George was hurled to the earth, and, by the aid of Ted Sullivan, in a few seconds securely bound.

Roger the Rough raised his carbine by the muzzle, as he stood over George, as if about to dash out the brains of the prostrate man.

Lanty seized his arm. "Would ye be afther putting a spy to death in the same aisy

way as ye would an honest man? No, no!” and he ground out the words with savage bitterness between his teeth. “Let him die bit by bit, that we may see it, an' enjoy it!”

And the three ruffians sat themselves round their victim, to decide upon the manner of his death.

George, in the meantime, lay perfectly conscious of what was going on, but utterly indifferent as to what was to follow. He made no remark, but, from the resigned expression of his countenance, one would have believed that he almost hailed as a relief the death that now threatened, and from which he saw no probability of escape.

After various suggestions had been made by the three desperadoes for the despatch of George, it was ultimately agreed that he should be tied to a sapling, and a slow fire lighted under him.

George, as he lay, heard all that was said, but with an apathy that nothing could move, he listened to the horrible decision they had come to.

“Ye hard what it is that we'll be afther doing to ye?” asked Lanty of him.

George made no reply, and hardly so much as cast a look upon the ruffian who addressed him.

“It's pace-male,” continued Lanty, “we will be afther roasting ye, an' faix, we'll see if a spy has any feeling at all, at all. Shure, it's meself does be doubting whether thim crathurs do be heving any at all, becuse, if they hed, they'd nivir be taking up wid such a dirty thrade.”

So saying, he took George by the collar, and, aided by Roger, roughly dragged him to a sapling that suited their purpose. Binding him by the middle to the tree, they unfastened his hands, only to tie them behind him round the tree, Roger tearing half a cotton kerchief that he wore round his neck to form the ligature. His feet were left unbound, as he was considered to be sufficiently well secured as he was, especially as he stood passive, immovable, and unresisting, apparently prepared to die, without a struggle, in any way his tormentors might think fit. He seemed to be almost like one in a dream, and paid as little attention to his captors or to their proceedings as if he took no interest in one or the other, and as if nothing in any way concerned him.

“Now, boys,” cried Lanty, “there he is fixed nate and illigant, an' it's a stick or two of wood we will be wanting, just to warrum him, but divil a more. Shure it's roashted he is to be, and not burrunt, or we'll be shpoiling his beauty.” And, as Roger drew up some boughs to the tree, he exclaimed: “Shmall sticks, shmall sticks, ma bouchal! Faix, ye'll be making a fire that will be shpoiling our roast entirely!”

While these events were proceeding, Macomo, wondering why Coolamie tarried so long, set out to meet her, and in so doing came across the tracks of the croppies,

and was not long in perceiving George's plight. At first he felt glad that his enemy was thus laid by the heels, but, remembering how the white had on two occasions lately saved his life, he relented, and determined that he in turn would show the Greybeard that there was still left in him some of the nobility of the Maroo chief.

Whilst they were thus engaged, Macomo stole down still nearer, and then he was not slow in perceiving that the runaways had left their firearms lying on the ground near the spot where they had sat down to decide upon the manner of George's death. A plan of rescue instantly suggested itself to the mind of the black, and whilst they were busily employed in placing the sticks they had collected in front of George, preparatory to lighting them, Macomo came stealthily forward with his own gun in his hand. He first took up Ted's pistol and stuck it in his belt of opossum hair. He next took up the carbine of Roger, and stood it against a log to be ready to his hand, and then, coming out more boldly, he reached out to the gun of Lanty, which was still farther from his hiding-place, and, throwing open the pan, blew away the powder that was in it. The lock of the piece, however, was stiff, and the spring gave a loud click as the pan cover was raised. The noise, trifling as it was, was sufficient to attract the attention of the scrubbers, who had everything ready for making the fire. As they turned round, Macomo threw down Lanty's gun, and, raising his own piece to his shoulder, presented it at the convicts. Lanty uttered a wild yell of rage when he saw how they had been foiled. "On him, boys!" he cried. "Hannim in dhoul! It's only one man, an' he a nagur, an' by the hokey he shall pay for this!"

"The first man that advances shall fall!" said Macomo. "Let loose your prisoner and go. Macomo does not wish to shed the blood of the whites. He has shed too much already!"

"Are yeez going to be bate this way by a black?" yelled Lanty, as the others held back.

"Macomo has the guns of the croppies. He can shoot them one at a time if they attempt to advance, and he will do so. Let them release their prisoner, and Macomo will not interfere with them."

"He won't, won't he? Shure, thin, an' it's kind ye are! Boys, are yeez going to be frightened by a blackfellow? Rush him, boys, altogether!" With the words, he and Roger sprang upon Macomo with a savage yell. Ted, not fancying to be the one to be shot, hung back. Roger was the foremost, and he had not taken two paces forward before the black fired on him. The ruffian staggered and fell, and Macomo, throwing down the fowling-piece he had first used, seized the carbine of Roger, that he had placed ready for the purpose. Quick as he was, however, Lanty was upon him before he had raised it to his shoulder. The two closed with each other, whilst Ted also ran up to the assistance of his comrade. A terrible struggle ensued, in

which it was evident that the black would be worsted if he received no aid. George, who had hitherto remained perfectly passive, seemed to wake up to energy only when he saw Macomo in danger of being overcome. That the black should perish in endeavouring to save his life was more than he could bear, and he made violent exertions to get free. In his powerful efforts, the old handkerchief that had confined his hands was snapped in two, and the instant he was free he rushed forward to where the struggle was going on, picked up the gun that had been thrown down by Macomo, and, clubbing it, knocked Lanty down with it. He had only just come up in time, for Macomo, though more active, was less powerful than either of the desperadoes who had assailed him, and a few seconds more would have seen him overcome and powerless in their hands. One look at the uplifted arm of George satisfied Ted that he was no match for the two who were now opposed to him. He retreated behind a stump, from which position he commenced a parley. "Aizy, aizy," he said. "It's bet we are, and shure the divil a more nor that ye want, or is it prisoners ye do be wanting to make av us?"

"No," replied George. "Thief-taking is no part of my business. You are safe from me."

"And me mates, too?" asked Ted.

"Yes; they are at liberty to go where they like; and if you care for them, you had better give them some attention."

Ted ran over to Lanty, for Roger was already sitting up and looking after his wound, which was in the shoulder. Raising Lanty's head, Ted cried, "Shure, thin, it's kilt he is intirely. Oh, wurra, what will I do?"

