MACPHERSON'S

GULLY:

A Tale of

NEW ZEALAND LIFE.

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MACPHERSON’S GULLY,

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CONTAINING

SOME VIEWS OF THE SOCIAL OUTLOOK FROM

THE PROLETARIAN STANDPOINT.

DEDICATED (BY PERMISSION)

To Sir George Grey, to whose great talents and

splendid career the author wishes to pay

his tribute of admiration.
O you whose lines have fallen in pleasant places, on whose paths in life fortune has beamed with gracious smiles, the following narrative will possess but little interest. Surrounded as you are with home comforts, troops of friends, and social pleasures, your severest pang, perchance, arising from satiety, you are utterly unable to estimate aright the strenuous struggle for existence maintained by the penniless poor. You will perhaps read no further, but dismiss the subject from your minds with the usual cant phrases about drink, improvidence, &c. Be it so. I address not the callous.

I seek an auditory only among those in whom the milk of human kindness still retains a lodgment, whose hearts are responsive to the cries of human woe. More especially do I address those who, having themselves fought the fierce and somewhat dubious battle with outrageous fortune, are ever ready to sympathise with, and wherever possible alleviate, the miseries of poor humanity.
In the year 187-, Alick Spencer, a stalwart young shoemaker, with his wife and child arrived in the port of Lyttelton. Having heard in the Old Country of the high wages to be obtained, and the many facilities which New Zealand afforded for getting on in the world, he concluded it to be a veritable land of promise. So Jeanie and he, having laid their heads together, and being young, hopeful, and moderately ambitious of improving their lot, resolved to emigrate. Settling in Christchurch, they began their colonial career with all the happy confidence arising from the possession of youth and vigorous health. For a time fortune seemed to promise success. Alick was lucky enough to procure employment in one of the boot factories, where, being a steady workman, he remained in receipt of good wages for over two years. Jeanie, who had proved herself a thoroughly economical housekeeper, had managed to save a considerable portion of their income, which was invested in the purchase of a small section a little way outside the city. Here a modest three-roomed cottage was erected, and they entered on possession of their freehold with happy hearts. Not a cloud marred the simple pleasure of their lives, and all their dreams of the future were of a rosy hue.

But trouble was at hand. A great dulness of trade set in. "Hands" were being discharged in all directions. The boot factories suffered in common with every other branch of business; orders were few and scarcely to be had at all at anything like paying rates. At length, as the depression deepened, Alick Spencer found himself, much against his will, in the ranks of the unemployed. For a week or two he busied himself about his house, draining, forming a garden, and otherwise improving his section; his constant companion being his "woe Bobbie," a bright little lad of three years. Frequently too, Jeanie, who was enthusiastically interested in the garden, would come out, and setting Ethel the baby on the grass for Bobbie to play with, would assist her husband in the pleasant task of planting and sowing. Here sometimes they would con-
verse together as to the look-out ahead of them. In spite of himself, Ahick found his usual good spirits give place occasionally to a feeling of despondency. His great fear was, that being unable to pay the monthly instalments, by which he had arranged to discharge the debt still remaining on the cottage, their little freehold of which they were so proud would be taken from them. At such times his bright-eyed sanguine little wife would rally him on his grumpiness, and the conversation usually take something like the following turn:—

"If the house were only free of debt, Jeanie, I shouldn't mind it so much; as it is, we may be planting those potatoes for others to dig, and these flowers for the pleasure of strangers."

"Nonsense, Ahick, I never saw the like of you; you're always fearing the worst. Keep up your courage man, times 'll mend, trade can't be always bad; somehow or other, you'll see, we'll manage to pull through."

But time wore on; weeks lengthened into months, and the dearth of employment still continued. Ahick daily ransacked the town in search of a job. Work of any kind, it mattered not what, he was eager to get; but night invariably saw him come home jaded, weary-eyed, and disheartened. Always it was the same; when a vacancy for one man occurred, a dozen were ready to fill the gap.

At length, together with a neighbour of his who was similarly placed, he shouldered his swag and, leaving the town, resolved to seek work further afield. They tramped the country districts in company for some weeks but, alas! the rural labour market, they found, was in much the same condition as the urban. Once, indeed, they got a job—to erect a few chains of post and rail fencing—and right heartily they set to work. Partly owing, however, to the heavy rains that ensued, causing what ought to have been an eight days' job to last a fortnight, and partly because of the low price at which the work was taken, they found that their fortnight's earnings little more than sufficed to pay
for their fortnight’s “tucker.” Disgusted with their want of success, they now decided on going back to Christchurch, the more readily as they had heard from a passing swagger that trade was beginning to look up in town.

Reaching home after an absence of six weeks, a poorer man than when he left, Alick lost no time in paying a visit to the boot factory. There, the manager told him that they were indeed busier, that trade had greatly improved, but he had no room at present, he was sorry to say, for any extra hands.

Meeting some of his former shopmates in the next street, he learnt that none of the old hands had been taken on, the reason being that their places were now filled with boys! The employers, it appeared, had discovered that young lads, after a short training, could execute much of the plainer sorts of work almost as efficiently, and certainly much more cheaply than men could, and being fully alive to their own immediate interests, had developed the discovery in a wholesale fashion. This general employment of cheap boy-labour was now a sore subject with the unemployed journeymen, but all their discussions of the matter had hitherto failed to elicit a feasible remedy. They felt themselves helpless in the face of it. As the little group sauntered through the town warmly debating their grievances, Alick felt that never before had his prospects seemed so gloomy. A temporary dullness of trade was bad enough, but this new departure in the tactics of the employers seemed to bar all hope of a betterment. He was quite at his wit’s end as to his next step.


A penny was produced and the Star became the property of the group. The telegrams respecting the Rush were speedily devoured, and the pros and cons of the matter eagerly discussed; all the more eagerly inasmuch as each man felt that the news was to him as the dawn of hope.
Here was a chance for unemployed hands. It appeared that a tract of alluvial country near the lower reaches of the Teremakau, had been discovered to be auriferous. A number of claims had been taken up, from two or three of which the yield was said to be surpassingly rich. It was further alleged that the lucky diggers did not care to disclose the full extent of their gains, the plain inference being, of course, that the ground was even richer than it was reported to be. The sensation was widespread. From all parts of the Colony men were hastening to the new gold-field.

Leaving his companions, Alick took a long, solitary stroll, pondering over the question—"Ought I to go?" In his then state of mind, he was inclined to look upon it as a providential opening. Here at least was a field where a man could labour without being under the pitiful necessity of begging leave to toil. True, he had no experience of gold-fields, but then, had he not often heard of raw new chums being frequently more successful than veteran diggers. And who could tell, there might possibly be a streak of luck in store even for him.

He finally decided that it was his clear duty to join the rush. But Jeanie—what of her! Next day he broached the subject, and found as he had feared that she was averse to his going. "You know," she said, "that when you left here before and went up country, I was opposed to your going: yet you would go, and what did you gain by it? Nothing, came back poorer than you went. What reason have you to think that this new notion of yours would result more fortunately? Diggings indeed! Everybody knows that where one man succeeds at the diggings, a hundred fail. And really Alick, don't you think that married men ought to stay at home to look after their wives and families, and let those who have nobody depending on them go to such places?"

"It cuts me to the heart to leave you Jeanie. God knows I have no desire to be away from you and the
children. But what can I do? Don't you see that the very fact of my being a married man and having a family to provide for, compels me to this course? I cannot, dare not remain idle while there's a chance of doing better. Besides, there's no saying, Jeanie, I might possibly be lucky, just for once you know, and if so, would not our bettered circumstances afterwards amply repay us for the hardship of a short separation?"

Needless to repeat all the persuasive arguments that were employed. Suffice it to say that finally, his wife, faintly hoping it might prove for the best, yielded a reluctant consent, and Alick set about the necessary preparations.

With considerable difficulty, land being just then a drug in the market, he disposed of his house and section. The price realized being a low one, he found that when all his liabilities were discharged, (his monthly payments on the cottage being in hopeless arrears) the sum he could honestly call his own amounted to but a few pounds. This money he proposed to leave with his wife, to keep the pot boiling as he said, until he had tested his luck as a digger.

All his arrangements being at length concluded, the morning of his departure arrived, and found Alick ready to set out on his journey with scarcely more than the proverbial half-crown in his pocket. Being no stoic, and devotedly attached to his wife and family, he felt the impending separation keenly. Though putting a brave face on the matter in the presence of Jeanie, he could hardly refrain from murmuring against Providence for the cruel necessity he was under of parting from all he held dearest upon earth.

The previous night, before retiring to rest, husband and wife, their feelings unusually chastened and softened in view of their troubles, had conversed long and earnestly together, and, both having been piously trained, had read together from the "Big Ha' Bible," had knelt together and humbly craved the blessing of "Our Father."
And now having snatched a hasty breakfast, he repaired to the bedroom, kissed his two still sleeping children, and after warmly embracing his wife, took up his swag and moved to the door.

"Good-bye Jeanie.—Good-bye dear!"—But Jeanie’s long suppressed tears now burst forth, and rushing forward she caught his hand in her’s. They stood for a space tenderly regarding each other. Not a word was spoken, but each silently commending the other to the care of "Him who careth for us," they parted!

CHAPTER XII.

The screaming kaks in Macpherson’s Gully seemed strangely excited as they dashed back and forth among the pine tops, alternately attracted and repelled by the steady stroke of the axe beneath.

