AN INTRODUCTION

to

T.W. Lavender's

"YOUNG BILL'S HAPPY DAYS"
REMINISCENCES OF RURAL AUSTRALIA
1910-1915

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Submitted for the Master of Arts degree, in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, the Australian National University, July 1984. Resubmitted, March 1986.
The introduction, editing and annotation contained herein is all my own work. All sources used have been acknowledged.
GUIDE TO CHANGES

A guide to changes made to the Introduction and text in view of recommendations made by examiners when this thesis was first submitted.

1. Typing errors have been corrected.

2. Chapter One ("Introduction") of introduction contains:
   a) Comment on Lavender's sources and their influence, (pp.3-4).
   b) Comment on the text's validity as history, (pp.4-5).
   c) More discussion of the comparable texts, including an examination of different perspectives on Aborigines of Facey on the one hand, and Lavender and Broughton on the other, (pp.5-8).
   d) A clearer explanation of the shape of the historical background chapters, (pp.10-11).

3. Chapter Three (New South Wales and Queensland) of introduction has been rearranged and abbreviated, and contains fewer statistics.

4. Synoptic introductions have been added to chapters four and five of the introduction, (pp.55-64).

5. Chapter Five (The Northern Territory) contains more discussion of the response of Territorians to the outbreak of World War One, in the context of their attitude to matters beyond the Territory in general, (pp.92-94).

6. References have been added throughout the introductory chapters, establishing their relevance to the text.

7. There are about forty percent more footnotes in the text, providing cross-references with the Introduction, and identifying more of Lavender's sources.
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Insights into the history and character of the Lavenders were gained through conversations with Mrs Marion Lavender, Mrs Gloria Woodley, and Esther Corsellis. They also provided photographs.

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Dee Waite typed the greater part of "Young Bill's Happy Days", helped proof-read the thing, and played tunes with me in between times.
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Photographs were obtained from the Department of History, James Cook University of North Queensland, Mr J. Petrofski of Gumlul, Queensland, the Australian National Library, and the Australian Archives, Darwin. Maps were drawn by Val Lyon of the Geography Department, Faculty of Arts, A.N.U.

Finally, thanks to Shirley Pradley and Debbie Mathews of the History Department for their help.
Map 1. Australia: Lavender's course, 1910-1915.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1963 and 1964 Tasman Lavender, then about seventy, spent as much time as his fragile health would allow, writing the story of his life between 1910 and 1915. Several times each week he caught the train from Gordon on Sydney’s North Shore into the city, to work at the Mitchell Library. There he researched the history of some of the places he had worked at or travelled through in those early years. He added the fruits of this research to his recollections.

He entitled his reminiscences "Young Bill’s Happy Days". The document is about 150,000 words long. While he was able, Lavender typed his story. When he was not, due to cataracts, he wrote in longhand, from which his daughter typed. A few pages in his own handwriting remain.¹

Lavender produced two copies, giving one to each of his children with a note indicating that he had written the document solely to be passed down to his descendants. However, a pseudonym (W.T. Nicholls) on the spine of a folder containing part of the typescript, and also in the text (p.384), suggests that he at least toyed with the idea of

¹See examples of typed and handwritten text pp.9a and 9b. The edited version of the typed text is on pp.261-62. The handwritten example corresponds to p.122 of the edited text (referred to in footnotes as YBHD). However, the edited version was based on a typed copy of the same passage, which differs very slightly from the handwritten copy.
publication. But he never followed it up, and for over twenty years after his death in 1969, the typescripts remained with his immediate family.

Tas Lavender was my great-uncle - my mother's father's elder brother. I heard about "uncle Tas' writing" in 1980, and first saw a copy of "Young Bill's Happy Days" the following year. Its historical worth was immediately apparent. Several members of the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, A.N.U., shared that view, and suggested that it should be made available to a wider public. A duplicate of the original typescript has been lodged with the Manuscripts and Rare Books section of the Australian National Library.

The document relates, in the third person, how Lavender left his parents' home in Sydney's western suburbs at the age of sixteen, and worked and travelled over central-western and north-western New South Wales, south and central-western Queensland, northern coastal Queensland, and the Top End of the Northern Territory, until he was enticed back to Sydney by the prospect of enlisting in the First A.I.F.

In the course of his story, Lavender presents a very detailed account of rural life, particularly of travel, work and leisure, spiced with descriptions of landscape, with some history, and with many anecdotes. He was well aware of the changing face of bush life, and assumed his readers would have little knowledge of the era in question:

...how different their lives and environment will be in comparison to that of their ancestors in my age.

Much attention is devoted to descriptions of travel. We learn what a

\[2\text{Note to his children preceding YBHD.}\]
shearer's bike looked like, how many miles constituted a good day's travelling by foot, what the company was like on a small coastal steamer, and of the insouciant progress of a train across western Queensland. Work experiences are described in considerable detail: the daily routine, and the functions of each member of a team, but just as much care is given to describing the recreational pursuits of bush workers: the gambling, pig-hunting, fighting, drinking, yarn-spinning, and so on. In the Northern Territory section in particular, there is also some account of white settlement in the areas through which Lavender passed.

Throughout the manuscript Lavender writes in very specific detail of conversations, day to day events, and stories he heard. Since he wrote some fifty years after his experiences, and there is no evidence that he kept a journal, the historian must occasionally be suspicious of the text's veracity. In order to clarify the manuscript's status, I have identified the several influences that bore upon its shape. In writing on the Northern Territory, Lavender clearly draws on a number of sources, paraphrasing anecdotes (which he had probably heard at first hand in the Territory fifty years before). He acknowledges some of these sources himself. Where he has not, I have attempted to identify them, and have noted these in the text. The style of most of these works is unashamedly romantic. Tom Ronan's biography of his father (a one-time Northern Territory station manager) is subtitled "An Essay in Ancestor Worship". Gordon Buchanan writes of his father in the same vein. "Bluey", we are told, "suffered hardships and faced dangers with fortitude and courage, carrying the flag of Empire." Lavender's most common reference was Ernestine Hill's The Territory, which aggrandises

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3YEHD, pp.33, 49, 200-01, 203-06.
the Top End and its inhabitants. For her, poddy-dodger Jim Campbell was:

...one of the roving brotherhood of the lost who galloped away from the police to the conquest of a continent. His life was high adventure and his death Greek tragedy. Even in the mad mosaic of human life in the Territory, it stands out in a bas-relief unique.

If this literature influenced him at all, it would have been to remind him of incidents and characters, and perhaps given him licence to romanticise their lives and his. But Lavender's narrative is quite sober by comparison.\(^4\)

In the second chapter I deal with the aspects of Lavender's life and background which shaped his particular perspective. These help to explain his attitudes to the bush, the Empire, drinking, the working class, and social and economic mobility, as displayed in the manuscript.

The text tells us about Lavender as a young man, as an old man and, with qualifications, about Australia before the First World War. The question of whether conversations and the sequence of daily events are reported accurately is unanswerable, and irrelevant to the memoir's historical worth. Harold Lewis's *Crow On A Barbed Wire Fence* (discussed below) is a more overtly literary and specific work, but is no less valuable to the historian who takes into account the author's perspective and intent. What is important is the impression that accumulates of the nature of work, travel and leisure; of relations

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between individuals, between classes, and between races. The impression gained from Young Bill’s Happy Days is largely consistent with the body of work relating to the Australian rural history in this period.

Part of this consists of the published reminiscences of youthful wanderings in rural Australia at about the same time. "Duke" Tritton left Sydney in 1905 at the age of nineteen with his friend "Dutchie" Bishop, and for "nearly four years" they worked around north-western New South Wales, from Mudgee to Walgett, droving, shearing, burr-cutting, fencing, rabbiting and gold-mining. They covered much of the country that Lavender was to cross in 1911-12. Tritton’s account of that experience, Time Means Tucker, was published in 1959. Like Lavender, he gives much detail of work experiences. His description of the working environment in shearing sheds provides an interesting contrast with Lavender’s. Lavender dismisses confrontations between workers and management as "bluff" and "nonsense", whereas Tritton depicts shearers and shed hands as being part of a continuing struggle for fairer wages and conditions. This can be attributed to Tritton's working class background (as compared with Lavender’s petty bourgeois roots), and to the fact that he was in the west very soon after the strikes of 1891-1902. "There was still a lot of bitterness between the owners and the shearers over the strike of 1902." Lavender, on the other hand, was there in the more settled and prosperous times.

Another example of the genre is Harold Lewis' Crow On A Barbed Wire Fence, first published in 1973. The son of a Methodist lay preacher,

5YHBD, p.59.

Lewis came to Australia from London in 1910 at the age of sixteen, in search of work on "a farm". He had to be content with casual pastoral work from Narrabri to Muttaburra, and employment in the sugar mills on the Queensland coast. He left Australia in July 1914. Lewis' book has more pretensions to literary merit then the other works in this class: it is more explicitly about coming to terms with the Australian bush character from the point of view of an Englishman, and with growing up. However, it also contains valuable information about the mechanics and relations of rural work.7

A.B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life* is a spare, literal account of the author's life with particular emphasis on the period between 1899 and 1914 when, from the age of five, he lived and worked on the farm belt east of Perth, drove cattle from the north-west to Geraldton, worked as a navvy on the railway line between Wickepin and Merredin, and toured with a boxing troupe. The description of the droving trip in particular is a useful adjunct to "Young Bill's Happy Days". Facey was never on the frontier of settlement though, as Lavender had been in the Top End. In the Pilbra the conspicuously violent phase of race conflict had passed. Hence, whereas Lavender depicts relations between blacks and whites as being characterised by suspicion and potential and actual violence, Facey found, at first glance at least, openness and cooperation. As his droving mate put it to him:

"[The Aborigines are] all friendly. Don't take any notice of the tales you hear. Those things did really happen but many

years ago. It's different now. 8

G.W. Broughton's experience was much closer to Lavender's in this respect. By 1908 he had grown tired of the junior bank clerk's life in Sydney, Maitland and Scone, so acquired a position on F.J. Durack's station, Lissadel, in the east Kimberleys. He was also nineteen. He remained there for two seasons before going to China. After a distinguished career as an engineer, Broughton also wrote an account of his youth, of which almost half is devoted to his time in north Australia. It reveals the routine of station life, in the dry and in the wet, and also deals with relations between owners, managers and stockmen, and between blacks and whites. Like Lavender, he admits to being taken aback by the way whites treated Aborigines. In this country, as on the Victoria River, whites were constantly wary, and maintained their position forcefully:

"... we white men have to be boss in this country or get out." 9

Violence erupted occasionally, with loss of life on both sides. And amongst the whites there was a "bush masonry" which bound them together, and protected them from the judgement of outsiders, just as Lavender would find over the border in the Northern Territory a few years later.

Finally, Carl Warburton's Buffaloes (1934) can be compared with parts of Lavender's account. Warburton was born at Millthorpe in central-western New South Wales in about 1894, and after returning from


war service in France, went to the Northern Territory with a mate to make his fortune as a buffalo shooter on the Alligator Rivers. They had great plans for a future in the business, but worked in the North for only one full dry season before alternative attractions took them elsewhere. Warburton's book on his time in the Territory is the most extensive account of Northern Territory buffalo shooting to be found, containing details of the logistics of organising a shooters’ camp, and the relationship between white shooters and their Aboriginal entourage.10

"Young Bill’s Happy Days" ranks with each of these works as a guide to the nature of work and mores in Australian rural society between 1900 and 1920. Only Facey rivals it for breadth of experience and of country traversed.

Perhaps the best known work concerning Australian rural history is Russel Ward’s The Australian Legend, in which he argues that the image that has come to be attached to Australian males had a basis in the way people lived in rural society up until the First World War.11 The image is of the carefree bushman, working when he has to, but devoting much of his time to gambling and drinking. He is independent, but above all, "a good mate".

The thesis has been criticised on the grounds that the legend was the product of romanticising city-dwellers who were reacting against


conditions in Sydney and Melbourne, or in Britain, and had less to do with the reality of nineteenth century rural Australia than Ward claimed. One must be careful in drawing "Young Bill's Happy Days" into the debate, since it is not only a chronicle of events between 1910 and 1915, but also a product of the nineteen sixties. Lavender would have been aware of the legendary image of the archetypal bushman by that time, and this may have coloured his writing. Bearing this in mind, the people Lavender describes often bear a closer resemblance to Ward's "nomad tribe" than to his own expectations, giving credence to Ward, and also suggesting that another legend existed in 1910. Lavender makes much of "mateship", both amongst workers generally, and between two people. His writing suggests several reasons why it became an institution. The logistics of bush work, particularly in the days before mechanisation, dictated that in most cases, men were required to work as a team of at least two. In the remoter regions, where there was still the risk of attack by Aborigines, whites were even more dependent upon one another. In that environment, mateship was an obligation. For "Young Bill", and perhaps for others, mates were also necessary simply to ward off loneliness. There are several references to isolation in the bush as being one of its most frightening aspects. Lavender does not represent relationships in the bush between whites as always being cordial. For example, he and his mate Harry Jones, became

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13See Chapter 2 for an analysis of the preconceptions Lavender took with him in 1910.

14YBD, p.465.
less than enchanted with the company on a droving trip across the Northern Territory.

From the moment he meets a swagman near Springwood who is "suffering a binge recovery", he finds that alcohol plays a large part in the lives of a great many bushmen. It is a side of bush life that he never fully accepts. In one instance his associates' drinking causes him to leave the district in search of new work and more sober mates.

Some of his comments concerning Aborigines grate, particularly in these days of flaunted national guilt, but Lavender is never reconciled to the way whites are expected to treat blacks in the North, and is not impressed by those who brag of their inhumanity. Finally, "Young Fill" was inclined to be more deferential towards "bosses" than the general run of "rough bushmen".\(^1\) The hard drinking, racism, and lack of respect for those in authority described by Lavender had been a part of his expectations, and lend weight to Ward's thesis.

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Having examined Lavender's life and times in chapter two, I go on, in three subsequent chapters, to deal with the areas in which Lavender worked: New South Wales and pastoral Queensland, coastal Queensland, and the Top End of the Northern Territory. They place his experience in a historical context: to show how land, capital and labour came to be combined in those areas in the years immediately preceding his journey. His experience of these areas was not comprehensive, so in sketching in the context, I have occasionally dealt with aspects which are not directly relevant to the text. For example, Lavender passed quickly

\(^1\)For example, see YEHD, p.174.
through the agricultural areas of New South Wales, but I have described that section of the rural economy in order to present a balanced view, and to illustrate his silences. Likewise, the mining sector formed a significant part of the Northern Territory economy, so I have given it space, even though had no direct involvement with it and only refers to it in passing. In these chapters I also discuss various issues raised by the manuscript, such as Lavender’s treatment of unionism, and the mentality of European society in the Northern Territory in 1914.

Footnotes in the text indicate its relevance to particular questions and issues. They also provide cross-referencing with the introduction, and additional information on stations (area, stock, owners), individuals and incidents that are referred to. References are given to other accounts which bear upon Lavender’s version of experiences and events. Where he has drawn on secondary sources, they are identified. Finally, any factual corrections that need to be made appear in notes.

My aim in editing the text has been to clarify it for the reader. Since he lacked a full formal education, Lavender’s spelling and punctuation were often faulty. However, it is not always possible to tell which errors were genuine spelling mistakes, and which were typing errors made either by Lavender, or by his daughter, who typed some (unidentified) sections of it. Therefore, there seems little value in preserving these mistakes, and to detail all changes in faulty spelling and punctuation would produce an enormous apparatus. Consequently, these errors have been silently edited out, except where there has been some reason to indicate where and how this has been done.
scrambled up with the bewildered and excited crew their firearms and in seconds the bewildered and excited crew members were putting up a tremendous fusilade into the scrub all round the boat; this continued for a few rounds, when Young Bill realised Joe was yelling and gesticulating for the company 'stop firing'- 'what the hells up with everyone, what yes shooting at'? The firing suddenly stoppe and Joe gave a high pitched nervous laugh and asked, 'is anybody hurt?', and on the company realising nobody was hurt, and George remarking 'but were all scared', Joe started to laugh heartedly: then every body was laughing and accusing everyone else of panicking over nothing at all. 'Dont know so much about that' said Joe, picking up the big hunting boomerang, 'if this had hit anybody it just would just about cut 'em in half: 'probably only some silly b---- of a no. one larraken of a station boy having a bit of a lark' (and how true does guess proved to be!); 'all the same keep a sharp look out for a while, there may be more to come'. But nothing at all happen.

At sparrow chirp that morning when the last of the flying foxes were passing over making for the days camp, a canoe load of abos gingerly approached displaying fish, and very closely watched by the suspicious 'all ready' whites. ensued a long yabber ref the boomerang incident. The weapon was instantly recognised, belonged to a myall back at the camp. It appeared one 'py-thon' (pythen— large variety of snake), a number one larraken Auvergne station boy who had been quarrelling and making mischief in the camp, had cleared out the night before after stealing spears and a boomerang etc. from the myalls. It was surmised he was on his way back to the station and the protection of the white bosses, and a tracking party were already on his scent: being a 'civilised' station boy, he would travel by night, sufficiently unafraid of the evil spirits. They, the abos, amidst much tongue clicking and head nodding were all agreed that py-thon was one much big b----', and they would catch up with him some day.
Example of handwritten text.
Chapter 2

BIOGRAPHY

What is romance? ... It's a flash of the past or the future. No man finds what he went out as a boy to look for. It's always over the next rise till it's back at a waterhole forty years behind.¹

I have only the vaguest impression of my great-uncle Tas, gained on a family visit to his home in suburban Gordon in about 1968. He was a very frail old man in a dark suit. That is all. But the impression is probably accurate, as far as it goes. For the last fifteen years of his life, encompassing the period in which "Young Bill's Happy Days" was written, he suffered from Paget's disease, a condition resulting in the weakening and deformity of the bones. He was a far cry from the "remarkably strong and hardy, and of course very healthy" youth who had taken to the bush in 1910.²

He was born at Ashfield in Sydney on 22 August 1894 and christened William Tasman Nicholls. Except for the four and a half years covered by these reminiscences, he was known throughout his life as Tasman, Tas or Tassie.

¹Hill, The Territory, p.440.

²YEHD, p.1.
His mother Esther, nee Shulz, was born in Berlin in 1866. She emigrated to New Zealand with her mother who is believed to have died there of consumption. Esther was working as a waitress in Sydney when she met her future husband, George William Lavender.

In 1884 Tasman's grandfather, George Bunn Lavender, a carpenter and son of a miner, had arrived in Sydney from Yorkshire as an assisted immigrant, bringing with him a wife and four children. He died three years later, leaving his wife Elizabeth to raise the family. Her achievements stamp her as a woman of considerable energy. From 1886 she offered her services as a "Professional Nurse and Accoucheuse" from premises in Moore Park, and later Paddington. She also spent some time on the Western Australian goldfields as a nurse.

The eldest of her children to come to Australia was George William, father of Tasman. He is believed to have left school at the age of ten, but nothing more is known of his life before he took up the position of advertising agent with the Hobart Mercury and Tasmanian Mail in 1894, some time after his marriage. By 1899 he and his family were back in Sydney. In 1906 he became the advertising manager and a founding director of The Farmer and Settler, the official newspaper of the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales. He began publishing his own trade newspaper in 1918 when the first edition of Poultry appeared. He continued to promote the Australian poultry industry for the rest of his life, remaining governing director of

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3 Except where otherwise indicated, information concerning the Lavender family has been obtained through conversations with Ann Lavender, Marion Lavender, Esther Corsellis, Marjorie Ellison and Gloria Woodley.

4 Sydney Morning Herald, 11/3/1905, p.3c; cutting from Poultry, c.October, 1939.

In 1910 the Lavenders were living in a two-storey house on a "property" at Wentworthville, west of Sydney. They had domestic help. George Lavender travelled by sulky each morning to Parramatta where he caught the train for his work in the city. His portrait belies his origins as a carpenter's son, but testifies to his aspirations. It speaks of absolute bourgeois respectability. One can well imagine that, in later years, he was to many the archetypal "old English gentleman". Though he could "turn on" the Yorkshire dialect, he (and his wife) normally spoke with a very correct, round Oxford accent. His written expression was in the grand style: convoluted, and perhaps pretentious, even by the standards of his day.

The Lavender children were groomed to fill positions in society commensurate with those for which their parents had striven. Their daughter, Nina, played the organ for the local Church of England, and later married an engineer in the Dutch East Indies. The boys were "church attendants" and also Boy Scouts. Tasman was a member of his school Junior Cadet unit, and was destined for The Kings School, Parramatta, before he took matters into his own hands. His brothers Cyril and Roy attended the Sydney Grammar School where they were members of the Senior Cadet Corps. Cyril became a lieutenant in the Commonwealth Military Forces and Roy a trumpeter with the New South

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5For a view of life in Sydney's outer suburbs at about this time, see Eugenie (Delerue) McNeil, A Bunyip Close Behind Me. Recollections of the Nineties by ..., retold by her daughter Eugenie (McNeil) Crawford, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1982).
Wales Lancers, before both enlisted in the A.I.F. in 1914-15. The youngest boy, Eric, was enrolled at the Wagga Agricultural College.

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Tas Lavender was born into a period in which there was a growing awareness amongst Australian Britons of Imperial ties, reinforced by a preoccupation with a White Australia and the perceived threat of invasion from Asia. The heroes of the time - the ideal archetypes - were those who could defend the Empire and racial purity: the strong, vigorous, pure, selfless Muscular Christians. Youth, wholesomeness and physicality were revered. Britain's favourite soldier, Lord Wolseley, could write in his memoirs of war as "the greatest purifier to the race or nation that had reached the verge of over-refinement, of excessive civilization."

Conquering races may be inferior as poets, artists and writers to those they subdue, but the latter would not have been subdued had they retained the manly virtues that made their forebears great.

The school cadet movement had been initiated by the New South Wales government by 1890 in order to harness youthful exhuberance for the

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6 Young Australia, 1/12/15, p.8; T.W.L.'s notes on war service.


cause. By 1909, in Australia as a whole, the movement was training over thirty-two thousand cadets between the ages of twelve and nineteen. In that year training became compulsory for youths between twelve and twenty years of age (though there were some grounds for exemption) and in 1911 males between twenty and twenty-five were included. Training consisted of "military drill, rifle-shooting and military exercises."\(^{10}\)

On Empire Day, 1909, the *Sydney Morning Herald* pronounced:

> We look to the cadet of to-day not merely as the soldier of to-morrow, but as the destined creator of the fuller Imperial sentiment that is to be.

The scouts were also promising:

> The boy scout movement, with its pledge of life-long loyalty to the King, promises as great success as anything we have.\(^{11}\)

Lieutenant-General R.S.S. Baden-Powell established the movement in Britain in 1908 and it quickly spread to other parts of the Empire and beyond. General training in bushcraft was combined with a moral code emphasising obedience, loyalty, selflessness, and above all, patriotism:

> "Country first, self second", should be your motto ...

If you take up Scouting in that spirit, you will be doing something; take it up ... because by doing so you will be fitting yourself to help your country. Then you will have in you the true spirit of patriotism, which every British boy ought

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\(^{11}\) 24/5/1909, p.6.
to have if he is worth his salt.\textsuperscript{12}

By the turn of the century, an explicit link had been made between the bush as an environment where empire-builders were bred and tested and the military interests of that empire. When the British army was confronted with the irregular fighting methods of the Boers in South Africa, the colonies were encouraged to send contingents of men, not necessarily trained in the militia, but competent at riding, scouting and shooting. The Australian colonies looked to the country for such men, and called them the Imperial Bushmen contingents. Such was the status of these men that when the fifth contingent was being put together, recruiting officers in Sydney were besieged by city-dwellers trying to pass themselves off as bushmen.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} characterised the Bushmen as possessors of "all the mobility of the Boers, all their endurance, their knowledge of rough life, and their courage."\textsuperscript{14} The link between the bush experience and war was perpetuated by Charles Bean after the First World War:

\begin{quotation}
Fire, floods, and even the concentration of sheep for shearing, or the long journeys in droving bullocks down the great stock-routes across the 'back country', offer many conditions similar to those of a military expedition. The Australian [that is, the one with bush experience] was half a
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{12}Lord Faden-Powell, \textit{Baden-Powell's Scouting For Boys}, (C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., London, 1952; first published 1908), pp.39-40. See also Lewis, \textit{Our War}, p.89: "... we had thought that nothing could be more patriotic than a Boy Scout."


\textsuperscript{14}28/2/1900. Quoted in Field, \textit{The Forgotten War}, p.135.
soldier before the war.\textsuperscript{15}

Much of the literature of the period represented rural settlement as a war-like confrontation between men and the environment: "In the forefront of the battle where the men who fight are Men."\textsuperscript{16} People of the outback were depicted as working selflessly for the good of the nation or even the Empire, prepping the way for others, and always as purer beings than those who lived "the life of folly and wine" in the cities.\textsuperscript{17}

Beside the portrait of the bushman as a stoic, soldier-like hero, there was another perhaps even more attuned to the imagination of adventurous youth. He was young, strong and care-free, often chivalrous, expert in the skills required for his calling, particularly riding. He was at his best when plunging down-hill or leaping across ravines on his favourite steed. The most famous example, of course, was "Banjo" Paterson's "Man From Snowy River". The collection containing that poem, published in 1895, was Australia's most popular book until 1914.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17}Ogilvie, "Beyond The Barrier", Fair Girls and Gray Horses, p.213.

The bushranger was a popular variant of this ideal, since he was not bound by the restraints of lawful behaviour. The nascent Australian film industry was quick to develop a special genre. Bushranging films were the most numerous single type of those produced between 1906 (when the industry began) and 1912, when the New South Wales Police Department placed a ban on them because of the films' supposed detrimental influence on public morality.\(^{19}\)

Popular writers and publishers had been exploiting the public interest in the bygone age of bushranging for some time. Alfred Cecil Rowlandson became sole proprietor of the N.S.W. Bookstall Company in 1897 and set about producing cheap, illustrated books that would appeal to the general public. His formula was to accept anything "Australian, and readable, and entertaining - with the incidents dramatically presented and the people made likeable - and paying reasonable respect to English grammar ..."\(^{20}\) Two of his books were about the adventures of young men in the company of bushrangers: *Three Years With Thunderbolt* and *John Vane, Bushranger*.\(^{21}\) They have much in common with Rolf Boldrewood's

\(^{19}\) Of the sixty films listed by Pike and Cooper as being made between 1906 and 1911 inclusive, fourteen dealt with bushrangers directly, and another three involved them incidentally. Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977, A Guide to Feature Film Production*, (Oxford University Press in association with The Australian Film Institute, Melbourne, 1980), p.4. Graeme Davison's *The Rise and Fall Of Marvellous Melbourne*, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1978) contains an analysis of the romanticisation of the bush in the nineties, in which he stresses the cities' growth and the removal of their inhabitants from the rural experience as factors, pp.251-54.

\(^{20}\) R. Wynn *et. al.*, *The Late Alfred Cecil Rowlandson, Pioneer Publisher of Australian Novels*, (n.p., Sydney, 1922), p.9.

Robbery Under Arms, and these are three books which we know Lavender read before he went bush or in the very early stages of his journey. Like "Young Bill's Happy Days", they were written from a perspective of experience about a period of innocence. An examination of these works might reveal something of the way he viewed the bush when he first left Sydney in 1910, and of the form his own writing took fifty years later.

