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The
PICKWICK
Portfolio



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KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The = PICKWICK Portfolio

Containing PEN and
INK SKETCHES
by Members of the
PICKWICK CLUB, KEW

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FOREWORD ←

IT BEING a trifle over seven years since a few enthusiasts founded ye club called "Pickwick," this booklet of literary snapshots has been published as a souvenir of the club's septenary. It is hoped that Pickwickians at home and abroad will cordially welcome the little volume as a memento of some pleasant hours spent under the auspices of the club; and, as a means of stimulating the literary and artistic efforts of members, we trust that the the journalette now started will be published annually. With many thanks for the support given to his initial venture, Mr Pickwick begs respectfully to present—his first portfolio.

MANTALINI
D. COPPERFIELD

SONNET
TO CELEBRATE
PICKWICK
CLUB'S BIRTHDAYS EIGHT,
AND TO
CONGRATULATE
IT ON
IT'S HAPPY FATE.

PICKWICK, all hail! Thou very king of clubs!
Now that seven years have brought thee birth-
day joys
We wish thee many more! —As little boys
Who have to suffer many serious drubs
To lick them into shape—like ursine cubs—
Yet with tin trumpets, dreadful drums and toys
Of the same nature, make a merry noise,
So we rejoice in spite of Fate's hard rubs.

For thou hast had misfortunes to bewail:
Some of thy visions fair have faded out
Of sight, and left no trace—like "Traddles'-land!"
But better things are come: our minds, our band,
Have grown with years. Therefore we gladly
shout
"Long live our King of Clubs! Pickwick—
all hail!"

JOHN JARNDYCE

A New Planet ←

WHEN Professor Moore retired from the University in order to devote his entire energies to the study of astronomy, he went to live in a house he had built in the ranges; and there he commenced compiling astronomic data for a great work to be called: "Companions of the Southern Cross." The professor had an only child, a bright intelligent little maiden in her teens, who had early shown a taste for scientific pursuits. She spent most of her time in the observatory with her father, and took great delight in looking through the big telescope. But as she

developed into womanhood, she spent less of her time there; and was often to be found taking long solitary walks in the fields. She grew restless and fretful, and finally decided to discuss the subject of her discontent with her father.

"Papa," she said one afternoon, "I want to tell you I'm unhappy." "Unhappy child?" exclaimed the astonished professor, "Why, haven't you read Copernicus, Kepler, Bode, Herschell and the others? And haven't you looked through the big telescope and don't you know the law of planetary motion? And yet you say you are unhappy!" "You don't understand, papa," she replied gravely, "I know all about planetary motions, but I don't know my own movements. I know Kepler and the other writers, but they don't know me. I've seen Sirius and all the other great worlds and now I want to see this one. I really don't think my pathway through life lies among the stars. I would like to be a planet moving round a sun and having a satellite following me. I hope you see the metaphor, papa," she added mischievously. "I want to visit the capital during the season; I would then be in my zenith and wouldn't be lost in space like I am in this lonely spot." The professor looked steadily at her, "You want a change my dear," he said, "I will send you to Melbourne to Mrs Gale; and will telegraph to young Gale to come up and help me with my work. You know, my dear," said the indulgent father, "I would give you half the stars if they were mine." "Never mind about that now, father," she said gaily, "give me half a sovereign on account."

The following Tuesday young Gale arrived and proved such a charming young man, that the professor's daughter forgot all about going to the city; and seemed never so happy as when she was chatting to the new assistant of the observatory.

One evening at twilight, Mr Gale was peering through the telescope, and he quietly remarked to the professor that he had discovered a new planet. "Which—what—where!!" exclaimed the professor, all trembling with excitement. "I'll go and get it," said the young man, and he suddenly disappeared

"Go and get it?" mused the professor in his absence, "One would think he was talking about an apple instead of a world!—Ah, I have it—he's gone to get the chart. Hem! strange he should have found a planet within three months, whilst I have failed to discover one in a life-time!" In a few minutes Mr Gale returned with Miss Moore by his side.