Suddenly, the sound of the axe was hushed, and a loud stentorian voice sung out excitedly:—"Look out there, Pete, stand from under, quick! Damnation! A loud, resonant crack—another, then a sharp succession of crackling sounds like the rapid discharging of revolvers, and with a mighty swish the giant pine went crashing down the precipitous sidling into the bottom of the gully. Snugly ensconced under an overhanging ledge of reef, close by the edge of the little creek that went tumbling down the gully on its way to the sea, lay the man to whom the warning shouts had been addressed. Not a scratch had he received from the falling pine, but a curious, and quite unlooked-for danger threatened him. The great tree in its descent had brushed before it a dense heap of scrub which, being now firmly jammed into the deep, narrow cleft forming the bed of the creek, had the effect of backing the water so rapidly, that in a twinkling "Pete"
was floated out of his hiding place, and left entangled in a mass of supple jacks and lawyers, from which he vainly endeavoured to free himself. His predicament was serious, as in his struggles his head kept bobbing up and down, now above, and now under the surface of the water, which was still rising. His mates, however, who had hastily scrambled to his assistance, reached him in time, and he was hauled out of the trap, and helped up the sidling to a place of safety.

"Cot tam it all poys, why you not shpeak pefore, sooher?" he ejaculated, with such spluttering grimaces that the comicality of his appearance, now the danger was over, evoked the hilarity of his companions. "Vat for you laff, Mac? A shoke's a shoke, but to vall dot tam pig bine dree on der headt of beoples, is shoost a leetle too goot. Dot's vat I say."

"I sung out to you at the first indication of danger, old man," said Mac, "but you see, Pete, it was this way. We intended, as you know, to fall that tree right across the gap, where it would have been nearly in its proper position as the top log of the dam, but a sudden gust of wind caught it aloft and the darned thing came down before its time, in the wrong direction, too, by a long sight, and so it came about that you had such a devil of a narrow squeak for it— but here comes Larry with some dry togs for you."

"Here ye are Pate me bhoy, get off your wet duds and get into these, an' ye'll be as right as nimpence. Ye're worth a dozen dead Dutchmen yet, begorra, in spite of the big scare ye got. Troth, it 'ud make any man feel a bit quare to be washed out ov a hole like a dhrowned rat, an' faith if Alick hadn't caught howlt ov ye when he did, it's mesilf 'ud feel a thrillfe onaisy about you now."

"Dot's shoost it, Larry. I vas drowndt out like a vasht rat, and den nearly schoked mit der plotty sooble yacks."

Having got on some dry clothing, however, Pete began to feel more comfortable, so with the remark that "dot shob deserfs von shmoke," he filled and lit his pipe, his mates following his example.
While thus enjoying their smoke, let me take the opportunity of introducing you, my reader, more particularly to the company. The party consisted of four. First:—Neil Macpherson, (Mac) a strong, thickset man about fifty years of age. Rough, grizzled, shaggy as a bear, he looked a fair sample of the daring, indefatigable prospector. He had roughed it in many parts of the world, civilized and uncivilized. His wide experience and great power of work combined with a certain firmness of character, had generally gained him the ascendancy among his mates, whether in California, South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand, and in the present "crowd" he was tacitly acknowledged as leader. Second:—Peter Bergh (Pete), a native of Hamburgh. Had originally been a sailor, but like many others had, years ago, deserted his ship to follow the diggings on the West Coast. Had remained there ever since, experiencing the usual ups and downs of a digger's life. Was a good steady mate, and a capital hand at panning off. Indeed, it was commonly said that where Pete failed to find the colour, nobody else need try. Third:—Laurence Doolan (Larry), a young Irish new chum who, fascinated by some glowing newspaper reports from the gold-fields, had made his way straight from the ship's side, determined to push his fortune at the diggings. Fourth:—"Alick," none other than our friend Alick Spencer, now almost as bronzed and rough in appearance as Mac himself. Eight months have elapsed since Alick first reached Canvastown, the scene of the rush. To his great disappointment, he found on his arrival that all the best ground, and much that was quite the antipodes of that, was already pegged off. Some of the claims were rich and paying handsomely, others, fairly well; many were duffers, but the great majority were simply being shepherded, their occupiers waiting till some of their more enterprising neighbours had bottomed, in order to decide by the result whether to sink or shift their pegs.

Alick was anxious to begin work at once—could not brook the thought of delay, and meeting with a few others
as eager as himself, they agreed to join in as mates and start operations at once. Accordingly, they duly pegged off and “set in” on a piece of ground where nobody supposed they would get the colour. But strangely enough, in a couple of days, to the astonishment of everybody, they struck gold, and that too in payable wash. Needless to say, they were delighted. The wash was indeed rather thin, but they had good hopes of it making as they advanced. Instead of making however, it gradually got thinner, and in little over a week, to their utter chagrin, ran out altogether!

Nothing daunted, they shifted their pegs to fresh ground and again “set in”—and again bottomed on gold! This time there was a fair quantity of wash, but the gold was so thinly distributed, that after some weeks’ persevering labour, the claim was abandoned as not payable. A similar result attended their next essay. And so it went on for months; always at work, always on gold, yet always on ground so poor that the yield seldom did more than pay expenses. Alick was now sorely discouraged, had some thoughts of giving up further attempts, but a visit from Macpherson, with whom he had formed a casual acquaintance on his first arrival, served to revive his hopes. Mac informed him that he had just struck a rich patch in a gully about twenty miles away, where he had been fossicking for some time, and that he was now quietly forming a small party to go out and work the ground. He wanted one more man, and had decided to give Alick the chance of joining. Was he on? Alick was, and at once agreed to set out the following day, arranging to meet the rest of the party at a certain spot in the bush before daylight next morning.

About noon of the day following that on which they started, they reached their destination—Macpherson’s Gully, at that time unchristened, and indeed but little known. After fixing their tents and having some dinner, they turned out to have a look at the ground, and before long had seen enough to raise Alick’s spirits as much as
they had formerly been depressed. Digging a hole they struck the reef at a depth of about three feet. They found gold in the stuff right through from top to bottom; but close to the reef was a layer of black sand, about eight inches thick, which was particularly rich. This layer, Mac considered, would yield fully fifteen penny-weights to the load. A handful of the sand deftly washed out by Pete on a long handled shovel left such a ring of the bright yellow metal behind it as fairly dazzled Alick’s eyes, and he turned in that night strongly impressed with the notion that the streak of luck he had longed for, had at last made its appearance.

Next day they made a more extended examination of their claim. They found that the patch consisted of a narrow strip of wash running parallel with, and close to the edge of the little creek. The average depth was between two and three feet, and try where they would, the prospects obtained were as favourable as those of the preceding day. Being now fully satisfied as to the value of the ground, they fell to considering the best and most expeditious way of working it. To secure a steady supply of water was of paramount importance. During wet weather, the creek itself contained water amply sufficient for their purpose, but at other times it was a mere string of tiny pools. Leading them to a spot about a quarter of a mile above the claim, Mac showed them a place where the sides of the defile approached each other so closely as to form a narrow gap. At this point he proposed to erect a dam, and as above the gap the gully again opened out and ran comparatively flat for some distance, he calculated that they would have storage for a body of water sufficient to enable them to work continuously. Mac’s proposal received unanimous approval, and no time was lost in setting about the job, in the execution of which, the incident befell with which this chapter opened.

The work of construction occupied a month—a month of laborious days. They toiled like galley slaves, though not like them in hopeless monotony, few men ever laboured
more heartily, or took more pleasure in their work. Only to the slave and the underpaid hireling is labour a curse. To the man who works with a reasonable hope of being able to achieve a position of independence, labour becomes a mere feather weight, and the severest toil is borne with a joyous fortitude that no difficulties can daunt.

During this time, their mode of life was simple in the extreme, healthful, and not on the whole unpleasurable; its distinguishing characteristics being hard work by day, and sound sleep by night. The short interval of recreation between the day's labour and "turning in" for the night, was sometimes devoted to yarns of the stirring-adventure type, consisting chiefly of reminiscences drawn from the rich experience of Mac and Pete. Mac, in particular, had a large fund of exciting exploits to relate, and to him the little camp owed much of its enlivenment. He had the rare knack of telling a story in such a way as to give his hearers a vivid conception of his meaning with scarcely any mental effort on their part. His word-pictures, though flawed perhaps by a too liberal garnishing of unparliamentary language, had all the realism of panoramic views. Nor was it only as a story-teller that Mac bore the palm, for when, as frequently happened, subjects of political or social importance cropped up for discussion, his information was found to be far beyond that of his mates, and they gladly yielded to him the lead in the Symposium. He was one of those men, not uncommon on the gold-fields, who unite with a hardy frame and adventurous spirit, keen powers of observation and a faculty for forming strong opinions of men and things, which opinions they hold in a bold uncompromising fashion, and are ever ready to give utterance to in the least conventional language.

A favourite subject of his was the pitiful state of the masses in the great centres of civilization. How to permanently alleviate the condition of the labouring poor, he held to be the most important, most pressing of latter-day problems. When his mates got him to hold forth on this topic they were only too pleased to listen, as the subject
lay near to their hearts, and the sentiments of the speaker were generally such as met with their cordial approval.

In the succeeding chapter I shall take an opportunity of placing before you, my reader, some of Mac's utterances on this topic, trusting to the importance of the subject to justify the digression.

CHAPTER III.

MAC held that our boasted (blasted) civilization was in many of its aspects nothing better than a huge fraud; that however admirable it might be in the abstract, in the concrete it meant simply this: increased luxury to the few, with increased distress to the many. The lives of the poor, he maintained, were getting year by year less and less worth living. The appalling wretchedness that existed side by side with all the luxury that unbounded opulence could devise, was the direct outcome of the thing we vainly call Progress, and not only constituted a strong indictment against it, but was an ever-increasing menace to the very existence of Society. To be sure, we in the Colonies had not yet come face to face with the same bad results which obtained in the older countries of Europe; but building on the same lines, we must sooner or later reach a similar condition.