In Robbery Under Arms there is an emphasis on the physical prowess of most of the main characters that begs comparison with Lavender's numerous descriptions of himself as a young man. Jack Marston sketches his brother:

I don't think you could pick a young fellow anywhere in the countryside that was a patch on him for good looks and manliness, somewhere about six foot or a little over, as straight as a rush, with a bright blue eye that was always laughing and twinkling, and curly dark brown hair .... He could do anything and everything that a man could do. He was as strong as a young bull, and as active as a rock wallaby - and ride! Well, he sat on his horse as if he was born on one. With his broad shoulders and upright easy seat he was a regular picture on a good horse.22

It is no wonder that Lavender was proud to be offered the role of Jim Marston in a film as he passed over the Blue Mountains in 1910.23

The dominant aspect in all three books is their depiction of the romance of an age and a way of life that was then over forty years past: the daring robberies, close shaves with the hapless police, the camaraderie, and the reckless riding:


23YBHD, p.16-18.
As I took the old horse by the head and raced him down the mountain side, I felt I was living again and might call myself a man once more.⁴

Also, in Robbery Under Arms and Three Years With Thunderbolt at least, the bushrangers are presented as essentially noble men, discriminating in choosing their victims, only ever shooting in self-defence, and always chivalrous to the ladies.

Nevertheless, these stories of crime and rootless deredevilry ran against the prevailing grain of puritan morality. The authors were only able to solve this confrontation by turning a moral tale. As Boldrewood's book progresses there is an increasing emphasis on the narrator's feelings of guilt at having strayed from the straight and narrow. In contrast to the Marstons, there is the aptly named George Storefield, the dull but steady and honest farmer who makes good:

... what a blind, stupid, thundering idiot a fellow's been, to laugh at the steady working life that would have helped him up, bit by bit, to a good farm, a good wife, and innocent little kids about him, like that chap, George Storefield ... ²⁵

The other two books are written from the points of view of deeply repentant men, and contain firm injunctions to youth not to follow in their footsteps.²⁶

For Lavender too, as a product of the suburban middle-class, there was

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²⁴Boldrewood, Robbery Under Arms, p.161. See also pp.21, 71; Pratt, Three Years With Thunderbolt, pp.94-96; White, John Vane, Bushranger, p.187.


²⁶Pratt, Three Years With Thunderbolt, pp.vii, 122; White, John Vane, Bushranger, pp.229-30.
a feeling that his life as an itinerant worker, though not criminal, was not totally laudable. The puritan virtues of Thrift and Sobriety were often offended. He was never able to reconcile himself to the life of so many of his fellow workers, of hopeless resignation to an endless cycle of hard work and harder drinking. For him, the wandering life was just a phase, the prerogative of light-hearted youth. He looked forward to the day when he would save some money, buy some land, and "settle down". This objective is affirmed by the fact that when he enlisted in the A.I.F. at Liverpool on 22 April 1915, he gave his occupation as "farmer".

Lavender sailed for Egypt with the Sixth Reinforcements, First Battalion, in June 1915. He reached the Gallipoli Peninsula in time for the advance on Lone Pine in August, and remained until the evacuation in December 1915. In France he served at Pozieres and Fouquet Farm, and was wounded at Flers in November 1916. He spent at least nine months recovering in England, but was back in France when the Armistice was signed in November 1918. At some stage during the war he was appointed Lance-Corporal. He returned to Australia in May 1919 and was discharged the following July.

Lavender was not inclined to talk of the war in later years, but some of his impressions are preserved in scattered references in "Young

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27 YBHD, pp.74, 144.

28 Discharge papers, held by his family.

29 T.W. Lavender, "Some First World War Experiences; Still Remembered after half a century", (unpublished manuscript, c.1966, pp.110), passim; T.W.L., notes on war service; communication with Commonwealth Army Records Office.
Bill's Happy Days", and in an incomplete manuscript which he entitled "Some First World War Experiences; Still Remembered after half a century". The overwhelming impression of the war that emerges from these sources is one of disillusionment. Raised on the rhetoric of the likes of Wolseley, with their stories of individual heroism and decisive victories, he found only an uneven contest between machine-guns and heavy artillery on the one hand, and flesh and blood on the other. Enthusiasm soon gave way to just a forlorn determination to maintain some semblance of equanimity, and to stay alive, and a deep sadness for those who were killed. He describes being subjected to prolonged bombardment at Pozieres:

...Tas was quietly having a hell of a time, waiting for the salvo he imagined would claim him: It was just another very nervy and unpleasant experience .... Then the thought of it down though the years, & it would crop up now & again, the unpleasant memory could not altogether be dismissed .... when the shelling eventually ceased, or eased, it was difficult to realise for a while, but existence suddenly became heavenly ....

His battalion lost sixty per cent of its members in that engagement:
"... just about all of Tassie's old cobbers had been killed or wounded, and they were sadly missed sometimes (as at present) very badly."  

In later years he participated regularly in Anzac Day ceremonies, joined the Volunteer Defence Corps during the Second World War, read literature on the war, and in 1963 wrote a small article for Reveille, the New South Wales Returned Servicemen's League's monthly journal, in which he expressed the standard view that the A.I.F. had established Australia's

30 Lavender, "Some First World War Experiences", p.89.

worth as a nation in the eyes of the world, at Gallipoli in 1915.\textsuperscript{32}

After the war Lavender worked towards his ambition of settling permanently on the land. However, it was on a far more modest scale than the grazing run he had envisaged some eight years previously. He and two of his brothers took up country under the Soldier Settlement Scheme near the small town of Barellan in the Riverina, where they undertook mixed farming. In 1926 Tas Lavender moved by himself to another property near Yalgogran. His plans, though, were thwarted by the poor quality of the country, and later by falling wheat prices and poor seasons in 1930 and 1931. In August 1931 he married Ann Cameron of Barellan and they moved to Sydney. Following a short and unsuccessful attempt at breeding poultry at Kellyville west of Sydney, he worked in his father’s business carrying poultry farmers’ supplies, until 1944 when he and his wife bought and ran the "Green Forest" general store and tea room at St. Mary’s. They raised two children, Marjorie and Ian, and in 1963 retired to Gordon.

Much of his time in retirement was spent reading the many books he acquired on Australian history and folklore, and in writing his own reminiscences. He planned to return to the Northern Territory (at the age of seventy!) with his wife, and got water-cans, rifles and a camp-oven together for the venture. But Ann was less than keen, and in 1964 they settled for a bus tour through the Northern Territory and western Queensland. Tas Lavender died in October 1969 at the age of seventy-five.

By the time he came to write "Young Bill’s Happy Days" in 1963,

\textsuperscript{32}Reveille, Vol.36, no.9 (April 1963), p.10.
Lavender had seen a few dreams disappear. He had gone to the war expecting perhaps "the acme of noble excitement, the apogee of patriotic enthusiasm," but found only mud and carnage. He had worked for ten years to gain a foothold on the land only to see it washed away in the flood of 1931, and to be obliged to fall back on his father's support for the first time in over twenty years. But back beyond those experiences were his four-and-a-half years in the bush and, from a distance of fifty years at least, it seemed a time when vision and fact were one.

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33 Wolseley, The Story Of A Soldier's Life, p.159.
Chapter 3

NEW SOUTH WALES AND QUEENSLAND

When Lavender headed for the country in 1910 he had specific ideas about what he was after. He went looking for the pastoral country, and so quickly passed through the more settled districts of central-western New South Wales. Consequently, he saw only fleetingly the landscape over which considerable structural changes were taking place. His quest led him through north-western New South Wales and southern and central-western Queensland, and there too changes were occurring. The squatting era was past; output, methods, and holdings were different; the character of rural society in general was shifting. This chapter describes the changes that were taking place in both the pastoral and new mixed farming sectors.

Cattle laid the foundations of the old order. From the eighteen twenties settlers pushed out from the Hunter Valley on to the Liverpool Plains, moving along the Darling tributaries into north-western New South Wales. Settlement spread further north, and by the sixties there were squatters on the Thomson and Flinders Rivers in central-western Queensland, where Lavender was to work in 1912.¹

By the eighteen sixties Australian wool was greatly in demand in

¹YBHD, pp.139-99.
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Britain, and as the problems of dingoes, spear-grass, transportation and labour costs were overcome, sheep came to replace cattle over much of eastern Australia.

Between 1870 and 1890 pastoralists prospered. Stations were typically large and were increasingly mortgaged to banks and pastoral finance companies in order to effect improvements (fencing, buildings, bores, dams) and to secure freehold title. In 1891 wool represented over forty per cent of the value of New South Wales and Queensland exports.²

By then, however, the structural imbalance within the industry was very apparent. While investment remained at high levels, profitability was declining as more marginal country was brought into use, and as rabbits and overstocking reduced the land's productivity. Wool prices were also falling. The faltering industry then experienced the worst drought in its history, from 1895 to 1903. In 1902 Australia's gross pastoral product had fallen to one-third of its 1891 level.³

The recovery was just as dramatic. Both New South Wales and


Queensland earned more from wool exports in 1911 than in 1891. In 1913 the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Stock declared:

It cannot now be advanced that the [pastoral] industry is suffering from hard times, because the seasons are good, the markets are asking for more stock, values are on the upward grade, and have never been so high as now...

By the time Lavender got to the bush the depression was just a memory. But because of the experience of the drought, technological change, and most significantly as a result of government policy, the shape of pastoralism was changing. The rural districts were dividing roughly into the pastoral regions and the new mixed farming areas.

In the pastoral districts holdings were much smaller than they had been in the eighties, or even in 1900, and smaller operators, the so-called grazing farmers, were forming an increasing part of the industry. Banks and pastoral finance companies began to sell properties they had acquired through foreclosure in the nineties, as markets were more buoyant, and the Fisher Labor Government imposed a land tax on freehold property in 1910. There was also the prospect of the recently enacted closer settlement legislation being put into effect. Since the eighteen sixties, New South Wales governments had used land legislation to wrest land from squatters in order to promote closer settlement. Over succeeding decades the pastoralists' influence

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4 New South Wales, New South Wales Statistical Register...1911, pp.1,079-80; Statistics for the State of Queensland...1913, p.5L.


6 See YBHD, pp.21-22.
in the Legislative Assembly declined considerably, and from the late eighteen seventies selectors began to organise and lobby parliamentarians for changes to the land laws. A series of land acts in New South Wales and Queensland whittled away at the larger stations in all but the remoter regions.

West of the tablelands in New South Wales the average holding in 1911 was only two-thirds as big as it had been in 1902. In the region between Coonabarabran and the Queensland border (encompassing Walgett, Moree, Wee Waa and Coonamble), the average size of runs fell from 7,170 acres to 5,731 acres over that period.

In 1910 graziers were also trying to increase the carrying capacity of their smaller runs, and to improve the quality of their stock. Attempts to put more wool on sheep were made in the eighteen nineties when the Vermont was introduced from America. This was a wrinkly strain of

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merino which provided a greater area of skin on which wool could grow. By the time of the drought about three-quarters of Australia's merinos were of this type. Their advantages proved to be illusory. Much of the extra fleece weight consisted of grease, and the wrinkles provided a receptive breeding-ground for the blowfly. The wool was also inferior to that of the Australian merino. By 1911 the "cult of the wrinkly sheep" was dying out. However, graziers continued to breed sheep with a view to putting more wool on each animal. The "Australian Merino" was developed, "a large-framed sheep, plain of body, but bearing large, deep folds of skin on the neck and a wide thigh." Being bred in the Riverina, it was well-adapted to conditions in the interior. Most importantly, it produced a heavier fleece, as is reflected in the fact that in 1907 shearers came under an award which included an increase in rates over the generally prevailing level, partially on the grounds that sheep were more difficult to shear than they once had been:

...the weight of the fleece has increased considerably ...[since the early nineties], due to a certain extent to increased length of staple, but mainly to increase in the density of wool, in the wool carrying capacity of the sheep's

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body, and in the carrying of more wool on the points.\textsuperscript{11}

The quality of cattle was also seen to be improving, due to "owners exercising more care in breeding".\textsuperscript{12}

The carrying capacity of holdings in the "outside country" was increasing through campaigns to eradicate the rabbit, and through water conservation.\textsuperscript{13} Rabbits became a serious problem in the early eighteen eighties, and by the nineties large sums were being spent by landholders to eradicate the pest. In 1902 New South Wales was divided into districts, with a Pastures Protection Board in each which could place a levy on stock, and with the proceeds erect rabbit-proof fencing, and otherwise ensure the destruction of noxious animals. They could also pay rewards for the destruction of rabbits, kangaroos, dingoes, crows, and so on. The larger stations employed men full-time to lay poison baits for rabbits. There were nine poison carts on Charlton station in about 1907. Wingadee station spent £857 on "vermin destruction" in


Artesian water was first discovered in New South Wales in 1879. From 1884 governments in that colony began to sink wells, and by 1911 had established over six hundred watering places along stock-routes. Queensladers also made extensive use of artesian water, though the state government was involved to a lesser extent than in New South Wales. Thus, with smaller holdings, and greater attention being paid to breeding and water conservation, the pastoral industry was becoming more productive.

The grazing farmers came from a variety of backgrounds. Bimbah station near Longreach, where Lavender built yards in 1913, had been selected in 1890 from Mount Cornish, which in turn was just a selection of the Bowen Downs lease. The owner, R.H. Edkins, the son of the first manager of Mount Cornish, was educated in Launceston and Melbourne, and was a prominent member of the Longreach community. Many, though, had a labouring background:

There are many men now occupying grazing farms of the smaller dimensions who, in their earlier days, followed other

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16 YBHD, p.174-75.
occupations such as drovers, well sinkers, station hands, &c...\footnote{17}

Ted Phillott, who Lavender worked for, was a drover for twenty years before drawing his selection near Winton. The man Harold Lewis worked for in around 1912 had forty thousand acres near Emerald which ran "two horses, one dawg, ninety goats." Lavender worked for a fencing contractor who drew a grazing selection in central Queensland in 1913.\footnote{18} Thus, with smaller holdings, and greater attention being paid to breeding and water conservation, the pastoral industry was becoming more productive.

In areas of higher rainfall - regions which Lavender traversed early in his journey - mixed farming was becoming viable. Developments in transport and wheat-breeding were making grain production possible in areas where previously only grazing was practicable, while expanding meat markets and the introduction of different breeds of sheep enabled smallholders to give some attention to grazing. In 1898 the New South Wales Department of Agriculture begun breeding higher quality, earlier maturing wheats which were also more drought-, rust- and bunt-resistant than existing varieties. Though yields per acre did not increase consistently before 1920, the new Australian wheats did enable the wheat-belt to be pushed further into the drier west.\footnote{19}

\footnote{17}Queensland, "Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Stock for the Year 1912-13", QPP, Vol.II, 1913, p.4; see also p.37.

\footnote{18}YBHD, pp.157, 163-64; Lewis, Crow on a Barbed Wire Fence, p.119.

The extension of railways into the inland regions from the eighteen seventies served to open up markets for the wheat. By 1910 New South Wales was served by a network of lines converging on Sydney from as far away as Hay, Bourke and Walgett. Queensland had several lines reaching westward from the coast, most notably from Brisbane to Charleville, Rockhampton to Longreach, and Townsville to Cloncurry with a spur connecting Winton with that line.

Mixed farming was also being made viable through the cross-breeding of sheep. Merinos were crossed with coarser-wooled but larger-framed longwool breeds from Britain, chiefly the Lincoln and Leicester, which enabled mutton and wool to be grown on the one holding, with ewes producing fat lambs and also an annual fleece. Cross-breds were mainly found in Victoria before 1914, but they were gaining in popularity in New South Wales as well, particularly in the higher regions.

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<td>Merinos</td>
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<td>Longwools</td>
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<td>Cross-breds</td>
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Merinos remained almost universal in the drier western regions of New South Wales and in Queensland where the natural grasses were inadequate

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for raising fat lambs to meet the requirements of foreign markets.\textsuperscript{22}

Apart from enacting land laws and building railways, governments were also active in promoting change by forming departments of agriculture. One was created in Queensland in 1888 "to watch over and assist ... the interests and well-being of an industrial class more numerous than any other, and upon whose labour depends the very existence and prosperity of the human family ... so that agriculturalists by the thousand can find here a farm and a home..."\textsuperscript{23} New South Wales formed a Department of Mines and Agriculture in 1890, and a separate Department of Agriculture in 1908. The aims of these departments were to educate farmers, to disseminate information, to experiment with new crops and to breed better wheat varieties. Officials travelled about the country lecturing to the new class of farmers on classing and culling sheep, and handling wool for market.\textsuperscript{24} The Agricultural Gazette of New South Wales was first published in 1890 and distributed free to farmers. The Hawkesbury Agricultural College opened in 1891, and several experimental farms were established in both New South Wales and Queensland.

Meat production, for so long limited by the size of the local market,
was also greatly aided by the development of the frozen export trade. The value of New South Wales frozen meat exports rose eight-fold between 1891 and 1911, by which time they were equivalent to six per cent of the annual wool clip. In Queensland frozen meat exports were worth almost half as much as that state's wool exports by 1913.

In 1912 the New South Wales Department of Agriculture's annual report contained the observation concerning the rural economy relative to its position in 1902:

There has been almost unbroken advance since that period, owing mainly to the fact that settlers have undertaken mixed farming more generally, and large numbers now combine sheep and wheat-growing with considerable advantage to both industries.

These changes were mainly taking place in the Western Slopes Division, and particularly in the Central Western Slopes (extending from south of Forbes, through Dubbo to Coonabarabran) where eighty per cent of grazing and/or agricultural holdings were mixed farms by 1913. The figure for the Central Western Plains (encompassing Condobolin, Narromine, Nyngan and Coonamble) increased from forty-two per cent in 1909 to fifty per

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cent in 1913. Under the impact of expanding markets and persistent efforts by governments to change the nature of rural settlement, mixed farming was becoming the norm between the mountains and the western plains in New South Wales. Lavender had not sought the thrifty and sober farmer, so he crossed these areas quickly in search of his vision.

* * *

As land use and tenure were changing, so too was rural labour. There were changes in the source of labour, in the labour market, the mobility of labour, and in the nature and organisation of work. As the pastoral frontier expanded, Aborigines were more often seen as a nuisance than as a source of labour. By 1910 native society in southern Australia was reduced to "protected" and dispirited fragments. Yet there are accounts of Aboriginal labour being used in New South Wales and Queensland at various times through the nineteenth century: to track down stock, in lambing, shepherding, shearing and cutting firewood. Written and photographic evidence suggests that there were very few Aborigines in rural employment by 1910. Lavender did meet three Aboriginal fencing contractors between Coonabarabran and Coonamble in 1911, and saw Aboriginal stockmen on Gundabluey station near the New South

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Wales-Queensland border.\(^{30}\)

Of the Europeans, some were permanent pastoral workers. Lavender met a rabbiter in New South Wales and kangaroo-shooters and fencers in Queensland who were able to follow their particular calling year-round.\(^{31}\) Shearing was becoming almost a full-time occupation in itself, particularly in Queensland. The blowfly was partially responsible for this. It became a serious problem around the turn of the century. Particular types of fly lay eggs in the wet and dirty wool around the breach of sheep, causing irritation, loss of condition and ultimately death. Crutching, whereby wool was shorn from the breach about six months after normal shearing, was found to be the only effective preventative measure. Some Queensland stations shore in the autumn in the hope that the general shearing would "serve a double purpose and thus save the extras work of after-crutching", but generally, two separate operations were necessary.\(^{32}\) A second factor making shearing more of a full-time job was the emergence of contract shearing companies (to be discussed in more detail below) through which the better shearers could secure a full season's work.

Others managed to remain permanently in the itinerant work force by moving back and forth between seasonal occupations, like the men Tritton saw near Quirindi who cut burrs for the greater part of the year, and

\(^{30}\)YBHD, pp.57, 69.

\(^{31}\)YBHD, pp.20, 148-50.

for the rest worked in shearing sheds. 33

As agriculture progressed in the nineteenth century, it spawned another source of pastoral labour: the selector-pastoral worker. While selections remained small and solely agricultural, farmers were often compelled to put the time in between sowing and harvest seeking itinerant work on pastoral stations, in order to make a living. Several witnesses giving evidence before the New South Wales Royal Commission on Strikes in 1890-91 indicated that most shearing was done by farmers in the more closely settled areas. 34 In 1909 C.E.W. Feen found that "a fair proportion" of shearsers were still farmers and farmers' sons. 35 But changes were on the way. As mixed farming spread, farmers were required to spend almost the whole year on their holdings to tend their sheep. Also, the increasing professionalism of shearing probably worked against those who could not devote the greater part of the year to that calling. Consequently, it is likely that a decreasing proportion of the rural itinerant work force was being drawn from small farms.

Some workers were from the coastal cities, like Lavender himself, or the rouseabouts he worked with at Gundabluey and Currawillinghi, or "Duke" Tritton and "Dutchy" Bishop who worked in the bush for four years

33 Tritton, Time Means Tucker, pp.15-16.


after leaving Sydney in 1905. The State Labour Bureau of New South
Wales sent 1,892 and 1,888 people from Sydney to work in country areas
in 1910-11 and 1911-12 respectively. They were mainly classified as
"bush workers", labourers, "farm students, miners, and station- and
shed-hands". Country towns were another source of labour, and their pubs were the
most widely used labour exchanges. There were still the small,
desolate places that consisted of little more than a hotel or two, but
by 1910 some substantial towns were becoming an established component of
the rural economy. On the north-west slopes and plains of New South
Wales there were seven towns with between one and five thousand people:
Narrabri, Gunnedah, Coonamble, Moree, Gilgandra, Walgett and
Coonabarabran. All, except for Walgett, had at least doubled their
population in the previous twenty years. Longreach was the largest town
in central-western Queensland with 2,511 people, while Parcaldine,
Hughenden and Winton each had between one and two thousand. As well
as providing the goods and services offered by private entrepreneurs and

36 YBHD, pp.53, 60, 65.
37 New South Wales, "Sixth Annual Report of the Director of Labour,
State Labour Bureau of New South Wales, for year ended 30th June, 1911", NSWPP No.10, Vol.2, 1911-12, p.8; "Seventh Annual Report of the Director
of Labour, State Labour Bureau of New South Wales, for year ended 30th
38 YBHD, p.34.
39 New South Wales, Results of a Census of New South Wales, taken for
the night of 5th April, 1891, (Government Printer, Sydney, 1894), pp.747-51; Australia, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia taken for
the night between the 2nd & 3rd April, 1911, Vol.III, (Government
Printer, Melbourne, [1914]), pp.2250-92.
government instrumentalities, these towns were a market for certain rural products, such as wheat, timber and meat.

The rural labour market's efficiency had always been impaired by the distances between stations and the lack of communications. In 1873 no shearsers had arrived on Robert Gray's run at Hughenden in time to take the wool off, so he and his overseer had to do it themselves.40 Often workers were obliged simply to travel about looking for work "on spec.", receiving rations and accommodation at stations which were interested in encouraging this flow of prospective labour:

Most of the outback stations issued rations ... [as] a means of ensuring a plentiful supply of casual labour. Any station that was noted for a generous handout always had plenty of men to choose from, but the tight ones were always avoided by any self-respecting swagman.41

Some shearsers secured stands at particular sheds by depositing £1 with the owner or manager, the money being forfeited if the shearer failed to arrive by rollcall. Shearsers' and rouseabouts' positions could be obtained with contract shearing companies by the same means.42 Workers in the bush made use of the services offered by the State Labour Bureau of New South Wales which opened forty-three country branches in 1896 at which employers seeking employees and workers seeking work could...


41 Tritton, Time Means Tucker, p.20.

Workers could also obtain railway and steamer fares on credit. But only six people were assisted by these branches in 1910-11 and four in 1911-12.  

The itinerant nature of most work in rural Australia also meant that transport was very important to labourers. Lavender used eight different means to get about: foot, horse-back, sulky, coach, bicycle, train, car and steamer. Foot-slogging was still prevalent in 1910, though generally reserved for those towards the bottom of the social scale. Lewis counted amongst those travelling out towards Aramac from Barcaldine for the shearing, "the lowest class of bush humanity bar the non-working sundowner, namely, the unskilled labourers,... humping it out to look for jobs as rouseabouts on the shearing shed floor."  

Shearers were more inclined to travel with saddle- and pack-horses or, from the mid-nineties, by bicycle. In 1909 Bean noted:  

"...before our visit the bicycle - the "safety" push-bike - had spread through the country as fast as the rabbit.  

The bike had the advantage of being cheap, fast and versatile. A low-priced machine could be had for the equivalent of between four and five weeks' of a bushman's wages in 1897, and for two weeks' wages by 1920. Fitzpatrick claims that the cyclist could travel four times as far as the pedestrian in a given time, and that "he could travel at a greater rate of speed across more varied terrain and surfaces than any  

43 New South Wales, Annual Reports of the Director of Labour, 1910-11 and 1911-12.  


45 Bean, On The Wool Track, p.82.
other transport modes in Australia. By 1918 the car and motor-bike were being used by a new generation of "gentlemen" shearsers who, being more mobile, were less inclined than their forebears to stop at the first pub and drink their earnings after the cut-out.

The extension of railways also increased the mobility of rural labour. The most lowly paid farm labourer could travel about 270 miles by rail in New South Wales on a week's wages, while a shearing shed hand could get about 560 miles for the same amount of work. Some, however, contrived not to pay anything at all, by "jumping the rattler". Despite trains and bicycles, travelling continued to take up much of the itinerant worker's time and earnings. Arbitration Court judges found in 1907 and again in 1917 that, on average, during the shearing season a shearer spent one-quarter of his time "on the road".

Once they arrived at a station, employees could be engaged in either permanent, seasonal or occasional work. Some smaller holdings used no permanent labour at all, other than the lessee himself and perhaps his family. At the other extreme there were places like Dunnumbral station north of Walgett, of 265,582 acres, which had an average of twenty-one

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49 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1905-07, p.84; 1917, p.404.
permanent hands on its books over 1911 and 1912. They consisted of a manager, overseer, bookkeeper, jackaroos, gardener, house cook, hut cook, housemaid, laundress, butcher, boundary riders and general hands. Such women as there were to be found in the pastoral work force were mainly employed as domestics on the larger stations. Dunumbrel usually had a further three to four workers engaged in poisoning rabbits in 1911-12.

Seasonal labour was perhaps the most prevalent type of rural work. In the pastoral sector this included shearing (between July and November for the most part), crutching (around March), burr cutting (after summer rains) and lamb marking (winter). Farms put on seasonal labour in spring and early summer to drive reapers, binders and strippers, stock and carry in hay, build stacks and sew bags. What might be called occasional labour was used to effect and repair fences, sheds, yards, tanks, dams and bores, and so on.

On the whole, where the amount of work employees had done could be accurately gauged, they were paid on a piecework basis. Only when responsibility for work could not be individually assigned, or when an employer wanted to engage workers for an indefinite period to perform

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50 Two per cent of those engaged as farmers, graziers, managers, or farm- or station-labourers in 1911 in N.S.W. and Queensland were women. This probably does not include domestics, but consists largely of "relatives assisting". Australia, Census of the Commonwealth ... 1911, Vol.III, pp.1,310, 1,324.


varied and perhaps unforeseen work, were wages paid on a time basis. Rouseabouts were in this category. There was no obvious way of objectively delineating the work of individuals working collectively, picking up fleeces and sweeping the shearing board, wool-rolling, piece-picking and penning up. Likewise, general station hands, domestic staff and farm labourers were normally required to perform a variety of tasks as the need arose, as was recognised by Justice Higgins in 1917 when he refused to assign awards to each of the various types of work done by these people:

> Even if a man spend most of his time in bullock driving, he is nearly always expected to perform other functions when he is available... I want to leave the employers free, as they have hitherto been free, to put the employee to any general station work they may think necessary.\(^5\)

Wool-pressers could also receive a weekly wage in cases where there were insufficient shearers in a shed to ensure that they would receive an adequate wage on a piecework basis.\(^5\) Generally, time workers received food and lodging in addition to their weekly wage. Of the pieceworkers, shearers were paid by the number of sheep they shorn, wool-pressers by the bale or the hundredweight, wool-classers by the fleece, and individual fencers by the number of posts they cut or erected.\(^5\)

Contracting - piecework on a group basis - was also very prevalent. Fencing, ringbarking, clearing, tank and dam sinking, yard building, as well as government road work, was done by teams working under

\(^5\)Australia, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1917, pp.419-20.