George made him no answer, but, taking up his gun and collecting such articles as were lying about the camp, he made them into a swag, and, leaving Ted to look after his comrades, he joined Macomo, who had remained, gun in hand, a short distance off, calmly awaiting the conclusion of the colloquy.

Beckoning to the black to follow, George moved away up the range until he was out of sight and hearing of those he had left behind. Then, suddenly stopping short, he turned round, and, in a voice that betrayed no small amount of emotion, said, "Macomo, you have saved my life!"

"The Greybeard has saved the life of Macomo many times. Macomo has saved the life of the Greybeard only once. He still owes the Greybeard much!"

"Macomo, you have lately done much that is good. You are no longer the murderer and plunderer you once were. You have shown yourself a friend to the whites. I would willingly forget the past, but I cannot—dare not. A terrible oath was taken, and that oath must be fulfilled."

"The Greybeard is right. Macomo has injured him. Only the life of Macomo can

satisfy the blood he has shed. Macomo is ready to give up his life to the Greybeard. He has no tribe, no warriors—nothing to live for now!”

“Has Macomo nothing that makes life pleasant to him—nothing?” asked George pointedly.

“Yes, there is one whom Macomo will leave behind him—Coolamie!” And his voice sank to a melancholy tone as he mentioned the name. “More graceful than the waratah, more beautiful than the flowering wattle, she loves Macomo, and has made his camp very pleasant. She left her tribe, her friends, and the hunting-grounds of her people, to follow the path of Macomo. Macomo loves her, but he has gathered the flower of the lake country, and bound it in pride in his knotted hair, only at the time when his head is to be laid low.”

“Listen, Macomo. Your life I cannot save. It is forfeited. It is the penalty of your crime to lose it, and my punishment, for recording a rash and wicked oath, to take it. But, believe me, that Coolamie shall be cared for.”

“It is good!” said Macomo. “Let the Greybeard watch over her, and let him get the white women at the farm to receive her, and Macomo will start contented for the long journey.”

“Take my word for it, it shall be so!” cried George, and, in the impulse of the moment, he put out his hand as if to clasp that of Macomo, but, suddenly remembering himself, he withdrew it with a shudder. Then, with a look of blended horror and compassion, he waved a farewell to Macomo, and without another word left the spot.

Macomo stood looking after his enemy until his form was lost to sight in the distance. For some time he stood buried in sombre thought; then, resuming his self-possession, he stalked away and took the nearest route to his camp.

Chapter X The Last Long Journey

WHEN Jamie returned from Newcastle with the message that everything was satisfactorily arranged for Jack's escape, Margaret had an interview with her brother, in which she received his promise to make a fresh start in some new country, and endeavour to make some atonement for the misery he had brought upon his unfortunate family. He had but one strong desire before departing, and that was to see his mother once again and obtain her forgiveness, if possible. In this his sister coincided, and she arranged to bring Mrs. Marcomb to the rendezvous, provided she could be induced to accede to the request. During all these arrangements, Mrs. Marcomb, although yearning in her heart to clasp her erring son to her bosom, had persistently refused to go near him, partly on account of her desire to keep the terrible secret from her husband, and partly because, in the first flush of the degradation and disgrace that overwhelmed her and her family, she had taken a vow never again to look upon his face until he was about to die, and the memory of that vow rose up as an impassable barrier, and stemmed the tide of a mother's emotions. Although a deeply religious woman, she was at the same time very superstitious, and, so strongly had the recollection of her awful vow taken possession of her, that it required all the persuasions of Margaret and of George, whose aid she had enlisted, to bring the mother to take a broader view of things, and consent to a reconciliation. The meeting was eventually brought about by George, who led Jack round to the garden as soon as night's mantle had covered all, and, no sooner had he thrust him inside the gate than mother and son were face to face.

"Oh, mother! Dear, dear mother!" Jack almost sobbed out as he rushed forward.

He would have thrown himself at her feet, but, instinctively guessing what he was about to do, Mrs. Marcomb prevented it by hastening forward and taking him in her arms, as she cried, "My son, my own boy! And is it thus we meet, to part so soon and for ever!"

There was silence for a few seconds, as the mother and son, so long separated, so soon to be again severed, held each other in a mute and fond embrace. Mrs. Marcomb, her motherly feeling alive to the danger of delay, was the first to recover from the transient happiness of the meeting.

"My boy, my Frederick!" she exclaimed as she released her arms. "We must not delay, when every moment is fraught with danger!"

Jack smiled lovingly upon her. "I care for nothing now. There is no danger that can affright me, now that your embrace has given my heart assurance of your forgiveness."

“Ah, Frederick,” said the poor mother, “human pardon, even if it be from those who have been the most injured by our crimes, is but of small account. It is elsewhere we must look if we would have it avail, and may Heaven pardon you as fully and as freely as I have done long, long ago!”

Jack kissed his mother fondly as he cried in a joyful tone, “Now let the worst come; I am prepared for it. Good or evil fortune will be met with a daring front, for, armed with a mother's loving blessing, I shall be strong in mind as well as in heart.”

No sooner had he said this than a warning coo-ee from Coolamie told them that danger was near, and in a few seconds more the sound of voices and the rush of feet left them in no doubt.

As a matter of fact, the surprise had been effected by Mr. Marcomb and a posse of police whom he had called in order to effect the arrest of the croppies, little guessing that his own wife's son was amongst their number.

Mickey, the serving-man, who had all along been in league with the croppies, and who pretended sympathy with the family merely for the purpose of serving his own selfish ends, having learned the secret of Gentleman Jack, tried to extort blackmail from Mrs. Marcomb, and it was her refusal that brought about his revenge. Knowing that a meeting between mother and son had been arranged, Mickey the faithless had informed Lanty and Ted and Roger, and they thereupon planned to interrupt the interview, and extort as much money as possible from the Marcombs. Unfortunately for the success of their scheme, the police had arrived a day earlier than Mickey had anticipated, and thus the scrubbers and the police came upon the scene in the garden from different directions. But Mickey's sense of honour was an elastic quantity; so he bethought him that, if he pretended to assist the police in their search for the robbers, he might thereby gain his own freedom.