"Ada," cried her father as she came into the room, "Has Mr Gale told you about his planet? You've got the chart, Gale—where is it?" and he held out a trembling hand. "It is here," said the young man, gently laying his hand on the girl's shoulder, "Isn't she a beauty?" "Well I'll be—eclipsed!" exclaimed the astonished parent, "Great Cyclones! You're not a Gale—You're a hurricane!"

MICAWBER

THE MELANGHOLY HEART ←

X HAD a feud with the evils of the nineteenth century. He stretched his limbs before a fire on a large open hearth. . . .

A woman entered the room where he was; he heard the soft rustle of her dress. She looked at him and sat down at his side on the low seat; a magazine lay open in her hand at a picture underneath which were the words "Will you not speak to me?"—An imagined end of the world by gradual cooling, till universal cold and ice had put an end to the human race with the exception of one woman—supplied the theme; it was a picture of this last woman standing looking up at the Sphinx in Egypt amid terrific silence.

If he did not see the pathos of it, X saw the picture. Nature appeared to him as a great writer says; "A Sphinx propounding a riddle to the pass-engers; if they could not answer it she destroyed them." "Nature, Universe, Destiny, Existence,—howsoever we name this grand unnamable Fact, in the midst of which we live and struggle,—is as a heavenly bride and conquest to the wise and brave, to them who can discern her behests and do them;

a destroying fiend to them who cannot."—

He stayed a few minutes longer and left the room.

... ..
Years passed. . . . A thunderstorm was raging, and a modern David and Jonathan were smoking light tobacco in a small room. J. made a few remarks and resumed his pipe for a minute, and then asked: "Have you seen anything of X. lately?" "Yes, I have," said D. "the grade from where he is to where he ought to be is a steep and long one." "I supposed that is the state of Denmark," said J. metaphorically. "It's opium," said the other, "found that out two months ago— one evening, maybe, he thought he was d—d, and hadn't the sense to stop himself being d—d worse. I reckoned he'd just begun to make a stand against the 'Opium.' I did not make a long discourse on the evils of intemperance in *any* line,—Oh, he knows (and D, made a note of exclamation in the air with his pipe stem). I would not hold a frost-bitten foot in the heat of a fire, snow is the thing.....Peculiar look temptation has from the onlookers' point of view.... He probably manufactured the stuff himself..... Devil works out of sight in these cases and is blacker than he is painted.....How it thunders outside!"

SAMUEL WELLER

TIME.

O Past! Thou art gone for evermore,
And I would not have thee 'gain;
For though thy days had many joys,
They did not lack for pain.

O Present, go! Thou always hast
More bitterness than sweet.
Once thou wert Future, soon thou'lt be past;
Glide by! on rapid feet.

And thou, O Future! Joy or pain,
I still would have thee come,
For what thou bringest cannot stay,
And when all time is done away,
Then memory, too, is done.

—Florence Dombey.

A DAY IN JAPAN

ON A LOVELY morning in August just five years ago we, that is, the ship's surgeon, the guide Tajima and myself, started from Kioto to shoot the rapids on the river Raturaway.

The journey was most interesting; the passengers were too. All the carriages were smoking, so there was no question of ladies trespassing into the sacred precincts; all smoked—myself excepted. The line went through a very long tunnel and some oil dropped from one of the lamps on to my dress, and when the porter came to light the lamp, somehow my dress caught fire and suddenly blazed up. I coolly smothered it out, but oh! there was such a fuss! About half a dozen gold-laced officials came bowing and apologising, and delayed the train. At last I made the guide tell them I didn't mind and that I wouldn't sue the company, and then after more bowing we went on.

The head of the rapids is about 3000 feet above the sea and the length about 13 miles, when the smooth water of the river is reached. The boats are large and flat bottomed, and have each 6 or 7 boatmen, with long bamboo poles to steer the boat off the rocks.

The men are very clever and it is marvellous to watch them. At first one felt too scared to think of anything but wonder if one would ever get out safely. On either side the gorge rises 1000 to 2000 ft and the sides are covered with Azaleas, cherry trees, pines, maples just turning red, intertwined with westeria and virginia creeper, and with every half-mile or so, waterfalls and cascades tumbling down, make the rapids more so. It takes about an hour to come down but it takes the coolies a day to tow the empty boat back.

