

(FOR THE BULLETIN.)

The train left Bourke, and then there began the long, long agony of scrub and wire fence, with here and there a natural "clearing" which seemed even more dismal than the funeral "timber" itself. The only thing which might seem in keeping with one of these soddened flats would be the ghost of a funeral going very slowly across from the scrub on one side to the scrub on the other. Sky like a wet, gray blanket, plains like dead seas save for the tufts of "grass" sticking up out of the water; scrub indescribably dismal—everything damp, dark, and unspeakably dreary.

Somewhere along here we saw a swagman's camp—a square of calico stretched across a horizontal stick, some rags steaming on another stick in front of a fire, two "billies" to the leeward of the blaze. We knew by instinct that there was a piece of beef in the larger one. Small, hopeless-looking man standing with his back to the fire, with his hands behind him, watching the train; also, a damp, sorry-looking dingo warming itself and shivering by the fire. The rain had held up for a while. We saw two or three similar camps further on—a temporary suburb of Byrock.

The population was on the platform, in old overcoats and damp, soft-felt hats; one trooper, in a waterproof. The population looked cheerfully and patiently dismal. The local "push" had evidently turned up to see off some fair enslavers from the city, who had been up-country for the cheque season, which was over. They got into another carriage. We were glad when the bell rang.

The rain recommenced. We saw another swagman, about a mile on, struggling away from the town, through mud and water. He didn't seem to have heart enough to bother about trying to avoid the worst mud-holes. There was a low-spirited dingo at his heels, whose sole object in life was, seemingly, to keep his front paws in his master's last foot-print. The "traveller's" body was bent well forward, from the hips up; his long arms—about six inches through his coat sleeves—hung by his sides, like the arms of a dummy, with a billy at the end of one and a bag at the end of the other; but his head was thrown back against the top end of the swag, his hat-brim rolled up in front, and we saw a ghastly, beardless face which turned neither to the right nor the left as the train passed him.

After a long while we closed our book, and, looking through the window, saw a hawker's turn-out which was too sorrowful for description.

We looked out again, while the train was going slowly, and saw a teamster's camp: three or four waggon covered with tarpaulins which hung down in the mud all round and suggested death. A long, narrow man, in a long, narrow overcoat and a

damp felt hat, was walking quickly along the road past the camp. A sort of cattle-dog glided silently and swiftly out from under a waggon, "heeled" the man, and slithered back without explaining. Here the scene vanished.

We resumed stopping—for an age it seemed—at half-a-dozen straggling shanties on a flat of mud and water. There was a rotten weather-boarded cob, with a low, dripping verandah, and three wretchedly forlorn houses hanging, in the rain, to a post outside. We saw no more, but we knew that there were several apologies for men “hanging” about the rickety bar inside—or round the parlour fire. Streams of cold, clay-coloured water ran in all directions, cutting fresh gutters, and raising a yeasty froth whenever the water fell a few inches. As we left, we saw a big man in an overcoat, riding across a culvert; the tails of the coat spread over the horse’s rump, and almost hid it. In fancy still we saw him—hanging up his weary, hungry, little horse in the rain, and swaggering into the bar; and we almost heard someone say, in a drawing tone: “Elo, Tom! ‘Ow are yer poppin’ up?” Such is the average intelligence of my countrymen.

The train stopped (for about a year) within a mile of the next station. Trucking-yards in the foreground—like any other trucking-yards along the line; they looked drearier than usual, because the rain had darkened the posts and rails. Small plain beyond, covered with water and tufts of grass. The inevitable, god-forgotten "timber," black in the distance; dull, grey sky and misty rain over all. A small, dark-looking flock of sheep was crawling slowly in across the flat from the unknown, with three men on horseback jogging patiently behind. The horses just moved—that was all. One man wore an oilskin, one an old tweed overcoat, and the third had a three-bushel bar over his head and shoulders.

Had we returned an hour later, we would have seen the sheep huddled together in a corner of the yards, and the three horses hanging up outside the local shanty.

We stayed at Nyngan—which place we refrain from sketching—for a few hours, because the five trucks of cattle, of which we were in charge, were shunted there—to be taken on by a very subsequent "goods train." The Government allows one man to every five trucks in a cattle-train. We'll pay our fare next time, even if we have not a shilling left over and above. We had haunted local influence at, say, "Comanavadrink," for two long, anxious, heart-breaking weeks ere we got the pass; and we had put up with all the indignities, the humiliation—we, in short, had suffered all that poor devils suffer whilst besieging "local influence." We only thought of escaping from the bush.

The "pass" said that we were John Smith, drover, and that we were available for return by ordinary passenger-train within two days, we think—or words in that direction. Which didn't interest us. We might have given the pass away to an unemployed in Orange, who wanted to go Out Back, and who begged for it with tears in his eyes: but we didn't like to injure a poor fool who never injured us—who was a stranger to us. He didn't know what "Out Back" meant.

Local influence had given us a kind of note of introduction to be delivered to the cattle-agent at the yards that morning; but the agent wasn't there—only two of his satellites: a cockney colonial-experience man, and a scrub-town clerk whom we'll kindly ignore. We got on without the note, and at Orange we amused ourselves by reading it. It said:

Dear Old Man,—Please send this ——— on; and I hope he'll be landed safely at Orange—or hell—or wherever the cattle go.—Yours, ———.

We had been led to believe that the bullocks were going to Sydney. We took no further interest in those cattle.