As soon as the alarm was raised, the scrubbers, wild at being baulked of their prey, determined to have a certain measure of vengeance on Jack, if possible, and accordingly, even at the risk of discovering their own presence, they fired in his direction, and succeeded in wounding him. For a few seconds he wavered, and then fell by the side of the fence, where he was immediately set upon by Ted, who plunged a sheath knife into his breast by way of making sure of him. But his victory was short-lived, for, ere he could withdraw the knife, the tomahawk of Macomo, who arrived just a moment too late to protect Jack, crashed into the scrubber's skull and silenced him for ever.

Only when, by the exertions of her husband and daughters, she was carried up to the house, did Mrs. Marcomb recover consciousness. Her first thought was of her son, her first question concerning him. “Where, where is Frederick?” she exclaimed. “Has he succeeded in escaping?”

Margaret answered sadly, "He has been wounded and made prisoner, and can hardly survive more than two hours."

"Not more than two hours!" exclaimed the lady wildly. "Oh, my vow, my fatal vow! Where is he? Let me go to him!"

"Will it not be too much for you in your present weak state?"

"A mother knows no weakness when her children demand her attention. But anything will be better and more bearable than this suspense. Where is he?" And she rose to her feet unaided, and to all appearance as strong as ever.

"In the sitting-room. And, oh, mother, dear, prepare yourself for a melancholy sight, for his life blood is slowly ebbing away from a wound received, not from the weapons of the police, but from the hands of one of his old associates."

Mrs. Marcomb could not prevent one choking sob from rising out of the depths of her overladen bosom. Then she added resignedly, "Heaven is just! It is our own evil deeds that find us out and punish us!" So saying, and leaning on her husband's arm, and followed by Margaret, she approached the couch on which lay her dying son, and, seating herself at his head, took Jack's hand in her own. This action caused him to open his eyes, over which the film of death was just gathering. Then for the first time he noticed his mother.

"Loving to the last!" he said faintly, whilst a smile of love played upon his face. "Dear mother, you have not deserted me!"

"No!" replied Mrs. Marcomb firmly. "To the last I will stand by you!"

And Mrs. Marcomb, encircling him with her arm, besought him to calm himself.

"How can I be calm," he whispered, for he was fast sinking, "with *him* always before me?" and he pointed out straight in front of him. "He always stands like that—his arms folded, and his fair hair and forehead dabbled with blood. He never mocks me, but that look of quiet scorn he turns upon me is more terrible than the most bitter words!"

"No, no!" cried Mrs. Marcomb. "You deceive yourself. He had no such bitter feeling towards you. With his dying breath, and it was sent forth in my arms, he forgave you and prayed to Heaven to pardon you!"

"You were with him in his last moments!" exclaimed Jack, his astonishment at the announcement giving more strength to his voice than it had previously displayed.

Mrs. Marcomb had spoken hastily, and now regretted having said so much. "Yes, yes!" she answered, "think no more of it!"

"I must, I must know all!" he said excitably. "I have not many minutes to live, and shall soon be face to face with him whom I have injured. How was it you were with him? Quick! I have not long to wait!"

"Oh, no, no, mother dear! Make not his dying moments more painful than they

are!” implored Margaret.

“You, too, Margaret! Ah, a horrible doubt comes upon me! He was about to be married when I butchered him—to whom, mother, to whom? Answer my dying question!” And in his terrible excitement, he spoke almost in his natural tone of voice, and raised himself up till he rested on his elbow.

Margaret turned an imploring look upon her mother, but Mrs. Marcomb's eye was fixed upon the countenance of her son, and she saw not the mute appeal to silence. Like a person under mesmeric influence, and as if she were constrained unwillingly to utter the words that came from her lips, she muttered hoarsely, and in a voice scarcely audible, “Yes; you have guessed rightly. He was to have been married to your sister Margaret; and on that terrible night when he met his death he went to find you, with the express intention of weaning you from your wretched mode of life, by disgusting you with it.”

Jack raised himself into a sitting posture as his mother proceeded, and when she had finished he stretched out his hands, made fearful, but ineffectual efforts to speak, and then there was a gush of blood from his mouth, his eyes fixed themselves in agonised pleading upon Margaret's face, and without a groan or a sound he fell back, and the next instant was dead.

Margaret sprang forward as he fell, and, burying her face in the couch by the side of her brother's body, breathed a fervent prayer for the sinful soul that had just gone to its account.

The poor mother sat as if turned into marble, and, unable to take her eyes off that face, upon which that look of pleading agony was still imprinted. It was only when her husband approached and soothingly placed his hand upon her shoulder that she was brought back to herself. Pressing her hand to her side as though in pain, she rose and made a step towards the door. She staggered and would have fallen, had not her husband been by her side to support her. She turned, wondering at the aid she had received, and, seeing her husband, she smiled faintly, as she said, “Thank you, James; it was thoughtful of you; but you were always thoughtful for me. I shall be better presently, but—lead me to my room.”

Chapter XI Coolamie

WITH the first light of day the police were off on the track of the scrubbers. Macomo had picked up the track very readily, and the party were far away from Mount Pleasant long before any of that grief-wearied family were stirring. When at last its members made their appearance, Margaret saw with great satisfaction that her mother appeared to bear up better than she had expected against the blow she had received. Her son lay dead, but still there was the consolation, poor as it may seem to those who have never been placed in similar trying circumstances, of knowing that, at all events, the assassin's hand had saved him from an ignominious death. To this he was certain to have been doomed had he been taken alive, and the heart-broken lady almost thanked Heaven that, in its mercy, it had spared her this last trial.

The day passed over heavily. There were certain formalities to be gone through, but the Sergeant of Police had saved them from much difficulty by authorising them to bury the body and promising to report the matter to his superior officer. There was thus nothing left but to make preparations for the interment. In those early days a burial-ground was to be found upon every large establishment, and that of Mount Pleasant already contained eight or ten graves. The Government men were set to work to dig two graves—one for each body—and, this done, they were allowed their liberty for the day. In the afternoon the corpses were consigned to the earth, unfollowed except by Mr. Marcomb, who, when the state of affairs was explained to him, behaved in the most magnanimous manner, though his wife and daughter watched on its journey to its last resting-place the remains of him they had so dearly loved, shedding bitter tears at this untimely ending to a career that had commenced with so much promise.