One felt like breathing again when we came into the smooth water, and landed, and had lunch in a real Jap. house, without chairs or tables. We had to take off our shoes, and were waited on by a pretty mousmee girl, while another sat near singing and playing on her samisan. Then after a walk through a quaint country village, with their fascinating

shops, we caught the train and went back to Kioto by another route.

At one of the country stations we appreciated the tea, which one buys, teapot full of hot tea, cup and all in a basket for 2 cents (1¼d.) The people run along like our 'Herald' boys shouting as they sell these. Then we got back to Kobe, tired, but with the thought that at least we had spent one day in fairy-land.

MISS MOWCHER

HIS YELLOW AFFABILITY

By which no reference to Malvollio is intended

NOTHING is more evidenced by the psychology of the canary, than that bird's disposition to optimism and charitable constructions. Albeit his mental scope is limited, the constituents of human tact and politeness are present in the canary's temperament: not only present but predominant.

Note his behaviour under obloquy. Paterfamilias "admires" to call the household bird insulting names, to remonstrate seriously with him, to upbraid him in a tone of deep reproach,—all because of the delightful incongruity of his deportment. He is unfailingly cheerful, anxiously polite; he responds punctiliously, moving up and down his perch with the urbanity, the gratified alacrity of one who is being entertained with genteel conversation and wishes to do all that can possibly be looked for in acknowledgement. Pascal says of laughter that "nothing conduces to it more than a surprising disproportion between what one expects and what one sees." And though one hardly *expects* anything different, yet the contrast between the bird's air and that imagined of any understanding—or less charitable being in the circumstances—makes the exquisite absurdity the "disproportion surprenante."

His small mind is so enviably tempered that all seems good to him. Noises that drive the irritable human to vituperation are with him "motifs" for the glad emulation of song. Brassfiling is to him

delectable, an inspiration! He has been so greatly impressed by the sound of sawing conducted under his cage on the back verandah, as to sing with extraordinary rapture not only at the time but also on the following morning: Materfamilias interpreting his feelings from the breakfast table thus:—"That sweet song lingers in my memory! He came! He played upon an instrument of wood, lovely to hear! Wherefore my heart is glad!"

His bias to leniency is fully understood, so that when he "puts his spoke" into a conversation, making the air throb round a discussion of, suppose!—some ill used artist, he is answered with ecstatic comprehension:—"You're a lovely dear! Would you do it? You wouldn't!—It would never enter this bird's brain. 'He shall have his picture in if he likes,'—say! 'for I don't care a red cent about pictures!' Without doubt, that is the standpoint of his yellow affability.

So confident is his friendliness that he can never imagine his notes unwelcome. Even when materfamilias has broken the thread of her discourse with a hurried "Lovely dear! oh, lovely dear!" purely to pacify his vociferous importunity, he shows no sign of subsidence, but becomes more exultantly vocal. The tide of his trustful eloquence is unstemmed even by the soon-following protest of "Oh, bother!—that's enough!" He is unheeding because incredulous.

His belief in one's good intentions is inexhaustible. His heavenly charitableness makes him suppose all overtures friendly, and so to be sweetly welcomed with chirpings and alacrity,—even those of the feline order. He has qualities that bind human friendship and make human nature loveable; and,—like Kim he is the "Little Friend of all the World."

MARK TAPLEY

A TRAGEDY

SCENE 1.—It is one of Summer's brightest days; a day that leaves nothing to be desired—save that if it were possible, it might last forever. Below our



Yours Truly
"Mcawber"

feet there extends a fertile valley almost surrounded by lofty mountains, whose heights rising tier above tier, hide deep gorges in between. Up the sides of the mountains grow the choicest ferns and flowering creepers, and crowning their summits, tower majestic gums. But there is something else besides rocks, ferns and creepers at the foot of the mountain there. At first it resembles a blackened tree stump, then gradually it takes a more human form, till finally we discover that it is the figure of a woman kneeling among the tangled ferns. Presently she rises and springing gracefully and lightly as any child, she pushes her way among the tall bracken and is soon lost to view in the dense scrub beyond. Our curiosity being now thoroughly aroused, we quickly descend and follow in the same direction.