\(^5\)Australia, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1905-07, p.95.

\(^5\)YBHD, p.148.
As noted above, contract shearing companies were in vogue by 1910. At a certain price per head of sheep, the contractor would handle the whole process, from hiring labour to supervising the shearing, baling and so on, and taking the wool away. Contractors made arrangements a year in advance to work on particular stations, so could offer shearers continuity of employment. In Queensland, seventy per cent of sheds share contract in 1911, though in New South Wales the figure was still below twenty per cent. Lewis worked for a contractor in central Queensland who worked on the smaller holdings:

... we travelled on his wagons, pitched our tents and erected the small shearing plant in the open, building cover from the sun with bush and scrub. Our six shearers would clear the mob in a fortnight, and we all fell on the job of dismantling like ants and were away the same night, sleeping in the wagons on the way to the next selection.

Groups of shearers also formed cooperative companies to shear on contract. Remuneration within a group doing work on contract might, again, be on a piecework basis, as in the case of shearers or fencers, or on a time basis. If the members were trusting and well known to each other, they might just divide the earnings equally.

This form of agreement had several advantages for the employer. He could know from the beginning how much the job was going to cost. Also, he could feel assured that the work would be done quickly, a particular advantage in the case of shearing where fixed costs in the form of shed

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56 Young, p.47; Tritton, Time Means Tucker, pp.53, 87-88.

hands' wages were being borne. Of cooperative shearing contractors Higgins noted: "...the tendency of such parties to 'speed up' is as apparent in the case of butty gangs [that is, cooperative sugarcane cutting contractors]."^58 In the case of contracting teams, it also meant that the trouble and cost of constant supervision did not have to be incurred, a particular advantage with Australia's reputedly difficult labour force:

The most irksome part of the economy of New South Wales is the management of the labouring classes, over whom the owner or the superintendent has so little hold that considerable dexterity is required to keep matters in a proper state.^59 Checks had only to be made occasionally for shoddy workmanship, for example posts cut from the wrong timber, or not being sunk far enough into the ground.

There were opportunities in the bush for self-employment for men with some small amount of capital. Rabbing was one of the most popular. As Lavender found, one could work with a sulky or some other conveyance, and any number of traps, or with a supply of jam and strychnine. By 1911 this occupation had become a significant part of the rural economy. It was so popular that John Fitzpatrick, a farmer and grazier of Junee, claimed it was affecting the labour market:

... the shortage of labour is, to a large extent, due to the fact that so many men have gone in for rabbit-trapping. If it was not for rabbit-trapping there would not be anything like the

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^58 Australia, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1911, p.87.

N.S.W. Exports of Rabbits and Hares.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Skins</th>
<th>Frozen Meat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>9,379</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>293,260</td>
<td>246,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>295,476</td>
<td>330,741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

shortage there is at the present time.  

Kangaroos were also shot professionally for their skins.

Mining, either for opal or gold, presented other opportunities for self-employment and, like rabbiting, required little capital, so could be pursued between engagements as a contractor or labourer. Finally, sharefarming was becoming increasingly popular amongst those who sought a degree of independence but did not have the resources to acquire land. The usual arrangement was for the landowner to lease land to the sharefarmer for the purpose of wheat-growing, and supply the seed. The sharefarmer, leasing only as much land as he (and perhaps his family) could work himself, provided the labour. Proceeds from the crop were divided equally between the parties up to a certain yield, the sharefarmer receiving anything beyond that as a bonus. One consequence of the alleged labour shortage was that landowners in the Dubbo-Wellington district were letting their land out to sharefarmers.

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60 New South Wales, The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1912, pp.763, 766.

61 New South Wales, Royal Commission of Enquiry into Alleged Shortage of Labour, Q.8,815, p.230. See also Tritton, Time Means Tucker, pp.59-60, 89; YBHD, pp.21-26.

because they could not obtain the labour to work it themselves.\textsuperscript{63}

It can be seen that there was no single relationship between employers and workers in the bush. Work was both seasonal and permanent: an employee might be on a particular station for a few weeks, or indefinitely. He might work alone, as in the case of boundary riders, or with hundreds of others in a shearing shed. He might be constantly under the employer's nose, or not see him for months. The experiences of Lavender and Tritton suggest that most workers who stayed in the bush for any amount of time encountered all of these aspects of rural labour at one time or another. Given this degree of fluidity, it might seem surprising that bush workers should have developed a coherent class consciousness and organised themselves industrially. Shearers were the first. As pieceworkers, it was perhaps not so apparent to them that "surplus value" was extracted from them just as from the earnings of wage labourers: they were more inclined to relate their earnings to their ability than to the total proceeds from shearing. Tritton wrote:

\[\ldots\text{I think the shearer is justified to a certain extent in boasting of his prowess. Being an individual worker, his earnings depend on his shearing ability.}^{64}\]

Matt Wilson, union organiser in western Queensland in the nineties, and later Northern Territory store-keeper, is supposed to have said:

I told Bill Lane that if he wanted the shearers to be Socialists he had better start persuading them to shear for so

\textsuperscript{63} New South Wales, Royal Commission of Inquiry into Alleged Shortage of Labour, pp.236-37. See also New South Wales, The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1913, p.775.

\textsuperscript{64} Tritton, Time Means Tucker, p.49.
much per week instead of so much per hundred. Nevertheless, their work environment did promote a certain cohesiveness. They gathered in camps on stations before shearing began each season, worked together in large numbers, lived together in huts while on the job, and often travelled between engagements in the company of fellow workers. As specialists, they were more inclined to follow the shearing from year to year than shed hands.

The Amalgamated Shearers' Union was formed in 1887 when several regional unions formed the previous year joined forces. In its early years it was successful in enrolling members and gaining concessions from employers, though this has been attributed more to buoyant economic conditions in the pastoral industry and enthusiastic organisers than to a general determination and solidarity on the part of all members. In 1891 W.G. Spence described workers in general as "men of apathy,... men of phlegmatic minds." He found "a great deal of apathy amongst workers,... it is up-hill work to arouse them to a desire to improve their condition." A separate Queensland Shearers' Union was formed by 1890, and shed hands organised also. Put developments over the following five years showed that these bodies could not withstand the combined strength of capital and government.

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65 Tom Ronan, Deep Of The Sky, p.115.

66 BHD, pp.51-52.


In 1890 the Australian Labour Federation succeeded in stopping the shipment of "black" wool from Jondaryan station in Queensland, and thereby wrung a "closed shop" agreement from pastoralists. This was the last win for rural labour for some time. In September 1890 shearsers and shed hands were called out in support of the Maritime Officers' Association which was contending the right of its members to remain affiliated with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. The strike failed. Then in 1891 members of the Q.S.U. and A.S.U. struck in protest against a form of agreement drawn up by the pastoralists' associations, containing provisions for "freedom of contract" and a reduction in wages. The strike lasted for several months, with workers congregating in camps, and troopers and special constables being dispatched to central-western Queensland in anticipation of violence, but the unions ultimately accepted the pastoralists' terms. Pastoralists drew up another agreement in 1893, containing further reductions in pay rates. Shearsers and shed hands struck in response in 1894, but again had to accede. Union membership declined with each defeat.

As the worst phase of the depression passed, unionism in Australia generally became healthier: "with the new century, a spirit of aggressive confidence was in the air." Confidence was not enough to
win the increases in shearing rates and shed hands' wages which members of the Australian Workers' Union (formed when the A.S.U. and shed hands merged in 1893) struck for in 1902. Funds were insufficient, eastern Australia was experiencing the severest drought on record, and the A.W.U. had to compete with a bogus pastoralist-sponsored Machine Shearers' Union.71 The A.W.U. considered the strike a partial success, as some sheds did accept its terms.

Since 1890 unions had advocated conciliation and arbitration legislation. The Commonwealth Arbitration Act of 1904 "gave the court power to conduct compulsory hearings on interstate disputes and to make binding awards and a common rule..."72 In 1905 the A.W.U. and Q.S.U. merged, and then applied for a federal award. An industrial agreement regulating the engagement of shearers, standards of shearing, the conduct of the shed and so on, was mutually agreed upon by the A.W.U. and the Pastoralists' Federal Council, and registered. The court awarded shearers a minimum rate of twenty-four shillings per hundred sheep (the A.W.U. had claimed twenty-five shillings, the P.S.U. twenty, which was the existing rate) and other shearing shed hands corresponding increases. The court declined to grant preference to unionists, or to grant A.W.U. representatives the right to enter stations to enrol members and collect subsidies. Nevertheless, from that time the A.W.U.

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71 Turner, Industrial Labour and Politics, p.39; Sydney Morning Herald, 12/9/1902, pp.6-7 and preceding months.

remained committed to arbitration. It took the P.F.C. and other bodies to the court again in 1911. Shed hands' wages were increased, shearers' were not, and preference was again refused.

When Lavender found his way to the shearing sheds in 1911-12, class feeling within the pastoral industry was still evident. Bean noticed it in 1909:

[Shearing] seems to go pleasant enough on the surface, but it's 'fight, fight, fight all the time underneath. That's what a shed is.'

But with returning prosperity and compulsory arbitration there was a general order and relative tranquility about the shearing operation. The procedure of electing union representatives and ensuring that all hands had tickets before shearing commenced was a common practice, taken for granted, at least in the bigger sheds. The A.W.U. was firmly established as the shearsers' and shed hands' union. Spence wrote in 1909:

Employees in the great pastoral industry have been working for the past two years under an award of the Court, and the relations between employers and employees are excellent.

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74Australia, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1911, pp.48-49.

75Bean, On The Wool Track, p.89. See also Bingham, The Beckoning Horizon, p.79.

76Spence, Australia's Awakening, p.314.
The President of the Arbitration Court commented in 1917, on the period since the previous hearing concerning the A.W.U.:

... operations [in the pastoral industry] have been carried on for nearly six years with very little friction. 77

This goes some way towards explaining Lavender's lack of emphasis on union matters when describing an industry with a reputation, gained in the nineties, for fiercely independent workers and angry confrontations between capital and labour.

The "bush" Lavender had read about was not quite the one he found in New South Wales and Queensland. In his search for the truly romantic, open-range pastoral experience, he was obliged to go to "no-man's-land", the wild [Northern] Territory. 78

77 *Australie, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports*, 1917, p.401.

78 YBHD, p.191.
Chapter 4

COASTAL QUEENSLAND

From the turn of the century coastal Queensland north of Rockhampton was the destination of a substantial tide of itinerant labour each year, attracted to the seasonal harvesting and milling of sugar-cane. Cane growing is restricted to the coastal belt, which receives heavy tropical rains between January and April. The industry was the only agricultural success in the history of white settlement in tropical Australia. In 1912 Lavender went to the Proserpine district with a mate who had worked there in previous years, and who was engaged to cut cane for the coming season.¹ But the work was unlikely to appeal to those in search of a pastoral ideal, and it is not surprising that Lavender did not stay long in this employment. It was merely a means to further travel and pastoral experience.

This chapter summarises the sugar industry's history in north Queensland to 1912: its transformation from large plantations and Melanesian labour to the small farms, co-operative mills and European labour that Lavender encountered. The workers, their work and organisation are also discussed.

Townsville, the biggest town on Queensland’s north coast, owed its

¹See YBHD, pp. 124, 126-36.
beginnings not to sugar, but to the pastoral hinterland. It was established in 1864 by J.M. Black on behalf of Captain Robert Towns, who had a boiling down works built there. The adjacent break in the ranges, providing easy access to the inland regions, gave Townsville an advantage over towns with better ports, and by 1865 Purdekin pastoralists were delivering their wool to Townsville for shipment. Gold discoveries on the Cape River in 1867 and on Ravenswood station in 1869 further stimulated the town's growth. By 1911 Townsville had a population of 13,678 people and was the terminus of the railway line extending west to Cloncurry. It lacked a rail link with Brisbane, but was a port of call for steamers operating between Singapore and the south-eastern ports.

Sugar-cane was first grown in north Queensland at Mackay in 1867, and by 1885 production had spread up the coast beyond Cooktown. Over the first twenty-five years of its development the Queensland sugar industry was dominated by large plantations which combined the operations of farming and milling, and relied heavily on indentured Melanesian labour. From the eighteen eighties the industry began to undergo structural changes that continued into the twentieth century. The employment of Pacific Islanders had been criticised by southern Queenslanders and British governments and clergy from the beginning, on moral grounds.

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4 Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, pp.73, 135.
Certain regulations governing this recruitment and employment were imposed in 1868 and 1880, and in 1885 Samuel Griffith's Liberal government legislated to curtail the employment of Melanesians from 1892. In 1891 planters brought 320 Italians to Townsville to work under indentures for two years, after which they would be expected to take up small holdings and supply cane to the mills on contract.\(^5\) In 1892 though, Griffith reversed his decision of 1885, and Pacific Island labour continued to be imported, despite the fact that organised labour in Australia had added its voice to those already condemning the practice. The new Commonwealth government legislated to prohibit the introduction of islanders after March 1904 and provide for the repatriation of most of those who remained by the end of 1906. A subsidy of £5 per ton on sugar produced with white labour (as compared with a subsidy of £3 per ton on all other sugar) was another inducement for growers to do away with imported labour.\(^6\)

From the late eighteen eighties uncertainty about the future of Melanesian labour induced some planters to sell or lease land to small farmers, limiting their own operations to milling. The transition towards an industry dominated by smallholders was further encouraged by both conservative and liberal governments which made money available for the construction of centralised mills to be run as cooperatives by farmers. There were fifteen cooperative mills in Queensland in 1912,


thirteen of them built with government money. As a result of these developments, small-farming was an integral part of the Queensland sugar industry from the mid-nineties, and by 1912 only two plantations, both at Bundaberg, still combined the operations of cultivating and milling cane.

The small farmers, such as the man Lavender cooked and cut cane for, were able to get at least a foothold in the industry with few resources, though some enthusiasm for the work would seem to have been essential:

...all the capital a selector requires to start upon a scrub farm is sufficient to purchase an axe and mattock, sufficient wire netting to net in his area under cane, and enough to pay the grocer, butcher, and baker, until his cane is old enough to take care of itself, which with an ordinary season is eight or nine months from the time he falls [sic] his first scrub. If he wants to he can then find plenty of work at good wages, until his cane is ready for harvesting.

Planting normally was done in the drier months - August to October - while harvesting and milling was concentrated in the period from June to December. Those farmers who were close enough carted their own cane to the mill. Others carted cane to the sidings on tramlines which redirected from mills, and some had portable rails laid from the main lines through

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9 North Queensland Register (hereafter NQR), 19/1/14, p.83.
their paddocks so that cane could be loaded directly into hoppers. Most growers had freehold title on between fifty and two hundred acres, though the average area of cultivation per farmer was just twenty-three acres in 1911. They were not a prosperous class, relying on family labour, and often obtaining employment with mills or other growers when they could get away from their own farms. A Commonwealth Royal Commission on the sugar industry in 1912 considered their position:

...the growers as a class do not, in our opinion, receive their fair share of the profits of the industry as a whole.

The Proserpine district was young but thriving when Lavender worked in the mill there in 1912. The town’s population had grown from 136 in 1901 to 1,102 in 1911, and in early 1914 the district as a whole was said to contain five thousand people. The town boasted a Chamber of Commerce, a hospital, telephone service, three churches, a brass band, and a Farmers’ Association of which ninety-five per cent of local canegrowers were members. The local mill was built to be run as a cooperative venture, but had been taken over by the government due to the non-payment of arrears on borrowed money. In 1913 it received cane from 240 suppliers who cultivated an average of 13.7 acres each. At

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10 NQR, 19/1/14, p.83; YBHD, p.132.

11 Australia, "Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry," p.xvi.


that time there were 121 holdings open or soon to be opened for selection, and "many thousands of acres of first class agricultural lands still to be surveyed..."\textsuperscript{15}

Government legislation restricting and discouraging the use of coloured labour in the sugar industry was very effective. Whites produced sixteen per cent of Queensland's sugar in 1902-03 and ninety-four per cent in 1912-13.\textsuperscript{16}

As harvesting and milling were seasonal and labour-intensive operations, the industry was dependent upon itinerant workers who were drawn mostly from "the larger centres of population": Sydney and Melbourne. Lavender and Lewis indicate that workers from rural areas were also attracted, though this source would have been limited by the fact that canecutting coincided with shearing.\textsuperscript{17}

Almost all cane was cut by "butty gangs": groups generally of about ten to twelve workers which often stayed intact over several seasons. They contracted to work for a grower on a piece-work basis, receiving so many shillings per ton of cane cut. While cutters were amongst the better paid workers in the industry, they had to earn it:

The work is extremely arduous, and, speaking generally, only

\textsuperscript{15}N.Q.E., 19/1/14, p.83.

\textsuperscript{16}Australia, Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia... 1915, p.346.

\textsuperscript{17}Australia, "Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry," p.xviii; Lewis, Crow On A Barbed Wire Fence, 72-73; YEHP, p.129.
men in the prime of life are fit for it.\textsuperscript{18}

Earnings ranged from eight to twenty shillings per worker per day, with an average of twelve to fourteen shillings for a ten hour day. From this the cutters found their own food and accommodation, and generally employed a cook. Where crops were small or particularly difficult to harvest, workers preferred to receive a fixed weekly wage.\textsuperscript{19}

Clearing, planting and ploughing was done by unskilled "field hands" who received a weekly wage, as did mill workers. Lewis represents work in the mills as being both tedious and arduous.\textsuperscript{20}

Labour in the industry was notoriously unstable. In one season a mill near Cairns employed 409 men to fill only eighty-eight positions. This general problem was due in some part to intemperance. The 1912 Royal Commission found that:

\ldots indulgence in alcoholic liquors is a great hinderance to successfully carrying on operations, and is a most serious cause of illness and degeneration among the workers in the industry.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the instability, and the seasonal nature of the work, there was a degree of organisation amongst workers and improvements were effected in wages and conditions. Capital was organising too. In 1907

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18}Australia, "Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry," p.lix.
\item \textsuperscript{19}Australia, "Royal Commission on the Sugar Industry," pp.xix, lix; Shlomowitz, "Industrial Equilibrium," pp.117, 121; YBHD, p.132.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Lewis, Crow On A Barbed Wire Fence, pp.68-69, 79-81.
\item \textsuperscript{21}p.lxii. Lavender's experience suggests that alcoholism was not restricted to workers in that community. YBHD, pp.133-35.
\end{itemize}
the Australian Sugar Producers' Association was formed. It was confronted by the Australian Sugar Workers' Union which in 1910 merged with the Amalgamated Workers' Association, a union which had been founded in the north Queensland mines four years earlier. There were unsuccessful strikes by field hands and mill workers in 1909 and 1910. Another strike was called in June 1911 which lasted until August and brought concessions from the A.S.P.A.. Workers had been receiving 22/6 and keep for a seventy-two hour week in the mills. They struck for an eight hour day in field and mill, and a wage of thirty shillings per week and keep. When a settlement was reached in August, the A.W.A. gained thirty shillings for a forty-eight hour week for mill hands and recognition of its rights to represent Queensland sugar workers. However, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, which milled one-third of Australia's raw sugar in 1912, paid only 27/6 with the remaining 2/6 being paid as a bonus only to those who worked the whole season. Field workers continued to receive a minimum wage ranging from 22/6 in the off season to twenty-five to thirty shillings in the crushing season until August 1912 when the Federal Minister for Customs stipulated that all sugar workers were to receive thirty-six shillings and keep for a forty-eight hour week. Employers who did not comply were ineligible to receive the sugar bounty. The Royal Commission found this to be "the first time in the history of the Sugar Industry in which it has been authoritively proposed to pay workers, other than cane-cutters, a living wage."

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23 John Armstrong, "The Sugar Strike, 1911", in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, pp.100-16.

24 p.lix. See also pp.xviii-xix; *Brisbane Courier*, 13/8/12, pp.5f.
So when Lavender worked around Proserpine in 1912, the Queensland sugar industry consisted mostly of scattered, often isolated communities, made up of predominantly Australian and European born small farmers and of itinerant labourers.
Chapter 5

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

When Lavender arrived in Darwin in 1914 the most significant aspect of the Northern Territory to most Australians was its lack of a substantial settled European population. At a time when a perceived threat of invasion from the north was foremost in many people's minds, the vacant North was seen as a danger to national security. When the Commonwealth assumed control of the Territory in 1911, its first objective had been to establish a white population there. Some believed that the effects of the tropical climate on Europeans would thwart these plans, but on the whole people were sanguine about the Territory's future, since it had the reputation of being a place of enormous untapped potential. This was despite the South Australian government's failure to achieve any substantial economic development in the forty-eight years it governed the Northern Territory between 1863 and 1911.

Lavender saw a lot of the Territory in the twelve months he was there. He travelled down the coast from Darwin and up the Victoria River before working on Victoria River Downs station, and then drove cattle from Wave Hill station across to Camooweal. He returned to Darwin via Porrólóóla, shot buffaloes east of Adelaide River, and finally worked in Darwin on Vestey's meatworks and the Darwin wharf before returning to the South. This chapter describes the few industries that were established in the Territory by 1914, and in particular the pastoral industry, with which
Lavender was mainly involved while he was there. There follows an analysis of the nature of society in the pastoral north before the First World War.

Those who went to the tropical north, especially the Top End in which Lavender worked, found an environment unlike those in which Europeans had settled elsewhere in Australia. They came to divide their year into two seasons: the wet and the dry. In the wet season, from November to April, north-westerly winds bring almost all of the annual reinfell, fostering lush growth in vegetation and inundating the low coastal plains. The dry season is characterised by south-easterly winds, and the grasses which flourished in the preceding wet become coarse and unnutritious.

By 1911 the 1.35 million square kilometres of the Territory contained only 3,310 non-Aboriginal people. Many Chinese had gone there to mine for gold in the eighteen seventies, and to build the Darwin to Pine Creek railway in 1886-89, and though their numbers were declining, in 1911 they still represented forty-three per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. Seventy-two per cent of the Europeans in the Territory were male, of whom one in five was married or widowed. No one knew how many Aborigines there were. Baldwin Spencer, Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Northern Territory in 1912, could do no better than suppose that there were "more nearly 50,000 than 20,000".¹

¹Professor W. Baldwin Spencer, "Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory", in Australia, Report of the Administrator for the year 1912, CPP No. 45, 1913, Vol.III, p.41. L.R. Smith calculates that there were likely to have been around 20,000 Aborigines in 1911, compared with a pre-contact total of about 50,000. L.R. Smith, The Aboriginal Population of Australia, (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1980), Ch.7.7. Australia, Census of the Commonwealth... 1911, Vol.II, pp.226-29.
The Northern Territory economy was dominated by the mining and pastoral sectors. Mining - mainly gold and tin - accounted for twenty-four per cent of the Territory's exports in 1910, and in 1911 employed thirty-six per cent of its non-dependent non-Aboriginal population. Most of these were Chinese. The few Europeans in the industry (ninety in 1913) were mainly involved in tin and copper mining. Most mining was concentrated in the area centred on Pine Creek.2

Pearl-shelling realised 3.7 per cent of the Territory's exports in 1910. Most of the labour was provided by Japanese. The buffalo shooters Lavender worked with east of Adelaide River were typical of the few hardy individuals who had pursued that line of business since the early nineties. Buffalo, brought from Asia for the early settlements on Melville Island (1824-29) and the Cobourg Peninsula (1827-29, 1838-49), were feral on the coastal plains east of Darwin. In the dry season they were shot for their hides and horns by whites working individually or in pairs, and with the aid of Aborigines who skinned the beasts and cleaned, salted and stacked the hides in return for food, occasionally liquor, and as much buffalo meat as they liked. It is unlikely that more than about ten Europeans were involved in this pursuit at any one time.3

The new administration of 1911 had much faith in agriculture as a means of populating the North, despite the repeated failures to grow


3Warburton, Buffaloes, passim; YBHD, pp.211, 501-511.
crops on a commercial scale in the Territory to that time. Experimental farms were established at Batchelor and on the Daly River, but confronted with distant markets, white ants, and expensive and inefficient labour, they were never a success.

In 1911, about one-third of the Territory's non-Aboriginal people lived in the Darwin district. It was a base for the civil service, for a few pearling luggers, and a source of supplies for the pastoral and mining communities of its hinterland. The town's commercial life was dominated by its Chinese residents:

There are about twenty Chinese shops, and here is a typical sign of one of them - "Wun Lung: Baker, Photographer, Fishing-boat Owner." Most of the menial labour was performed by Aborigines in return for food, clothing, tobacco and opium ash. By 1914 the new Commonwealth administration was trying to move them from camps on Lameroo Beach and the fringe of the town to a new compound further out on Kahlin Beach.

A languid air pervaded this little town of wood and corrugated iron perched amongst the mangroves thousands of kilometres from the centres of government, commerce and culture. A concerned citizen wrote of Northern Territory towns in 1914:

Instead of efforts being made to improve local conditions "the tired feeling" everywhere predominates, and where it is so easy to lie back and do nothing, it seems against human nature

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to expect anyone to take thankless burdens upon their shoulders.

Pine Creek, serving the mining population, contained one-quarter of the Northern Territory non-Aboriginal population, and a few other small towns served as bases for police troopers and sly grog sellers, and as venues for race meetings.

The most important component of the Northern Territory economy in terms of its contribution to exports was the pastoral sector. In 1911 it employed 418 non-Aboriginal workers. Though it was pre-eminent, it could hardly be called a success. The first country to be stocked in the Territory was on the Georgina River where Queensland pastoralists took up land in the mid eighteen sixties. Rocklands was the very first station established. These pastoralists retreated with the onset of recession in the sixties, and no runs were formed for another decade, though stock was overlanded to the north from Queensland and South Australia in the meantime, for sale to Overland Telegraph workers. Springvale became the first station to be stocked in the Top End when Alfred Giles arrived with sheep from South Australia in 1878. By 1885 the nucleus of a pastoral industry existed, with stations established in the Darwin, Victoria River and Barkly Tableland districts.

Two of the earliest investors in the Territory were Melbourne police magistrate J.W. Lyons and South Australian pastoralist C.B. Fisher, who acquired Glencoe station soon after it was formed in 1878. Then in 1879

6"Northern Territory Times, 1/1/14, p.2e. See also Broughton, Turn About Home, pp.29-30.

they obtained a lease over 15,890 square miles on the Victoria River, which became the famous Victoria River Downs run - the station Lavender would go to the Territory to work on. It was stocked by 1883 with cattle from Fisher's properties in southern Queensland: Noondoo, Currawillinghi and Wilmot. (Lavender worked on the first two in 1911-12.) By then Fisher had invested heavily in the station, but financial difficulties forced him to relinquish it. In 1890 V.R.D. passed into the hands of Goldsbrough Mort and Co. Ltd.

Between 1890 and 1910 the Northern Territory pastoral industry was beset with problems of a declining local population, redwater disease amongst travelling stock, the failure to open up foreign markets, and drought in eastern Australia. By the turn of the century the industry was in a poor state. Between 1889 and 1898 the area under lease fell by thirty per cent and the area stocked by eighty per cent.\(^8\)

In 1910 the pastoral industry was made up of "a scattering of stations whose lack of prosperity reflected the nature of the country."\(^9\) It continued in this vein for many years. Even in 1952 J.H. Kelly described its history as "largely one of struggle against bankruptcy by the smaller holders, and of small dividends, or no dividends at all, for the shareholders of some of the big company holders of the very big

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areas." Nevertheless, by 1914 there were some slight signs of maturity as pastoralists became aware of what sort of industry the Northern Territory environment could support and what they could do to improve their chances of success. Governments too were taking an active part in fostering development.