In the evening the little family assembled in the sitting-room, silent and plunged in grief. Their loss was too recent for any pretence of indifference to be made. What little conversation there was was conducted in few words and in low tones. No word was spoken about him who had that day been borne to his last home; but it was evident that the thoughts of all were travelling to that narrow spot where lay a sinner awaiting the dread fiat of the Eternal Judge. Thus they retired early to rest. Mr. Marcomb, however, expressed his intention to sit up a little longer, in order to communicate with the police in case they should return. They had been gone hardly half an hour, and Mr. Marcomb was sitting buried in thought, with a book before him which he had been trying, but trying unsuccessfully, to read, for his thoughts would wander away from the page. He was disturbed by hearing the sounds of

footsteps outside, and instantly rose, thinking the police had returned. He had hardly gained his feet, before the French light, which served as a door, was rudely pushed open, and Mickey, followed by Lanty Maher and Roger, entered the room.

“God save all here!” said Mickey in a tone of unconcern. “You see, I've come to tell ye that I did be coming back. It's not so soon as ye were expecting me back, I'll go bail!”

“You impudent scoundrel, you! You shall pay dearly for this!” cried Mr. Marcomb.

“There, there!” interposed Mickey. “It isn't praching we do be wanting. It's money. So just give us up what ye have, an' thin we'll lave ye alone!”

Mr. Marcomb looked from one to the other of these ruffians, and at once saw that his unhappy reference to last night had done more harm than good, by exciting the evil passions of the men. Assistance was not to be had. If he could get rid of them by giving them the money, without alarming his wife, he would do so. He therefore said, “Silence! Make no noise to alarm the ladies, and you shall have what you want.”

This being settled, Mr. Marcomb, followed by Lanty, left the room. No sooner had he done so than Roger, who had hitherto kept up appearances tolerably well, sank exhausted into a chair, and gave indications of fainting.

“Kape your spirits up, Roughey!” cried Mickey. “Shure it's only this one sthroke, and we are made men for the next twelve months.”

The Rough groaned heavily, and placed his hand upon his shoulder. “If I could only get the bullet out!” he growled out.

“After the night, ye'll be able to take it aisy, alanna, wheer ye like,” was Micky's consolation.

“The confounded arm hangs like a ton weight at my shoulder, and seems to drag me down,” groaned the Rough.

“Shure, an' won't the money we'll get buy ye a docthor, an' thin——”

He stopped short, for he heard a footstep on the verandah, and the next instant there was a tap at the French light.

Mickey and Roger looked at each other. The blinds were down, and the person outside could not see into the room.

“Hide behind the windy curtains!” whispered Mickey to Roger, who rose heavily from the chair and did as directed. “Who's there?” now asked Mickey in his usual tone of voice.

“It's me—Jamie. I want to see Mrs. Marcomb,” was the reply.

Mickey's eyes sparkled as in a savage whisper he said to Roger, “The spy's brat! By this an' by that, but it's in luck we are this night. Ye won't see her by shtopping

outside!” he cried aloud.

Jamie opened the door and entered. He carried his gun in his hand, and seemed not a little astonished at the chamberlain who was there to receive him. “Hullo!” he ejaculated, “my lame chap! So you've worked it, have you? Got promoted to house-work?”

“Shure, an' yes,” replied Mickey, with a grin. “It is a little house-work I do be doing just now; an' what is it I'll be afther doing for ye?”

“I want to see Mrs. Marcomb.”

“An' it's Mrs. Marcomb ye want? Faix, thin, ye'll have to wait, for it's in bed she does be at this blessid minnit.”

Jamie had come fairly into the room, so as to have Roger behind him. Mickey, as he spoke, had gradually approached the lad, until now he was close to him. The boy, not in any way dreaming of attack from that quarter, had allowed him to come thus near. And now, as Mickey concluded, he made a sign which Roger was not slow to interpret. He was almost within reach of Jamie, and one step after he had quitted his concealment placed him close to the lad. As he stepped, he seized with his unwounded arm the gun which Jamie held carelessly, and tore it from his grasp. At the same time, Mickey seized Jamie by the throat, and endeavoured to cock a pistol which he held in the other hand. Jamie, however, was much more powerful than Mickey had reckoned for, and the ruffian had as much as he could do to retain the mastery that the first attack had given him. As the boy struggled, he called loudly for help.

“Knock out his brains, Roughey, jewel. He twists like an eel, an' his muscles are like iron, an', faix, it's as much as I can do to holt him!” Mickey panted out as he struggled with the boy.

Mickey threw away the pistol, as he cried, “Here, Roughey! Hoult him wid yer one hand, and grip him tight!”

The Rough obeyed. He held the lad by one hand, and Mickey also held on by one hand, whilst with the other he drew a clasp knife from his pocket, opened the blade with his teeth, and, grasping it firmly, was about to strike his victim, when he in turn was seized and his arm was borne down by Coolamie, who, with flashing eyes and dilated nostrils, now confronted him. Aided by this surprise, Jamie tore himself loose from Mickey, and the latter, with an oath, seized the young girl savagely, and plunged the knife again and again into her bosom. With a wild shriek, as she received the wounds, Coolamie fell to the ground, and Mickey turned once more to attack the lad. Jamie was now prepared for him. He had made but short work of the Rough, whom he had thrown off with as much ease as if he had been a child, and then, seizing his gun, he had it to his shoulder just as Mickey turned upon him.

Before the convict could make the spring he meditated, Jamie fired, and the ball, true to its mark, entered the ruffian's skull between the two eyes. He gave a shout and a spasmodic spring into the air, and fell dead.

At the same instant that Coolamie had given her first death shriek, screams of terror were heard to arise from the room towards which Lanty had gone. He had heard Coolamie enter the house, and, fearful of surprise, had called out to Mr. Marcomb, and had thus alarmed the ladies. When they screamed, he thundered at the door for admittance, and, not being able to force it, he placed his pistol against the lock and discharged it. Mr. Marcomb, seizing the first offensive weapon that came to hand, was prepared to dispute his entrance; but just then Lanty caught the sound of voices and of eager rushing feet outside, and, guessing that the game was up, left the door and made his way back to the room, just as the shot was fired that had killed Mickey.

After discharging his gun, Jamie had clubbed it, with the intention of settling accounts with the Rough. Roger, however, had made his escape as soon as he saw Mickey fall, and Jamie only barely caught sight of his retreating figure. Before he could follow him, Lanty rushed in, calling upon the others to hurry off and escape. He ran against Jamie before he perceived who it was. Then he uttered a wild execration and struck fiercely at him. The boy, however, rushed forward at the same time to grapple with him, and the blow that was aimed at him with the butt of Lanty's musket took but little effect. Coming by surprise, however, it took him off his feet, and he fell before he could close with his assailant. Lanty gave one wild, vengeful look, as if regretting that he could not stop to finish the work, and then rushed off, as the hurrying footsteps of the police were heard in the house. Jamie sprang to his feet again, but before he could rub his head and look to his weapon, Lanty had disappeared and the police had rushed into the room, and, presenting their guns at him, called out, "Surrender in the King's name! Stir a step, and you are a dead man!"