After Nyngan the bush grew darker and drearier and the plains more like ghastly oceans; and here and there the "dominant note of Australian scenery" was accentuated, as it were, by naked, white, ring-barked trees standing in the water and haunting the ghostly surroundings.

We spent that night in a "passenger" compartment of a van which had been originally attached to old No. 1 engine. There was only one damp cushion in the whole concern. We lent that to a lady who travelled for a few hours in the next "compartment." The seats were about 9in. wide and sloped in at a sharp angle to the bare "match-board" wall, with a "head" on the outer edge; and the cracks, having become well caulked with the grease and dirt of generations, the seats held several gallons of water each. We settled one, rolled oneself in a rug, and tried to sleep; but, all night long, over-coated and comforted bushmen would get in, let down all the windows, and then get out, again at the next station. Then we'd wake up frozen.

Some time in the night, a cheerful girl of about 40 got in from somewhere in the awful black wilderness. She took a seat opposite us. She had evidently something on her mind, and it soon came out; she was boiling over with indignation. It seemed that another woman had summoned her to appear as a witness, on the other woman's behalf, in a maintenance case! "What would you think," she asked, indignantly, "of a woman like her, over 30, having up a young fellow of 19 on a case like that? And the nicest, quietest young fellow you ever seen! And it ain't the first she's had neither, I know—. What will his poor mother and tather think? they're respectable people—what will they think of me? . . . What will my husband think when he comes home? He'll say that I was thick with such a woman. What does she want to have me up for, of all the women of the world? I don't know nothing about it, never saw her above twice. I seen the young feller turnin' the mangle for her—that was all. I know what I'll do. I'll say to the magistrate, 'What am I dragged up in this case for? I don't know nothing about it! I don't know the woman from Adam, and so on. Then she put the case to us—there were two of us—' as follows:—

"Now, supposin' it was you—a young feller like one of you—that was led astray by a grown-up woman like her, and through no fault of your own; and me—that yer never injured—was to go up against yer and swear away yer character, and bring trouble and disgrace on you and your people—what would yer think of me?"

We were getting a bit uneasy, but we sympathised and agreed with her in a general way. She told us to lie down and sleep if we wanted to, and not mind her; but we preferred to stay awake. She talked for two hours, and; after she had got out, we heard her telling her troubles to a station-master whom she knew, a porter, and two guards. They seemed greatly moved.

We dozed off again, and woke at daylight, and recognised the ridgy gum-country between Dubbo

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and Orange. It didn't look any drearier than the country further west—because it couldn't. There is scarcely a part of the country out west which looks less inviting or more horrible than any other part.

The weather cleared, and we had sunlight for Orange, Bathurst, the Blue Mountains, and Sydney. They deserve it; also as much rain as they need.

HENRY LAWSON.

Dear BULLETIN,—I am learning to be thrifty *a la* Sydney "Saunders;" and this is "me" up to date. Breakfast, bread and butter, and one cup of alleged tea or coffee, 2d.; lunch, long beer and bar-snatch, 3d.; dinner, steak or chop, mashed potatoes, bread, 3d. Result, 8d. per diem.—NEM., Melbourne.

Coleman & Sons' Special Eucal. Oil is A one

One of the wildest excuses on record for relief from jury service was made by a Dubbo (N.S. Wales) butcher to Judge Dooker. About midnight counsel were just warming to their work when one of the jury suddenly jumped up: "Please, Mr. Judge, will you let me go home and have a sleep. I've got to get up early and help father kill beef."

Colemane & Sons' Eucalypte Pills stir one up

A N.Q. paper objects to THE BULLETIN'S quotation of J. Plumper Hoolan's ferocious remark:—

I would follow the man who applied the cat to my back until I had drunk his heart's blood.

THE BULLETIN does not advocate revenge, as the paper argues. Certainly, it does not nearly so much object to—or, rather, it would much more readily excuse—the private vendetta of a wronged man, than the cold-blooded devilishness of a machine that should be as passionless as a stone image, and has all the safety of recognised authority at its back. Hoolap's remark merely proves THE BULLETIN's contention that the lash breeds crime; in his case, even the far-off possibility of the imagined lash breeds murder.

Coleman & Sons' Eucal. Loz. are for the voice

Editor BULLETIN,—I was penetrated to the gizzard with the tender and precious poem lately published by you, entitled "Florrie," and credited to a Maoriland poet, who puts new Rembrandtlike tones (so to speak) in the ordinary run of Australian verse. In my opinion, he is deeper than Browning. As a humble poetaster myself I take the liberty of flinging a bouquet of my own on to the stage. Do not reject it; it is a soul-wail:—

FLOSSIE

In a dim fane of goodness-graciousness,
Emboss'd from the Moh's unhallo'd stir,
In deep and awful spooniness of Her,
Appall'd at all Her Moreness and My Less;
Lo! I behold the Temple of Excess
Yet not beheld exactly, for the pall
Of glamour dimm'd my vision bacchanal.
Blind to the Ladder-holes of Foolciness!
Not less to one who seldom useth soap.
But adds to Nature rather than bereaves?
An aromatic Radiancy like thee,
Shedding its henna on the horoscope,
Ever revealing to the Johnnies free
The muzzled muchness of thy vinous sieve

THE DIPLOMANIAC

P.S.—If I have made myself as clear as
"Florrie's" poet, you needn't pay me for this
dum-de-doo.—Dirso.

Coleman & Sons' Vio. Ointment is marvellous