Land legislation in the South Australian period had been liberal in several respects. Stocking requirements and holding sizes were generous, and rents were low. However, there was little incentive to improve runs, because no compensation was available for improvements and the government could terminate leases at short notice. When it took over the Territory, the Commonwealth provided for the classification of land, with the area available and the duration of the lease depending on the carrying capacity of the land. There were improvement conditions and, again, rents were low.

By 1912 large tracts of the Top End had become concentrated in very few hands. One-quarter of the area under lease and permit (35,920 square miles) was held by four lessees or groups of lessees: the executors of W.F. Buchanan's estate (Wave Hill station - 7,843 square miles), Forrest, Forrest and Collins (9,897 square miles), Joe Pradshaw (6,800 square miles), and Bovril Estates, a British meat processing company. In 1909 Bovril had bought Victoria River Downs (11,380 square miles in 1912) for $165,000 from Sidney Kidman, Alexander Forrest and

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Isadore Emanuel, who had acquired it in turn from Goldsborough Fort in 1900.\(^{12}\) Fifty-six per cent (81,729 m\(^2\)) of the area held under lease and permit was in the hands of seventeen pastoralists. Stock ownership was even more concentrated, with almost two-thirds of the Territory's cattle in herds of five hundred or more being on only six stations in 1908.\(^{13}\)

Concurrently, however, there was a trend towards the taking up of small blocks under annual permit, on the edges of the large runs. While many of these small-scale operators (who were mostly stockmen) may have been bona fide pastoralists, the Administrator believed that several had the intention of only branding cleanskin cattle that strayed from the established holdings, rather than stocking the country from elsewhere or breeding their own stock. Lavender found this to be so in the Victoria River district.\(^{14}\)

By 1914, pastoralists had sorted out the most suitable areas for raising cattle. The first graziers to breach the north had taken up land in the Darwin hinterland and on the Cobourg Peninsula, but by 1914 there were only a few small holdings around Darwin supplying the local market. Arnhem Land had been found to be totally unsuited, firstly by


J.A. MacCartney who abandoned his Florida run in 1893, and again by the
British-based Eastern and African Cold Storage Supply Company which
moved twenty-two thousand head of cattle to eastern Arnhem Land in 1903,
but was liquidated by 1908. The Victoria River and Barkly Tableland
districts were found to be the most suitable, containing good pastoral
land covered by Mitchell and other perennial tussock grasses. The
Victoria River area also contained good natural water supplies, while
the Barkly Tableland was most accessible to Queensland markets.

Cattle were established as the most appropriate livestock for the Top
End by 1914. Sheep had been tried and found wanting in the Darwin
region in the late eighteen seventies and early eighties, on V.R.D.
between 1890 and 1893, and on Pradshaw's Run later in the nineties.
They were unsuited to the climate, pastures and distances, were preyed
upon by dingoes, and required more improvements than the industry could
afford. In 1914 only Avon Downs on the Barkly Tableland ran sheep in
the Top End. Willeroo, Newcastle Waters and Rocklands stations gave
some attention to horse-breeding, but on the whole Territorians were
only interested in cattle. Numbers rose by 105 per cent between 1899
and 1910, from 251,000 to 513,000.

In 1914 the so called "open range" method prevailed in the Northern
Territory. It consisted of running as many cattle on as much country as

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16 See map in Bauer, Historical Geography, p.213.

possible, with the least possible outlay on improvements. In 1912 the Veterinary and Stock Department's report contained the observation:

...practically none of the steps which have been taken to improve the country in other places have been taken in the Territory.\(^5\)

Apart from low rentals and the lack of compensation for improvements on resumed holdings, the enormous cost of even stocking a run was also responsible for this situation. Duncan estimates that it "frequently took seven to ten years merely to prepare a run for stocking by finding water and installing the bare minimum of facilities". C.E. Fisher invested £150,000 in V.R.D. (a run which was considered inadequately improved in 1935) and £243,000 in his Northern Territory holdings as a whole.\(^6\)

Improvements generally consisted of a few stockyards, perhaps some dams in creeks, and a rough dwelling made from local materials. Linklater describes Tom Nugent's hut on Banke Banke station north of Tennant Creek:

His homestead was a log hut of one room with an earth floor, and his furniture was in the best tradition of the modern

\(^5\)Northern Territory, Report of the Administrator...1912, p.117.

uncluttered style - one box, one form, and one deal table.  

Stock management was of necessity, given the standard of improvements, very haphazard. In 1903 Rocklands had its first muster in seventeen years, and in 1908 it was reported that a muster on an unnamed station revealed that it carried twenty thousand more cattle than the management had reckoned on. Since mustering was never totally efficient, scrub bulls were rife on most runs. There was no segregation of herds, so heifers were joined prematurely. These factors, as well as the fact that little new blood was introduced to herds, meant that the quality of livestock was poor. The absence of paddocks also caused mustering to be drawn out over long periods, which in turn caused cattle to lose condition. The lack of watering facilities meant that land was not used efficiently.

Inadequate as they may have been, some efforts were being made to increase the carrying capacity and efficiency of stations in the early twentieth century. Several stations on the Barkly Tableland were boring for water, and fencing was being undertaken on MacArthur River station. In 1907 four tableland stations imported new stock to improve the

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22 A.A. CRS F987: Brackenreg and Shepherd, "Investigation of Pastoral Leases - Northern Territory", c.1935.
quality of their herds. In the Victoria River district, Wave Hill, Inverway and Gordon Downs sank wells in 1905 and the 1914-15 Administrator’s report stated that in that area, "the stations, notably those which have changed hands, are ... being developed by water conservation." The report of 1907 had noted that "most places added yearly to the number of yards." Wire fences were being erected on V.R.D. and Wave Hill by 1908 and a stud paddock was constructed on V.R.D. to facilitate more controlled breeding. The industry was certainly lacking in capital, but by 1914 some efforts were being made to rectify that problem.23

Distant markets were a major problem. There were four main stock-routes leading out of the Territory. One led from the Victoria River through Timber Creek to Wyndham, from where the firm of Connor, Doherty and Durack shipped live cattle to Fremantle from the early nineties.24 Other routes led along the Overland Telegraph line into South Australia, around the gulf through Porroloola into Queensland, and by way of Camooweal, also into Queensland - the path that Lavender’s party took. For graziers on the Victoria, the Western Australian route was convenient, as the distance was relatively short and water was available at regular stages for eight months of the year. However, V.R.D. and Wave Hill continued to send stock east, so the Wyndham market must have been limited. The other three routes were fraught with


problems. Lack of water was obviously troublesome on the track through
the centre, and stock travelling over the notorious Murrani track had
the same difficulty. The gulf route was better watered but was subject
to flooding, entailed a greater risk of contracting disease, and was
four hundred miles longer than the Camooweal route for Victoria River
cattle. In dry years the eastern and southern tracks were impassable.25

Some of the difficulties were slowly alleviated. Inter-colonial
quarantine restrictions began to be lifted in late 1898 and were
completely abolished by 1903. In 1905 Queensland imposed a "dipping
law" on stock passing south across the "tick line", but a dip was built
at Anthony's Lagoon in 1906 to meet this exigency. By 1910 the South
Australian government had sunk wells along the southern section of the
Overland Telegraph route. The extension of Queensland's railways into
the west and the establishment of meatworks on the east coast also
provided an easier outlet for Northern Territory stock.26

When the Commonwealth assumed control of the Territory in 1911, it
planned to overcome the problem of access to beef markets by building
meatworks in Darwin. In 1914 Vestey Brothers, another large British
meat processing firm, agreed to build the works and to make one-third of
their capacity available for processing other owners' beef.27 In turn,

25See Lavender's account of a droving trip over the Murrani track and
on to Camooweal, YEH D, pp.356-451.

26Duncan, The Northern Territory Pastoral Industry 1863-1911, pp.58,
61, 86, 138; Pauer, Historical Geography, p. 158.

27Vesteys bought Wave Hill in 1914, and two years later held 27,670
square miles in the Northern Territory and 8,400 square miles in the
Kimberleys. Alan Powell, Far Country. A Short History of the Northern
the Commonwealth agreed to extend the railway to Katherine and provide rolling stock and a siding at the works. Nothing went right. The works opened in April 1917, operated for three short seasons and once again in 1925 before closing for good. Only 536 head of privately-owned stock were treated in that time. The failure has been attributed to the inappropriateness of Darwin as a site, inadequate railway facilities, dear and inefficient labour, and the outbreak of the First World War.28

The tropical climate dictated the yearly routine on cattle stations. Mustering, branding and cutting out stock for sale commenced as soon as possible after the wet lifted, so that cattle could be put on the road while there was still feed and water along the stock-routes. Also, on the vast unfenced runs every available day was needed to account for as much stock as possible. Once the wet set in operations were scaled down as movement about the country became very restricted.

Apart from stockmen, the larger stations also employed bookkeepers, carriers to take supplies to outstations, cooks and blacksmiths. When Bovril's chairman visited V.R.D. in 1915 he found that the station was very largely self-sufficient. Harness and saddlery were made there from leather produced from the hides of the station's cattle. He saw a wagon which, except for the axles, was made on and with materials obtained on the property.29


Tasks such as fencing, yard-building, carrying and boring were often done on contract, as was branding at one stage on V.R.D. Drovers were also contractors. Using Lavender's figures of one drover per hundred head of cattle, and government estimates of stock exports, the number of people involved in moving cattle out of the Territory between 1901 and 1913 varied between a trough of around one hundred in 1905 and a peak of about 570 in 1913.

A lot of pastoral labour was provided by Aborigines, and race relations were never easy. Both government and church had become involved in Aboriginal matters. Jesuits established a mission at Rapid Creek near Darwin in 1882, and made three attempts to set one up on the Daly River. The last one closed in 1899. The Church Missionary Society of Victoria established a mission on the Roper in 1907, and in 1911 a Catholic mission was founded on Melville Island. The Commonwealth government appointed Walter Baldwin Spencer to formulate an Aboriginal policy in 1912. He advised that Aborigines about towns be removed to camps, such as Kahlin in Darwin. For the rest, he suggested that reserves be gazetted, within which nomadic Aborigines might be taught gradually to adopt European culture.

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31 YBHD, p.359.


33 Spencer, "Preliminary Report...1912", pp.48-49.
On stations though, government had little effect in this period. Policemen, with Aboriginal trackers, were stationed in several areas, but their main function seems to have been to assist stations in tracking down cattle-spearimg blacks. On the whole, blacks and whites were left to come to terms with each other in their own ways.

Linklater claims that Aborigines were shot indiscriminately during the cattle migration and the rush to the Kimberley goldfields. Matt Savage first went to the north-west in 1912:

To make friends with wild blacks required plenty of patience and cold nerve. Most of the pastoralists preferred to shoot them off the station. I suppose it seemed quicker and easier to do the job that way.

In turn, Aborigines often responded to the whites' incursion by killing men and cattle, and it appears that there was never a white man killed by Aborigines (except perhaps in the case of loners travelling or working beyond the ken of fellow Europeans) without a punitive expedition being despatched to exact retribution. Most annual Government Residents' and Administrators' reports on the Northern Territory from 1901 to 1915 contain complaints of continued cattle-killing. In 1904 the policemen at Timber Creek claimed:

34 Linklater and Tapp, Gather No Moss, p.74.

35 Willey, Boss Drover, p.98.

There would be more country stocked in this district if the blacks were not so troublesome amongst cattle and horses, and so treacherous towards the inhabitants.

The Borroloola constable reported a similar situation in his district:

I am quite sure if native depredation can be reduced to a minimum most of our Northern Territory stations would show a much larger increase. These are two most serious questions our ... stockholders have to contend with, that is - native depredation, and a remunerative market for their surplus stock.\(^\text{37}\)

Though much racial antagonism continued,\(^\text{38}\) there was also an increasing degree of cooperation between blacks and whites as each came to recognise the advantages that could be derived from the other. For whites, there were two things to be gained from a closer relationship with the Aborigines. Firstly, if the blacks could be induced to settle close by homesteads and outstations, then they could be more closely watched and the amount of beef that they consumed regulated. This arrangement was actively encouraged on several stations, including V.R.D. and Wave Hill.\(^\text{39}\) The second advantage to whites in cultivating Aboriginal cooperation was that the blacks represented a cheap source of

\(^{37}\)Australia, Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1904, pp.27, 28.

\(^{38}\)In 1914 a "desperate encounter with blacks" was reported in the Victoria River district in which several Aborigines were arrested, some on suspicion of having murdered a part-Aborigine, and some of having possession of stolen beef. They allegedly tried to shoot a constable, and when trying to escape, one of them was shot. Lavender would have been in the district at this time. Northern Territory Times, 2/4/14, p.4c.

\(^{39}\)Buchanan, Packhorse and Waterhole, p.165; Ronan, Deep of the Sky, p.195; Mrs Aeneas Gunn, We of the Never-Never, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1982; first published 1908), p.116; YBHD, p.310.
labour. As early as 1873 John Lewis used Aboriginal labour to construct buildings, yards and fences at his buffalo shooting camp on Cobourg Peninsula. 40 There were Aboriginal "station boys" at Springvale in 1883, four years after its formation, and by 1895 V.R.D., Wave Hill and Bradshaw's Run were also employing the locals. 41 In 1912 Spencer claimed that "practically all" cattle stations depended on Aboriginal labour, and that the number of Aboriginal workers on each station ranged from two to fifty. 42

Aboriginal men undertook stock work, to which they adapted readily, while women were taken on as domestics and as concubines, both on stations and by drovers. Remuneration was in the form of clothing, boots, blankets, mosquito nets, meat, flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and pipes, and Spencer claimed that in a few cases long-serving, "civilized" men were paid partly or wholly in cash. During the wet, those who had been doing stock work were thrown back on their own resources, and had


41 Creaghe, "Diary, 1882-1883", p.29; A.A. CRS F302: Timber Creek Police Journals, 14/5/94-7/8/98: see 18/3/95, 27/3/95, 17/5/95; Fary Durack, Kings In Grass Castles, (Corgi Books, London, 1967; first published 1959), p.371. Unless he was referring only to "myalls" (that is, Aborigines who lived a substantially traditional way of life with little contact with whites), a statement attributed to Lindsay Crawford in about 1895 contradicts the above:

During the last ten years, in fact since the white man settled here, we have held no communication with the natives at all, except with the rifle. They have never been allowed near this station [V.R.D.] or the outstations, being too treacherous and warlike. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1895).

42 Spencer, "Preliminary Report", pp.42, 47.
to hand back their clothing issue until the following dry. A comparison of the monthly "blacks account" and non-Aboriginal employment figures for V.R.D. for the years 1909-14 indicates that Aborigines absorbed most of the seasonality of employment. While the average monthly cost of maintaining Aborigines varied from £9.6s in December to £29.11s in May (a rise of 218 per cent), the average number of Europeans and Chinese employed was quite stable, ranging from nearly sixteen in December to almost eighteen in June (a fourteen per cent rise).

The gravitation towards homestead camps and employment has been explained as being the result of the gradual erosion of "life choices" available to Aboriginal people. As whites took a firmer hold on the land, actively asserting their claim to it with the rifle, the traditional nomadic lifestyle became less attractive. At the same time the sugar, tobacco and so on available from the white man were positive inducements to fall in with the new order of things. However, not all

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Aboriginal people in the north had any choice in the matter. E.C. Creaghe was at Carl Creek station, western Queensland, between the Gregory River and the Northern Territory border, in 1883, and saw a woman brought in:

The usual method here of bringing in a new gin is to put a rope around her neck and drag her along from horseback, the gin on foot...

The new gin ... is chained up to a tree a few yards from the house, and is not to be loosed until they think she is tamed.47

If an Aborigine absconded from his work, the accepted practice was for him to be retrieved by his employer and given "a bashing".48

In 1911 the non-Aboriginal population outside the Darwin and Pine Creek districts was predominantly Australian-born. Most whites involved in the pastoral industry would appear to have come from other pastoral environments, mainly in South Australia and Queensland, with experience of the industry and its mores.50 There were exceptions, as Levender noted when writing of the cemetery at Pradshaw's Run:

Amongst them rests the bones of a one time bank manager by name of Palmer. How and why he changed from that profession to a stockman out in that wild country is anyone's guess (although similar cases out the Territory way were not so unusual).51

47Creaghe, "Diary, 1882-1883", 20/2/83, 21/2/83, p.8. See also Birtles, Lonely Lands, p.213.

48Willey, Boss Drover, p.52.

50Based on a survey of some of the better known whites: those who have written or been written of.

51YBHD, p.267.
Birthplaces of non-Aboriginal Territorians beyond the Darwin and Pine Creek districts, 1911.

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TOTAL 1,000 169 1,169

The number of whites employed on individual stations varied considerably. V.R.D., as the then largest station in the Northern Territory, can be taken to represent one extreme with its average of from fifteen to eighteen non-Aborigines on the books at any one time.

About four of these were usually Chinese. At the other end of the scale, some small stations were run by just one white man.\textsuperscript{52}

Like Matt Savage, most white men in the Territory seemed to move about quite regularly:

> During my early years in the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory, I took whatever jobs were going. I worked on Argyle, Victoria River Downs, Rosewood, Waterloo, Sturt Creek and Willeroo; never staying anywhere for very long.\textsuperscript{53}

Of more than ninety employees on the V.R.D. books over the years 1909-14, sixty were engaged for periods of one year or less, while only two (one of whom was the manager) were on the station for the whole six years. One worker was employed on six separate occasions over that period, but never stayed for more than six months.

* * *

There were no more isolated places in Australia in 1914 than the inland regions of the Northern Territory. Beyond the railway line, the only means of transport were coastal steamer (along the navigable stretches of a few of the major rivers) and horse. Except for the brief period of the Hall's Creek goldrush in the eighteen eighties, no one travelled via the Territory to get to any other place. Those who did make the effort to get there had to endure not only the isolation, but also the constant threat of ambush by Aborigines. People who sought out such an environment must have been motivated by more than financial concerns, for there were easier ways of making a living. In going to

\textsuperscript{52} For example, see Durack, \textit{Kings In Grass Castles}, p.334; \textit{YBHD}, pp.397-98.

\textsuperscript{53} Willey, \textit{Boss Drover}, p.104.
the Territory, Lavender saw himself as adopting a very acceptable and
even revered role - that of the frontier bushman. There was status to
be gained, something to talk about in the years to come. Having
described the droving trip from Wave Hill to Camooweal, he wrote:

They would now be able to hold their own in any company, very
few "knockabout" young fellows could talk of having crossed the
Territory with cattle.54

For Michael Durack, in the age when British imperialism was at its
zenith, working in the North was an act of patriotism:

As long as [he] was in the saddle going from one place to
another, whether or not there was any practical necessity for
the journey, he felt his time was being well spent. He was
"pioneering", "empire building".55

Others perhaps were repelled by the more settled areas rather than
attracted by the North. The Territory was used as a refuge from the law
of the other colonies and states. Darwin Police Inspector Paul Foelsche
reported in 1883:

...a good many of the criminal class from the back country of
Queensland have found their way here, among them some who have
served various terms of imprisonment in that colony for horse
and cattle stealing, highway and mail robbery...56

Judith Wright has suggested that people who went bush were those who
were unable to function within the society of the time with its
particular rules governing social interaction: "...the bush ethos

54 YBHD, p.451. See also p.250.

55 Durack, Kings In Grass Castles, p.297.

56 S.A.A. 790/1883/24: Foelsche to Government Resident. Quoted in
Merlan, ""Making People Quiet"", p.81. See also YBHD, pp.179, 450.
attracted the men hurt by life or unwilling to meet its demands..."57
Another theory would have it that colonists suffer from an inferiority complex which leads them to seek out supposedly inferior and servile populations which they can dominate.58

Whatever their motives for going there, the whites of the Territory had created a distinctive society by 1914. There is an image of the bush as a place where, unlike in the city, the human spirit is free from all fetters and able to realise its full potential. The further one moves into the outback, the greater the freedom. No place was further out back in 1914 than the Northern Territory. When Jeannie Gunn went there she threw off the "false veneer of civilisation". Tom Ronan wrote of the North as a place "where men still lived according to their natural impulses, where the brakes of public opinion and mob prejudice did not exist..."59 Such views overlook the fact that people took their preconceptions and prejudices along with them when they went, and that when they got there they found, not a blank, malleable landscape to be moulded at will, but a hostile natural environment and a less than tractable indigenous population. The society that had evolved through the interaction of Europeans, Aborigines and the Northern Territory environment by the time Lavender arrived was highly structured. If it was a truer representation of some innate "human nature" than other


59Gunn, We of the Never-Never, p.150; Ronan, Deep of the Sky, p.89.
societies, then it would have provided substance for the theories of Hobbes rather than those of Rousseau.

There were several fundamental divisions in the social structure of the pastoral North. Two of these divided the European community: class and gender. Of the 416 people engaged in pastoral pursuits in 1911, thirty-nine (9.4 per cent) classed themselves as employers, and another eight (1.9 per cent) worked on their own account. Most of the representatives of capital however, were managers, and as such they could never wholly identify with their other employees. Matt Savage knew of new managers who sought to shore up profits and cover their own inadequacies by cutting employees' rations. When Lavender was at Wave Hill he observed that "the bosses Puck and Herb" set themselves up around a camp fire apart from the other employees. For their part, stockmen were rarely enamoured of pastoral companies or their managers. While they would not steal from one another, cattle were considered fair game.60 There was trouble catching Jim Campbell, the notorious cattle duffer who operated on V.R.D.: "...all save Mr Townshend [the manager] and the M[ounted] C[onstable] were actively working in his interest."61

In 1917 a stockman shot the Wave Hill manager in the shoulder, but was found not guilty when tried. The jury foreman's statement, though perhaps made in jest, illustrates the identification of managers with owners and a strong feeling against the pastoral companies: "...what's

60 Duncan, The Northern Territory Pastoral Industry 1863-1911, 40; Willey, Boss Drover, pp.50-51; YEBD, p.351; Froughton, Turn Again Home, p.49.

wrong with shooting one of Vestey's managers?" And finally, Lavender notes that at a debauch known as a "Gum Tree Spree", all hands were welcome "other than the bosses and their 'silvertail' staffs".63

The 14.5 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population beyond Darwin and Pine Creek who were women were also considered a distinctive group to at least as great an extent as in western society as a whole. They were not always welcome. Jeannie Gunn met with considerable antagonism from the Elsey stockmen from the time they heard she was coming to live there. The compassion and morality that were associated with the stereotype of white womanhood were inimical to the Northern ethos.

Two other divisions - of race and region - served to unite the European community. Aborigines and Europeans were separated by a wide cultural gap:

Indeed if one tried to invent two styles of life, as unlike each other as could be, while still following the rules which are necessary if people are to live together at all, one might well end up with something like the Aboriginal and European traditions.64

Whites held a generally unflattering view of the Aboriginal people. They were considered impulsive, cowardly, treacherous, able to respect only those whom they feared, and hence amenable only to a firm hand. They were also seen to be lazy and improvident, and therefore unworthy of the land they occupied. In short, from the whites' point of view,

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62 Willey, Boss Drover, p.76.

63 YBHD, p.302.

64 Stanner, White Man Got No Dreaming, p.59.
the Aborigines were innately and irrevocably inferior.\textsuperscript{65}

The gulf between blacks and whites was accentuated by the fact that Europeans came to take control of the land on their own terms, while the Aborigines were not prepared to accept this passively. It was a case of invasion and resultant warfare. In order to win that war, it was considered imperative, at all times, to convey an air of invincibility. Jeannie Gunn was warned: "die rather than own to a blackfellow that you were frightened of anything..."\textsuperscript{66} This idea was easier to impress upon Aborigines when guns were at hand, and they always were.

Right along the "line" since arriving in the Territory, the lads had been warned, never to cause the blacks to think you were not always armed and ready for attack.\textsuperscript{67}

Whites also maintained their standing in the social structure by discouraging all Europeans (except anthropologists, who were considered "a class apart" and "a bit mad"\textsuperscript{68}) from taking any personal interest in Aborigines.

The white man who allows a nigger to sit at the table, or


\textsuperscript{66}Gunn, We of the Never-Never, p.57.

\textsuperscript{67}YBHD, p.307.

\textsuperscript{68}YBHD, p.307; Linklater and Tapp, Gather No Moss, p.10.
plays cards, boxes, or skylarks with him, is much to be deplored. 69

Lavender indicates that this precept, and the many others that comprised the "unwritten law" of the Territory, was enforced by ostracizing transgressors. Savage found that one's job and level of wages could depend on whether or not one had the appropriate attitude towards Aborigines. 70 The distance between the races was reinforced through language and folklore. The use of terms like "nigger", "buck", and "gin" served to disguise the Aborigines' humanity. Whites also had a very keen sense of their short past in the region, and for them it was filled with tales of Aboriginal dastardliness and savage European reprisals. Jack Watson, second manager of V.R.D., was known as "the Gulf Hero", not only for riding exploits and daring encounters with sharks and crocodiles, but also for his barbarism towards Aborigines. Mrs Creaghe stayed near his place on the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1883:

Mr Watson has 40 pairs of blacks' ears nailed round the walls, collected during raiding parties after losses of many cattle speared by the blacks. 71

Of such people were the Territory's legends made.

Aboriginal employees presented a problem, requiring another category in the social order. On the one hand, it was considered necessary to impress upon them the idea that though they worked in concert with whites, they were nonetheless subordinate. This was all the more

69 Mason, Darkest West Australia, p.40.


necessary because working Aborigines tended to remain in contact with and to empathise with their "myall" clansmen, and there was the chance that if they were taken too much into confidence, this could be used against the whites.\textsuperscript{72} On the other hand, it was to the whites' advantage to weaken the bond between working and other Aborigines, to bring the former around to identifying with European interests. Hence, the distinction at a gathering at the Victoria River Depot in 1914:

That night there was great feasting ... the whites and more civilised Abos round one fire, the rest of the nigs including near myalls a little way off round another.\textsuperscript{73}

On some stations Aboriginal stockmen were brought across from Queensland so that they would have no connection with the local blacks.\textsuperscript{74} Part-Aboriginal people received little consideration on account of their portion of "white" blood:

There is ... a decided tendency to treat the half-caste just as if he were full-blooded aboriginal.\textsuperscript{75}

The second division uniting Europeans in the North was that which they perceived to exist between themselves and the rest of the continent, or indeed the rest of the world. Whereas the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 generated enormous interest amongst many Australians in the South, in the Territory Lavender found only indifference and a reluctance to become involved. Linklater notes the same response:

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{72}Costello, \textit{Life of John Costello}, p.179; Willshire, \textit{Land of the Dawning}, p.11. \\
\textsuperscript{73}YBHD, p.275. \\
\textsuperscript{74}Broughton, \textit{Turn Again Home}, p.53. \\
\textsuperscript{75}Buchanan, \textit{Packhorse and Waterhole}, p.110. See also YBHD, p.213. 
\end{center}
On Bob's arrival back at Bedford Station at the end of October [1914] we asked him if anything startling had happened, in the world "outside our ken." He said "nothing." About a week later he said, "There is a war on." I said, "Who are fighting?" He said, "England, Germany, Russia and France are all at it, hammer and tongs!"  