In answer to Alick's remark on one occasion, that "With all its drawbacks, a civilized condition is surely preferable to a barbarous one," he replied: "It ought to be, lad, it ought to be, but for a large proportion of the people, it unfortunately is not. I have lived with men in both conditions. I have seen the poor white labourer in the crowded cities of England toiling on from year to year, in his joyless gin-horse round earning little more
than sufficed to keep him fit for further toil. I have seen him when the feebleness of age fell upon him, with no brighter hope in his breast than that of becoming, in his helplessness, a burden upon friends who, however willing, would be hardly fit to bear the load. In default of friends, I have seen the poor broken-spirited creature languish under the callous discipline of work-house officialdom, and the cheerless prospect of a pauper’s grave. Yet such is the fate civilization ordains for myriads of those by whose labour it exists.

“Look, on the other hand, at the rude child of nature in his native wilds, as yet untainted by the vices of civilized man. Strong-limbed, bright-eyed, light-hearted, he enjoys to-day and has no fear for to-morrow. His wants are few, and for the most part, easily supplied. His necessary exertions are invariably conducive to the retention of vigorous health, on which happiness among all conditions of men must ever largely depend. Mark the lithe grace and freedom of his movements. Observe the gleeful readiness to extract pleasure from every trifling circumstance. See with what merry abandonment, on his return from the chase, he joins in the childish gambols of his ‘young barbarians,’ himself as young in spirit, and as laughter-loving as they. Beyond all question, the lot of this man, call him barbarian, savage—what you will—is a happier one than that of the pallid, careworn toiler in the health-destroying factories of civilization.”

“Would you then,” queried Alick, “advocate a return to barbarism?”

“By no means. I do not oppose civilization as such. I do not undervalue the greater knowledge, the scientific discoveries or the wonderful mechanical inventions of modern times. The multitude of labour-saving appliances they have placed at our disposal have added immensely to the wealth-producing power of mankind; and if the extra wealth so created were devoted, as it ought to be, to the general well-being, it would be a distinct blessing to the world. But as we judge a tree by its fruits, so must our
modern system be tested by results. And what are its chief distinguishing features? The rapid accumulation of large individual fortunes on the one hand; on the other, a horde of poverty-stricken, prematurely-debilitated workpeople! The wealthy become millionaires; the extra clever, or the extra fortunate follow hard upon their heels; while the great bulk of the masses, who are neither clever nor fortunate, retain but the heritage of despair (now fast growing into sullen hate), their lives a mere funeral procession to the grave.

"Parliaments, and laws, and Christian institutions notwithstanding, capital is the genuine ruler in all civilized communities, and as far as the poor hirelings in its pay are concerned, exercises an authority as despotic, and in many ways more atrociously cruel, than that of the kingly despots of the olden days. Yet we are told we are no longer a nation of serfs, but a free people, and in a thousand conjunctures are called on to exult over the many liberties we possess. As regards the major portion of the people, this is utter bosh, the mere empty conceit of ignorant or mercenary phrasemongers. The well-to-do only are free. I tell you that to-day the face of the poor man who strives to bring up his family honestly, is held as securely to the grindstone as if he were chained thereto by legal enactments. His service, though nominally free, is as truly forced as that of the veriest slave. He knows that the pittance he receives for his labour is all that stands between his little ones and the miseries of destitution. However hateful or unwholesome the servitude may be, therefore, yet is he so bound to it that what he chiefly fears is to be free, freedom in his case meaning the 'sack,' with all that want of employment implies to himself and family. And well does the greedy, grasping capitalist know the fact. He knows that this power of the sack is, in his hands, a whip that cuts as keenly as any ever wielded by Southern slave driver.

"Meanwhile, the people are practically helpless. If they turn to the Church they are told of the virtue of contentment,
of the duty of pious resignation, and admonished to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven! The Clergy are so intensely respectable, and poverty is so very much the reverse, that between the shepherds and the sheep there seems a great gulf fixed. Small wonder that the attitude of such large numbers of the working classes towards the Church should be one of sullen indifference, or even active hostility, cherishing as they do the notion that their oppressors and the Clergy are practically allied. For the capitalist, also, is highly respectable, though his respectability is usually of different stuff. It is mainly the kind of article so much in vogue now-a-days, which consists in the things that a man has rather than in what he is—the respectability of the purse. It is in no sense respect-worthiness. Yet the two things are so confounded that, though the wealth on which his title to respectability is based, has been wrung in pitiless fashion from the unrewarded sweat of the poor, the gross injustice of his extortions is lost sight of, covered by the mantle of respectability as by a reputable robe of uprightness.

"This sort of thing, if continued, will ultimately bring even Mrs. Grundy into disrepute, and the Litany of honest men will read:—"From all respectability, good Lord, deliver us."

"Nor do they fare better at the hands of the politicians. The science of politics, despite the long experience of mankind, is still in a very crude condition. In every country statecraft has been made to subserve the interests of the few, as against those of the many. Its chief end and object has always been the preservation of the existing Order; or when change became inevitable, to secure that the sacred rights of Property should in no wise suffer. The rights of Poverty—the interests of the unpropertied poor, have ever been beyond its scope. Patriotism has, in its practical results, meant substantially the maintenance of order, that is, of such order as for the time being obtained. Such changes as have been effected, have left the power of Capital, and the helplessness of Poverty, more pronounced
and more antagonistic than ever. As in warfare the weak become the prey of the strong, so in peace the poor remain the legitimate quarry of the rich. It is evident that patriotism, as so defined, can exist among the poor, that is, among the great body of the people, only in proportion to their ignorance, and that, as the latter is dissipated, the former must decay. This result is rapidly approaching. Everywhere we see signs of fermentation among the masses. Everywhere the question is being asked whether true patriotism does not dictate the destruction, rather than the preservation of the present Order. We have Nihilism in Russia, Socialism in Germany, Communism in France, and Internationalism in Spain and Italy; while in England and America, the extreme types of Trades Unionism are yearly becoming more and more imbued with International and Socialistic sentiments.

"I tell you what lads, one of these days we'll be having such a rattling up of the dry bones of Society as will produce chaos. But out of that chaos will arise a new Order more permanent, because more equitable than the present, in which the selfish individualism now rampant in Society will give place to a loyal regard for the common weal.

"All the signs of the times indicate that a violent convulsion is impending. We may deplore the violence, but the social upheaval that seems now inevitable will be no child's play, and can scarcely be accomplished by pacific methods. Possibly the violence may be lessened, and the raging elements in a measure controlled, by the advent of some capable, far-seeing statesman, who will resolutely set himself to grapple with the social and industrial problems that now cry aloud for solution. But such a statesman, if successful, will be phenomenal, one whose name will ring through the ages as the chief benefactor of his kind. He will be no mere time-serving, phrase-loving politician, but a man—above all things, a Man—whose head is clear, and whose sympathies are wide and deep; who will spurn the traditional cobwebs of individualism, and strong in the people's support, will refuse to be fettered by the paltry exigencies of Party."
"But," remarked Alick, "I've heard it maintained that the inequalities existing in Society are but the natural result of freedom among men of unequal capacity; that while the strong and clever must rise by virtue of superior abilities, the weak and the stupid must necessarily go to the wall; that, in fact, the state of things we complain of only exemplifies the natural law of the survival of the fittest."

"Survival of the fittest be damned!" growled Mac. "Don't you see that if that contention were well founded, we should have no alternative but to accept the present condition of things, with all the evils, moral and physical, with which it is beset, as the best obtainable? Nay, the very evils themselves would have to be accepted as the necessary results of natural law, and by no means, therefore, to be combated or done away with. Such reasoning would be fatal to all improvement, and would inevitably lead to the conclusion that 'Whatever is, is right.' No, no! There is implanted in the great heart of humanity a divine discontent with injustice, a saving impulse (everywhere hindered by individual selfishness) to right what is wrong, and give to every man his due. I have no quarrel with the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. That doctrine is the expression of sound natural law, and would, in a just social system mean the survival of the best. The law of modern society, on the contrary, means to a large extent the survival of the least fit, the survival of the greedy, the extortionate, the overreaching, the unscrupulous,—the survival of the worst. As thing now stand, worth and wealth are almost synonymous terms. The man who succeeds in the world, is the man who shows most conspicuously the talent for making money. He who acquires most wealth is accounted most worthy of survival. Success in life is measured by the standard of pounds shillings and pence. The nobler, more chivalrous qualities are at a discount, fit only for the silly fools who go to the wall, and the great god Mammon is the presiding deity of the day."
"There's N,—for instance, who made his first 'rise' as the keeper of a way-side grog shanty, where 'lambing down' was an every-day occurrence. He then moved to town where he increased his pile by running a large 'Family hotel,' without boarders, but with a lucrative bar trade. He is now a cut above the beer shop, of course, having become a big city landlord, eminently respectable, and having no connection with the trade beyond deriving from it a large proportion of his income in the shape of hotel rents.

"There's P—again, who used to shine as a dealer in mining shares. His superior cheek, and amazing powers of misrepresentation, soon raised him above the level of his class—a class by no means deficient in the qualities that distinguish the 'fittest.' Wherever there were pigeons to be plucked, there was P—in the midst of them, ready to perform the operation with all the skill of an adept. No trick was too mean for him; no lie too audacious. None could promote a bogus company, or dispose of a salted claim, with more innocent assurance than he. The result of it all was, that in a short time he was able to retire from the business with his nest effectually feathered. He is now a City Magnate, an influential money lender, with shares in every concern that pays a steady dividend.

"Such men as these 'survive' and become the founders of families. Nor will such families be at any social disadvantage in mixing with the wealthy progeny of those other 'survivors' who earned their title to rank among the 'fittest' by expert gridironing, or the adroit manipulation of political railways, whereby the value of their lands was enhanced, and their fortunes established. The moral stigma attaching to their foundation is lost sight of—obscured in the glamour that surrounds success.