Scene 2—It is nearly sunset and the swift stream that glides by our feet is black from the shade of trees and undergrowth that fringe its banks. As we stand dreamily watching the coursing waters, a slight rustling is heard, and looking round we behold the woman—whose very existence we had forgotten for the moment—throwing herself headlong into the treacherous stream.

For a moment we stand paralyzed, scarcely believing the evidences of our senses and then, the thought of instant action seizes us. But what's to be done? alas! we can't swim a stroke. But there—can we let her sink into a watery grave without one feeble effort to help her? No! Come what may we *must* save her. But what's ... ah ... a sapling ... a branch of a tree to reach out to her ... Yes, that will do..... These's no time to loose, and with three sudden jerks we uproot a sapling.

But look... do our eyes deceive us, or are we dreaming? For there on the opposite bank sits the woman gazing at us with wondering astonishment. The sapling drops from our hand, and the woman, instantly taking in the situation, laughs long and merrily as she calls to us across the water:

"I do enjoy my evening dip!"

N. NICKLEBY

THE NORSEMAN'S SONG

GREEN tumbling seas,
The wild seabirds screaming against the breeze;
Old oceans roar
On rocky shore,
And storm tossed, bending trees.
The free, the free!
The rolling sea!
Sunshine or driving wind,
We fight and cheer,
We know no fear,
The coward lags behind!

Tempestuous life,
And hearts grown strong breasting with joy it's strife;
The clash of arms,
The war's alarms,
The sea with fury rife.
The free, the free, etc,

And then the flash
Of lightning and the thunder's rolling crash;
The midnight sweep
O'er darkening deep,
The morning's landward dash.
The free, the free, etc.

Our foes are strong;
The battle tense; but whether short or long,
Throughout it all
We hear the call,
And shout the Norseman's song.
The free, the free, etc.

PICKWICK

THE MAKER OF THE SOUL

PRIMITIVE man had no clear distinction between the living and the dead. This is startling but intelligible.

We know that he was not in any such condition as Adam and Eve. There was no science of palæontology when that story was first brought into the

world; Newton had not written his "Principia," nor Darwin his "Origin of Species," nor had Grant Allen given to the world his "Evolution of the Idea of God," and, if they had, we may be sure it would never have been born.

How was primitive man, ignorant of the processes on which life depends; to know whether a man struck down would get up again or not? Try to realize his thoughts. A man received a blow on the head from a club; he fell; sometimes he got up again immediately; sometimes not for an hour or so; sometimes not for a still longer period, so his friends would keep him, in case he might get up at any time. They would look after him for days and weeks, keeping him in the house and placing food before him while they took theirs, a custom which still exists among certain savages. They would look after the corpse until it decomposed. Perhaps as it so visibly grew less and less they gradually got the idea that the man must be departing, but whither? (It must be remembered that the dual theory, the idea of another shadowy self, or, as it is now called a soul, had not yet entered into the mind of man.) For a long time, probably, no explanation of the extraordinary occurrence could be given. At last it was thought that children, who came into the world as mysteriously as the other people left it, offered an explanation. The man was born again as a child. This indeed, is a belief among certain savages at the present time. But perhaps there were other people to whom this idea did not occur. They, seeing the corpse gradually decay and disappear, might very reasonably conclude that the man was being annihilated. They naturally would not like this to happen to their friends. Now, in those days they had no chemical analysis to tell them the constituents of the human body. How were they to stop this annihilation? Sooner or later the idea would occur to them to cover the body or the bones with something resembling the body in appearance. This, though it would not stop the process mentioned, would nevertheless replace the wasted portions in

a manner that to them would be satisfactory enough.

In time, the corpse having entirely vanished, nothing would remain but these artificial coverings. Still, it would be looked upon as *the man*. Later, finding that these things did not stand the weather or climate very well, they would make stronger ones, perhaps at last of tree-boughs, making a hollow for the remains of the corpse. Now, as the bones could obviously be taken out of the man (the image) at will, was this still *the man*? Probably they decided that, as long as the bones touched the image, it was *part of the man*, the bones being the other part. Still later, when the bones decayed entirely, the image would be the *entire* man.