It could be that in country where hip-slung revolvers were standard attire, people felt no need to cross the world in search of adventure. But few were motivated by patriotism either. There was actually a smaller proportion of native-born Australians (and more British-born) in the Territory beyond Darwin and Pine Creek, than in Australia as a whole. But without regular contact with the outside world, concepts such as patriotism and allegiance to a wider polity fell away. Instead, in their isolation, people became totally absorbed in their own uniquely northern way of life and elevated the standards of morality and professional excellence that had evolved in that particular environment to universal precepts. There was the "disgruntled old bushman [who] complained that in Sydney there were statues set up "to blokes who had never even found a waterhole"."  

But while Territorians were isolated from the rest of the world, they were often dependent upon it, and this produced antagonism. To 1911 the Northern Territory was part of a South Australian federal electorate, but when the Commonwealth assumed control in that year, the Territory was not considered populous enough to form an electorate in itself. Territorians were disenfranchised, so that they hadn't even a nominal say in their government. Decisions affecting the Territory were made by.


77 Linklater and Tapp, Gather No Moss, p.39.
distant governments and pastoral and meat exporting companies. They were often made in ignorance of northern conditions, or determined by wider economic and political considerations, so that to Territorians they seemed (and often were) inappropriate. The South was also the source of criticism concerning race relations. Northerners responded to investigations into the ill-treatment of Aborigines with "a freemasonry of silence among the white men, including often the bush police..." Their attitude is illustrated amply by W.H. Willshire:

Many have been the arguments and controversies about the aborigines..., and those who live in large cities in luxury, are the ones who sympathise with them....

I only wish some of those canting snufflers were placed in some of the predicaments I have been in with the wild cannibals. 79

By 1914 then, pastoral life in the North was not only physically perilous, but also highly structured socially. That structure could not be found in statute books, but was nonetheless apparent to those who tried to flout it. Only those who complied, and possessed the requisite excellence in bushcrafts - especially horsemanship - and disdain for danger, were fully accepted and regarded as "Northern Territory bushmen".

78 Broughton, Turn Again Home, p.53. See also YBHD, pp.230, 282, 318.

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"YOUNG BILL'S HAPPY DAYS"
REMINISCENCES OF RURAL AUSTRALIA
1910-1915

T.W. Lavender

Introduced, edited and annotated by
Peter Woodley

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EDITORIAL NOTE

In most cases, where it is considered necessary to indicate that the document has been changed, the original word or phrase is retained with the correction added afterwards in square brackets. Where this makes the sentence unduly messy, the original word or phrase is noted at the foot of the page instead. Omissions are also indicated in footnotes.

Where Lavender's marginal notes do not fit neatly into the text, they are included as footnotes. These notes are indicated by a superscribed number, followed by the letter "a" in the text, eg. 7a.
Foreword

HOW THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY
(IN THE THIRD PERSON)
CAME TO BE WRITTEN

The writer's late younger brother George Shortus, who was a First World War veteran, and at the time of the following recounted happenings recently retired from an exceedingly busy and more or less successful business life, and obliged to endure an existence of comparative physical and somewhat mental inactivity in consequence of old war injuries, was continually regretting to his older brother (the writer), who frequently visited him, that he was "very often bored to death with continued inactivity". As he, George, had experienced a business career of "ups and downs", gambled overmuch on big ventures that didn't always come off, and ran the law closely, too closely at times, in getting back into the "game" again after tumbling to the bottom of the ladder (and it happened more than once), the writer knew he, George, could compile a good story in the form of an autobiography of his business experiences, and mentioned to him that if he would tackle this pastime it would probably be one hobby that would help him to at least cut down to some degree the boring phase of putting in time.

In answer to this proposition, George declared it would involve too many people still living, in embarrassment amnest their activity (to say nothing about his own of course) in business transactions that, well, (to put it in the vulgar vernacular) smelt too highly to be brought into the light of common or public knowledge. (Because he was a "businessmen", perhaps George could not visualise writing the proposed autobiography unless same were published and money made therefrom.)

However, the writer persisted with the idea submitted to his brother, who eventually came back with the following challenge: "Look here Bill,
when you ran away from home as a lad, for the bush, you were away for
four and a half years. We never heard much from you, and seldom at
that. I remember you were all over half Australia. What were you up to
all that time? Look, if you'll guarantee to write a dinkum account of
your adventures over that period and pull no punches, I'll do the same
by your proposal to me. Well, is it on?" Without hesitation, Pill
accepted the challenge.

The upshot of the agreement was that George proved too slow at making
a start, and after postponements through illness etc., suffered yet
another of his severe debilitating attacks, from which he "passed on
over the border". The writer, having in the meantime got properly
going, became interested enough to see the matter right through, and
here's the tale for what it's worth.

"Old" Pill offers no excuses for mistakes in faulty compilation,
spelling or punctuation etc., except submitting that he couldn't be
topping his elementary education in the usual way, and at the same time
acquiring all sorts of fascinating experiences in the "bush" and
"outback", which was just what he wanted to do at the time anyway.

Well, looking back on those irresponsible years now that the writer is
knocking on seventy odd, with the exception to regret at having caused
his ambitious parents embarrassment and worry in his youth, Old Pill has
no qualms over those years, and would not have missed out on them for
anything.
Map 1. New South Wales and southern Queensland.
Chapter 1

OFF TO THE BUSH

Young Bill, the narrator, was not always known as Bill. When he was some fourteen years of age he attended a new school, to wit, Parramatta South. It was the passing custom of the schoolboys at this particular seat of learning to address any lad whose name they were not acquainted with by the slang title of "Blue", and the nickname stuck until Blue finally left the district for adventures in the bush some two years later. (Incidentally Blue had black hair, not red.) Nor was Blue ever addressed as Bill until after leaving home at just over sixteen years of age, but having been taken advantage of at his christening and given a name which he then considered somewhat sissy, he assumed one of his other Christian names, that of William, and was proud to be addressed as just plain "Bill".

"Young Bill" was not a really big fellow, but he was remarkably strong and hardy, and of course very healthy. Like most young fellows of this type, Bill was ashamed of his glorious youth. He was over-sensitive of being so young, and after leaving home persistently endeavoured to assume by speech and actions that he was years older. However, this didn't work at all, as everybody saw through it, and for a few years our hero could just not escape being referred to as Young Bill.

Bill's parents had great plans for their eldest boy, but had a very worrying time over him. He was wild all right, also wilful (or just
dam' silly), but this of course was not realised by Bill until later on (for like his brothers after him, he was to have finished off at a Greater Public School). In due course however, when Bill had not long attained fourteen years of age, he was sternly informed by his father to "hold himself in readiness" to attend no other than The King's School. Young Bill knew the time had arrived to run away from home and so escape this terrible ordeal, and he considered this plan much more interesting than studying for a few years at any Greater Public School.

As explained, Bill was then fourteen, and had just previously virtually wasted a precious twelve months at the State Public Schools; just loafed, played up and learnt nothing at all. Meanwhile, he became very interested in Australian bush stories, especially bushranging. Charles White, who was on the staff of the Farmer and Settler newspaper (Bill's father being one of the original three partners who founded that paper), wrote a number of books on Australian bushranging and completed his John Vane, Bushranger about this time, and presented his friend (Bill's father) with an autographed copy for his eldest son, having met Young Bill and knowing how interested he was in that type of bush stories. Bill enjoyed the book immensely, and thence onwards read all literature of this nature that he could procure.1 Australian bushmen became his heroes, bushrangers in particular, and even the humble swagman was held in high esteem. And it was at about this time our hero made up his mind to see as much of the outback bush and the adventures that could be experienced thereby, as soon as possible.

However, Bill's father, realising how his son was wasting his time,

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1See Introduction, Ch.2, for an analysis of some of the literature of this period and genre, which we know Lavender read.
finally made arrangements to send him off to The King's School, a Greater Public School of some repute situated at Parramatta. To escape this terrible ordeal, Young Bill ran away from home for the first time with a few belongings packed in a sugarbag and a few shillings in his pocket. Going under an assumed name and keeping to the bush roads and tracks, Bill walked off along the Old Windsor Road from Toongabbie, and after considerable walking and sleeping in the bush for a couple of nights, arrived at the Blue Mountains west of Richmond. Bill didn't like the way people stared at him suspiciously and passed remarks such as "the police were along here looking for a boy of your description; ran away from home" etc., etc.. To make matters worse, he wasn't even wearing long trousers, was still in short pants. Up in the bushland hills toward Kurrajong some simple and kindly people took our hero in, and realising he was a good worker about the farm, didn't question overmuch his cock-and-bull story of how he came to be wandering about the countryside in the manner he was. However, in the course of a few weeks the police caught up with Young Bill and his parents came along one fine day to take him home.

The upshot of the escapade was that Bill was allowed to leave school and it was planned he farm the property his father had just bought in Bennalong Road, Toongabbie, right opposite Mount Constitution (Mount "Dorrie" in the then local idiom). Mount Dorrie proved to be a wonderful "happy hunting ground" for Bill and his brothers, and the countryside was steeped in the folklore of the pioneers. They eventually located the mounds of some convict graves (probably correct); also rotting chain leg irons etc., and other hand-welded articles, and now and again would find an old copper coin (much larger and heavier than their counterparts of today) dating as far back as King George the Second's reign. They would be well over one hundred years old then.
This was the bush where Bill and his brothers used to hide their pea-rifles etc. in hollow logs. Bill's troop of boy scouts manoeuvred over this bushland: the second lot of scouts to be formed around Sydney (or Australia for that matter, Mosman was the first). The Scoutmaster, a university student, later became a member of the first A.I.F. along with several others of the old troop, and several were killed and wounded in that tremendous struggle of World War One. It is in the little Anglican church on Mount Dorothy that there is appropriately inscribed on marble the names of Bill and his brothers, and two (Arthur "Weary" Willmot and Ross "Chip" West, the best of course) who left their bones overseas, one killed on Gallipoli, and the other on the Broodseindeen [Broodseinde] Ridge, Belgium.

But in the meantime matters were not going too well with Bill and his parents, their son was playing up "old Harry": nothing really bad or wicked, just impossibly wilful and unmanageable (say Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn rolled into one). Eventually his parents thought that time and patience on their part would see the necessary change in their lad. However, after a couple of years of this experiment, Bill's parents became somewhat desperate, and as on the previous occasion of leaving home two years earlier, his father sternly and solemnly warned him to "hold himself in readiness" to take a position he would acquire for him on an up country station.

For some time back Bill had planned with two of his mates to "clear out to the bush", and now the time had arrived; they were all ready for the escapade. Bill had no intention of becoming a docile jackaroo with some "naise" family, but intended to travel around just when and where he felt like it and see as much of the back country as possible. Bill's father knew his son well enough to read his mind, as it were, and Bill was watched very closely the next few days, but of course he couldn't be
shadowed all the time, and shortly made off to his beloved "bush". One of his two mates who were to accompany him couldn't or wouldn't make it, so two lads only started out together. "How did they travel?!" you may well ask. Such adventurous youths of those days (A.D. 1910) loved to hump their "blueys" like any other true blue bush swagman: that is, our heroes walked and carried their camping gear on their backs. The boys were knowing enough to guess their parents would inform the police of their escapade; consequently the back tracks and roads and open bush were kept to as much as possible until they reached Penrith. Here the boys thought it prudent to cross the bridge over the Nepean River well after dark (such a bridge is a bottleneck and can easily be watched, the lads having learnt all about this in the Boy Scouts). So they chose the railway bridge, and it, [it] was at least proved, was not watched.

And so through a fine spring night the boys kept walking, and eventually camped beside the road well toward Springwood; and it was the warm morning sun about eight or nine a.m. (very few lads boasted a watch those days) that stirred them into rising. The billy was boiled and breakfast taken leisurely, the blueys rolled, and our heroes continued their journey. Life was good, a bonzer day and adventure calling to them from up country. Caution was now thrown to the winds, and although it was felt that they were still running a chance of being picked up by the police, no attempt was made at avoiding the highway; indeed it would have been most difficult to do so, the thick virgin bush enclosing the road for miles, and no alternative side roads (fifty years ago, remember), nor were there many houses, and the villages were very small and far enough between.

It was on rounding a bend suddenly, the boys observed coming leisurely towards them at about two or three hundred yards distance, a mounted police trooper. It was too late to duck into the bush, they had
obviously been seen, they would just have to brazen it out with the policeman. As almost expected, the trooper, after some casual conversation asked the lads' names and other questions, and of course [they] were easily caught out by the policeman, false names, concocted story and all. The boys felt a little foolish when the trooper expostulated with them for "telling such a lot of lies", and when they, Young Bill in particular, gave a little lip back, they were spoken to sternly by the "law", and were told they "had no right to speak to me (the trooper) in that manner". This quietened our heroes and they were instructed to "come along" to the Springwood police station. This entailed following on behind the trooper, who incidentally was mounted on a nice looking and quiet enough bay. It appeared the policeman had been keeping an eye out for the lads whilst out on patrol, having had instructions from his headquarters to do so. It was three or four miles on to Springwood and the "prisoners" bucked up a bit and made the best of an embarrassing situation by hailing all passers-by and endeavouring to make out they were hardened criminals who didn't give a darn. But perhaps they felt a little dampened as they were ushered into the lockup, and the door closed and locked.

Here the boys carried on the spirit of bravado: the mouth organ was played to no end, accompanied by much singing. Then came card games, euchre of course, being recognised as the popular bushman's card game. The lads resolved that should their parents arrive for them, they would find their hardened sons carrying on in this manner, including both smoking. In the event when Bill's mate's parents could be heard arriving, the same mate immediately climbed down and implored Young Bill to hide his smokes and quieten down.

And so the trooper collected Bill's mate from the cell after a quick handshake. The mate was all excitement now, and very pleased to be off
with his parents. Blue never saw his friend until four and a half years later. The same Mate had grown up a conventional "old woman", and after two or three letters at intervals of a few months, Bill dropped him altogether. The Mate's father shook hands with Bill and gave what no doubt was meant to be good advice (Bill sensing the meanwhile he was "copping" all the blame for leading "mother's darling" astray, which was probably true enough). Then he was left alone in the cell.

Was Young Bill downhearted? No, but he was a little lonely for a while. Then the trooper entered and informed our hero (what he already felt sure and pleased about) that his parents had wisely decided to let their eldest son go his own way since he was so determined to do so. "You can camp here for the night if you like," said the policeman, who also learnt on enquiry that Bill had plenty of tucker in his dillybag. And if he "cared to cut some wood in the morning, he could collect a couple of shillings for same". (2/- was 2/- those days.) The trooper then departed, leaving the cell door unlocked. Incidentally, this was the only occasion in Young Bill's life (other than the barb wire "clink" of A.I.F. Army experience) that he ever entered a lockup cell.

Bill enjoyed a good meal, boiling water provided by Mrs Trooper, then read by single candlelight for an hour or two, Robbery Under Arms, rolled his bedding out on the cement floor, and slept soundly until sunrise. Mrs Trooper, who was very busy with three or four little girls, called Young Bill to a hot and plentiful breakfast in her kitchen (the old stone built police station is still there in service), chatting away the meanwhile, telling Bill all about her little girls and asking him many questions about himself. Then Bill got to the woodheap. He was a strong lad, liked to think he was good with an axe, and as a matter of fact he was. Anyway, he chopped a rare pile in the course of an hour or so, showing off his strength and prowess for the benefit of
some of the staring villagers, who seemed somewhat impressed. The Sergeant was very pleased on observing so much wood cut, paid Bill two or three shillings and wished him good luck. Young Bill packed his bluey and strode off along the Western Road feeling the world was his oyster (or the outback anyway). He had something like 15/- in his pocket, and so wasn't worried about financial matters at all.
Bill cobbered up with another swagman later in the day and they travelled along together. He was a middle-aged man, and was carrying a heavy swag. He turned out to be a rough diamond. Apparently a navvy who followed public works, [he] had been on the booze and "done" all his earnings, and sick and shaking had rolled his swag once more and was on his way to Wallerawang where he had a mate on a public works job who he thought could also get him work there. It was the first time Young Bill had yarned with a person suffering a binge recovery, and on suggesting to the chap that he should bank his earnings so that he would be less likely to spend it, the answer was that when a fellow was sick for the want of a drink he would draw all his savings out and "do the lot" just the same; followed by: "A fellow should have married long ago, and then he would have someone to look after him, but it's too late to think of that now." And as a result Young Bill couldn't help feeling sorry for him, under the circumstances.

That evening the two travellers camped beside the road in a clearing amidst the bush. As Bill pitched his six by eight [foot] tent it was looking a little like rain, so he invited his mate who did not have such a possession, to share his. But the chap declined and prepared to camp a little apart, where he bedded down following a yarn and a smoke beside the camp fire. During the night it started to rain and Young Bill again
invited his mate in out of the rain, and the chap was willing enough to accept. Bill even arranged some of his own gum twigs he had been sleeping on, along the other side of the tent and his fellow traveller settled down comfortably enough. In the morning Bill watched his companion gather his roll of blankets up, and in doing so disturbed some of the aforementioned gum twigs, and what should drop from them than a highly polished bright "silver" plated pistol. The poor fellow got a terrible start and looked down on it as if he couldn't believe his eyes, as if he wondered whether he wasn't on the verge of the horrors after too heavy drinking. However, Bill hurriedly explained he had put the pistol under his own bed the previous evening and forgot all about it when later halving the bush mattress.

The fellow gave an exclamation of relief and shakily carried his nap out of the tent. Of course Young Bill knew nothing of the horrors (delirium tremens) at that time, but he could see his friend was very nervous and shaky, in fact a rather sick man. Bill can't quite remember why he placed the pistol, presumably loaded, under his bedding: probably felt a little scared camping out in the bush by himself (or pretended he did); even forgets what became of the silly cheap little pistol, but he never ever bothered to rely on such a (supposed) safety ruse again until some three years later out in the wilds of the Northern Territory. Then, incidentally, it was a dinkum .38 six-shooter, and a necessary precaution too, not a silly .22 single shot toy pistol purchased in Parramatta for about 3/6. A dangerous enough toy, but in those days of 1909-10 any boy at all could possess these "suicide" pistols, or pea-rifles a little dearer, say from 7/6 to 12/6. Young Bill and his brothers used to stroll through the bush with these dangerous weapons. Bill can remember a pea-rifle on which the hammer refused to remain cocked, so it was carried ready cocked when hunting, and held in place
with a thumb. On firing it wasn't necessary to pull the trigger, one just let the hammer go. No wonder every other day there was a case in the press of a fatality, only too often fatal, of lads accidentally shooting their mates whilst out hunting. Of course Bill's parents were not aware their lads played around with these firearms, but the boys used to hide them in a hollow log in the bush. But our hero is digressing from the story.\(^1\)

Young Bill and his newly-found mate were bowling along merrily and on nearing Hazelbrook were bailed up by a giant of a man, a friendly country fellow one could see, talkative but almost deaf. Would the young fellow care to take a job with him? He was working up a dairy, and meantime did a lot of work in the bush: 15/- a week and keep. The proposition appealed to Young Bill: the bush work, not the dairying. So he handed over his rations and a few shillings to his travelling mate, who had expressed his opinion that Young Bill should take the job, a much better proposition than "walking the roads, a silly pastime for a young fellow to be doing". And Bill could see he was sincere with his advice. So they shook hands and Young Bill, like hundreds of other mates he met and parted from in the bush over the next few years, never saw or heard of him again.

However, our hero was learning the psychology of the bushman: ask no pertinent questions of a man, let him tell his own story if he wants to, and "take a man as you find him". Most important of all, don't bother about his religion or family, as this could lead to dire consequences. Bill had been surprised that his travelling mate had not asked him more questions, such as how he came to be on the road at such a young age,

\(^1\)Cf. Lewis, Our War, pp.41-42.
where was he going, etc., etc.. Bill had been treated as "one bushman to another", and appreciated it.

"Big Bill", Young Bill's new employer, or "Boss", directed his new hand off the Western Road by bush track to his humpy down a wild gully, explaining that he would follow directly. Bill arrived at the humpy just as his boss did. But something had happened to Big Bill, something had happened to transform a genial looking and good natured fellow to an angry roaring lion, scowling horribly. Young Bill knew little of human nature at that time, but he could sense that his boss made a wasted effort to control his temper and speak a civil word or two. Big Bill disappeared round the corner of the humpy yelling, swearing, and accusing his wife of being the cause of it all: "Why the bloody hell did ya let the cows stray again?" Being a woman, Mrs B.B. had been "too busy to notice the herd had strayed", had her "own chores to attend to", and so on: stood well up to her man. With all the fireworks around, Bill wondered what sort of a boss he was going to work for. The wife, with her small daughter, went looking for the herd and returned in about half an hour or so with about a dozen cows and calves, the nucleus of the dairy herd Big Bill hoped to own some day.

Bill slept in his tent some fifteen or twenty yards from the shack. That September and October turned out very cold at night, and nap (blankets) were scarce. By gathering up a spare bag or two and donning all clothes (at times), Young Bill kept himself from freezing altogether. Plenty of tucker, rough as it was, was a "feed" for Bill. The work was hard, starting in the early hours of the morning loaded down with axes, saws, wedges and the "kitchen sink", and a sugarbag half filled with good rough tucker; walk anything up to a few miles up and down gullies and over the ranges to where Big Bill remembered there should be a giant peppermint tree that could be split into posts and
rails, slabs or palings etc.. Hard work all right, but Young Bill didn't mind; to him it was fascinating, he was learning every day. Big Bill was rough and a bit hasty sometimes, occasionally bad tempered and surly, but he had his good points too: he was good natured and considerate, often remonstrated with Young Bill: "You young bugger, you should have ..." and so on. When conversing with other folk he would often refer to Young Bill as "this young bugger". But it was all in good humour.

On Sundays Bill would take a towel and his .22 rifle and stroll down the gully with a couple of very pleased dogs. He would take his bath and swim in a clear rock pool then wander through the bush amongst the tangled ranges for many miles, now and again getting a shot at a wallaby. Although they were shy and elusive, the hunter would generally bag one or two and proudly return home with the skins, considering he had had a fairly interesting and fascinating day.

Big Bill was a true bushman, a great axeman and bush worker. Young Bill was presently to learn that although his boss was deaf enough, he would be the first to hear even the faintest warning creak of a tree about to end its life under the combined action of their axes and saws. Young Bill thought it was some instinct or sixth sense he had acquired during his long experience as a bush worker. One late evening the two men had finished up a timber splitting job. Time to leave for home and Big Bill decided, much to the gratification of a tired Young Bill, to leave all the tools on the job and pick them up some time later (for Big Bill was also tired). A day or two following, Young Bill was to bring the tools in, as the boss planned he did not intend moving the "worked" timber for some time. Well! Young Bill gathered the gear together, the huge crosscut saw, the two axes, wedges etc., carried the lot for some hundred yards or so, and looked round for a place to plant most of the
load. He finally hid it in a burnt out stump. Big Bill pretended to be
indignant at the presence of Young Bill arriving home without the full
load. A few days later, the boss unexpectedly decided to pick up the
remainder of the tools, since he was passing within a mile or two of the
place anyway. When Young Bill arrived home that night (he had been set
to saw up a big stringy-bark 'way in the opposite direction), he was
greeted somewhat in the following manner: "Yer young bugger, I ought to
kick yer backside; why the ---- ---- didn't yer tell me yer planted the
tools half a mile from the job? I wasted half an hour lookin' for 'em."
However, Young Bill was later congratulated for having left the tools in
such a clever hiding place. And Bill felt pleased with himself when the
boss finished up remarking, "We'll make a bushman of yer yet."

Our hero got a little homesick sometimes, but it would soon pass. Too
much to wonder at in the new bushland opening up around him; too much of
interest for a boy who was so fond of the bush. Young Bill read a fair
deal, mostly at night lying on his bunk smoking a pipe (if you please!).

During the lunch break the two Bills would read from the newsprint the
lunches were wrapped in, but at night Young Bill read anything and
everything, so long as it was about the bush. A cheap unabridged
edition of Robbery Under Arms was being painstakingly absorbed. Bill
had other ideas besides bush work amongst timber, such as cattle
"duffing" up country. He thought he may even now be hanging back or
missing out on a spot of bushranging (now he was taking his Robbery
Under Arms too seriously). Anyhow he decided to move on up country.

From another bush worker Bill had met occasionally, he learnt the
harvesting season was about due out Bathurst way, and good money was to
be earned. Bill tucked his worldly belongings into a couple of
sugarbags and emerged onto the Western Highway, intending to board the
train for Bathurst. Pulled up for a breather under a gum tree, lit up a pipe, had a long look round and felt it was good to be alive. Why catch the train at all, thought Young Bill. Why not roll the bluey and just stroll along the roadway: one can always hop the "rattler" when tired of walking.

Our hero was awakened from this reverie by a sulky turnout pulling up on the roadway, and a chap proffering, "Good day mate!" The owner of the sulky was apparently a "traveller", and also apparently looking for someone to share a good yarn with. He was one of those people who couldn't go for long without chattering to someone or other. The state of the weather was, of course, thoroughly thrashed out for a start, then other subjects were touched on, the man of the sulky doing ninety per cent of the talking (and this went on for the few weeks these two were to be mates). When the yarn had gone on for about an hour Bill was asked, "Which way yer travellin'?" and on Bill explaining his intention of catching the train to Bathurst, either that or "walking along a bit", he was invited to hitch a ride with the traveller. Bill had already learnt that "Jack" was off up country to do some rabbiting, and would keep going until he got on to good rabbit country. Bill climbed into the sulky and after two or three hours had passed, realised that if he could only put up with this fellow's talking, he might even go up country per sulky turnout, and perhaps even do some rabbiting himself: and in the event, this proved partly so.

It was pleasant enough riding along in the sulky that morning, other than Jack's incessant chatter about nothing in particular, and if Young Bill got a bit sleepy at times, Jack would appear to be not too pleased at talking to a person who was not sociable enough to keep awake and pretend to be interested. Bill put up with it and pretended to listen for fear he might be obliged to jettison the sulky ride.
Around Mount Victoria and Katoomba way it was very cold indeed, and Young Bill experienced his first snow. Here the travellers were pleased to crawl inside a small tent and turn in on a mattress of freshly picked gum twigs and leaves, and 'twas somewhat difficult finding anything not too wet. Every means were employed at keeping warm at night: all spare clothes were worn, old sugarbags, and even some spare tuckerbags were utilised to keep out the cold. It was surprising what could be carried on a single horse drawn sulky! Tied on to the back of the vehicle was a bag of chaff, which supplied the daily needs of the pony. The travellers covered about thirty miles a day, pulling up occasionally to boil the billy and grill a couple of chops or a piece of steak, and of course the nosebag was slipped on the pony.

The travellers arrived at an insignificant village in the Hartly Vale an hour or so before sundown, and camped as they had done on the previous nights. The following day was Sunday, with fine and pleasant weather once more. Jack, kind as he was to animals (with the possible exception of rabbits!), decided to give the pony a rest for the day. They were only a couple of hundred yards from fresh running water, and at dinnertime Bill rode the mare bareback to the stream for a quencher. On his way he passed a crowd picnicking under a drooping gum tree on their Sunday outing, at the same time allowing several fine looking hacks to nimble at the grass. Bill noticed a couple of middle-aged men, who had the appearance of having done pretty good for themselves, observe him with interest. Bill was pleased with this because like plenty of other young fellows of that time he fancied himself on a horse, especially bareback.