"Thus we see that the mode in which wealth is acquired, is of minor importance compared with the great fact of possessing it; 'success' being the crucial test by which 'fitness' is determined.
Believe me lads, if moral worth and fitness were conjoined, and justice had unimpeded sway, not a few of society's fittest would be fit only for universal execration. Survival of the fittest! Good Heavens! fit for what? Fit only to beguile the simple, and oppress the weak; fit only—ugh!"—Here followed a burst of vigorous invective, altogether too strong for reproduction.

CHAPTER XV.

In the preceding chapter I have set before you connectedly some of Mac's sentiments in substantially Mac's own words, omitting only the numerous expletives too hot for publication. And now to our tale.

The dam was just finished; the boxes and other appliances, rough, but fairly fit for the work, fixed. The weather had been for some weeks unusually fine for that part of the country, so that the water gathered but slowly. There was already, however, a supply sufficient for about three days' washing, and they resolved to turn it on and set to work. At the end of the third day the dam was empty, so they amalgamated (the gold being fine), the contents of their wash-tub. On retorting the amalgam, they found the result of their three days' washing to be eleven onces of gold, worth about £40, a result highly gratifying to all hands.

With a loud "Hurroo! we're in it this time, bhoys," Larry tossed his hat high in the air, and gave vent to the exuberance of his feelings by cutting a variety of fantastic capers round the camp fire, winding up by performing a frolicsome jig to the tune of "Finnegan's Wake."

"A fery coot tanse," cried Pete, "fery coot, indeed; put tendt gount your schickens pefore dey are hatched, ma boy."
"What do you mane, you double-Dutch spalpeen! Aren't they as good as hatched? Isn't the gold there, an' who the devil can take it from us?"

"Oh der goldt is dere right enough, andt no pody can dake it vrom us, put it isn't vasht out yet; it isn't in our hands yet, ma poy, andt you know beople say, 'a pird in der push is wordt two in der hand, eh?'"

"Ye don't mane it. What! a bird in the bush——"

"No, no," cried Pete, hastening to explain, "I ton't mean—a pird in der push is wordt two in der handt, put—a handt in der push is wordt——"

"Oh, go to bed, Pate, an' try again when ye wake up."

"All fery coot; maype I know vat I mean (a trifle sulkily), maype I shpeak Sherman petter as you shpeak Eunklish."

"You've got him this time," laughed Mac, "hit him there again."

"Begorra, ye're right, Pate. What a man manes is the main thing after all. Tip us your fist, me bhoy; I'm a bit of a Dutchman mesilf, I believe."

Nor was Alick less jubilant than Larry, though less demonstrative. He calculated that it would take at least a year to work out the claim, and as the ground all over was pretty much the same as that part of it that had already gone through the boxes, there was a moral certainty that at the twelvemonth's end they would each possess about a thousand pounds. At this thought his spirits rose so high that he could scarce restrain the impulse to join Larry in his dance of triumph. But his strongest feeling was one of devout thankfulness. "How wonderful," thought he, "are the ways of Providence. How true it is that man's extremity is God's opportunity. Just when I was in the last stage of hopelessness, with no heart for further effort, to think that Mac, whom I had almost forgotten, should turn up and offer me, unsolicited, a share
in this claim. That was the turning point in the long lane of misfortune, and now the one dream of my life bids fair to be realised."

Alick’s pet ambition had long been to be the owner and occupier of a freehold farm, free from debt, and free from his old enemy—the harassing dread of the wolf at the door. And now, in imagination, he could see, in the near future, the happy consummation of his heart’s desire; could see himself living a healthful, contented, and withal industrious life, his smiling, faithful wife by his side, and his children growing up around him strong and sturdy, with every prospect of a fair start in the world.

He indulged in the pleasing reverie without stint, his happiness being just a little tempered with impatience for the rain they now waited for to fill the dam, and so enable them to resume work.

At length it came, came too in thorough earnest, as if hurrying to make up for lost time. It was late in the afternoon. Pete was busy preparing some "flap jacks" for the evening meal, the others occupied with the various odd jobs incidental to camp life, when the clouds which for the last day or two had been drifting up from the South, and piling themselves in great irregular masses on the horizon, began to overspread the heavens. As the huge black shadows stole overhead, cutting off the light of the sun, and hushing to silence the feathered tribes of the bush, there was a peculiar feeling in the close sultry air, a feeling as of tension, betokening that a storm of unusual severity was at hand. First came the sound of a few heavy drops on the spreading fronds of the fern trees, and then, all at once—the deluge. To say that it rained would convey but a faint idea of the wild tumultuous downpour that now ensued. In the morning the dam, which in ordinary rains would have taken about a week to fill, was full to overflowing, and still the torrents of rain descended as if the windows of heaven were indeed opened. All that day it continued, and before night, the flood races, of
which there were two, were running bank high. They now became seriously apprehensive as to the safety of the dam. It was obvious that, if the bye-washes, large enough to relieve it in ordinary rains, should prove inadequate to convey the surplus water now flooding into the gully from all sides, the breastwork would be subjected to a pressure it was little calculated to withstand. Meanwhile, they could do nothing but wait the cessation of the storm.

As they turned in that night, Pate remarked oracularly, "What's to pe, will pe, poys; pefore long I tink we'll hear somedings." And so it befell. About midnight, they were awakened by the loud creaking of timber, and pulling on their boots, they hurried along the sidling until they came within view of the breastwork. The rain had ceased entirely, and by the light of the moon, which shone fitfully between the rugged clouds that went scudding along the sky, they could see thin, hissing jets of water issuing from between the timbers. They waited a few minutes, momentarily expecting the final catastrophe. Suddenly, with a great crash, the structure collapsed, and the huge body of water burst forth from its pent-house with irresistible force. Not like a swollen mountain torrent surging down the steep declivities of its rocky channel, but straight from the gap, it came with a voice of thunder, as if shot from the mouth of a mammoth gun, and swept down the gully, a mighty, rushing avalanche, fury in its breast and ruin in its track.

"No use crying over spilt milk," said Mac, "but it's a pity we didn't make these bye-washes bigger. Now the damage is done, however, the best thing we can do is to turn in and get some sleep. As there's another month's dead work ahead of us before we get things fixed again, we'll want to be in fair trim to tackle the job in the morning."

Mac's suggestion was at once acted upon, it being indeed the only sensible course open. They had seen the labour of a month swept away in a moment, and though they felt
a bit "downed" by the disaster, yet after all, the damage was not irreparable; it was simply one of those vexatious occurrences to which diggers are constantly subject, and which they usually grin and bear with the best possible grace.

Daylight, accordingly, found them up and stirring, fully determined to make good the disaster of the previous night in the shortest possible time. While preparing breakfast, they were startled by a succession of loud cooeys from Larry, who had gone down to the creek for a billyful of water. Fearing that some accident had befallen him, they hastened down the sidling in response to his cries. They found him standing on a stranded snag, in a state of the wildest excitement.

"In the name o' God, boys, luk here! Holy Mother! What's happened us? The gulley's clane shifted!"

Looking in the direction of the claim, to which Larry, with outstretched arm was pointing, a sight met their gaze which fairly made them gape with astonishment, and rub their eyes as if uncertain whether they saw aright. The whole of the narrow patch of sand and shingle constituting the claim, and in which they had confidently believed their fortunes lay embedded, was swept clean away! leaving the dull slope of the exposed reef as naked and bare as if shaven by the action of a glacier. Their feeling was not depression: it was stupor.

If you, reader, have ever been in such a condition that no possible combination of words could adequately express your feelings; when even the very thought of giving articulate expression to them, would never for a moment present itself; when only silence and the lapse of time, could restore your mind to its normal state, in which language would again become a suitable medium of thought, you can form some idea of how the party felt at this juncture. They stood for a little while and stared, in a dazed kind of way, at the scene before them. Then, sitting down, each at a considerable distance from his
neighbour, as if a certain degree of solitude was necessary to enable them to realise the situation, they mechanically lit their pipes, (the digger’s never-failing solace), and began to smoke!

Presently, as if moved by a common impulse, they started to their feet and filed down the gully, Mac in the van. All the way down the steep defile to the shingly beach beneath, and right across that to some distance beyond low water mark, there was evidence on every hand of the terrific force of the rushing water. Its track was strewn with tangled heaps of scrub and timber, while here and there among the shingle, they could discern faint streaks of black sand, the remnants of the wash on which they had built their hopes, and which was now, as far as they were concerned, irrevocably lost!

Having by this time realised the full extent of the calamity that had befallen them, they began, strangely enough, to recover their wonted spirits. As far, at least, as coolness and self-possession went, they were now their own men again.

"The stalk of carl-hemp in man," the bit of "real grit" which your true digger is never entirely without, began to reassert itself, and climbing their way back to the camp, they breakfasted with as much apparent unconcern as if the events of the last twenty-four hours were matters of everyday occurrence.

The altered condition of things had to be faced resolutely, and the conversation which ensued had sole reference to the future, nobody deeming it worth his while to spend his breath in unavailing talk anent the unfortunate chapter of their experience which was just ended. Mac announced his intention to spend a week or two prospecting some of the neighbouring gullies. Pete knew a bit of ground near Hokitika, some fifteen or twenty miles away, which he reckoned would yield small wages, and he decided to set in there until something better turned up, Larry agreeing to accompany him.
As for Alick, he made up his mind, on the advice of Mac, to remain for a few days, and while there was plenty of water in the creek, to put through such odd shovelfuls of wash as the flood had left in the various nooks and crannies of the gully; Mac—who had been uniformly kind to Alick—believed that by this means he might readily get an ounce or two, and knowing him to be a married man, whose wife and children might be feeling the pinch of poverty, had proffered his assistance in the getting of it.

Without loss of time, Pete and Larry began their preparations. Before noon they had their swags strapped on their backs, and with Pete's cheery "Better luck negst dime, poys," bade adieu to Macpherson's Gully.