"No thanks to you that I ain't one now. I've had a pretty close scrape of it as it is; and now here you corner me up, when I ought to be following them rascals," answered Jamie, with an injured air.

"Who are you?" asked the sergeant, seizing Jamie by the collar with no very gentle hand.

"Keep your hand off me, for I'm rather hot-tempered," answered Jamie, with a frown. "If you must know, I'm Jamie Maxwell."

"Son of Sergeant-Major Maxwell?"

"Of him as was Sergeant-Major; yes——"

"Give me your hand, my lad. Now, what is all this about?"

Mr. Marcomb had now entered the room, and he briefly explained the attack that had been made, though he was astonished at the appearance of Jamie.

Jamie then told of his entering the room, of his colloquy with Mickey, and of the attack made on him. "I was settled to a certainty if it had not been for the black girl there. And they have settled her, poor girl! She was a game 'un, and no mistake, to tackle that fellow there!"

"And did the black girl do this?"

"No, that's my work. Pretty shot, wasn't it? Plumb centre between the two eyes." He then detailed the particulars of the struggle, and of the rush of Coolamie to his rescue, of her death, and of what occurred subsequently, up to the arrival of the police.

"Poor Coolamie!" said Mr. Marcomb, bending over the body of the black girl. "I ought, however, to say, poor Macomo! For I do not know how he will bear the loss of his gin."

"Macomo!" exclaimed the sergeant. "Yes, now I look at her, I can see it is the gin who was with him last night."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the black chief entered the room, followed by George. He looked eagerly round the room, as though he had hoped to see his enemies in the hands of the police; and then his eye fell upon the group who surrounded the body of his Lake Blossom. He advanced, as if curious to see what so interested them, with no thought of the loss he had sustained pressing upon his heart. But one glance showed him the dress which Mrs. Marcomb had given her, and which she took so much pride in wearing. Hastily he stepped up, and those who stood around considerately made way for him. For a second he stood transfixed, as if doubting what he saw, then, as if he could doubt no longer, he uttered a hollow moan of pain, and threw himself on his knees by the side of her he had loved so well. He raised her hands, pressed them tenderly, and then let them drop; and, as they fell heavily, he lifted her head and gazed into those eyes over which death had cast its dull, senseless film. He uttered no word, but now and again a wild sob broke from his bosom as though it would rend it. Then he pushed the dress aside, and looked at the gaping wounds through which her young life had escaped. Uttering rapidly some native words, but in so low a tone that none could hear, he sprang to his feet, drew himself up proudly to his full height, and, though almost choked by the sobs that would find vent in spite of all his struggles to suppress them, he looked round with an unmoved countenance upon those who stood about him. Then, leaning forward, he raised the body, and threw it with a sudden jerk over his shoulder. Without speaking, for he could not trust himself to utter a word, and bearing his bleeding burden with him, he strode out of the room.

Mr. Marcomb would have interfered to detain him.

“Let him go,” interposed George. “It's always best to let these blacks have their own way with their dead. He wants to be in a quiet place to indulge his grief over her, and then he will bury her after the fashion of his tribe. When she is thus disposed of, then woe to the man who struck the blow!”

“The man who struck the blow won't give much trouble,” put in Jamie, “for there he is, quiet and harmless enough.” And he pointed to the body of Mickey. “I put him out of harm's way, you see.”

“You!” exclaimed George, who now for the first time saw his son. “How came you mixed up in this business? How came you here?”

“Well, you see, General,” and Jamie scratched his head, “it is a breach of orders, sure enough. You told me to wait for you—there's no denying that; but, after I'd waited two nights and nobody come near me, and after stopping to-night until I knew it was too late to expect you, I come up here to see what was wrong, for I made sure there was a difficulty some where, and was half afraid you'd got into a scrape.”

“You see the consequence of disobeying orders,” said George sternly. “If you had stopped as you were told, you would not have risked your own life, and would not have caused the death of that poor girl.”

“She saved me—there's no doubt about that. She's a regular trump, and no mistake. If you'd seen how she tackled my lame friend, and stuck to him, too, like one o'clock. If she kept her hold only a second longer, my bullet would have done for her what her gameness did for me.”

“And do you know that she is the gin of Macomo?” asked George in a low tone.

“Yes; I heard the sergeant say so just now. I say, General, it's a rum go, isn't it, that his gin should save my life?” And Jamie shook his head, as if there could not be a stranger thing, according to his idea.

In the meantime Mr. Marcomb had inquired from the sergeant how it was that he had come up so opportunely, and that officer detailed the circumstances which had led them to resolve upon returning. He would have set out that same night to follow the scrubbers, but George advised him to wait until Macomo had laid poor Coolamie in her last resting-place, as he was certain that the black would be only too glad to assist in running down the murderers of his faithful gin.

The police officer, when he rose at daylight the next morning, found Macomo sitting at the door awaiting him. Only staying to take a hasty meal, the party started off in pursuit of the escaped felons, but, after they had been gone for a week, news reached the farm that they had been unsuccessful, and had given up the search. They had picked up the tracks of the scrubbers readily enough, and Macomo had followed

them down to the river-side, about two miles above where the Paterson debouches into the Hunter. There they had evidently taken possession of a small boat and embarked upon the river. After that all trace of them was lost, and, though the police and Macomo searched both banks of the river for several miles above and below the spot whence they had started, their landing-place could not be discovered. When at last the constables gave up the search, Macomo refused to return with them. Certain of ultimately finding what he sought for, he declared that he would continue the search until he was successful. When he had tracked the marauders—and of his ability to do this he had no doubt—he promised to send a message to the police, so that the apprehension of the offenders might be made by them. Relying on this promise, they left him to his solitary perquisitions.

George and Jamie continued in the neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant until they learnt the result of the expedition. When they ascertained beyond all doubt that the police had failed, they disappeared without saying farewell to any.