Passing the picnic group on his way back from the waterhole, Young Bill noticed, incidentally(?), a few good looking girls, and the two important looking fellows mentioned earlier approached Bill and had a
(seemingly!) casual yarn with him. One remarked to the other that he (Bill) was a suitable type for ---- (mentioning some name that Bill didn't quite catch) and followed on to explain to the "prospect" that they were a party of artists rehearsing scenes for a "movie" they were making, none other than Robbery Under Arms. (Was Young Bill interested here? Of course he was: he had just finished reading Rolf Boldrewood's famous novel on Australian bushranging.) And these people wanted a young man to play the part of the younger Marston brother, as the artist intended for the part was unexpectedly unavailable. Bill was all agog to have a go at the proposition, and was told to present himself at a certain address on the outskirts of Lithgow the following Sunday morning, and they would give him a screen test and try him out for the part. In any case, in the meantime call in at Mr So-and-so's at such and such an address and he would give Bill full particulars and read over the script and see if it suited him, etc., etc.

Young Bill assured these people he would follow up the opportunity, and rode off as proud as anyone could have felt. In the event the opportunity was allowed to pass: couldn't stand the idea of hanging around Lithgow till the following Sunday and losing the chance of making up country per sulky travelling. Thinking back over this incident Young Bill often thought that perhaps (with certain reservations) he was suitable for the part, and this apparently occurred to the people who were planning the film. If this "movie" was ever produced, it must have been one of the first silent moving pictures produced in Australia, and
probably the first made of Robbery Under Arms.  

And so in due course the travellers left Bathurst behind, and set course for Blayney. Not far out of Bathurst the travellers were looking for a camp for the night a little later than their usual time, round about sundown. Young Bill was to scout ahead and examine a creek some couple of hundred yards down on the right and see if there was any water there, and a likely place to camp. Bill found both and plenty of firewood too, and something else: rabbits, thousands of them. Bill had never witnessed anything like this before, and as he proceeded down the creek rabbits ran everywhere and the ground seemed to open up as they scurried for shelter. This was a normal occurrence in a country area where rabbits abounded, but Bill was thrilled to bits as this was the first time he had experienced such a sight.

The travellers passed through Blayney, then Orange and Wellington.

Some two or three years later, when Young Bill passed within sight of "Redford's Lookout" on Bowen Downs station in central Queensland, he harkened back to the above mentioned incident, for it was on Bowen Downs that Redford and his men duffed a big mob of cattle and drove them across to Adelaide, the facts being absorbed in Boldrewood's story, where "Captain Starlight" was supposed to carry out Redford's escapade. Some weeks before sighting Redford's Lookout, Bill had visited the township of Miles, some one hundred and fifty miles northerly of the lookout and adjacent to the town of Roma. Here he heard from the local greybeards how Redford was tried at Roma for his cattle stealing from Bowen Downs station, and although the evidence was very strong for a conviction, local sentiment was so strong for the "underdog" and unsympathetic with the big squatters, that the "law" could not get a jury to convict Redford, and he got off scot-free. The town of Roma was then "struck off the judicial list" (so quoted the greybeards) and no further cases were held at Roma for some years. [This note is contained within parentheses in the body of the original text. There is no record in Pike and Cooper's Australian Film 1900-1977 of Robbery Under Arms having been filmed in 1910. However, two bushranging films are known to have been shot around Lithgow in that year - Thunderbolt and Moonlite, pp.14, 16.]
Bill could have started with a couple of "cockies" (wheat-growers) had it suited him, as the farmers were looking round for likely young fellows to help them out with the harvest some two or three weeks ahead. But Bill was set on making further up country whilst the opportunity lasted. And so at last the travellers reached Dubbo, and not finding a suitable camp handy put up at the Overland Hotel on the southern outskirts of the town.

It was a new experience for Young Bill, boarding at a pub. The tariff was one shilling per meal or bed, or one pound per week, and the accommodation and food was good too. But of course the minimum wage those days was still under ten shillings a day. Our hero found that he liked staying in an hotel, for a while anyway. One met all sorts of people coming and going, but he was of course mostly interested in the bushmen: farmers, station workers, stockmen and drovers etc.. A fair few swagmen were about those days, hard living men who generally got rid of their earnings quickly, mostly by drinking; a few roving men like talkative Jack travelling per horse and sulky, or buckboard (a light bush buggy requiring two horses). Also a few per bicycle, and it was wonderful what these fellows could carry on their bikes. These latter people were mostly shearers and shed hands on the lookout for a job with the harvesting now that the shearing had "cut out".

Here our hero learnt to take a drink in the bar with all sorts of characters. He started with shandies of course, (beer with plenty of lemonade). He also cut his tobacco from a plug and smoked a pipe, same as any other "bushie". By mutual consent, Jack and Bill parted company here. The former was on the lookout for another "listener" to his incessant chatter, and Bill for his part, was thoroughly fed up with the fellow, and anyway he had served his purpose. Bill was very pleased with the idea of having arrived so far up country. Jack went scouting
for some good rabbit country, so he reckoned, but Bill had the idea that he had taken a harvesting job with some cocky. Anyway, he never saw Jack again and quickly forgot him.

Young Bill became pretty pally with the hotel keeper's son-in-law. He was sort of handy man about the place, was going on holidays for a couple of weeks, and wanted someone to carry on in his place. Would Bill take the job? The latter accepted and had a pleasant couple of weeks. Bill got pally with another fellow whose name also happened to be Jack, and he too was a "rabbiter" who possessed a horse and sulky turnout and about one hundred and fifty traps strung out along the axle. Bill was very anxious to work with him and jumped at the opportunity when invited. Jack would give him a job for a few weeks, and if he was still willing would help him set up his own "plant". The two eventually set off in an easterly direction for Dunedoo township some hundred miles or so off, where a new freezing works had just been established.
The country the Mates travelled over the next few days was interesting enough: timbered and scrubby for the most part, not so much cultivation and grazing paddocks; as a matter of fact a little too closed in and lonely, so Bill thought. The homesteads seemed to be set well back off the reddish bush road.

Bill learnt all about the "new" Jack: a small wiry elderly man, a Victorian of Irish descent, and proud of the fact that he had been reared in the "Kelly country" (Ned Kelly the bushranger of course), and woe became anyone who spoke ill of those famous (or infamous) people. Jack was just a simple, independent countryman, having been reared on his struggling parents' pioneer farm. He was tough and tireless, and generally good humoured and congenial company. He had a repertoire of old colonial songs he used to sing. Some of them had about fifty verses, with the chorus sung as many times. Jack really thought they were classics and masterpieces, and had no time for the modern "flighty rubbish" at all. After travelling some hundred miles or so in this manner, fairly good rabbiting country was found near the village of Cobberah (pub, store, police station etc.). The freezing works at Dunedoo was some ten or twelve miles further on. The Mates' "trapping rights" were on a settler's holding, generally some two or three thousand acres of an old station property lately having been cut up for
closer settlement. The settler, a young married man with a small family, was known as a "grazing farmer", growing mostly wool and mutton. The farmer lived in a fairly decent cottage (for the bush), but for the rest, except for a fair amount of old timber being "rung", there was a tremendous amount of improvement work to be done on his holding; and this went for most of the holdings in the new district.

The country was "moving" with rabbits and the settlers were naturally elated with the new freezing works opening at Dunedoo, and were welcoming "decent" rabbiters on their properties. Young Bill's new mate Jack was a champion rabbiter. He could work from one hundred to one hundred and fifty traps on his own at a pinch, and work them properly. And this was the number of traps Jack actually had, one hundred and fifty and (somewhat like Harry Dale the drover) they jingled from the sulky axle.1

And so Jack started to teach Young Bill all about rabbiting. Bill found it very hard work for a start. First of all one carried a dozen traps at a time swung over the shoulder and walked over the section of country one planned to use, setting traps at suitable places, say a "dunghill", then say forty or fifty yards further on a likely hollow log, and so on. When the dozen traps were set out, one returned to the central plant and collected another dozen, and so on. Whenever finishing setting a trap, a mark was scratched on the ground pointing the direction of the previous set trap, and denoted whether it was set at a log, dunghill, burrow, etc., etc., and the approximate distance to same. For instance, this sign ←—— could indicate that the next

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1On rabbiting as an opportunity for self-employment, see Introduction, Ch.3, p.47.
trap was set at a dunghill (rabbits') in the direction indicated, and the three parallel marks would indicate the distance as about sixty yards (one mark equalling twenty yards). This sign could indicate a log, this one a burrow, etc.. This system made it necessary that the trapper went the round of his traps beginning first at the last one set, and finishing at the first. If the rabbits trapped warranted same, it was necessary to go round the traps three times nightly: sundown, midnight and "sparrow peep" (sometimes four times nightly may be warranted). Going through the nightly rounds the trapper carried a chaffbag over his shoulder and a hurricane lamp in his hand. Fly-proof screens were strategically placed along the line of traps every few hundred yards, where the trapper unloaded his catch. If the rabbits were particularly thick, the traps might be set in the same positions three times running, but usually only twice. Then the traps would be gathered up into heaps of a dozen and carried in that manner to the new "set out" selected, and the routine would start all over again.

Trapping could be made very hard work, and one could easily overdo it; get too tired to enjoy it at all. After an early breakfast, the sulky would be loaded with anything up to one hundred pair of rabbits, and Jack would drive them into Dunedoo, some twelve miles or so off. The price collected was about sixpence a pair. Whilst Jack was away, Bill would be resetting the traps, including laying them out along a new site when necessary. Sometimes Bill would collapse into his rough bush bunk and just die for hours. Jack was a terror to "go" and never seemed to get tired. Besides rabbits, quite a variety of fauna was caught in the traps, including wild cats, goannas and blue-tongues, foxes and crows etc..

Just as the Mates were getting a go on at trapping carcasses, Jack's sulky mare became ill. Poor thing just moped about listlessly and
wouldn't eat, probably ate something in the bush that didn't agree with her. Jack worried and fretted over the sick animal, just as he probably would have over his sick child, if he had one. Jack walked for miles and rode on borrowed horses for days hunting up a veterinary surgeon to care for the patient, and finally succeeded in doing so. Meanwhile, Young Bill carried on with the traps as best he could. It was lonely enough for a young fellow all alone in the scrub and bush, might just as well have been a hundred miles from anywhere, and a little weird going round the traps in the middle of the night. As a matter of fact, Bill squibbed it once or twice: went round nearer nine or ten p.m., and was grateful for the extra sleep.

It was a lonely place where the Mates camped, about a mile or so from the settler's homestead, and goodness only knew how far from anywhere else. Of course the country was fairly overgrown with bush and scrub, and one could not see further than a few hundred yards in any direction. Within a few hundred yards of them and outside the settler's boundary fence, was a red gravel bush road running roughly north and south. To the north it went on to Coonabarabran, Bill forgets how far off, but there were remarkably few travellers who used this road; some days none at all. Now and then the settler would drop in on them to get an idea on how they were cleaning up the rabbits. He would calculate their figures up to so many thousands, rub his hands together in a pleased manner and declare he would now be able to run so many hundred more sheep. This made Bill feel he was doing a good job, in more ways than one.

Eventually Jack's mare "got down to it" and died, in spite of everything. Jack went off to look for a new pony, leaving Bill to burn the remains of the deceased horse and carry on with the traps. Since the pony's illness, the Mates had been skinning the rabbits and pegging
their pelts out on wire frames to dry. Our hero was amazed how quickly he learnt to skin rabbits, a hundred could be done in no time. Of course the carcasses had to be left a few hundred yards from the camp, for in spite of flights of crows, the stench was pretty high when coming downwind. The settler didn't seem to mind overmuch; he would brave the abominable odour and get close enough to make a tally of how many rabbits less he would have to find feed for.

Jack arrived back in camp without a pony, but a promise of one in a few days' time. Well, the Mates settled down to poisoning rabbits. Jack had carried a case of cheap quince jam (which was bunny's favourite) and a supply of strychnine poison, in case of an emergency like the present one. Bill thinks he remembers the mixture was an ordinary one and a half pound tin of jam, and a wax matchbox lid of strychnine (wax matches were used extensively those days, in spite of the fire danger). This quantity laid hundreds of baits. One simply walked along and every ten or fifteen yards scratched the ground with a dwarf mattock and laid a minute quantity of bait in the hole. Not too early in the day, as the birds and ants would eat up too much of the bait. Poisoning had this advantage over trapping, one got a good night's sleep in. But awake and out just early enough to see the dead bunnies lying about, and so beat the crows and other pests to tearing the skins about. The poor old bunny died practically alongside the bait, and was already a little swollen: also other hangers on including some beautiful birds, and foxes too, who loved their morsel of sweet jam, but foxes were generally found a little way from the poison, and in the direction nearest to water. Handling the poisoned bunnies was much different to handling carcasses that had been trapped. (Our hero forgot to mention that the trapped rabbits were killed by simply holding them upside down, and striking them sharply on the back of the neck with the
outer portion of the open hand. A strange thing about bunnies, they never attempted to fight back and never scratched or bit. When grasped by a handful of loose skin they seemed to lose all power, and just hung limp.) Much care was necessary handling poisoned fauna, one could easily become contaminated through a cut or scratch about the hands. No doubt poisoning for skins was a much more easygoing occupation, but not nearly so much money could be made as in trapping. The sundried pelts were eventually packed in chaffbags, and it was amazing how many could be packed into a chaffbag when stowed by an old hand at the game. They averaged about five to the pound, and (as far as Bill can remember) about twopence per skin (approximately sixty per cent [of] the price of a carcass) was their selling value at that time.

But matters beyond the Mates' control were happening now. The new freezing works at Dunedoo suddenly closed down, with no definite date of reopening. The general impression was that they (the works) had bitten off more than they could chew; took in too many rabbits, and now couldn't cope with them. Jack was a bit fed up and disgusted, thought he "might make north for the Pilliga scrub and start wallaby shooting again". He offered to take Young Bill along if he wished to go. Young Bill wasn't fussy, he'd realised partnership with Jack was a bit too much "go", and a bit too lonely to boot. Bill yearned for younger and livelier company again. And so they parted the best of friends.
Young Bill had a persistent longing to get out amongst the big sheds (shearing sheds), so he thought he would make his way back to Dubbo and board a train for a north-westerly direction somewhere, which seemed to be the country from which the shearing fraternity came whom Bill had met and yarnd with back at the Overland Hotel in Dubbo. So our hero returned to that town per His Majesty's Mail (just a sulky turnout with a second pony in outrigger). The mailman cherished Bill's company, "wished he would catch the train at Dubbo and go north through Eumungerie" (for some reason or other one of the mailman's popular phrases was "from here to bloody Eumungerie"), through Gilgandra (he "knew every inch of the country"), and so on to Coonamble, "a fine town and plenty of work there too!" Our friend had a great win when he realised Bill was interested in old-time bushranging. He knew all about the Breelong outlaws, the Jimmy Governor gang (Breelong station was "only a few miles north" from where the travellers were at the moment). He knew the gang personally and all the station people and everyone connected with the affair. He had been out a few times with those folk hunting the outlaws down. Our narrator seemed to have the opinion of lots of folk who knew all the facts, that whilst nothing of course could justify the dreadful initial murder orgy the gang indulged in, they had been unjustly ostracised and taunted, mainly over one of their number daring to marry a white woman. According to Bill's companion, they were quiet industrious folk before they suddenly went berserk altogether.
And so to the Overland Hotel once more, where Bill was welcome enough, and the folk were undoubtedly sorry that Jack had not returned also. The pub staff wanted Young Bill to stay around and get employment locally. As a matter of fact, Bill suspected the proprietor's daughter and son-in-law (who hadn't any children and gossip had it they never would) had taken rather a fancy to Young Bill and were prepared to regard him as one of the fold; but of course our hero had other ideas than settling down, and so eventually caught the train for Coonamble.

Two incidents worth mentioning were experienced on the train. A fellow (apparently a country businessman) wanted Bill to drove a mob of sheep for him from Gilgandra back to Dubbo, but Bill, although intrigued by a spot of droving, didn't care about going back on his tracks. Had it been in the opposite direction, say towards Coonamble, he would have been definitely interested. However, in the meantime Young Bill had conferred with an elderly swagman who certainly looked a bushman, a man who, under the circs, looked smart enough and was appropriately dressed: wore a smart goatee beard. Bill, out of the train window at "bloody Eumungerie", observed the old "bushy" apparently half drunk, arranging with the train porter to have his kelpie dog taken aboard. He carried his neat swag along and entered our hero's compartment. Immediately on being seated, he drew a large half-full bottle of Worcestershire sauce from a pocket and took a good swig without turning a hair. This he repeated ever[y] so often. Bill later learnt that some bushmen when recovering from a spree, drank large quantities of this sauce as a "pick-me-up", and a help in getting back to normal after heavy drinking.

Bill and the smart looking old fellow got talking and it was learnt that he was a shearers' cook of some renown (admitted so himself!) and was on his way to a "string of sheds" out Charleville way, Queensland. Bill was quite intrigued and probably showed it. The shearers' cook was
on the lookout for an "offsider". Bill had learnt all about these cook's offsiders, who were on one third of the cook's earnings, and it was pretty good money. Bill wasn't altogether taken with this particular job, but he was fascinated with the idea of a string of sheds out Queensland way. He fell in with the "proposal". The upshot of this short acquaintance terminated in an eye-opener for our hero and confirmed certain vague and vulgar knowledge he had heard bandied about by people who make jokes of that kind of ribald conversation. Bill couldn't make the old man out for a while, but when growing suspicion became a certainty that our renowned shearers' cook was a homosexual, Bill couldn't get away from his new acquaintance fast enough. And that was that. Bill was learning the stark realities of human nature as he went along.

Young Bill found Coonamble a big country town sporting some ten or twelve pubs (in the idiom of those days country towns, small or large, were always assessed in order of importance by the number of hotels they boasted). Apparently it was too early for the shearing, which would start in earnest about July and reach full blast in August, so Bill took a job making "bush" hay: that is, the boss went along with the horse-drawn mower cutting the mature grass, which being a good season was abundant, tall and coming into seed; just ready for cutting. Two or three of Bill's mates followed with pitchforks, stacking the cut grass into heaps, called "stooks", where it was left a few days to dry before being carted in and stacked.

The country around Coonamble was beautiful open plains, lightly studded with myall and boree timber for the most part, and 'twas the first (deep) artesian bore watered country that Bill had experienced. These bores were drilled to a depth of from three to five thousand feet generally, and some further out were much deeper. The water gushed up
at the rate of thousands of gallons per hour and was hot, almost boiling. It usually had a distastefully soda-ie flavour about it, but was much more palatable after being left standing for some hours: afflicted one with the "runs" somewhat, until one became more used to it. However, it was excellent for stock and was conveyed for miles per "bore drains" throughout the magnificent and hugh areas of grazing country. Woolgrowing was (and still is) by far the most important industry in this district.

Here was a happy gang of which Bill was pleased to be associated with. Among them were two Australian natives and two Englishmen. One of the latter was inclined to be a little affected, "how shocked his family at home would be if they could only see him now at this humble occupation," etc. The rest of the boys had great fun over him and pulled his leg to no end, especially the other Englishman who would get a bit fed up with him at times, and literally tell him to take a tumble to himself and not be such a fool. It was pleasant enough working in those wide open spaces, with a view of the Warrumbungle Ranges on the south-eastern horizon.

However, this was only a "flash in the pan" job, and our hero was back in Coonamble again and reckoned himself "just it" (say a genuine bushman!) to be staying at The Bushman's Home. One paid a few shillings a week at these places and occupied a bunk in a large room with several other fellows (not in the one bunk of course!). From all over half Australia came these campers, interesting company, mostly. Here Bill learnt a lot about knocking about the country under all sorts of conditions. Humorous anecdotes about various station owners and their

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1See Introduction, Ch.3, p.32.
employees were a popular topic, also stories about various hotel keepers, etc.. But the fellows Bill envied most about the camp were a couple of smart looking shearers just down from the far west of Queensland. All experienced fellows in the camp reckoned "those two blokes had knocked about a bit". After a week or two of this lazy but fascinating life Bill started out with a casual acquaintance, humping their blueys north towards Walgett. The travellers camped for a night adjacent to the famous Wingadee or Bullaroara (the old name) station, among the largest in New South Wales. The following morning they parted, Bill making off north-easterly to Come-by-Chance (incidentally correct spelling by today's mapping) township and station, his mate resolving to keep northward toward Walgett. Our hero eventually called in at Come-by-Chance station and enquired if there was any work doing. The boss, "Old Burgess" (really Colless), was away, but the jackaroo in charge explained there wasn't any work doing at the time, but invited Bill along to the kitchen to join the hands at an afternoon tea break. The cook proved a kind, friendly type of woman and insisted in filling the traveller's tuckerbags with bread, meat and brownie etc.. Bill could have offered to pay for same, but he was beginning to understand the hospitality of the bush people and knew same offer would more often than otherwise not be appreciated. When the traveller was leaving to go on to the bush village only a mile or so off, the cook remarked that he might meet "old man Burgess" returning from the township, and if he got to yarning with him "don't tell him anything about getting any tucker from the place"; 'nuff said! Bill learnt later that he was known as "Hungry Burgess". Bill did pass the the great man a-horseback, and looked him straight in the face, bidding him "good day", and got quite a civil answer from a seemingly keen glancing but pleasant enough personality. But of course, mused our hero, Mr Burgess may have been feeling a little amiable after imbibing at the local pub.
That night Bill camped in the paddock just opposite the pub, picking a shady gnarled old coolabah and musing the meanwhile, he'd have liked a pound note for every swaggie that had camped in the same spot over previous fifty years or so. The township comprised one pub, the store and post office combined, and three or four cottages and shacks; no police station. As a matter of fact, as far as Young Bill (or rather Old Bill) can remember, the nearest police were at Walgett, some forty or fifty miles off.

The following day was Sunday. Bill climbed out of his blanket fully dressed when enforced sleep wore off and the sun became too hot. The pub verandah and open door to the bar was in full view about a hundred yards off and several blokes, some with glasses in their hands, were loafing about smoking, drinking and yarning. They watched our hero pour some water from his waterbag into a folded sheet of paper set in a depression in the ground, and enjoy a wash. They (the pub blokes) waved to him and held their glasses aloft beckoning him over, and they were answered in pantomime that the recipient of their invitation soon would. Next the billy was boiled and a leisurely breakfast heartily partaken of, bread and cold mutton (Come-by-Chance station buckshee), Young Bill making the most of putting on an act for the benefit of the audience on the pub verandah. He then sauntered over and joined the interested company. Bill wasn't at the pub verandah two minutes before he was invited to join several other fellows with "'ave a drink young feller". Young Feller accepted, calling for a light shandy (about half and half lemonade and beer). Before the morning was out, Young Feller was extended this invitation again and again and "laid off" a little after two or three, beginning to feel a bit heady. Explaining his refusal to join in and giving this reason, the company had a laugh, one of the prominent personalities (a decent sort of shearer chap) remarking, "Too
much is no good for young fellows, it goes to their head." Bill offered
to shout in return, but the rest wouldn't hear of it.

Presently Bill was approached by a fine rugged type of old man,
already "three sheets in the wind" and happy enough with it. He
eventually explained there was a couple of week's burr (Bathurst burr)
cutting to be had on the adjacent Bungle Gully station, twenty-five bob
a week and tucker. Furthermore, there would be plenty more interesting
work to follow, if our hero cared to take it on. The elderly man was
known as "Old Jim". He turned out to be quite a character, of rugged
integrity and much native intuition. Jim confessed to being eighty, and
although he had led a rough enough life, the last forty or fifty years
as a bushman, prospector etc., he was wonderfully hardy and well
preserved. As a young man he had seen service with the British navy in
the Indian Mutiny and later the Boxer Rebellion in China. He had reared
a large family who were scattered to the four winds, and wife dead many
years back.

Jim roped another fellow in for the job, a shearer named "Tiger"
Kirkham. Tiger travelled by bike, swag rolled over handle bars and
strapped down each side of front wheel frame, sugarbag hanging from bar
between front and rear wheel, and a frame extending under and beyond the
seat over the rear wheel for other gear: quart pot neatly strapped to
the front fork, the whole outfit neatly packed and looking
spick-and-span. Tiger had just returned from a holiday in the city
after the previous season's shearing, and was looking for odd jobs
pending the general shearing which would not commence for a few months
yet. So after dinner at the pub, the three new mates set off for the
camp.
Jim led the way along a creek through a timbered paddock or two, and the party reached the camp after a few miles of travelling. Apparently Jim, who was a trusted hand about the station, had been set up in this camp, and arranged with the boss (the station manager) to rope in a couple more men from the township (that is the pub), and set the gang to work at the burr cutting. The camp was just like any other bush set-up, a couple of ten by eight foot tents, and a rough bough shade and bark and sapling table and forms; a camp oven, two or three billy cans and blackened kerosene tins, a few tin plates and mugs and some rough eating utensils. And of course the camp was adjacent to a creek or waterhole. Sometimes the water was fair enough, other times foul and smelly enough to necessitate boiling before drinking. Very often in a camp similar to this one, a cut-down four hundred gallon tank was supplied. This was kept full of the foul water, and plenty of ashes and charcoal from the camp galley fire was thrown in every day or so, and this undoubtedly cleared and purified the water. Generally plenty of good rough tucker, the meat more often than not dry salted. Plenty of jam, sauces, bacon powder, bread and brownie from the camp oven, spuds and onions etc., but seldom any butter.

\[In 1901 \text{ Bungle Gully consisted of 79,971 acres, held under lease and licence. New South Wales, Western Division of New South Wales. Royal Commission, (1901), p.161.}\]
Old Jim lorded it in one tent, and Tiger and Young Bill made themselves comfortable in the other. There wasn't much to the burr cutting: the three blokes generally lined up a hundred yards or so apart according to the density of the pest (which was proclaimed a noxious weed by the local Pastures Protection Board, and landholders were obliged to exterminate the pest under threat of fining) and cut the burr with "chipping" hoes as they advanced for a mile or so, then turn around and cut another "face" alongside that already done. Every couple of days the burrs were piled up at convenient intervals with the use of forked sticks, and when dry enough, burnt (not much science to it!): a monotonous enough occupation but as it only lasted two or three weeks and the company was very interesting to Young Bill, the time went pleasantly enough.2 First up boiled the billy, and the rough cooking was taken in turns. Very few people carried watches those days (at least not in the bush, and incidentally wrist watches were not even dreamt of). The camp stirred probably between seven and eight o'clock. Old Jim was generally up first, and he was a good cook. Breakfast over, the boys cut burrs for a while, then sat down and spun yarns for a change. Nobody was in a hurry and nobody worked hard. Old Jim could spin an interesting yarn any old time. He'd been anywhere and everywhere, met and heard of all the outback characters, and could tell hundreds of stories and anecdotes, most of them humorous. A newspaper never reached the camp at all, but a certain amount of cheap paper-covered literature and sometimes an odd old classic was available. The highlights in yarn spinning were reserved for the camp fire gathering after tea, for although it was still summer, as always a camp fire drew company, by day as well as by night.

In the vernacular of those times and places, the nickname "Tiger" meant the chap referred to as such was a great worker: "A tiger for work" (but incidentally, his mates noticed, not at burr cutting!). Tiger Kirkham was typical of a certain type of bushmen, perhaps shearers in particular, had very strong opinions and "knowledge" of his own reckoning, and conversed on them at times over the camp fire in a manner quite amusing to Old Jim and Young Bill.

One magnificent starry night Jim was pointing out some of the planets and telling their story. Tiger kept very quiet for a while, then suddenly burst out, "Bull oh! All balls! It's a star, that's what it is and nothing else. Can't yer see it's just a star? How can yer believe all that silly bunk about them --- other worlds millions of miles away? They'll do me as stars and that's all they are!!" At first Tiger was taken seriously, and his mates attempted to point out where he might be wrong, but it only caused Tiger to rave on the more. His listeners learnt to take his philosophy quietly, and disguised their humorous reactions. Another night Bill and Jim touched on the wonders of modern navigation. This set Tiger off again: "The ship just went there, there was nothing to it! The captain steered the ship by the rudder didn't he? Took the ship to where he wanted to go! And there was nothing else to it!"