During the next few days Alick diligently scraped together all the payable stuff he could find, and with the help of Mac, put it through, finding himself the richer by over three ounces.

And now his prospects of success on the gold-fields being reduced to zero, he determined to make the best of his way home. This course Mac (to whom he had confided all his troubles), entirely approved.

"Prospecting," said he, "is all right enough for such as I who have nobody to care for, and for whom nobody cares; but, situated as you are, lad, your proper place is by the side of your wife and family. It is now the second week in December, and if you start off to-morrow morning, you'll reach Christchurch in time to spend Christmas with them."

Accordingly, early next morning he began his journey, Mac accompanying him part of the way through the bush. Before taking leave, Mac thrust into his hand a small chamois leather bag, containing about a couple of ounces, saying, "there's my Christmas box for the youngsters." This last act of kindness fairly overcame Alick. "You have been a true friend to me all through, Mac," he said; "no brother could have been kinder, but this gold is more than I ought to accept. I have no right to take advantage
of a generosity that leads you to forget your own necessi-
ties. Judging by my late unfortunate experience, I might
never be in a position to—to—repay—"

"You shut up! What the dev— Never you fear
for me, Alick; I know my way about. So-long." And
wheeling round, Mac walked rapidly away, and soon
disappeared in the bush.

Alick pulled himself together and resumed his journey,
mentally resolving that if ever fortune placed it in his
power to recompense him, Mac should have no reason to
regret his generosity. "Farewell," he soliloquised, "one
of the best and most unselfish of mates, with a heart as
kind and tender as his exterior is rough; richly endowed
both physically and mentally, a man eminently fitted to
survive, if only, as he says, the best were the fittest, but,
evertheless, destined, I fear, to go to the wall; to die in
poverty-compelled obscurity, and leave the world as selfish
as he found it. Strange that it should be so. Strange
that, while the foxy, one-idea’d money-grubbers should
flourish 'like the green bay tree,' the nobler spirits should
perish from the face of the earth! Strange that in a
'Christian' community, the fundamental laws of self-
sacrifice should be looked upon as a thing impracticable,
and the tendency that makes for selfishness be everywhere
in the ascendant!"
CHAPTER V.

AFTER a tramp of about seven hours, Alick reached Sheehan's accommodation house—the general store whence they had drawn their supplies during their sojourn in the Gully. Here he hoped to find letters from home. He had had no word from Jeanie since leaving Canvastown, and he was now very anxious for news as to the welfare of her and the children. Only twice since he left home—now over ten months ago—had he been able to send her any money, and as the sum on each occasion was but small, he judged that she could not but be in want of help.

In answer to his enquiries, Sheehan informed him that he had no letters on hand at present, but Sam (the packer who brought his stores from Greymouth), was due that afternoon, and he would most likely bring the mail with him. He decided to put up at Sheehan's for the night. After having some dinner, and exchanging his gold for bank-notes—Sheehan being a buyer on behalf of one of the banks—he was gratified by the arrival of "Sam" with his three wiry pack-horses well laden with the usual supplies, consisting chiefly of flour, tea, sugar, and the inevitable tobacco.

"Got the mail with you, Sam?" asked Sheehan.

"Here you are, all that's of it," handing him a small parcel containing about half a dozen letters.

On these being sorted out, two of them addressed to Alexander Spencer, were handed over to Alick, and he retired a considerable way into the bush, there to peruse them in undisturbed seclusion.

In the first letter, which, he saw by the post-mark, had arrived in Greymouth four weeks previously, Jeanie minutely detailed her circumstances, and concluded by strongly urging him to come home. He found that she
was making a brave fight for it—earning a living for herself and the children by sewing for one of the warehouses in town, but the work was poorly paid, and though she toiled early and late, she had the greatest difficulty in making ends meet.

"I don't blame you, Alick," she wrote, "for not sending home more money, for I know you would be only too glad to do so if you could, but I really think you ought to leave the diggings and come home at once. Your want of success involves no discredit; to stay longer in the face of constant discouragement would, I think, be wrong-headed and foolish. I believe we should have been better off had you stayed here and taken your chance of finding employment; besides, whatever troubles we may have to face, we will bear better together than apart. The children, I am thankful to say, are healthy and strong. Bobbie keeps asking me,—and in such a plaintive tone; it saddens me sometimes,—"When is father coming back? He is naughty to stay away so long, isn't he mother?"

The next letter, dated a fortnight later, he noticed with some concern, was not in his wife's handwriting. It was written, he found, by Mrs.—, a neighbour of hers, Jeanie herself being too ill to perform the duty. The following extract will sufficiently convey its purport:—

"In answer to a loud knock at the front door, Mrs. Spencer left the wash-tub, and hastened round to see who it was. She found a messenger from the warehouse with a bundle of shirts to be made up. She was detained a few minutes receiving instructions about the work. On returning to the yard, she was horrified to find that little Ethel, whom she had left playing with her doll, had over-balanced herself and fallen into the tub, which was half full of water. Alarmed by her shrieks, I and some others rushed in. We found her in a dreadful state of excitement, with the child in her arms. We did what we could to restore animation; but the poor dear child was dead. Doctor N. arrived shortly after, but could do
nothing but pronounce life to be extinct. Mrs. Spencer
is still suffering from the shock of the sad occurrence;
and to make matters worse, your little boy, who has been
ailing for the last day or two, has developed symptoms of
diphtheria, and is, I fear, likely to be seriously ill. The
disease has been prevalent in the neighbourhood lately,
and I have heard of more than one case resulting fatally.

I am sorry to have to send you such bad news, but
however painful it may be, it is necessary that you should
know the worst."

As before mentioned, Alick was devoutly attached to his
wife and children. The sad, and altogether unlooked-for
news he had just read therefore, pierced him to the heart.
He writhed in agony of spirit, until at length, tears came
to his relief, and there, in the solitude of the bush, utterly
broken down, the strong man wept like a child!

"Oh! if I had only been at home," he groaned, "this
would never have happened. Oh, Jeanie! Jeanie! That
I should have left you to bear this cruel blow alone!" In
his self-accusing wretchedness, he began to look upon his
long-continued absence from home, as nothing less than a
base desertion of his responsibilities. Then, with a sudden
revulsion of feeling:—

"God in Heaven!" he cried, "hast Thou forgotten to
be merciful? Where is Thy loving kindness? Where
Thy tender mercies? Was it not enough that in all
worldly matters, my steps should be constantly dogged by
disappointment and failure; that all my plans should be
thwarted, and my every effort foredoomed to disaster, that
Thou hast also laid Thy hand heavily on my loved ones?
Surely in Thy dealings with me there is no place for
compassion! Oh! Thou who seest all men, and knowest
all men's motives, what have I done that Thine anger
shouldst burn so fiercely against me? In what have I—
God forgive me. I know not what I say; but oh! Thou
hast made life bitter—bitter!"
Worn out, at length, by the violence of his emotions, he sank down among the scrub, and gradually fell into a state of semi-consciousness. A strange, trance-like quietude now took possession of his soul. His troubles were all forgotten. He was no longer in the bush, but far away in the land of his nativity, among the scenes of his early boyhood. The cultivated fields and the green lanes he knows so well, lie spread out before him. There, in the hollow, is the hamlet where his playmates dwell. There, too, is the schoolhouse, and the church and the graveyard, every mossy headstone, every grassy mound in which is familiar to him. It is a tranquil Sabbath evening, and the atmosphere of the place is pervaded with a soothing stillness. As he nears his home—the little thatched cottage in the lane—he can hear the familiar sound of his father's voice, as he reads in reverent tones, a portion from the sacred page. He can see, too—for the stone walls offer no impediment to his vision—the family assembled together, can see himself, a little ruddy-faced boy, sitting in the circle. Then as they unite their voices in praise, he hears—and notes with peculiar interest—his own piping treble, as it joins in the prayerful song:—

"Oh, God of Bethel, by whose hand,
    Thy people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage,
    Hast all our fathers led:

    Our vows, our prayers, we now present
    Before Thy throne of grace:
    God of our fathers, be the God
    Of their succeeding race."

As the sound of the singing died away, the vision passed, and waking with a start, he found himself lying in the scrub, the red beams of the declining sun, filtered and mellowed in their passage through the tree tops, illumining the surrounding undergrowth with a soft, cool light. To
his intense astonishment, he found that he was not alone! A little way in front of him, under a cluster of tangled vines that hung suspended from the lower limbs of a huge rata, sat a stranger, an aged man, who from his posture, seemed to be sunk in the deepest reverie.

Presently, the old man raised his eyes and, after regarding Alick intently for a moment, said in a voice whose tones were soft, yet peculiarly penetrating:—

"You have been what the world calls unfortunate. You have failed in your undertakings; you have suffered loss. Death and disease have entered your family; and Providence, you think, has dealt hardly with you."

Oddly enough, this abrupt address, and the stranger's seeming intimacy with his affairs, excited no feeling of surprise in the breast of Alick. He listened with passive receptivity of mind to the old man's words, and was only conscious of a desire to hear what further he had to say. He continued:—

"All things are of God. What men call success, what men deem failures, are equally his gifts. Nor is this an evil, and that a good, save in so far as they affect the health and vigour of the soul. Man's life is twofold; the life of outward seeming by which men judge, often erroneously, their fellow-men, and the true, inner, all-important life, in which the real man waxes or wanes in spiritual stature. I have lived long beneath the sun, and this have I learned in the years of my pilgrimage, that he best endures suffering who believes it for the best. He turns defeat to victory; overcomes tribulation by rejoicing in it, borne up by the conviction that trouble and crosses, disappointment and sorrow, are the tenderest messengers of His love. Think not that worldly successes are special marks of His favour, or misfortune the sign of His wrath. I have seen men striving and scheming through long weary years solely for the things that pertain to the outer life, in the process starving and stunting their spiritual being. I have seen them achieve wealth and social distinction,
but alas! at what expense! Their souls were shrivelled and dwarfed, and their seeming success was, after all, the most dismal failure. No man can devote his energies wholly or mainly to the pursuit of wealth, but at the imminent peril of his eternal well-being. There is that in the pursuit which chills and deadens the nobler instincts, and promotes the growth of a sordid selfishness—the deadliest enemy of the higher life.