Chapter XII The Last Black Hand

A FORTNIGHT has passed away since the sudden and unannounced departure of George from Mount Pleasant; and the events of the story now take the reader back to the spot where its first terrible incident occurred—the now-deserted farm of George Maxwell. Three years of neglect and desertion had made a great change in its appearance. The fences had fallen or been broken down in places, while the whole aspect of the place had become more wild and overgrown than it had been in its original state, and before the hand of man had interfered with the work of nature.

It was after sundown, and darkness was already closing in upon the scene. The day had been bright and cloudless, and the night promised to be fine and clear. By the side of the grave, and looking pale and spectral in the moonlight, stood George Maxwell, leaning on his gun, and his eye fixed in troubled thought upon the grassy mound beneath which he buried all his hopes of happiness in the world.

George stood for a few seconds regarding the grave with sorrowful eyes; then, as thoughts of the past and of the present thronged upon him and half-maddened him with conflicting memories, he let his gun fall from his hands, and with a heavy sob dropped on his knees beside the mound and buried his face in the long grass that grew over it. “Oh, must our separation be eternal!” he groaned out. “Shall we never meet again! Must this wicked oath in its fulfilment divide us hereafter, as the fearful deed that called it forth has parted us here? Oh, wife, wife, hear my voice, and, if Heaven permits the spirits of the departed to commune with those they loved here below, guide and direct me in this cruel strait!” In his agony of mind he clasped the cold earth in a frantic embrace, and lay sobbing hysterically for some seconds. Then he became quiet, and was lying thus, when Jamie came to inform him that supper was ready.

“Now then, General, all's ready!” said he.

George raised his head at the summons, but even in the pale moonlight it could be seen that his cheeks were wet with a moisture that had never come from the dewy grass.

“Hullo!” cried Jamie in astonishment, as he remarked this evidence of what he considered a weakness. “What's up?”

“There is this,” replied George, in a calm and assured voice. “The dew of Heaven has fallen upon my heart and found an outlet from my eyes. We are pardoned, Jamie! we are pardoned!” he said excitedly. “We shall once more meet those sainted ones who lie below!”

“And have you really been crying about it?” Jamie asked, unable as yet to

overcome his wonder at the phenomenon.

“I thought never to be able to shed a tear again,” George went on. “I thought that the fountain whence spring these blessed drops had dried up for ever, and that I should never weep again. But, as I lay in mad despair upon the grave, there came from below the whispering voice of my beloved wife ‘As you forgive your debtors, so shall your debts be forgiven you!’ Those were the words she uttered. I knew them well once—strange that I should have forgotten them. When I heard that small whispering voice, I knew what I had to do, and in my heart I forgave this last offender the wrong he had done me. Then came the blessed tears, my brain was cleared, and I saw plainly the course that lay before me. Here on this grave we will to-morrow seal the pardon of him who was the chief offender, and thus secure our own forgiveness for the past! Remember, Macomo has saved my life—saved it, too, from a fearful death of torture, from which, unaided, I had no escape.”

“Well, and didn't you save his life many a time?” rejoined the son.

“Saved it—yes, but for what? Can we claim credit for that which was only one portion of our scheme of vengeance.”

“To my mind, saving a life is saving a life, whatever it's done for.” Then, as George shook his head, he added, “That's the way I look at it. However, he didn't save me, so I've nothing to thank him for, and he hasn't wiped off my score!”

“No, but you forget that the poor girl Coolamie gave her life to protect yours—at a moment when, without her, you must have perished.”

Jamie was silenced, but only for a few seconds. “She did save me—I won't attempt to deny that; but I can't see how that is to go to Macomo's account.”

“She did it, knowing our intentions towards Macomo, and knowing that your death would release him from his greatest enemy. And yet she gave her life for yours, and thrust herself into danger, solely with the hope of conciliating us.”

“Well, she was a game one—there's no saying against that. She was about the best sample of a black gin that I ever came across, and I was right down sorry when I found I wasn't in time to stop the knife work.”

“Remember, too, that Macomo has done you good service, for it was his hand that took the life of the coward who killed poor Blucher!”

“His hand, was it? Well, that's a good chalk to him. Though I don't know,” and Jamie shook his head reflectively as another view of the case presented itself. “I hardly think I have anything to thank him for. He took the job out of my hands, and it would have been more satisfaction to me to have done it myself.”

“But you loved your old friend, Blucher, and must feel thankful to the man who avenged him.” And then, as Jamie still shook his head doubtfully, he added, “He might have escaped as the others have done.”

Jamie laughed a short, scornful laugh. "Not a bit of it! *I* should have been on his track; and I don't lose a trail that I'm once on."

"Jamie," and George laid one hand fondly on the boy's shoulder, whilst with the other he took that of his son, whilst he spoke in a gentle, persuasive voice, "Listen to me, boy. God's law has said, 'Thou shalt not kill.' And if we knowingly offend against that law, we shall never again meet with your mother and the little ones. They are in Heaven, and if we lose our places there, we shall never see them more."

Jamie remained silent, though George paused to give him an opportunity of reply.

He continued, "Macomo has done much good since that evil day when he robbed us of everything." Jamie made a sign of assent. "He has saved my life, and his gin has saved yours, when they might have let us perish, and so have been safe from our pursuit. But it is the sin that we shall commit that I wish you to see—a sin that will prevent us from hereafter joining your mother and the little ones. You loved them, Jamie, when in life, and I am sure that you would not wish to be separated from them for ever."

Jamie looked as if he were half inclined to shed tears himself, singular as he conceived the operation to be. "Look here, General," he said with a husky voice, "if you put it that way, it's another thing. You give the order, and I'll obey; so say no more about it."

That same evening two other individuals were camped upon the old farm, at no very great distance from where George and his son had held their conversation. They were Lanty Maher and Roger the Rough. Lanty looked faint and hungry, and he had evidently undergone great privation since he was last seen at Mount Pleasant. His beard, untended, had grown wild and straggling over his face. His one eye looked unnaturally large, and appeared to protrude from the hollow, sunken orbit, glittering and fiery, and instinct with more than its usual malice. Roger the Rough was in equally bad plight. His burly form was now emaciated, not only by the semi-starvation he had suffered, but also by the wasting effects of the wound so long untended. All his old boldness and energy had departed from him, and he was utterly listless and broken down. He shivered before every passing breeze, rendered delicate by weakness, and complained bitterly at not having a fire whereby to warm himself.

"And who do you expect to meet here, anyway?" whined Roger.