Another night the likelihood of war with Germany was touched on. Tiger had all this sewn up too. "Give me ten thousand men from the bush and let me pick 'em and I'll take Germany." Of course Tiger was thinking of the thousands of kangaroo shooters and nearly all Australians who naturally were good shots and could find their way about the open spaces and, if necessary, live off the bush. Poor Tiger! He probably went to the war later, and probably was a "good Digger in the line". If he wasn't killed he must have returned a much more
worldly-wise man, but still very proud of the Australians (and well he might). He had explained to Bill in due course that he was an only child, being reared by his parents in a horse-drawn caravan. His father was a shearer and they travelled about the country from shed to shed, Tiger being employed as a rouseabout from a lump of a lad onwards. One can imagine he would have had very little schooling, if any. He could certainly read and write a little but probably never read a decent book in his life, much less possess a geography atlas. No wonder this type of bushwhacker had ideas of their own. Poor Tiger had to return to the "big smoke" within a couple of weeks, the penalty of having had too good a time with certain types of women whilst holidaying in the same big smoke.

There were a few 'roos and emus to be seen since arriving at Coonamble, and in that country on the boree and myall plains and generally annexed to a waterhole of some sort, Bill had his first sight of a flock of brolgas (or native companions) going through their queer and fascinating capers, literally dancing.

After three or four weeks of burr cutting, Jim and Bill were given certain tools and plant and a heavy spring cart and quiet reliable half heavy horse, and dispatched to the "outstation". It proved to be a boundary rider's hut and shed, and a light built "round" breaking in horse yard. It was some eight or ten miles out from the head station (same head station being not much better than a glorified stockman's hut). The two station hands had a couple of drinks at the pub and also sat in to dinner (a wonderful meal for a shilling those days). The Pilliga-Walgett road, which passed through the village of Come-by-Chance, also divided the station property. After a couple of jolly hours at the pub the hands pushed on and later the track went through thick bush and scrub for miles, mostly dense pine, with some small open
plains. Now and again a few cattle would show up, most of them bolting as soon as they observed the strangers. Close on sundown the camp was made and it was nice to hear the boundary rider Ted's cheerful voice welcoming the Mates. Ted proved to be a jovial fellow generally, a bit on the light and talkative side, a native of those parts and easy enough to get on with. There was a large and near boiling heavy flowing artesian bore right at the camp, and the first thing Bill did was to enjoy a dip and bath in the large round hole made round the bore head. This at the invitation of Ted who seemed pleased at the prospect of a young fellow from the big smoke for company, and was anxious to extend all the hospitality available.

Next morning Ted was up first, apparently always rising at sparrow chirp, and ran his horses into the yard whilst his billy boiled for breakfast. The new arrivals had brought out several hundredweight of fresh and salted beef, a beast having been killed at the homestead the day previous to their leaving, so the camp sat in to a juicy fried steak for breakfast, and plenty of it. Then Ted rode off for the day's work ahead of him. Bill and Jim set about a start on their job, which was to build temporary but strong cattle yards annexed to the camp. There were pine posts and rails to be cut and barked for a start, then snigged on to the job, by horse of course. Bill knew little then of yard-building, but his mate knew all about it. Post holes were dug some ten feet apart, Bill's first experience really of the fencing bar and special shovel for same. Two eight foot posts were stood in the holes, and stout rails interlocked, the whole wired together with "Cobb and Co." knots and "Queensland hitches". Bill was pleased enough to hop into the hard work, and Old Jim was grateful enough to do most of the easier work, marking out wiring etc.. Bill found the work healthy and interesting, and the time quickly passed.
A short cut passed through the property, a sort of back track between Coonamble and the Come-by-Chance/Pilliga road, and it passed close to the camp. Consequently the outstation had visitors every few days, swagmen and other travellers, and sometimes teamsters. These people were made very welcome, sometimes stopping for a day or two at the station's expense. And if they were short of tucker, as they generally were, they were loaded down with plenty to take with them. No wonder the station manager (a Mr Mc-somebody?!) went crook when he arrived in due course to see how things were going, and found hundreds of pounds of beef had disappeared; but there wasn't much he could do about it.

On Saturday afternoons and Sundays Bill used to give Ted a hand breaking in young station horses at a pound a head (that was between them). The boundary rider was good with horses and could ride just about anything, and after he had had a "go" our hero was kidded into it. He was thrown two or three times at first, but clever Ted was always in like a flash to his assistance, generally before his mate had hit the ground, sometimes catching him under the armpits or snatching him from the ground if the young horse was inclined to be vicious at all. What Bill was most concerned about on these occasions was his mate couldn't stop laughing. He reckoned the show a hell of a joke. But Young Bill got used to that too. Anyhow! After several of the youngsters were handled, the lad from the "big smoke" could ride all but the worst. The twisting in the air buck was the most difficult to stick.

After a few weeks the cattle yards were ready, and the boss, that is the manager, always referred to and addressed as Boss (and that went for nearly all stations), arrived with a jackaroo and a couple of others to do some drafting and branding etc.. Bill was invited to lend a hand and was much pleased about it. Old Jim cooked for the whole camp.
The yards were constructed adjacent to the junction of three adjoining paddocks, which was obviously a good idea. Ted fixed Bill up with a bit of a stockwhip and on mustering commencing, the boss organised the party in line not too far apart, as the timber was very thick in places. The muster would start some three or four miles down the end of a paddock (to say "the bush" would be more appropriate) and the cattle being pretty wild would go for their lives as soon as they saw the man enemy, toward the yards and didn't give any trouble till it came to actually yarding them. Then the fun would start, the cattle wanting to head for any direction but into the yards. But with whips cracking, the musterers would gradually close up on them and with a couple of quiet old cows in the inner yard as decoys, the mob (small mobs of about fifty) would eventually be forced and coaxed into the big yard.

Odd cattle were pretty wild and would charge away into the scrub, and it was the job of the more experienced stockmen to go after them and fetch them back. It took a regular stock horse too for this particular job. It had to know its work as well as the man on its back. Then would come more dangerous work, only for experienced hands, that of draughting, cutting out etc.. Ted and two or three of the others would ride in amongst the cattle and "cut out" certain beasts. In this the horses did as much as the rider, actually shouldering and pushing the beast in the desired direction. Young Bill (with another new chum) was handling the sliprails, and had to be on the alert and pretty quick to drop the rails and replace them when a beast was manoeuvred into position to be received into that particular yard. Bill and his mate had to watch that the stock already in their yard didn't get out, and most important of all, look out for themselves too. There was always the danger of being charged and injured, or even ripped open with a beast's horn. However, the boss was a sensible man and saw to it that the new chums took only a minimum of risk.
The "fats" were put into a special paddock preparatory to dispatch to the railhead at Coonamble. "Stores", that is stock not fat enough for the market, went to another paddock. Breeding cows and calves at foot, along with the bulls, went to the third paddock. The new chums were warned to look out for some of the bulls, and odd other beasts too, and not to take any chances with them. Young Bill soon realised that understanding and knowing cattle was the important part of stock work of this nature, and the knowledge could only be acquired by experience, the more the better. A chap like Ted the boundary rider, an experienced stockman, was worth watching. He would go in amongst them on foot and knew instinctively what to do when a beast charged. He would sometimes just quickly throw himself down sideways and get up unconcerned when the charging animal passed. Anyway, Young Bill had the story confirmed that a charging beast became practically blind when within a few feet of its victim, more often than otherwise its eyes being practically closed.

The branding of the young steers, and "cutting" of the young bulls was interesting work and could be dangerous enough too, to one not understanding the procedure. But as Bill and a couple of others were doing the hauling up on the safe side of the fence, they were quite OK. A beast would be lassoed round the horns or neck and hauled up to the rails by horse- or man-power, the rope being looped round a very strong post; a couple of these installed especially for the purpose, it being the first occasion that our hero had put fifteen to eighteen inch posts five or six feet in the ground. When the beast was close to the rails, Ted and the other experienced hands cleverly roped the animal in such a way that it was ready for the knife or branding iron or both, their ears also being marked by slitting with a sharp knife. Where a beast up to say one-third grown needed handling, same was done by "bulldogging". One of the experienced hands (again!) would rush up alongside the animal
from behind, and grabbing a horn in each hand would put the pressure on sidewise after the manner of a wrestler, and over the beast would go on its side. A couple of hands would then rush in and sit on its neck and body. Sometimes the chap on the horns was helped by a hand grabbing the animal's tail, and pulling sidewise in cooperation. Occasionally a spirited animal would put up a great fight, struggling and bellowing to no end, and once in a while would suddenly break clear out of the hold.

It should have been previously mentioned that several good cattle dogs had been used all through the mustering, but not in the stock yards. A couple of them, the boss's, were particularly clever at the work and could "almost talk". The way they would go into the thick scrub and hunt obstinate cattle out to the musterers was a treat to watch: also a great help in bringing back a beast trying to break away from the mob, at times in fact, more valuable to their masters than an extra hand. Two or three of the best also went with the droving outfit but were kept well on the chain at night, and quiet.

These were happy days for Young Bill. Over the camp fire at night many were the tales told of outback stations and droving trips etc. Young Bill vowed he would experience all there was to see in this phase of bush life too. The boss was pleased with the yards and complimented Old Jim and Young Bill on the job being a good one. Apparently the fats, about four hundred of them (a fairish mob about those parts) were to be walked to railhead at Coonamble for trucking to Sydney when all was ready, and Young Bill was determined to go along for his first droving trip if same could possibly be managed. The boss was willing enough, but he was full-handed for the trip. However, he practically promised Bill the next preference.

In the event, Young Bill went with the cattle to railhead, Coonamble,
taking the place of the permanent station hand whom it apparently had been decided could not be dispensed with about the station.
A shearer travelling between stations: "It was wonderful what these fellows could carry on their bikes."

Shearing (Weilmoringle, N.S.W.): "There were all sorts of people there, larrikins from the city street corner gangs, flashly dressed shearsers on bikes..., a fair percentage of all sorts of bushmen with their swags."

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Chapter 6

CATTLE DROVING, HUMPING BLUEY AND SHEARING SHED ROUSEABOUTING

The cattle for Coonamble were divided into two mobs of two hundred and fifty each, as apparently this was a better idea of droving the stock instead of in the one big mob, now made up to five hundred with latecomers from the head station. The idea was to have the fatter and quieter in one mob, the poorer and more restless in the other group. The flighty mob were to travel in the van, for of course they were the poorer in condition and would get first pick at the grazing to their better [?better their] conditioning. A couple of the experienced hands reckoned these arrangements should have been the other way round but the boss thought he knew better. Not that the procedure of travelling first or last mattered much, as it was a good season with plenty of grass and herbage about everywhere.

Young Bill would have liked to travel with the first mob on account of their being a bit wilder than the second lot, but being a new chum at the game he had to be content to string along with the quieter cattle. There were three men to each mob, with Old Jim in a buckboard as cook. The mobs were travelling some few hundred yards apart, and Jim generally camped in between so the tucker could more conveniently be kept up to both groups. The boss or one of the more experienced drovers generally travelled with the first mob, and had a lot of riding about arranging matters on ahead with the station people through whose paddocks the cattle travelled.
Nothing much happened during the trip to Coonamble, with the exception of a bit of a wild break of the cattle off the camp one night, strangely enough the "quiet" mob. The station jackaroo was in charge of the second herd, assisted by Scotty (a newly arrived emigrant) and Young Bill. During the night, according to whether it was a good or bad position for the cattle to camp on, one man, and occasionally two when necessary, would "ride" the herd throughout the night, one hour on and two off, or two on and one off as the case may be, the object being to keep the cattle from straggling or "rushing", through fright, off the camp. One night toward piccaninny daylight, during Scotty's "trick", something, it was never ascertained what (as a matter of fact Scotty later confided to Bill he was asleep in the saddle at the time), the herd made off at a gallop.

The jackaroo's and Young Bill's horses were already saddled and ready for just such an emergency and their riders were supposed to be in the saddle within seconds to help stop the stampede (the "rush" it was generally called). However, in the event, this particular night Young Bill was sleeping less his trousers, as suffering from severe chafe near the crutch (a not unusual handicap when riding all day and every day and sleeping in one's clothes). He had applied the usual cure of plenty of soap and lather, and then allowing same to dry without washing off. Anyhow, Young Bill took a chance and was caught with his pants down, and by the time he had climbed into them the rush was half a mile off. However, no harm was done, the cattle, with Scotty and the jackaroo in the rear (they were supposed to be in the lead of course, and endeavouring with the whip and yelling to turn the lead and get them "ringing", and so halt the rush) galloped a few hundred yards and came against a thick belt of timber in front of a strong rabbit-proof fence, and this was sufficient to turn them and the rush (if such a mild gallop
could be called a rush) petered out. As already remarked, no harm was
done, but had they been really wild like some of the cattle Bill helped
to handle a couple of years later, there could have been a fine old
mess.

What laughing and joking went on for days over this experience.
Although Scotty reckoned openly he wasn't asleep when the rush started,
everyone pretended to take it for granted he was. Bill got particular
hell, the boss pretending to take it serious, and making out that our
hero should have sprung into the saddle without his pants, even
notwithstanding being badly chafed. The two new chums "bit" a little at
first, but quickly realising they were coming off much worse for it,
kidded to bite back, then joined in the general laugh against
themselves.

By the way, Bill forgot to mention, a lad accompanied Jim in the
buckboard turnout. He was known as the "horse-tailer" (one with any
droving turnout of any size) and was in charge of half a dozen spare
horses which were changed about with the riders, if necessary. They
were a happy crowd of men, and of course the trip wasn't long enough to
become monotonous (as Bill found in later years that droving trips could
last too long). The weather was pleasant enough between autumn and
early winter, and no rain to speak of. "Old" Bill well remembers one
debate over the camp fire one evening. Scotty had the temerity to refer
to Australia as an "uncivilised country" and the jackaroo pretended to
be indignant at the "insult" and demanded an explanation. Some of the
reasons Scotty put forward were: only one man in fifty carried a watch
(which was true enough); that a large percentage of the people
apparently slept in their working clothes, not bothering about pyjamas
(true enough again, as far as droving was concerned anyway); very few
bothered about collars and ties or "Sunday" clothes (OK as far as the
bush was concerned, and Scotty had only had bush experience in his new land); also people went for weeks, even months, without the pastime of an up-to-date paper, and so on. Incidentally, Scotty eventually made good, taking on a big suckering and ringbarking contract, and employing several men.

On reaching adjacent to Coonamble, the boss arranged with large property owners, the Landers Brothers, to agist (paddock) the cattle and top them off for a few weeks before actually trucking them to the "big smoke". (Incidentally, again, about fifty years later when "Old" Bill was settled in business adjacent to Penrith, he read of the death at a great age of one of these brothers, and that they had originally started out from that district, proving once more "it's a small world".) This finished up the few days droving trip, and our hero and most of the others made back to the head station. Old Jim said goodbye to the company at Coonamble as he intended retiring to a shack that he owned on an old worked out goldfield adjacent to Bathurst. Wattle Flat was the place, and an old friend of Jim's was living in the cottage, eking out a subsistence fossicking a little gold from the worked out diggings. Of course everyone promised to write him and look the old fellow up some day, and see if they couldn't find some gold for themselves (this in reply to Jim's general invitation). The old patriarch probably died there in due course, and another hardy old pioneer would have gone west. Jim was valuable material for some novelist, had same ever discovered him, and there would have been a comparable case of "Trader Horn" telling his story.

Young Bill put in time at Bungle Gully station as a general hand until about the middle of June, and then pulled out to get some rouseabouting (spelt as pronounced). The "general" shearing was due to be in full swing in August and Young Bill was getting keen for some experience in
that line. A mate of Bill's, the lanky horse-tailor lad (a little older than Bill), and of course in the vernacular his nickname was "Splinter", was also keen to give the sheds a "go"; so the lads set off together, catching the light Cobb and Co. coach (three horse) the thirty or forty miles to Walgett. This town proved not nearly so large as Coonamble, and more "bushified": more of an outback township, as it were, about a hundred miles from the railhead at the larger town of Coonamble, and on the Barwon River, which is the upper part of the Darling. Bill liked Walgett the best. He realised in due course that there was always something about an environment away from a railway. The further off, the more pronounced the casual friendliness of the place. People were in less of a hurry and had more time to lounge about and yarn.

Splinter was born and raised in this environment, and personified the same. The lads put up at a pub and after loaing around the town yarning with various other loafers for a few days, learnt that an early shed called Currawillinghi, a station just over the Queensland border, was due to start shearing early in July. The shed was roughly some one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles (according to the track one travelled) in a north-westerly direction. As it was only about the middle of June, Young Bill and Splinter decided to put the time in humping their blueys, travelling in easy stages and seeing all there was to be seen by the way.

The first stage was to Dungalear station, some ten miles or so northerly from Walgett.\(^1\) The lads camped in an open patch amidst the

\(^1\)In 1901 Dungalear consisted of 134,653 acres held under lease and licence, and was owned by the Australian and New Zealand Mortgage Company. New South Wales, Western Division of New South Wales. Royal Commission, (1901), p.144.
scrub that night, alongside the track, for that's all it was, and probably on the station property. The following morning Bill witnessed for the first time "johnnie cakes" being baked on top of the camp fire ashes. Splinter spread his spare "clean" shirt on the ground, mixed up the flour and baking powder (the famous old brand of "Aunt Mary's" was on hand everywhere in the bush, although some fellows more particular over these matters preferred to carry cream of tarter and soda), added a little salt and then water, palming the mixture into dough with the bare hands. The ashes would want to be just at the right stage, no flame at all. Then the cakes, a little bigger than the size of a large scone and fatter and thinner, was placed on top of the ashes, which had been raked level to receive them, and later turned over just at the right time. If well made they were excellent eating. Damper baked "in the ashes" was mixed the same way, but of course had to be buried in the ashes and the outside burnt crust scraped away: also excellent eating, but soon got stale and unpalatable. Johnnie cakes were generally cooked when one was in a hurry and hungry, damper taking much longer to bake. Mutton, sometimes beef, with jam or dripping, even fat or sugar, sometimes butter and brownie, generally made up the meals whilst travelling in this manner. And of course tea with every meal, and generally black.

The next stage of travelling was about the same distance to Dunnumbral station.2 The lads camped in the woolshed huts here along with several other travellers and enjoyed their company for a day, living on the free bounty of the station cook, who always had a supply ready for the

2"Dunnumbral" in contemporary records. In 1912 the station was owned by A.M.L. & F., comprised 7,732 acres freehold and 189,095 acres leasehold, and ran approximately 62,000 sheep and 300 cattle. A.N.U. Archives of Business and Labour, 132/6: Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Company, Station Records, Dunnumbral.
travellers (sometimes called "swaggies" or "bagmen"), same being collected each evening.

The next camp remembered by "Old" Bill was adjacent to the township (a store and post office, of sorts only) of Moongulla, the station of the same name being hard by. Thousands of acres of dense pine and budda, the latter sometimes called sandlewood. Not much open plain at all, one wondered where the hundreds of thousands of sheep in these parts got their tucker. It was wonderful woolgrowing country too. Then a short stage to Pinegobla station, where the lads camped in the woolshed huts for a day or so. The weather was cold now at nights, getting on for the middle of June, but an immense stack of dry logs were handily laid up for the coming shearing which would include, of course, a great amount of fuel for the steam engine to drive the shearing machinery. And so the lads slept handy to the cook's galley with a huge log fire burning all night. Our heroes camped here an extra day, collecting an ample supply of beef, having made it their business to hang around the station homestead, which was only a few hundred yards off, when a beast was being killed the evening of their arrival. The manager of the station himself was watching the killing, and it was he who casually asked the travellers, "Did you fellers want some meat?" and "you fellers" walked off with about half a hundredweight of it.

The next stage was made a long one, twenty-eight miles in the one day, to the township of Angledool. The boys had intended to camp on the

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3 In 1901 Pinegobla was owned by the Law Debenture Corporation, and consisted of 34,452 acres leasehold. New South Wales, Western Division of New South Wales. Royal Commission, (1901), p. 144.

Narran River, but it turned out to be a lonely "bushed in" place, and as the lads were still feeling up to it (probably in consequence of the couple of days loafing about on good tucker at Pinegobla) they decided to walk another ten miles or so and camp amongst civilisation and company at Angledool township. However, they were very tired on reaching the township about sundown and making camp on the Narran River (the Narran again!), two or three hundred yards from the main part of the township. Young Bill, at least, never forgot that day's travelling; did about fifteen or twenty miles before he began to feel any fatigue at all. The lonely road stretched on ahead through the perfectly flat timbered country, sometimes visible for miles ahead, straight as a gun barrel. The lads saw no other humans that day, and as far as Young Bill can remember, no habitations either, same apparently being well back off the road and screened by the timber. By mutual agreement for a start the mates travelled briskly with their not too light "blueys", seven or eight miles without resting, but thence onwards spelled much more frequently, sitting on their "swags" and enjoying a smoke the meanwhile.

Angledool was a town of about four pubs, a hundred miles or so from a railway: a one hundred per cent woolgrowing centre of course. A few days were spent here, fishing in the river (amongst other pastimes) for small cod, yellow belly and catfish etc. Other than loafing round the camp reading novels and lounging round the town staring at anything at all, the main pastime was playing cards, euchre of course, or billiards at one or other of the pubs, a "bob in" and the winner shouting. The weather kept fine all the time, but very cold and frosty at night. Then the lads were off for the Queensland border and a one pub, one store township just inside Queensland called Hebel, or Kelly's Point (a bend in the Bokhara River). All these rivers eventually found their way to the Barwon and Darling Rivers. The actual border was a gate in a
rabbit- and dingo-proof fence, and the young travellers lived up to the tradition they had so often heard of, standing in Queensland and urinating into New South Wales. Camp was made under a low-spreading bushy coolabah tree, with a big log adjacent and plenty of firewood to hand: nice and handy to the pub too. Plenty of company here. Shearers and shed hands and other knockabouts were putting in time in and around the pub, and like our two wanderers, waiting for the rollcall at Currawillinghi, a few days off yet.

The pub of course was open all the time, the nearest police station being some thirty miles off. After sundown a log fire was kept burning just clear of the verandah opposite the bar, where a footpath would be made some day when the township grew big enough to warrant it (if ever?), and every now and again a bob in would be called for and the cards cut, the winner shouting for all hands. Any of the company who happened to be broke were included in the round of drinks, for this was the law of the bush. Those who were natural talkers, especially if they were also natural leaders, held the floor most. The ribald conversation eventually got round to royalty and the King. Now came something new to Young Bill, the King being roundly cussed as a sponger, and worse. Our hero in his innocence had been brought up in the tradition that being a loyal Australian was synonymous with being loyal to the ruling sovereign, and couldn't help putting same sentiments into words, a mistake in such company of course, but Bill was very young and inexperienced!! However, although most of the company loudly guffawed and roundly cussed the King in no uncertain way, he, Young Bill, was taken good naturedly and assumed to be a "raw pommy", and Bill was glad to let them think so. He soon learnt that the likes of these rough men were generally very loyal Australians, although they wouldn't stand a bar of royalty. And so Young Bill became known as "that young pommy bloke" during the couple of days at this camp.
Out to the shed a day or so before the rollcall: nearly all labour in a shed was booked up beforehand, the employees lodging a deposit against not turning up. However, more often than not quite a few failed to turn up, but there were generally a few there on the off chance of this happening, such as Bill and Splinter. There were all sorts of people there, larrikins from the street city corner gangs, flashly dressed shearsers on bikes (an odd motor bike but no cars those days), a fair percentage of all sorts of bushmen with their swags, a few with riding and pack-saddle horses and some with sulky etc. turnouts. Everybody selected a bunk in the huts as they arrived, and birds of a feather flocked together, Bill and Splinter bunking in with a bunch of lively young fellows, mostly up from Sydney especially for the "shedding". In the event everyone got a job, and at that the shed started one or two hands short.

Shearers and rouseabouts and other true blue bushmen were organised within the Australian Workers' Union. Even in those days it was a very strong organisation. As soon as the rollcall was finished and the extra hands put on, the shearers on the one hand and the "rouseys" on the other, automatically as it were, held a meeting and elected a representative each, who immediately became known as the "reps.". The next procedure was a "show of tickets" (those possessing same produced an A.W.U. financial ticket) to ascertain who were financial members or otherwise. Those not possessing a ticket signed a voucher prepared by the reps. to draw on their wages for the price of membership, which was 20/- those times (more for the shearers). Incidentally, it never occurred to anyone to refuse to become a member. This was just as well,

5Cf. Tritton, Time Means Tucker, p.39. On unionism in the pastoral industry, see Introduction, Ch.3, pp.50-54.
for it would have meant severe ostracization and worse for them. Meanwhile the "shearers'" cook was elected by popular vote, the mere rouseys having to put up with whoever was provided for them. However, although they were nearly always first-rate cooks, after a few days dissentive growling would generally start against their "indifferent" etc. cooking. Hence the saying, a cook should either be a good fighter, or stone deaf (assumed or otherwise).

Bill and Splinter, being young and active, were selected by the "Boss of the Board" as "pickers-up". There were some twenty shearers along a single board (not a "big shed") and Bill found himself picking up for the three furthest away from the wool tables upon which the fleeces were thrown at the near end of the board. The picker-up closest to the wool tables would be looking after five or six shearers, and so on. Work was supposed to start at six o'clock in the morning, but as it was mid-winter and the shed not artificially lighted, work could not commence until daylight. Some time before starting, the engine whistle had signalled all hands up in comfortable time for a pannikin of hot tea and a lump of brownie, and plenty of either. The work then went on until eight o'clock, and then came the breakfast break. Plenty of hot tucker, chops, mince balls, curry etc. To work again and another short break later for morning tea and brownie, taken on the board itself (that is, the floor of the shed, always called the board). Another break for dinner, which was a comparative bush banquet. Two smokos in the afternoon similar to the morning, then a scrumptious tea when too dark to continue work.

After tea, gambling at the mess tables was the popular pastime. The lighting system was simply slush lamps, that is, jam tins filled with fat, with bagging wicks. The gambling games were hazards (a dice throwing game), a "knap" card game school, and euchre for anybody who
cared to make a game up. Shearers and their following were inveterate gamblers. Sometimes good shearers would end up broke after passing through several sheds. Two-up and hazards raked in a big turnover. This phase of shed life was well organised too. It seemed to be agreed by unwritten law who would run the "schools". These fellows were on a good wicket, they won all the time. But most of them were gamblers also and would take a chance with the rest. Generally the gambling games were played in a jovial, rollicking spirit but sometimes, especially if grog came into the camp, there would occasionally be wild brawls and sometimes a good fight. Young Bill would now and again have a bit of a game, but somehow never took to it too seriously: just couldn't be bothered concentrating, so of course generally lost. Bill also had a "scrap" here and came out of same with a bloody nose, but as he was too tough and strong for the other fellow, and the same "other fellow" knew a bit too much for Bill, both parties were secretly(?) pleased when the onlookers were satisfied with a fair show and made(?) the youths call it off and shake hands.