"And if the pursuit of wealth be dangerous, its possession is little less so. There is that in the possession of riches which tends to pamper self, which tends to puff man up with an exaggerated idea of his own importance, causing him to view with proud disdain the humble toilers in the ranks of poverty, and by hiding from him his own inherent littleness, intensifies that spiritual decrepitude whose end is death.

"From many of the most insidious temptations which beset the higher life the poor are comparatively free. The discomforts and privations resulting from a state of poverty, have for the quickened soul a wholesome disciplinary influence. They not only tend to safeguard man against excessive pride, but by impressing upon him a sense of his own weakness, and the constant need of Divine succour, contribute towards preventing forgetfulness of Him who is the source of all sustaining strength. They entail suffering, no doubt, but in all ages, the noblest spirits have been made perfect through suffering, and there is a sweetness born of suffering which none but the sufferers know. Tribulation has no terrors for the man who accepts it as coming directly from the hand of Him who cannot err. He endures it bravely; nay more, he welcomes it, rejoices in it as being for him the highest good, and as destined to work out the noblest ends. Shorn of earthly comforts, deprived of all earthly hopes, he falls back on the bed-rock of the Eternal, and on that secure vantage ground, calmly, confidently awaits whatever may betide. And when at last his troubles are over, and the end of his pilgrimage in sight, to him Death comes, not as
the pitiless King of Terrors, but as the lovingest, peace-
fullest herald of the Most High, come to accomplish his
soul’s everlasting enfranchisement.”

Here the stranger’s voice betrayed an impassioned ring,
and his face was lit with rapture. Regarding him atten-
tively, Alick observed that, while his features were plain—
having none of that regularity which we usually associate
with manly beauty—yet the spirit that was in him lent to
his countenance such a nobility of expression, that he
appeared as one transfigured. The very scrub surround-
ing him, as if sharing in his ecstasy, seemed to Alick’s eyes,
to be lustred with a heavenly glow, borrowed from the
benign presence of the strange old man.

“Grieve not,” he continued, “for your child. You have
suffered but a temporary bereavement. Death has not
injured her; she is safe, and in a purer atmosphere awaits
your coming. Among the delights reserved in heaven for
those who enter that blest abode, is the joyful smile of
recognition—the gladsome welcome which those who have
gone before accord to them that follow after.”

The sun had now sunk to the line of the horizon.
Through a gap in the bush the great eye of day displayed
his glittering disc resting on the edge of the waters.
Along the breast of the Pacific lay a broad belt of golden
light, so alluring in its grandeur, so apparently substantial
in its structure, that it seemed like a solid pathway of
celestial glory joining earth to heaven. Moved by the
wondrous beauty of the scene, the old man rose, and
advancing a few steps towards the opening in the bush,
stood for a space with clasped hands and heaven-lit
countenance, gazing on the glories of the sunset. As he
thus stood like one entranced, Alick could hear him
murmur in rapt accents, “How beautiful are Thy works,
Lord God Almighty!” But even as he spoke there came
a change. The sun dipped beneath the waves with
startling suddenness; the golden light vanished from the
sea; the emerald splendour of the bracken was lost in the
gathering gloom.
Singular to relate, the figure of the stranger faded with the fading day; and, starting to his feet, Alick, to his utter amazement, found himself entirely alone! Whether in the sudden darkness the old man had stolen away unobserved, or whether his appearance and strange language had been altogether the result of Alick's overwrought emotions, giving to the subjective workings of his own mind an apparent objective reality, he knew not—nor did he greatly care to know. Sufficient for him that he left the spot with his faith renewed and his courage fully restored. He is no longer (as he had seemed but lately to be) a mere uncared-for atom, tossed hither and thither on the billows of a blind insensate fate. He feels that in and through all the vicissitudes that make up the sum of human life, there is a great all-knowing Presence. The events of the last few hours have brought him sensibly nearer to that Presence. There is in his soul a vivid realisation of his relationship to Him who upholds the entire created universe by the might of His power. Borne in upon his mind is the feeling—and it is to him inexpressibly sweet—that he, even he, is known to, yea and cared for, by the great Maker and Lord of all. Hence is his strength renewed, and "with a heart for any fate," he calmly sets his face to the future.
EARLY next day he left Sheehan's, and turning inland, followed the bush track in the direction of Dilmanstown, intending to make that township before night. About mid-day he reached the north bank of the Teramakau. Here an unexpected obstacle presented itself. The river was in high flood, and though the fresh appeared to be abating, a glance was sufficient to show that for that day at least it was quite unfordable. Having no tent with him, he began to look round in quest of a suitable spot in which to erect a temporary shelter for the night, when the sound of a rough, hearty voice fell upon his ear: "Stuck up, mate! no crossin' the ole creek this day, I reckon. Guess we'll have to 'bide a wee,' as the song says."

As the speaker emerged from a clump of undergrowth, Alick recognised the tall, lanky form of "Californy Jack," a whilom acquaintance of Canvastown.

"I've crossed the Teremakau more'n fifty times just about this yere spot, so me and the old river's kinder friendly you see. As a gin'ral rule, she's safe enough; but when she's sorter got her back up, travellin' in a hurry, like—tearin' along at the rate o' knots like she is to-day—cartin' down big tumblin' dabs o' timber like 'gators on the warpath, she'll stan' no darned liberties; she's got to be treated with all doo respeck, you bet."

"Lucky job I met you, Jack. I wasn't quite sure about the exact lay of the ford."

"Thunder alive! is it you Alick? How the devil are you? Tarnation, man! I wouldn't have known you from a grampus. Come along this way; we'll have the billy biled direcd'y." Going into the bush a short distance, they entered a snug little clearing, where Jack, who had arrived on the scene two hours before, had already fixed his fly,
and proceeded to make things comfortable. Here, they soon started a fire, "biled the billy" and over a pannikin of hot tea and a slice of damper began to make each other acquainted with their respective luck since leaving Canvastown. Jack was a strong wiry fellow about forty years of age. Originally a Lancashire lad, he had acquired the adjectival appellation "Californy" from his having spent a considerable portion of his life on the diggings of the Golden State. Since landing in Hokitika, now some five or six years ago, he had become universally known as one of the luckiest, good natureddest, most determinedly spendthrift diggers on the Coast.

On leaving California, he had made a trip home to England, the happy-go-lucky possessor of some four thousand pounds. The bulk of this money he invested in the purchase of a hotel in the suburbs of B,—installing therein as host, Elisha, his elder brother and only near relative; with the design, as he said, of making a man of him. Elisha, who was a married man with a family, and a totally different stamp of being from Jack,—the one brother being as niggardly as the other was lavish—readily took charge of the business; and Jack, with the remainder of his money, set about giving the trade of the house a "proper start." Every morning he would station himself at the door, inviting inside, and freely shouting for all that came along. Not content with that, he engaged a German band and an Italian with a couple of dancing bears to come and give a performance now and then in front of the house. Soon a promiscuous crowd of idlers would gather round, and when by-and-by the strains of the band subsided, and the clumsy gyrations of the bears came to a halt, Jack would in the most effusive manner, announce his readiness to stand drinks for all hands. The hanger-on of the market place, the thirsty way-farer, the public house loafer, the seedy, broken-down swell, the "free and independent" out of a job, the young and the old, the halt and the blind, all—all were welcome to partake of his bounty in the shape of drinks.
“Come along boys, don't be bashful; step inside and give it a name. What's yours? an' yours? an' yours? Speak out; anything you like an' nothin' to pay; this is the house that Jack built; ha, ha, ha!—go it lads.”

Having shouted for them to their heart's content, and made them all "comfortably" drunk, he would dismiss them with a "glad to see you again" sort of air, and after a short interval proceed to collect another batch. Naturally enough, while Jack's cash lasted, the hotel did a roaring trade, and Elisha, who was complete master of the situation, thrice apace. But everything comes to an end, and in a surprisingly short space of time, Jack reached his bottom dollar and—the end of his tether.

Blithely bowing to the inevitable, he, for a consideration of fifty pounds, made over the fee simple of the place to his brother, and sailed for New Zealand. Directly after reaching Dunedin, he made his way to the Coast, where he started afresh on the diggings with every faith in himself and his "luck." Nor did his usual good fortune desert him. Wherever there was a claim turning out specially rich dirt, or offering special facilities for profitably working the more ordinary wash, Jack was sure to be "on the job." If his party took up a piece of abandoned ground which the previous owners had thrown up in despair; ten to one, a payable lead would be struck directly. If the claim was particularly good, and all at once the wash run out to nothing at all, it was usually found that Jack had sold out just prior to the disaster.

And all this without any apparent cunning on his part, but simply owing to his having what was generally allowed to be the "d—l's own luck;” said euphonious expression being synonymous with superlatively good fortune. But Jack profited nothing by the uniform smiles of Dame Fortune; for every spurt of work was followed by a "burst" corresponding in length and magnitude with the degree of success that had attended his venture. Nor was he in the least what was called a "selfish swiper.” He could
never thoroughly enjoy a spree unless he was surrounded by a mob of friends." Sorry friends they were, too, for the most part, consisting generally of the roustabouts, dead-beats, and stone-broke gamblers that constitute the usual rag-tag and bob-tail of mining centres. On his visits to the town with gold in his pocket, these would rally round him with the most affectionate solicitude, and stick by him, while his money lasted, with a trustful constancy that was positively touching. Nor would they forsake his company till the last shilling was gone, and the smiles of Boniface gave place to a steadfast business-like gravity. Then would they disappear as if by magic, leaving Jack by himself to slowly suffer a recovery; and brace himself up for another spell of industry.