Here is the critical point. When the savage first noticed this, he could see that the man must have passed from the bones to the image. Here was the germ from which the soul-idea could spring, and spring it did, and flourished through all the centuries right down to the present year of grace 1904.

SQUEERS

GLORY

IS LIFE worth living? Yes, a thousand times, yes, one was compelled to answer when out meeting the sun early one morning in late winter. O! for the gift of a poet's tongue to speak the thoughts which awed and stirred the soul; filling it with great and deep emotions of wonder and joy, passionate gratefulness, and peace.

Come with me and see what I was privileged to see on such a Heavenly morning. Have we not all at one time or another gazed upon a great landscape painting and been led to exclaim: "How beautiful! but too lovely to be often seen!" No picture however 'true to nature,' could ever convey the impressions and glory of this scene before us. In a great semi-circle stretching away for some miles, are green clad rises and shadowy valleys, while near by winds a stream of water, along whose banks the golden-balled wattle adds a strain of glorious colour to the scene. Here and there appear pretty, white roads

climbing up between rows of sweetbriar and fir-trees ; and cottages and larger edifices, though disgracing Nature, are made to harmonize with it, because of the condescension of the great Dame, whose heart seemed to catch the warm heartedness of the beaming sun.

Surrounding all is a chain of low mountains, silvery grey in tint ; to the extreme left of which, snow-capped Macedon uplifts it's modest elevation in misty beauty. Nothing unnatural here, no tyrant fashion, neither anxiety nor discord. Perchance some cynic passing by might have pointed out yonder serpent on wheels puffing it's way along through cutting and down dale. Did it spoil the scene? No ! There was kindness in the air, and the very smoke from the engine shone out in pure whiteness, floating along o'er the land like a "pillar of cloud by day." Nature was there too, in the mighty steam which was it's life.

The cattle and the birds seemed to be calling on all humanity to live and love and learn.

In the midst of all, ever so slightly veiling his beauty with a transparent robe of filmy silk, smiled the glorious sun. Smiling, shall we say, at the expense of all who imagined that life was not as pleasant as it might be.

Who can wonder at their decision, when such blessings and glory are left out of their reckoning. These make their own life not worth the living, do they not ?

JINGLE

MY FIRST CONQUEST

Extract from Mrs Downing's tales of her girlhood

(RATHER to her distress her father has ordered Maisie to accompany Hugh Macquean as far as the Buck of MacCormack, on his way to Aberdeen University. Her mother is angry, and Hugh is disappointed on account of the elder sister Mary. However, "as Mary cudna go," Maisie determines that Hugh shall not be sorry that she is to go.)

"Tak' care o' thae ponies noo ! An' dinna be loiterin' along the road," called my mother after us.

"The cocks wes makin' a fine noise 'as we left the farmyard. A' the birds wes singin' in the woods. There wes the scent of young fields in the air and the dew wes sparklin' in the sunshine. I just forgot everything except that it wes guid to be ridin' ower the hills with the fresh breeze in my face, an' all around sae beautiful.

"Presently Hugh began to sing, and after that we didna hurry oursels. Sae we cam to the Buck o' MacCormack an' sat down.

"Weel ! There we sat talkin' and talkin', I wi' me shoes an' stockings off, towslin' me feet in the grass. Ma word, it wes soakin' ! When up gets Hughie all of a sudden. 'Guid-bye tae ye, Maisie,' says he, and wes off down the hill.

"So there on the Buck was the big, ungainly, bare-footed, fourteen year old herd-lass, gazing with apparent unconcern after the retreating figure of Hugh Duff Macquean, student of Divinity ; the ponies tethered near by, oblivious of the fact that their mistress is piqued."

Mrs Downing laughed.

"Down he went slower and slower. Then round he turns sharp, up the hill again to where I sat. Wiout a word he put back ma face an' kissed me !—an' wes off like a shot."

"Was that all ?" I asked, "What did you do ?"

"Well, na ! A canna say as it wes," says Mrs Downing complacently, "The last time I wes in Aberdeen wi' ma boys, he wes there—a weedower. He askit me to marry him an' I heard him tell ma mother he never forgot Maisie and the ponies."

"And you didn't marry him ?"