"It's our old friends they do be. Friends, ye remember, Roger, ma bouchal—the black spy and the white spy." And he growled out a curse in Irish upon the pair. "They're to meet forninst the ould grave I did be showing ye, on the day of the full moon, an', by the same token, that does be to-morrow."

"Well, and what have you got to say to 'em? We never had any luck where they

were, and we'd ha' done better to have vamoosed," replied Roger uneasily.

"If I spake to thim, it will be out of this, Roger darlin'," and he tapped his musket. "If we can do nothing else, we can pay thim off for the tricks they did be playing us."

"And how did you come to know all this?"

"Faix, it was Mickey, the jewel, that tould me all about it. He was listening onst, forninst the mistress's windy, an' he hard her spaking to her daughter about some solemn meeting that was to take place betuxt the black spy and the white spy."

Roger shook his head nervously, as he replied in a fretful tone, "Just what I said. We've never had any luck when we've made attempts on these people. If you take my advice now, you'll leave 'em alone."

"Divil a lave! If there did be a rigimint of crushers it's meself would chance 'em for the revinge I'll have to-morrow. What's to hinder us, thin, from lying hid in the bushes, which do be thick enough to cover a rigimint of yeomanry. Thin, whin we get thim together, you take one and meself will take the other, and over the pair of thim go."

"It's all very fine laying a thing out that way, but you know I can't use my arm."

"I forgot—but it's no matter, ma bouchal. It's meself will shoot the pair of thim. Whin I fire an' knock over the first—an' it's the white spy shall be the first—whin I fire, do ye be afther giving me yeer loaded gun, an' shure the black divil will be settled before he knows what hurted him!"

The night passed away and the morning opened bright and clear. Noon had passed, and the sun had already begun to sink towards the west, when Jamie's quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps. He clutched the gun fiercely, and something like an angry flush spread over his countenance. His father also heard the sound, and, turning to his son, by a mild but impressive gesture directed him to lay down his weapon. The lad let the butt of the piece fall to the ground, but still retained his hold upon the barrel. The next instant there was a low warning coo-ee, and Macomo stood before them.

He had taken great pains with his toilet for this last and deadly meeting with his foes, and was in full dress as a war chief of the Maroo, about to start upon some great and dangerous expedition. His hair was bound up with a broad fillet of plaited currajong, and the knot of hair thus formed was decorated with the three eagle feathers that had once been his distinguishing badge. He carried his gun, the gift of Mr. Marcomb, in his right hand, and a powder-flask slung by a belt hung from his shoulder. He had no native weapons with him, for the tomahawk that was stuck in his belt was the small, sharp, steel axe that he had received at Mount Pleasant. He looked jaded and weary, as if he had just come off a long journey; his form was

emaciated, his cheeks hollow and sunken, and his eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, looked dull and heavy. He strode up to the grave, near which George was seated, and then, laying his gun upon the earth, he took the belt with the powder-flask from his shoulder, and the tomahawk from his girdle, and laid them by the side of the gun. Drawing himself up with something of a proud and defiant air, he folded his arms over his bosom and exclaimed, "Macomo has come. The great chief of the Maroo knows how to keep his word, and is not afraid to join his brothers on the silent path!" George bowed his head. "I expected nothing else from you," he said, and then there was a silence for a space. This was broken by George, who thus addressed the black in a voice that shook with emotion, "Macomo, you have deeply injured me—injured me in a way that nothing can remedy. Does the black know how to forgive?"

"Macomo has long known that he did a wrong to the Greybeard, but he never knew the full extent of that wrong until he himself lost the bright flower he had brought with him from the lakes. Macomo knows now that he deserves death. He is here to die!"

"Have you no word," asked George, in tones of commiseration, "for those who lie below—no regret for the deed which in an evil hour you committed?"

"Macomo's life since that unhappy day has been one continued regret. Often and often, as his comrades fell beside him, has Macomo wished that evil deed undone; but since the Lake Flower faded, Macomo has wept tears of pity for the Greybeard and the sorrow he has endured!"

"And did you really shed tears of pity for me?" cried George exultingly.

"Macomo knows from what he has himself suffered how much he must have caused the Greybeard to feel."

"This was repentance!" said George with joy, "and repentance should be crowned with forgiveness. Give me your hand!" And he stretched out his hand to the black, who, however, hesitated to take it. "Give me your hand, I say! I swore an oath that the three black right hands that had joined in the bloody deed, of which this green mound is the memorial, should go together on this cross," and he took the hand of Macomo in his own and placed it upon the timber. "Here," he continued, "upon this symbol of Christianity, the sign that gives us warrant of our redemption, I now clasp the third of the three right hands that robbed me of those I loved, and here before my Maker I declare that, as fully and freely as I hope to be pardoned myself, so fully and freely do I forgive you for the wrong you then did me."

Macomo started back in surprise as he heard those words.

"Do not wonder," George went on. "Your repentance—for the feeling you described was repentance—has ensured you the forgiveness which I had previously

determined to bestow on you.”

Macomo drew back and looked wildly upon George. “No, no! It cannot be!” he exclaimed. “Macomo has earned death, and he came here to receive it. Let the Greybeard take the life of Macomo, and then the spirits of those who lie below will be able to travel unfettered upon the long journey.”

At that moment there was a sound in a cluster of scrub close by. Each of the three turned towards the spot, and each at once saw what had caused the rustling that had given them warning. The barrel of a gun had been protruded through the bushes, and, half hidden by the leaves, a fierce countenance was seen, the eyes fixed upon George, who was fairly covered by the piece.

“Dhoul!” muttered Lanty, for he it was. “It's meself will oblige ye, but the white shpy first,” and only a second or two after they caught sight of him he had George covered and pulled the trigger. Macomo, however, sprang forward the instant he perceived the scrubber, probably hoping to reach him before he fired, or at all events to so disconcert him as to prevent his taking steady aim. His spring brought him between Lanty and George, and directly in the line of fire, and almost as he reached the ground he received the contents of the barrel full in his breast. Throwing up his arms, he gave one wild yell, and then fell forward on his face.

The instant the black had fallen, George sprang off to cover, but Jamie, who had retained possession of his gun throughout the whole interview, stood his ground, and, raising his weapon to his shoulder, pointed it at the spot where the villain had previously shown himself. The moment Lanty's head was visible, Jamie pulled trigger, and with so true an aim that the ball entered the forehead of the scrubber and caused instant death.