On the present occasion, he was on his way to Dilmans-town to deplore, under the auspices of Bacchus, the death of one of his mates. His claim, about ten miles distant, was on a steep terrace; and was worked by means of a short, blind tunnel. Despite the presence of immense numbers of huge boulders, which hindered their operations at every turn, the ground was paying remarkably well, the gold being coarse and fairly plentiful. But one morning, a boulder, under which "Cockney Bill" was crouching in the act of fixing some timber supports, fell from the roof, and Bill was crushed into a shapeless mass!

All work on the claim was, of course, suspended; nor was it likely to be resumed for a week or more. But, while the rest of the party elected to remain in camp, Jack determined that a proper regard for the memory of poor Bill imperatively called for a visit to town, and this with the usual consequences fully in view, said consequences being, in fact, an essential part of the respect due to the occasion. In no other way, as it seemed to him, could he fittingly express his sorrow, or pay adequate tribute to the worth of his deceased mate.

Alick took occasion to earnestly remonstrate with him, pointing out the folly of these constantly recurring
fuddling bouts; and the conversation which ensued lasted far into the night. Lying there under the fly on their bed of dry fern, the busy mosquitoes rendering sleep impossible, they kept up the argument with considerable vigour. While Jack was willing to admit that his past behaviour was not altogether creditable, and even that he sometimes had serious thoughts of turning over a new leaf; yet—"What's the good o' gold, anyway," he would say, "if a man can't get some fun out o' the darned stuff." Finally he was fain to confess that Alick had "the right end o' the stick." Speaking generally, he guessed he had better "shut off steam;" but, as regarded his present purpose, he was immovable. Bill's death was altogether too sad an occurrence to be passed over in dull uninteresting sobriety. "No use talkin'," said he; "when a man's chum get's squashed by his side, suthin's got to be done. 'Taint right that you should mouch along quiet like as if nothin' unusual had happened; it's clean agin human natur'; leastaways, it's agin mine"—and there, perforce, the matter rested.

The following morning, the fresh had gone down, and the river, here about two hundred yards wide, appeared to have shrunk to something like its normal volume. Still the water was suspiciously muddy, and running at a tremendous pace. Jack, whose judgment on such matters was really valuable, declared that she wanted six hours yet "to kinder settle down, an' ease off like," before she could be safely tackled.

Among our West Coast rivers, all of them more or less treacherous, the Teremakau has long had an exceptionally evil reputation. And if the numbers of its victims were known, the list would no doubt be sufficiently formidable to justfy the feeling of distrust with which, before the present era of bridges, it was universally regarded. Many an adventurous digger, many a hardy bush-man, many a weary plodding packer, has terminated his career in its turbid waters. For a great part of its length, its bed consists of shifting shingle, with here and there a mighty
boulder, round whose ponderous base the flood waters twist and whirl with mad velocity. It frequently happens that some great tree, its foundation sapped and hollowed by the insidious current, falls headlong into the flood, and tossing about in its rapid voyaging, gets jammed between a boulder and the bank of the river. Soon, its branches intercepting the rolling shingle and floating débris, a temporary obstruction is formed. Then, when a fresh comes down, the river, swerving from the impediment, bores furiously into the opposite bank; here scooping out great pools, and there, a little lower down, building up fresh and constantly varying shingle spits.

Thus, the impetuous torrent being compelled to spend its fury at ever-changing angles, the configuration of its bed is subject to extensive alterations with each recurring flood. Woe to the belated swagger who, secure in the confidence arising from past experience, incautiously attempts to ford the stream where often before perhaps he has crossed with ease and safety. Suddenly, he steps from comparatively shallow water into an unsuspected hole, and in a moment is swept away by the remorseless current, to be afterwards found (if not sepulchered by the shifting shingle) lying on some gravelly shallow, a bruised and battered corpse!

It was late in the afternoon before Jack decided that they might safely attempt the ford; but even then, he reckoned there was need for the utmost care. His instructions to Alick who, as the less experienced man, was willing to follow his lead, might be briefly summarised thus:—Keep your feet well down, take short steps, and be sure that one foot is firmly planted before you lift the other. Then with their swags securely strapped on their heads, and holding between them a stout sapling by means of which they could oppose their united strength to the current, the two men entered the river and began to move slowly ahead.

I may here explain, for the benefit of the uninitiated, that the practice of using a sapling in this way, when
parties of men are crossing dangerous rivers, is quite a common one. A spar is cut sufficiently long for all hands to hold on by, and as they make their way across keeping in line with the rush of the water, the man up stream acts as a kind of breakwater for those below, while he in his turn is assisted by bearing on the sapling held rigidly in position by the others. In this way, too, the serious results of individual slips are in great measure avoided.

The water was icy cold, and by the time they reached the middle of the river, their teeth were chattering and their limbs benumbed. Though the water so far had not been more than waist-high, yet such was the force of it that it required strong, continuous exertion to enable them to maintain their footing. Just a little way ahead, the peculiar motion of the water, to Jack’s experienced eye, indicated greater depth. “She’s worse than I expected by a damned long sight,” he said, as nerving themselves for extra effort, they slowly and cautiously advanced. Now the water rises to their shoulders, and they are sore bestead to preserve their balance. “Steady mate, steady!” cried Jack, as Alick stumbled, swung half round, and with difficulty recovering himself, left Jack slightly in advance. “Steady—steady—stea—God!” with the exclamation on his lips, he suddenly sank in a hole, and at the same moment letting go the sapling, he threw up his hands and was caught in the deadly swirl. Spinning helplessly round and round, he was borne swiftly from the view of his horror-stricken companion. An instant later, lower down the stream, there was the flash of an upturned arm, a momentary break on the surface of the whirling flood, and Jack disappeared, nevermore to be seen of men!

Scarce had Alick time to realise the frightful peril of his situation ere the treacherous shingle on the edge of the pool gave way beneath his feet, and he felt himself sinking. Ere the waters closed over his head, he gathered all his strength, and making a desperate bound forward, battled
bravely for a moment in a vain attempt to reach the shallower water beyond. But the feat was more than mortal power could accomplish. It was his last conscious struggle! Quickly the current gained the mastery and—

* * * * *

Three days later, about a mile lower down the river, a group of prospectors stood on a low shingle-spit gazing pityingly on the dead body of a man. Not even his most intimate friends could have recognised in that unsightly object the form and face of Alick Spencer. Yet he it was, alas! That swollen, disfigured shape, the mouth and eyes filled with river sand, the poor stiffened fingers still clutching the broken sapling, comprised all that was mortal of hapless Alick. The hoping, fearing, trusting, despairing, ever-vainly-endeavouring heart is still.

All his attempts to get on in the world have ended so!

What shall we say, reader? Was this poor, broken life of his altogether a failure, think you? Truly, from the point of view of worldly success, we must so pronounce it; nor is there any possible consideration to mitigate the force of the verdict.

If our brief appearance on the world's stage be followed by utter extinction; if all our views of life must be rigidly bounded by death; if we may not look beyond for a fuller life in which the cruel inequalities of the present will be redressed, in which the fearful moral enigmas which beset us here will be resolved in a clearer light, you may take it as my mature conviction that there is neither truth nor justice in the universe of God. Not only this man's life, but yours, mine, every man's, is hopelessly blank, utterly destitute of all permanent significance. Nay, more; from the morning on which the first conscious man trod the surface of this planet, to the coming night in which it will, like its accompanying satellite, circle in space, an airless, waterless waste, the whole sum of human existence, with all its pulsing pleasures, with all its rending pains, can amount to nothing more than a meaningless farce—a mere sardonic wrinkle on the passionless face of Time.
CHAPTER VII.

It was Christmas Eve, and merrily rang the Christchurch bells. A holiday air pervaded the town. The main thoroughfares were crowded with people, and the pleasant sounds of cheerful talk and merry laughter were heard on every side. Here and there, the shop windows were besieged by smiling groups rendering the homage of spontaneous admiration to the fanciful decorations, and all bent, apparently, on making some appropriate purchases wherewith to celebrate the season. As is usual on such occasions, the children were vociferously to the fore. For them mainly, the purse-strings of the seniors were relaxed; for them the busy shopkeepers displayed their most attractive wares; and to them, with their bright eyes beaming, and their little hands laden with presents, it seemed as if the millenium had come. And how the unrestrained glee of the youngsters spread like a genial infection to the oldsters! Sober gray-beards and elderly matrons, their feelings warmed and softened by the humanizing influence, thought mayhap of the olden time in the distant home-land,—now seen but dimly through the mist of years—when for them too the mysteries of the toy shops constituted a fairy wonderland; when the strange puzzlement of a Jack-in-the-box, the martial blare of a sixpenny trumpet, and the ineffable delight of chocolate creams, were all-absorbing attractions.

Voices whose ordinary tones were hard and raucous became mellowed to a husky softness. Faces whose wont it was to exhibit a staid and solemn gravity became subject to innumerable puckering and twitchings, as if the little bundles of nerves and muscles which form the controlling gear of facial expression, had somehow got out of order and were pulling and tugging at cross-purposes; until after repeated attempts, having succeeded in hauling the reluctant features into the required posture, they kept them fixed at a "broad grin" as being the best result obtainable under the circumstances.
Hearts were surreptitiously stealing out of their unguarded hiding places on to unaccustomed sleeves, as if under the gracious influence of the time they were wishful to be out yet half ashamed to be seen. People seemed to have tacitly agreed to temporarily put aside the hard asperities of life; to proclaim an armistice in the daily warfare of existence, and descend for a time to the simplicity and kindliness of childhood. Would that such influences were more permanent!