"Na ! na ! What should an auld woman like me want wi' marryin' again ?" she demanded indignantly, "Surely aince is enough for anybody in *this* life !"

Mrs Downing is modest ; and so she has called this story "My First Conquest."

AGNES WICKFIELD

THE MOSQUITO ; A Summer Idyll

WITH eager soul and thirsty sting,
With waving foot and buzzing wing,
The 'skeeter is a nasty thing

To have inside a room.

He settles nowhere very long,
As soon as you can hear his song
You reckon you won't be far wrong

To try to seal his doom.

You slip your hand out of the bed,
And strike the blow to kill him dead,
And then you hit the wall instead

And fill your heart with pain.

For like a spirit in a mist
He circumvents your frantic fist,
And flies wherever he may list,

He goes—but comes again.

Until, exhausted with the chase,
All knobs and bumps about the face,
You "chuck the sponge" and say your grace,

And lie out straight and still.

Just hear his bugle blow "Advance!"

As with preliminary prance

He swoops down on your countenance

And starts to work his drill.

But human nature is so weak!

For when you feel his victor beak

Embedded in your victim cheek,

The hand of Fate falls crash.

... ..

And then you light the gas to trace,

By aid of mirror and grimace

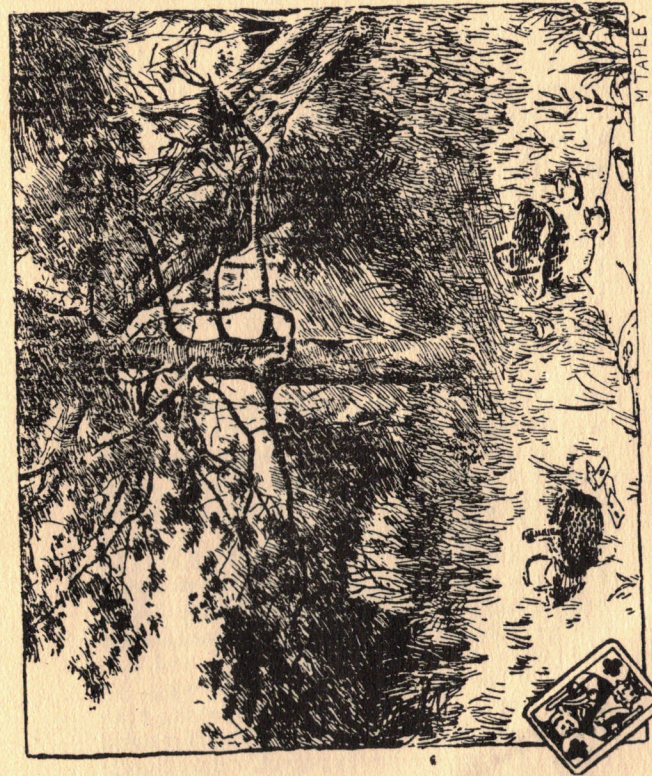
The 'skeeter's ruins on your face,

And go and have a wash.

D. COPPERFIELD

THE BLIND BAGGAGE

"AS I was saying," said the stranger, we had reached Pueblo, Colorado, and there were still seventy miles ahead of us before we could strike the silver mines of Cripple Creek."



The Pickwick Tree

"A tramp had told us the night before, that twenty miles along the railroad track, there was one of those interesting things called a water tank, where the engines stop to replenish their exhausted boilers.

If we camped there till 8 p. m., a passenger train, he said, would come along, and there would be a good chance for a ride on the "blind baggage."

"Wait till the engine fills up," said our tired friend, "and when she moves out, make a quick rush and jump on." The "blind baggage," I may explain, is the tramp's term for the bridge of the baggage car near the engine. Unlike the other cars on an American train, this bridge has no door opening on to it—figuratively speaking it lacks an eye. Once the train is in motion therefore, the conductor cannot reach this bridge; and the tramp who gets on there while the train is in motion, can remain unmolested till there's a stop. We were glad to get this tip from such an expert. The thought of shortening the journey by any means was always absorbing and the idea of doing so through the agency of a water tank had now a fascination quite intense.