Dashing into the cluster of saplings that had given shelter to the treacherous murderer, he there found Lanty lying dead, and Roger standing over him endeavouring to discover some sign of life in the body.

“Surrender!” cried Jamie, as he covered Roger with the gun.

“There's nothing else for it!” growled the ruffian, looking down and nodding his head towards the disabled arm that hung helplessly by his side. “You see I can't resist; and I ain't sorry that this has been put an end to, though, if you'd sent a ball through me as well as him, it might have been a good service!”

Jamie, with the assistance of Roger, dragged the body of Lanty out into the open space near the hut. He found his father kneeling by the side of Macomo, whom he had raised up into a half-sitting—half-reclining attitude, in which he supported him. Seeing that Lanty was quite dead, Jamie joined his father, and took his place in supporting Macomo, whilst George examined the injury he had received. It was evident that the wound was a mortal one, and that the black had not many more

minutes to live.

He regained consciousness just as George communicated this opinion to his son. He smiled faintly upon the two, as they now knelt by his side, supporting him and vainly endeavouring to staunch the blood that flowed from the wound. "The Greybeard is very wise," he said in a broken voice. "He said that Macomo should die, and the croppy took the life of Macomo, when the Grey-beard refused to do so."

"Alas!" cried George. "I had hoped for something different to this. I wished to make you a better man."

"The Greybeard can see very far, but he could not see the croppy behind the scrub. The Greybeard wished to save Macomo, but could not. Macomo was not deceived. He knew that he had been summoned to join his tribe on the long journey. He was prepared."

"Macomo, once again you have saved my life. That shot which you received was aimed at me, and only for your intervention I should be lying here instead of you."

"Macomo is glad. If he has done anything to please the Greybeard, let him see that Macomo is laid as a warrior should be, with his face towards the full moon and his weapons by his side, so that he may take his place as a chief at the head of his tribe."

"Fear not," said George, as he grasped Macomo's hand. "You shall lie in your grave as you have fallen. None shall touch you."

An unmistakable look of satisfaction spread over Macomo's face. "The Greybeard is a great chief," he murmured, and then, as he lay, he told him in faint accents and in broken phrases how he had continued searching for the track of the scrubbers until he had found it. He had followed it up, and had come upon them on this spot four days ago. He had watched them for a day, and, seeing that they had evidently encamped here for some days, he had started off to give information to the constables. They had wished him to wait to guide a party to the spot, but, fearing that he would be too late for his appointment, he had left instructions by which they would be enabled to follow him, and had come on at once, having arrived only at the moment when he stood before the Greybeard. "They will be here to-day," he continued. "They have a boat, but Macomo had to walk a long round."

"Why did you not tell us of this? Had I known of their presence, a very little precaution would have saved your life."

"What are they? Dogs—warrigals! Macomo feared them not. He knew the Greybeard did not fear them. He came to give his life to the Greybeard. He gives it for him. He is content!"

"But I—I—who would have saved you!" groaned George.

“It is better as it is. Macomo could not live. His camp was very lonely. The bright Flower of the Lake is waiting for him on the dark track. She loved Macomo, and she will not start upon the long journey without him.” His voice had sunk lower and lower, and he spoke these last words with great difficulty.

“Oh, Macomo!” cried George. “Would that I could say that we shall meet again in the better land; but, oh! it may be that a beneficent and merciful Providence will permit us hereafter to reap the benefit of our mutual forgiveness!”

Macomo's eye lit up for an instant, and he raised his head proudly. “Macomo is a great chief—the Greybeard is a great warrior. They will meet again at the end of the dark journey.” The excitement was only momentary. His eye paled again, and his head sank down. He was silent for some seconds, and then in a weak, murmuring tone he said in his native tongue, “Coolamie—loved Coolamie—we will make the journey together.” His head dropped, his eye glazed, there was a brief tremor of the body, and then the last of the once-dreaded tribe of the Maroo had passed from earth.

As Macomo had said, the constables arrived on the old farm about sundown. They buried Lanty, and took charge of Roger the Rough, who was executed some fortnight afterwards, in company of five or six others who had been guilty of some of the many crimes then punished with death.

George and Jamie performed the last rites to the black chief, according to the ceremonials of the tribe of which Macomo had been the leader. When this duty had been attended to, the father and son paid a brief visit to the mill. They found old Sandy hale and hearty as ever, though he had given up the greater part of the management of the mill to his son-in-law. Sophy was as busy and as bustling as when first introduced to the reader, though she certainly did not bounce her husband to the same extent as she did then. Two days George and Jamie remained at the mill, and then they departed.

Mrs. Marcomb did not long survive the death of her only son. Mr. Marcomb continued to live on at Mount Pleasant until his daughters married, and then retired to Sydney. The daughters became founders of families, that now count many members in the colony during the generations that have intervened.

George Maxwell was never again heard of, but many years back there lived upon the Blue Gum Flat, the spot where one scene of this narrative was enacted, an old, grey-headed man. He had cleared himself a block of land, out of the very heart of the heavy forest, and lived there altogether alone, serious and somewhat taciturn, but by no means morose. The traveller passing along the road after dark would be sure to see the light burning in the windows of the hut, and, if he paused and listened, he would hear the voice of the old man, reading aloud from that Book

which is at once a source of comfort to the old and an invaluable instructor to the young. He worked but little in the field, but there was one small enclosure upon which he bestowed considerable attention in keeping it neat and free from weeds—a grave, at the head of which was a broad black-butt slab, with the one word “Jamie” inscribed thereon. None knew who Jamie was, though, amongst the earlier settlers in the district, there were some who remembered that “Old Smith”—for that was the name by which he was known—soon after his arrival amongst them, had been accompanied by a younger man, who, some five years later, fell a victim to one of the savage tribes.

Old Smith of Blue Gum Flat continued to live on there for fifteen or sixteen years longer, and was well known to all the then residents in the district as a man who never lost an opportunity of doing a good turn to his fellow-man, be his colour white or black. In this calm and serious old man there was no vestige to be traced of the terrible Greybeard who had been the scourge of the Maroo, or of the dreaded Old Man of the Gun who had been the phantom of the Colos.

Whether it were he or not, he has now long since passed away, and his house has disappeared before the rush of population. Of the grand, old, primeval forest, with its stately trees, few vestiges remain, save here and there some hoary giants stand erect, like gaunt finger-posts on the road of time, pointing to the dark deeds that were done in their midst—one hundred years ago.