* * * * *

Away from the joyous crowd—away from the din and the stir of the streets, in one of the quiet suburbs of the city, stands the little two-roomed cottage tenanted by Mrs. Spencer. Here, indeed, we see no signs of mirth, no indication of seasonable festivities; for the humble tenement is the house of mourning, and pale-faced Grief holds her court within its walls. It is ever so. Our gayest scenes have aye a background of sorrow; the world's gladdest symphonies are constantly marred by the dolorous notes of woe.

The bright, sanguine expression that used to form the peculiar charm of Jeanie's face has, ever since Ethel's death, given place to a settled melancholy. And now redoubled sorrow sits at the mother's heart; for death has a second time entered her dwelling, and the form of her other child—her blithesome, wee Bobbie—lies there stretched on the bed waiting for the coffin that is to come on the morrow. But yesternight he was alive, and though the doctor gravely shook his head, she had fondly hoped the sickness would pass. And then, when all hope was dispelled, and she could no longer strive against the conviction that his life was forfeit to the fell disease, she had earnestly prayed that God would spare him until his father came home, that Alick might kiss his darling before he died. Faithful through the watches of the night she had kept her post by the bedside, lovingly attending to the sufferer, and not daring to take rest for herself lest while she slept the end should come.
"Mother," he asked, in the hoarse whisper by which alone he could now express his wants, "has father come home yet?"

"No, dear, but he'll soon be here, before Christmas, I hope—and you know it is almost Christmas now, and he'll bring such a nice lot of presents for Bobbie."

"Will he bring me a tricycle, mother? You know he promised to get me one"—referring with childish tenacity of memory to a promise he had extracted from his father to procure him one of the toy tricycles just then in vogue.

"Yes, darling, only Bobbie must not tire himself talking, but must try to sleep so that he may get well soon and be able to run and meet father when he comes."

Towards morning, starting up from his fitful slumbers, "Oh, mother," he said, "I'm so glad that father has come—but where has he gone? I don't see him now."

"Bobbie was only dreaming; father hasn't come yet, dear."

"O yes he has, and he stood just where you are, mother, and he kissed me, and he lifted Ethel in his arms and she kissed me too. An' oh, mother, I'm—so—glad!" Then he closed his eyes, and a sweet angelic smile flickered over his wan features, while his mother, her tears dropping on the pillow, watched him with yearning solicitude. Soon the crisis came; a short struggle as if in pain, a faint gasp, a little choking sob, a sudden stretching of the limbs, then—absolute rest. In the dread stillness that followed, Jeanie, her heart riven within her, realised that she was childless.

And now as she sits by her cheerless hearth, a few sympathising neighbours around her, she exhibits none of the usual parade of woe; but rather that sad tranquillity of mien which speaks of sorrow repressed; no less real, and infinitely more touching, than the wildest abandonment of grief. Knowing the keenness of her anguish, her neighbours say but little. They instinctively feel the
uselessness of mere words, so mutely express by their silent presence their sympathy with the bereaved mother. The deepest sorrow ever loves the deepest silence. It is wholly inarticulate. Human language can never adequately express it. And even as it is incommunicable from within, so is it impenetrable from without. The heart, indeed, knows its own bitterness, but round it is a great void through which even the most consolatory utterances are powerless to pass. In the first onset of intense grief, the tenderest phrases have a hollow, meaningless sound, and can carry no comfort to the stricken spirit. Not until the healing influences of time have dulled the pain, and rounded the raw edges of the wound, can words portray the feelings, or, however kindly meant, be of any service to assuage the pangs of the afflicted heart. The grand old seer of the ancient days saw deep down into human nature when he penned the words—"So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

In the evening the clergyman called. He was a valued friend of the family, and the solace he sought to convey to this distressed member of his flock was rendered in no perfunctory spirit. On their arrival in the Colony, Alick and Jeanie had placed themselves under his pastoral care, and he having come to know them intimately, held them in that high respect which sterling character, however humbly circumstanced, everywhere receives from the wise and good. Observing Jeanie’s wan appearance, he wisely insisted on her partaking of some refreshment; and in a few kindly remarks addressed to all in the room, urged the necessity that lies upon us all at all times to take due care of our health, not only that we may be the better able to sustain affliction, but that we may thereby maintain ourselves in a fit condition worthily to perform whatever duties lie to our hand.

Having in the morning charged himself with the necessary preparations respecting the funeral, he now
intimated that these were complete. He further mentioned, with the hope of in some measure diverting Jeanie’s thoughts from the contemplation of her bereavement, that he had that day seen the manager of the boot-factory in which Mr. Spencer had been engaged, and he had assured him that on Alick’s arrival home—an event that was now daily expected—there was a certainty of his obtaining employment. Jeanie, in a tremulous voice, essayed to thank him for his kindly interest on their behalf; but, breaking off—“Ah, me,” she said, “Alick’ll be a sad, sad man when he comes home and finds his darlings gone! He was so fond of them, and they loved him so!” Here her rising sobs prevented further utterance; and the minister himself, deeply affected, lifted up his voice in prayer. Using much of the impressive Scriptural diction which when the heart is in a fit state to receive it, is more than all other forms of speech fitted to convey balm to the wounded spirit, he prayed that God would sustain his suffering servant under the heavy burden which in His inscrutable wisdom He had been pleased to lay upon her; that for both parents, the mother now present, and the absent father, as yet unaware of the death of his boy, this sore trial might be made to work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The company had just resumed their seats on the conclusion of the prayer, when there was the sound of footsteps outside, followed immediately by a sharp knock at the door. It was the postman with a bulky registered letter for Mrs. Spencer. Seeing by the post-mark that the letter was from the “Coast,” she nervously opened the envelope and spread its contents on the table. There was, to her astonishment, a parcel of bank-notes, but strange to say, no other enclosure! She examined the envelope again, but no; it was quite empty. Then she vainly searched among the notes; it was evident that no letter had been sent. But stay; what is this? A small piece of paper, apparently a clipping from some newspaper. This she mechanically lifted and glanced over, and as she read a quiver passed
over her countenance—"Merciful God!" she moaned, and fell helpless on the floor! Tenderly they carried her into the other room, and while some of the women employed such simple remedies as they knew in order to restore her to consciousness, the clergyman, fearing that in her exhausted condition the swoon might be followed by serious consequences, despatched a messenger for his own medical attendant. She had partially recovered when the doctor arrived, and he having administered an opiate, reassured the minds of those present by stating his opinion that she only required rest, and that after a sound sleep she would probably be all right.

Desirous of finding a clue to the cause of the severe shock which the poor woman had obviously received, the clergyman now lifted from the floor the piece of paper which had fallen from her nerveless fingers, and perused it with the deepest concern. It was a cutting from a Hokitika paper, and contained the following paragraph which he now read aloud to the company:—"Found Drowned.—We regret to have to record another case of drowning in the Teremakau. Two days ago a party of prospectors fossicking along the South bank of the river came upon the remains of a man lying on a shingle-spit close to the water's edge. The body, which was much swollen and disfigured having evidently been in the water for some days, appeared to be that of a digger in the prime of life. Close by, and still attached to the corpse by means of a leather strap, lay a small swag which on being searched was found to contain some letters, from which it appears that the deceased was named Alexander Spencer, and that he was a married man belonging to Christchurch. There was also found a sum of money—£27 in bank-notes—which will, of course, be forwarded to the widow. From the fact that there was still retained in the grasp of the dead man a length of broken sapling, it is surmised that the deceased had been accompanied by one or more mates, and that the party must have perished in an attempt to cross the river during the late fresh."
All in the room were deeply affected by the sad tidings. “God pity the poor soul in her sore distress,” said one of the women, her voice broken by emotion; and the words found an echo in every heart.

Next morning the doctor again visited his patient. He found that as far as physical strength was concerned she had made satisfactory progress, but alas! her mental condition was beyond the reach of medicine. Her mind enfeebled by rapidly accumulating misfortune, had been unable to withstand the shock of the last and severest blow of all—the sudden announcement of her husband’s death. The vacant eye, the wandering, far-away expression, the lack of all intelligent appreciation of her surroundings, made it abundantly plain that the lamp of reason was utterly extinguished!

She was possessed of a singular delusion, traceable doubtless to the long buffetings of fortune to which she had been subjected. She imagined that she owed a great deal of money; that the landlord was suing for his rent; the butcher and baker, with a host of other creditors, clamouring for a settlement of their accounts. Weighing her heavily down was this great load of debt which she was quite unable to pay, and in satisfaction of which the wrathful creditors had taken her husband and children and sold them into slavery! Still there was hope; one little ray of light seemed to penetrate the gloom. She would work hard; she would earn money; she would pay everybody; and though it might take years to accomplish it, she would yet redeem her loved ones from bondage.

Then a spasm of doubt would seize her. Would her creditors be content simply with the payment of their bills? Might they not also demand interest? Pathetically she would question those about her as to the likelihood of this contingency; and when they, falling in with her humour, would assure her that only the amount of their accounts would be asked for, that some of her creditors might even be good enough to forego a portion of their
just demands, her fears would vanish, and she would hope-
fully assert her ability ultimately to pay all that she owed.
Then folding her apron carefully across her knee, and
plying her fingers nimbly as if in the act of sewing, she
would pursue her fruitless task with such assiduity, such
earnestness, such pitiful hurry, as if time was pressing
and there was so much to be done, that oftentimes the
unbidden tears would start in the eyes of the beholders.

But let us hasten over the painful scene. Suffice it to
say, that shortly after kindly hands had laid wee Bobbie
in the cemetery; poor Jeanie, widowed, childless, and now
hopelessly insane, was conveyed to *Sunnyside, there to
wear out the remainder of her days in merciful oblivion of
the past.

Reve Wardon.

*An asylum for the insane.
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