... ..
Along steep mountainous sides the track cut its way through the heart of a still, silent forest; in its wild solitudes we tramped along like pigmies tresspassing on some vast, unknown domain. It was dusk when, turning a curve abruptly, we beheld ahead of us, the lonely water tank.

Halting on the lower side of the cutting we lit a fire. The air was damp and chill and the blaze only half warmed us; we sat close around and got what heat we could. Thus we waited—it seemed half the night when suddenly Clifford jumped up and exclaimed: "The train!" Yes she was coming. It was a thrilling sensation hearing her drawing nearer and nearer, grunting at deep intervals in her uphill climb. The fire was hastily put out, and we crouched a few feet below the line, waiting her approach. Louder and louder grew the hisses of exhausted steam. Suddenly there was a fierce gleam from her burnished lamp, and with a last seething roll she stopped.

There was a long spell of the boiler filling process during which our eyes were fixed intently on the front bridge of the "baggage." "Now," said Blakiston half rising up, as the engine made a preliminary snort, and there was a quick rush forward. But tripping on the embankment, I fell—rolled—to the depths I feared, but a tree stump blocked me. "Come on, Wills!" cried my mates hoarsely; the train had carried them about fifty yards, but every second the cold steel wheels were revolving swifter and swifter. A moment's recovery and I was pursuing them. "Come on!" they cried again. It was distincter—I was gaining—but another moment and I would be breathless. Frantic—mad—with despair, at the last tension of brain and muscle, I got up to the bridge. . . . Exhausted, I was gasping—the engine was blasting its damning hisses as if all were over—when, with a firm grip, my mates, with one pull, landed me breathless on the bridge.

Next morning we entered Cripple Creek.

MANTALINI

THE FREEDOM OF LIFE

SIXTEEN miles up in the Otways; the bush as still as midday; our farmhouse destination the only one in a ten square mile area. Conversation had been jerky and exclamatory—for the route resembled the temperature chart of a fever patient for we were fresh to saddle work—but its tenor was: "Must be terrible, tied down here to a monotonous, eventless country life; never any variety or change. Couldn't stand it a month! No! give us the Freedom of the City."

... ..
It would make a fine "Australian Interior"—No sombre Bernard-Hallian tones, or gaunt Ford-Pattersonian tints either; but sunshiny colors, the clean, rich yellow of "undressed" board walls, with here and there a grocer's brilliant Xmas chromo; the vivid white chimney-end with its cavernous black mouth, background to the heaped red coals and the

overhanging fryingpan in which glow the golden-yolks of a dozen eggs ; the blue-ginghamed housewife, her red shirted husband, their brown faced four-year-old—and the two hungry saddle-stiff townies.

After dinner they talked—under pressure.

“ Bush fires ? oh yes, pretty bad last year. Worst about Xmas. Crop burned, cattle smothered, fences swept ; but house saved and nobody killed, thank God ! Little 'un there pulled us thro' ! How ? Well I'll tell you. Nellie—our oldest—galloped home, flames mighty close behind her, jumped the gates and got in. Forty head of the cattle stampeded up found 'em shut and dropped in heaps. Rained cinders after that. Boys and I watched the sparks outside; wife and the girls inside. Wet-bagged those that came up thro' the floor or down thro' the roof. This kiddie sat with her face in wet cloths eleven solid hours without grizzling, and after two days fight was the only one of us seven who could see—rest smoke-blind. For a week she was the family blindman's dog ; led me to the shed, fished out netting and props for the wife and me to grope round, and fence a yard. It wasn't square being built by feel, but it held the pigs when she drove 'em in. She bailed up the scorched milkers who had just barely escaped the fire, (poor brutes they moaned like humans !) and led the boys to them, it was agony to milk them, greater agony to leave them burdened. So for six days, till we began to see as thro' a glass darkly we were dependent on the Babs—it was a new version of ' and a little child shall lead them ' she led us well ; she's a brick ! ”

This was but one of a hundred, to them, commonplace incidents. Finally : “ Sorry you chaps have to go. Wish you could stay a month ; do you a world of good ; must be terrible tied down in the city isn't it ? No variety, same monotonous grind. I couldn't stand it, kill me in a month. I must have the Freedom of the Country.—”

TOOTS