This shed "cut out" after three or four weeks' work, including some time lost with wet weather. After any rain the shearers took a vote as to whether or not the sheep were too damp to shear. Damp wool was very bad for storing and brought on rheumatism amongst the handlers. Some of the younger shearers had a bad name for handling the sheep, even if they were "dripping wet". These people were unpopular with the rouseys, who always hoped for the time off on full pay. The Arbitration Court award laid down that rouseys could be put to work about the station at the grazier's instruction, but in the past they, the rouseys, made themselves such a nuisance if put to work in this way (accidentally(?) broke their axe- or shovel-handles etc.) and made such a nuisance of themselves that the squatter was glad to leave them alone to loaf about
in the huts until the sheep dried sufficiently for shearing to continue.6

A favourite pastime in these wet weather spells in certain districts was wild pig hunting. The hogs were domesticated animals gone wild of course, and generally decades earlier. They had inter-bred and deteriorated over the years, and most of them were smallish with more or less long snouts. Most of the hunters would be armed with old shear blades (relics of the days when shearing was done with the "tongs") mounted at the end of six or eight foot poles. The pigs were generally found in small mobs of half a dozen or so, but sometimes in large numbers. They invariably kept to swampland, often amongst lignum scrub, which is apparently to be found over huge areas of some of the back country. The idea was to catch the pig alive if possible, easy enough with a good trained dog. However, Young Bill was with a party who brought home a fine young hog, slung upside down from a long sapling, a couple of fellows being on each end of same. It took a lot of hard work over a couple of hours to get piggie home to the cook, and it was amazing that an animal could be carried upside down in such a way for so long, and survive. Same catch would be put into the "killer" pen (generally for sheep) at the cook's galley, fattened up as much as possible, and eaten before the cut-out.

The gambling went on more intensely than ever. There were several Aboriginal stockmen employed on the station, and all of them were fond of two-up. One particularly big fellow called Combo (there was always a Combo amongst any group of Aborigines in those parts, it seemed a popular nickname amongst them) was very good at pitching the pennies high into the air off the "bat". In fact they pretty well seemed to go out of sight sometimes. The boys (blacks) hadn't much to gamble with, and anyhow they didn't know how to gamble, but they loved to have a "fly" whilst the silver lasted. Some of the whites would get the willing Combo to spin the pennies for them. (Those days two pennies only were used, the quicker timesaving method with three pennies was not then thought necessary.) When Quombo [sic] would be balancing the pennies on the bat getting set to spin, there would be many cries of "Send 'em up to heaven Quombo," or "Knock a star off Quombo," and so on. And Quombo would bend his knees and almost touch the ground with the bat, then straightening up suddenly and putting every ounce of his great strength into the effort, the pennies would fly upwards spinning and at

1Current maps have the station as "Gundabloui", and station records of 1912 call it "Goondoobluie". At that time it consisted of 826 acres freehold and 184,652 acres leasehold, and ran 91,000 sheep and 1,200 cattle. A.N.U. Archives of Business and Labour, 146/329: The New Zealand and Australian Land Company, Annual Returns from Stations and Sydney Office - Goondoobluie, 1912.
a tremendous speed. As they descended there were cries of "Look out, here they come," or "Stand back, don't let 'em hit yer." If the pennies touched anyone they were automatically barred and had to be spun again, and anybody they did touch was roared at (if a mild weakling) for holding up the game, or jokingly admonished if a big tough fellow, for in this environment the law of the jungle reigned supreme and the lion was boss. When the pennies hit the ground they bounced many feet high two or three times before settling down. Then the cry would be "two bastards on bikes" (the popular phrase) if tails showed up. Young Bill never ascertained why and how this phrase originated, and incidentally it was never used later in the A.I.F. (the First A.I.F. anyhow); it seemed to be a saying peculiar to shed followers. When heads showed up, fresh bets were laid and up went the pennies again. The bat changed hands every time tails showed up, and it was surprising how many times running heads or tails, or "two ones" (one head and one tail) could persistently turn up. And of course when two ones turned up, it meant a respin. It was very amusing to stand off and watch a game; every player's head would be bent back in unison as their eyes followed the pennies up and then down again, all together, following the spinning coins to the ground, even up and down when they bounced, especially when Quombo had the bat.

As the shearing stretched into weeks the "mob" became more or less bored with the constant routine, and both shearers and rouseys welcomed any excuse to break the monotony. The shearers struck for more pay for alleged sheep too "wrinkly" etc. to make decent wages (the award was 30/- per hundred find your own tucker, and rouseys 30/- per week and
It was also claimed fair lumps of lambs (which the award specified must be shorn at a much cheaper rate than full grown sheep) were not lambs at all, and were sufficiently advanced to demand the full rate, and so on.

The rouseys for their part would find (especially when a couple of travellers dropped into the huts looking for work and to be entertained for a day or two before moving on) that they were grievously shorthanded and would "go slow" until the wool lay all over the place, and the whistle would go and shearing be held up until the wool was cleared away: followed with much tongue-in-cheek parleying between the bosses and "reps" and committeemen of the employees. The latter generally won, and the strangers would be "put on". Although by the ruling of the Arbitration Court there were heavy fines etc. against strikes in the shearing industry, it was too much loss of time and trouble for the pastoralists and shearing contractors to bring their case to law. It was much more economical in the long run to pay say fifty or a hundred pounds out, and get along with the shearing. The shed employees knew just how far to go in these bluffs, and rarely went too far. These occurrences generally happened when the time off for rainy wet breaks (on full pay for the rouseys) were too far apart. A break in the monotony with wet weather nullified the chances of this sort of nonsense.

On the whole they were a wild lot of fellows, but generally easy

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2The award granted shearers 24/- per hundred, but the existing rate over much of Queensland was 30/-. In October 1911 the award rate for shed hands between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one was raised to 30/- and keep. Australia, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1911, p.107.
enough to get on with providing they were away from the drink. When it got into the huts anything could happen. There was a bad instance of this at Gundabluey. A runaway German sailor hadn't been home since he was a lad (and was at this time approaching middle age), and didn't intend to return home either, as he would immediately be arrested and punished for avoiding his compulsory three years' permanent military training in the German army. He was a decently pleasant fellow generally, with lots of stories of voyages in foreign parts, and he'd been in all the hellholes and otherwise of the seven seas. When German Charlie was sober, Young Bill and his mates were always ragging him about the coming war with Germany and England (it was then three or four years off), and of course they reckoned England would win, but Charlie always maintained (in his peculiar English speech) that if it (the war) was on the sea, England would win, but if on the land, then Germany must win. When in his cups, "German Charlie" was a holy terror. He looked for fight everywhere, and his best mates became his worst enemies.

However, one Sunday evening Charlie came home to the huts from some bush pub (probably Moongulla) blind drunk on strong spirits. He accosted a big game of cards going on at one of the rouseys' long mess tables, wanting to have a "go" (fight) at one particular player, a big tough young chap nicknamed "Bing Eye" from a rough part of Sydney, and with his one eye (no glass eye worn) and savage scowl, he looked like an old-time pirate, tough enough for any dirty fighting. He "hoed" into Charlie like a hurricane and beat the tough sailorman down (though remember the latter was drunk).

Then happened something that opened Young Bill's eyes, something

3The word "who" is here deleted.
reminiscent of what he had heard and read of the dirty fighting of the Sydney "push" larrikin gangs some two or three decades earlier. Apparently it hadn't altogether died out, and there were several larrikins in this group from the big smoke. When Charlie found himself being forced back and down by Bing Eye's whirlwind attack, he made the fatal mistake of turning dirty (a habit acquired no doubt in many a low down encounter in the aforesaid "hellholes"), and grasping a sauce or vinegar bottle (there were several lots grouped along the table), attempted to use it on his adversary. Bing Eye immediately retaliated in kind, joined by several of his city mates, as mentioned, and for a minute perhaps twenty bottles of ingredients were thrown and smashed. Charlie quick and lively took cover under the table and the barrage missed him. Next thing the "mob" had him clear of the tables and forms and with Charlie on the floor, they put the boot in good and proper. The kicks could be heard on flesh and ribs to no end. Then they (the mob) quickly made themselves scarce, just as the Boss of the Board and some of his staff came on the scene and enquired as to all the hullabaloo. On being informed of same, the boss remarked, "Leave him alone, and if he shows any more fight we'll lock him in the woolshed press for the night." But there was no further trouble, Charlie had had enough.

Young Bill spoke to Charlie the following morning. He looked sick, sore and sorry, his face all swollen and bruised, and his ribs and body must have felt terrible. He declared he didn't remember anything of what happened the previous night. Of course he couldn't go to work, and got the sack. Young Bill and a mate were entertained one night by Charlie some weeks later at a smallish shed in the New England, where the tough sailorman was sober and his old decent self again.

Eventually after some ten weeks or so Gundabluey cut out. There was
much excitement as the last sheep were shorn, culminating in rousing cheering when the very last wooley was put down the chute. Then within a few hours the "mob" began scattering to the four corners of south-eastern Australia. It was now getting somewhat late in the "general" shearing season, and most of the men were off to their homes and other occupations until next shearing. Some alas, would make for the nearest bush pub, and then no further until they had "knocked down" their earnings in a spree lasting from a couple of days to a couple of weeks. Then sick and shaken, their credit cut out with the publican and not being able to sponge any further from people around the township, they would roll their swags and start off on the bush roads and station tracks looking for another job. Young Bill used to feel sorry for these helpless drunks (and well they knew it). Many a few bob was handed to a sick man in this way (that is a fellow really suffering for the want of a couple of drinks) and the majority of "travellers" - bushmen - out that way had the same habit as Young Bill. In fact it was the custom to give a "down and out" (provided one thought he was worth it) anything from a couple of bob to a couple of pounds.
Chapter 8

TRAVELLING BY BIKE THROUGH THE NEW ENGLAND

Young Bill was again somewhat in a quandry as to what he should do now. He felt he would like to go "further out" for outback adventure, but none of his particular mates were going West, they were off to their homes in Sydney and other places. Splinter was returning to his own people for a while down Come-by-Chance way. But one big young "learner shearer" who Young Bill had picked up with had a shed to go to down near Inverell in the north-west New England; as a matter of fact Inverell station, a few miles from the town of that name. "Big Jim" was the chap's name (or nickname) and when he learned Bill was undecided where to make for, he said he thought he could get him on at Inverell, or a good chance anyway. Young Bill would have liked to have gone West, but after the lively company he had been experiencing, the thought of going "further out" on his own made him feel lonely. He'd miss the company he had now become used to, and so he couldn't resist the temptation to go "further in" with Big Jim and three or four others that were going down that way.

The party were all on bikes this time (Bill had recently won a decent old wooden rimmed machine in a raffle) and struck out east through "back" station tracks, crossing the Barwon (upper Darling River) at Caidmurra station, thence to the railhead at Moree, roughly some hundred
These were carefree happy days, everybody joking and chisacking and good fellowship and mateship was the order of the day. (This was the spirit that helped to inspire the two A.I.F.s in later years, handed down from the Pioneers of this country.) Midday billy and quart pot boiling would be under a shady group of trees near some waterhole (tank or dam, billabong, river or pond), a "lay off" for a couple of hours, then on again till near sundown. The track was rough enough, and the chaps were in no hurry, Inverell station not starting for a couple of weeks or so. Night time generally found the travellers at some station huts being entertained by the hands, or camping beside some roaring log fire in a lonely enough place, if one could not "make" bright company. And so the travellers made Moree and caught the train eastward to Inverell. It seemed a little strange being in big towns again like Moree and Inverell, after being out back as it were for some considerable time. However, the travellers were enjoying themselves staying at the various pubs, and drinking too, Bill on shandies or ginger ale with a dash (a dash of beer of course). The townsmen picked them up for travellers from "further out" and Bill and his mates were held more or less in high esteem on account of coming in from the Gundabluey cut-out. Young Bill enjoyed all this, and the late doings at the big shed lost nothing in the telling. The publicans in particular pretended to be very interested in the strangers and made much of them: they (the publicans) were of course thinking of the bar trade they might harvest from these newcomers, they should be well chequed up. However,
there were no heavy drinkers in this particular group, and the pubs had to be contented with their casual trade only.

There was little enough to amuse these bush fellows in such towns those days: drinking, billiards and cards, and loafing about smoking and yarning. There was also, generally, the local illegal two-up game on the outskirts of the town. It was wonderful how one could be parted from one's capital in this way, Bill realised, and by the time Inverell was due to start he hadn't much left. A couple of the group were broke (steady drinking and gambling) and of course had "touched" Young Bill and others more or less successfully for the loan of a "few shillings" or a "couple of quid". Thinking back on those days, "Old" Bill surmises that Young Bill was a "good touch". Others of the party, would not be as good hearted as he (or as soft and foolish, depending how this trait in one would be regarded). But these matters were the least of Young Bill's worries, and he realised as time went on that it was a likeable trait in any person, and one got a certain amount of pleasure out of it. Big Jim was successful in getting Young Bill a start at Inverell shed. The rest of the party, not being so fortunate, moved on and out of Young Bill's life.2

Nothing untoward happened at this shed, but it was a different environment and company to what one had experienced further out: there was a lesser proportion of real bushmen and more townsmen and city dwellers just out for a few weeks' or months' shearing, and then back to the towns and cities. There was not the mateship and easygoing good fellowship either, and life was taken more seriously. The countryside

2Inverell station was formed in 1836. In 1910 it was owned by the Campbell brothers, consisted of 26,000 acres and ran 26,000 sheep. The Pastoralists' Review, Vol.XX (Mar.1910-Feb.1911), pp.268-71.
was beautiful after the flat areas further out, rolling green hills and valleys, valuable woolgrowing country, all cleared of timber etc. except enough left for shade. Three or four weeks at Inverell shed and then came the cut-out. Young Bill was again in a quandry. He felt he should have gone west and fulfilled his ambitions to experience life out back. But the pull was all the other way, to where all the rest were going, to their home towns or on the lookout for a late shed down the New England, or a bit of late harvesting. And so once more Young Bill could not resist the company and joined a small group who hoped to get the work mentioned.

The days went by pleasantly enough, fine weather for the most part, and the New England country travelled through was something like its counterpart in Europe (and Bill confirmed same a few years later: of course the timber was different, no eucalyptus gums, acacias etc.). The roads were good after those experienced further out, which made cycling a pleasure. This trip developed into a mere tour on bikes. The sheds the lads called at were all full handed. Too many were looking for a late shed. However Bill thoroughly enjoyed the travelling, the pubs on the way being patronised every few miles, where the lads "got their legs under the table" for as many meals as possible, staying overnight more often than not, and patronising the bars often enough too. East to Glen Innes was the first stage, some fifty miles or so, then on south through Guyra and Armidale. [The] next place of importance was Uralla, where the travellers viewed the bushranger "Thunderbolt's" grave. (Incidentally, when Young Bill was no longer young or even middle-aged, he read a little book all about Thunderbolt and his contemporaries etc.; and to read the book was to be convinced too that neither Fred Ward or Thunderbolt (two different people) were interred in this grave, but a poor sickly devil of a stepbrother of Fred Ward's, who in turn was a
lifelong friend of the bushranger. Verily truth is stranger than fiction at times, and anybody interested enough can read all about the abovementioned matters in the little book called Captain Thunderbolt: author (? a lady writer, name forgotten). The dinkum bushranger (generally known as Thunderbolt) eventually settled in Queensland where he was occasionally contacted by some of his old New South Wales friends. A little south of Uralla the Lads passed one of Thunderbolt's lookouts, close to the left-hand side of the road. The immediate country surrounding the (probably granite) monolith, was bare of all trees etc., and didn't suggest much of a hideout. Bill surmised that in the outlaw's time the formation was amongst plenty of camouflaging timber and scrub. The pile of huge stones is picturesque enough, and there is a cave of sorts where no doubt others besides the renowned bushranger camped and slept. Young Bill was very interested in these historical spots relative to the famous Thunderbolt, as the bushranger was one of his early literary heroes, being immortalised (?) in the cheap New South Wales Bookstall edition Three Years With Thunderbolt by Will Monckton, who spent three years as the bushranger's "Boy". The book impressed Bill (too much to be good for him!) as he was fond of the bush and the adventures that could be got out of association with it. Somewhere around this locality one of the travellers who knew these parts pointed out the hump of Ben Lomand, the highest point in the New England; but other than that it was just another stunted timber outcrop some half mile or so over to the left of the road. The next big town was Tamworth. There were only two of them left together now. The

3 Annie Rixon, Captain Thunderbolt, (Quality Press, Forest Lodge New South Wales, 1945.)

4 The book was ghosted by Ambrose Pratt.
balance of the seven who started the trip gradually dropped out at their home towns, and two caught the rattler for the big smoke at Tamworth.\(^5\) The remaining two helped them to make up their bare fares. However, they would be OK as they were going to their homes.

By this time it was only a few weeks to Christmas, a bad time to be travelling for work, casual labour generally being "laid off" until after the holidays: the shearing and harvesting was pretty well finished. The two Mates decided to strike out for the west here. Wall's home was on the far north coast somewhere, and like Young Bill, he wasn't much more than a kid. And so, west for Gunnedah some fifty miles off. Here the Lads got about three weeks' work on a big chaffcutter. The only notable event about this job that Bill remembers is the sheafs of wheaten hay were lousy with scotch thistles, pricking and stinging the hands to a nasty soreness: also the fact that a team of bullocks was used to cart the hay and chaff about; an unusual sight in the particular environment, even in those days.

[The] next township of any consequence on the travellers' track was Coonabarabran. The Lads then struck out for Coonamble, about ninety miles off in a westerly direction. It was pleasant enough travelling most of the way, through both flat and undulating country, leaving the timbered parts behind as Coonamble was approached, and Goonearrawar station (as pronounced)\(^6\) was passed through about halfway across; no different from any other station except that the woolshed (and any shearer or shed hand could tell the tale) shearing machines were driven

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\(^5\)The words "The lads," have been deleted from the beginning of this sentence.

\(^6\)"Goorianawa".
by electricity, the only instance of the same in New South Wales, and probably Australia also. From about this locality onwards to the "Coon" (nickname of the big town) the Lads had a fine changing view of the rugged and erratically silhouetted Warrumbungle Ranges running parallel to the Boys' travelling, a few miles to the southward.

It was a lonely track for the most part, and few people were met with. However, Old Bill has very pleasant memories of the travellers meeting a young police trooper on a lonely stretch of the track. The trio pulled up naturally as one man for a yarn (an old bush custom). The trooper seemed glad of the chance of a "pitch" and was very interested in the bike travellers and what they had to say; and so after a few minutes it was decided to boil the quart pots and have a drink of tea and some brownie. It occurred to Young Bill that the trooper somewhat envied the Boys their undisciplined freedom. The conversation was the usual bush talk: horses, the season, the chances of rain, shearing and so on. No, the trooper couldn't tell them of any work about, and remarked what they thoroughly realised themselves, that it was too near Christmas: "Wouldn't be much doing till later." And so the two Mates rode off westward, and the trooper in the opposite direction. Goodness knows what he was doing there, probably just a routine ride. Other company were a trio of sturdy built Aborigines on a job of contract rabbit proof fencing. Fraternising with these folk, Bill was impressed with the meeting, as it was the first time he had seen these people doing really hard work, and they were evidently enjoying it. Previously all the Aboriginal people Bill had contacted were stockmen.

The nearest the Boys got to a job since leaving Gunnedah was a station (name forgotten) wanting some floodgates built across creeks and gullies out the back of the run. The boss grazier wanted the work done contract. Young Bill and Wall were anxious to have a go at it, and with
the necessary tucker and plant were dumped out in the hills some miles from the homestead. However, after having a crack at it for a couple of days to get an idea of a price for the job (the boss's idea) the Lads realised there was not sufficient heavy timber handy enough for the work; same would have to be cut at no little distance from the job, which would make the work more costly than the boss apparently anticipated. On being advised of this by the Lads, the boss sang the prevailing song: "Thought he would leave it till after Christmas." He probably thought too that these lads were apparently a little inexperienced for the particular work. Bill now thinks they were too, especially Wall, who didn't seem to relish hard work: a big lazy careless fellow, but a good mate.

The Lads made Coonamble about a fortnight before Christmas. They were practically broke but they still had their bikes. A council of ways and means was held and it was decided the bikes be sold to the best advantage, and the Boys would eke it out on the proceeds until after the Christmas holidays, when work would begin to become available. (Young Bill had previously traded in his old "raffle won" bike for a much better one, way back in Inverell.) The Mates were disappointed to ascertain the best price they could get for their machines was four pounds ten shillings for the two of them (a "dealer" of course). However, the Lads parted with the bikes and put up at The Bushman's Home (the one Bill had camped at about ten months previously) and settled down to put the time until after Christmas on a very frugal allowance. But getting close up to that time, he got a bit tired of the boring existence life under these circumstances turned out to be and "let his head go" with his few bob, and finished up living high on tinned fruit, iced sundaes etc., and shandies too: ended up broke just on Christmas Eve. However, Bill had made up his mind what he would do: he'd go "on
the wallaby" over the Christmas holidays. It would be a new experience, and if Wall wasn't game for it (as in the event he wasn't) Bill would go it alone. No, Wall declared he would sooner battle on under near broke conditions, but of course he had a bovine and contented disposition, the opposite to his mate. However, being a good mate, Wall offered to share his remaining few bob with Bill if he would stay put and battle it out until after the holidays, but of course Bill would have none of that. And so on Christmas Eve morning very early, whilst all at the "Home" were still asleep, Young Bill rolled his bluey and strolled through and out of the town, the only soul in the main street, and set out northerly for Walgett just as the sun was rising. Again, was Young Bill downhearted? Strangely enough he wasn't: he was even a little thrilled. He was "on the track" for Christmas week, and broke.

Somewhere about ten miles out Bill spelled at the Yowie pub. It was probably about eight o'clock and the place could have been deserted, except that all doors and windows were open, as the weather was pretty warm. Young Bill hung around for a while, hoping for a yarn with some early riser; but the occupants of the pub slept on, so he went on and camped under a shady clump of trees handy to water. On the track again toward the cool of the evening, and camp again for the night a couple of hundred yards from the Tyrone pub, about twenty miles from Coonamble. About sundown Bill strolled over to the pub, and joined the company sitting on the edge of the bar verandah; got yarning to one young fellow in particular, who was in for the Christmas break from one of the surrounding stations. The young fellow suggested to Bill that he put the following day, Christmas Day, in at the Tyrone: "Only a fellow out of his mind would be on the track Christmas Day" (probably he was right thought Young Bill). In effect, why not hang round and enjoy the hospitality as a guest. Bill remarked he "would think it over". After
enjoying the Tyrone's hospitality to the extent of two or three drinks (somebody shouted, the young fellow once), Bill strolled off to his camp, and slept well enough after his twenty mile walk.

On the following morning, which was Christmas Day, our hero strolled over to the Tyrone probably about eight o'clock. The blokes that were about, including Bill's "young fellow" acquaintance, seemed quiet and taciturn enough, probably suffering a bit of a hangover from the night before. Young Bill was in no humour for this kind of atmosphere, and had no intention of hanging round when he supposed he may not have been welcome; and perhaps he was a little sensitive of being stony broke. Probably an hour or two later the company would have brightened considerably under the stimulus of a few drinks, and would have taken the down and out young stranger to their hearts. However, the said "stranger" wasn't so fussy about sizing the position up in that way, so quietly walked back to his camp, packed up and taking a shortcut through the scrub so that he would not pass in view of the pub, came out on the road some two hundred yards or so past it. Looking back momentarily, Bill could see a group step onto the road from the pub, and stare after the "ratty" (a phrase they would probably use) young swagman who preferred to be on the track Christmas Day, rather than hanging on at the bush pub. Had Young Bill looked back long enough probably the company would have waved to him to come back and join them. But our traveller didn't look backwards. Now that he had started he preferred to keep going, and he had no regrets whatever. No distance ahead and on the left was the gate to Wingadee station, and Bill remembered from his tour through this country the best part of a year earlier, that it was ten miles to the homestead. Bill planned an easy day, to arrive at said homestead about tea time.

Probably about ten o'clock, the traveller made camp so as to miss the
heat of the day, under a beautiful shady clump of wilgas surrounded somewhat by a spinifex claypan: a good view all round with scrub and open grass plain country in the distance. No water to hand, but Bill had filled his waterbag back along the track, and now hung it in a good possey in the wilga shade. Plenty of merino woolies about, some of them approaching and evincing disappointment on finding that a human being had claimed their lovely siester shade where, apparently, the human being judged by the tens of thousands of jumbuck visiting cards lying about, they were wont to pass a few of the hottest hours of the day. However, after staring at the man-animal for a while and stamping their fore-feet in puzzlement, they retired handily enough to the next best shade available, and kept Young Bill company for the rest of his sojourn there; and although he didn't feel lonely (strangely enough, again), those sheep, and the smell of them, including their camping ground he was on, was company of sorts. This may seem strange to folk who have never experienced same, but bushmen will certainly understand it.

The camp was on short commons. There wasn't much tucker in the "bags", but Bill had been practical enough to invest the very last of his silver in tea and sugar and a few pounds of flour and ingredients, and a tin of jam or "cocky's joy" (golden syrup). Some johnnie cakes would have to be cooked for a meal, so he got the necessary fire going and prepared his Christmas dinner. He was "peckish" enough to thoroughly enjoy the food. Just about this time a buckboard and pair hove in sight with two men aboard, the "boss" type, our hero could see at a glance, and they were apparently driving to visit the big station, passing within fifty yards or so of our traveller, and staring very hard. Young Bill thought they were probably thinking along the lines of the Tyrone pub blokes: "What a ratty young fellow this must be," and so on. But the "ratty young fellow" wasn't a bit bothered about what they
were thinking and gave them a cheerful wave which was (just) acknowledged. Our hero watched their dust disappear along the track (just a bush track) and into the scrub.

Having finished his meal Bill filled his pipe (he'd made sure of a fair supply of tobacco before being "flat" broke) and sitting on his bluey enjoyed a long smoke cogitating the meanwhile: well, here it was Christmas Day 1911, and he'd turned seventeen the previous August whilst at Gundabluey station, he hadn't amassed anything at all in wealth, and not much in useful knowledge. However, he had certainly been around a bit and seen things, and he had and was enjoying same. So why worry? There was plenty of time to start saving money, he was only young yet, which he admitted grudgingly. Why not "knock about" for a few years, then settle down and start saving? And of course he would end up with a grazing station of his own. It was wonderful how that "pipe" dream persisted down the years. Bill cut another pipe-full from his medium strength plug tobacco, lit up and thought on. His home down Sydney way: what would his folk be doing? Probably enjoying their Christmas dinner in their usual style; Dad carving the poultry and pork, and Mum heaping the plates with vegetables, followed by the trinket studded plum pudding. The folk would be wondering where the absent one was this second Christmas away from home. This reminded him he hadn't written home for some time, could have done so right there and then but it occurred to him he hadn't bothered to pack any writing materials: and he thought of all this without any twinge of nostalgia (or remarkably little under the circumstances). However, he resolved to get a letter off as soon as possible, and pay more attention to writing home regularly. (Old Bill is pleased to reflect the resolve was kept, and said correspondence was never so neglected over the following years.) Our traveller knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the heal of his boot
same as any other true blue "bushy", took a long pull at the waterbag, now getting pretty low, rolled his swag out, and prepared for a couple of hours' laze and doze through the hottest hours of the day.

Bill eventually slept notwithstanding the flies, and awakened to find it later than he intended. He may have dozed even longer, but the jumbucks were moving out from the shade to pasture and water, "baaing" to each other in loud sheep voices the meanwhile, and so disturbed our hero. Bill sprang up, drank the last of the cold tea from the billy, and packed for the track. It was pleasant travelling now, past mid-afternoon and cooler. A few 'roos and emus were passed, the former standing up and staring, the latter continuing to move about calmly, seemingly unafraid of the man-animal. No rabbits to speak of in this country: too hard for burrowing for one thing, probably bad enough some seasons. There was lots to attract the attention as one looked about: some beautiful coolabah and other eucalyptus; fine looking boree, myall, beef- and white-woods. Bill's eyes sought out the timber suitable for fencing and other purposes. The galah, cockatoo and other parrot families were calling and yodelling in the late afternoon. These types of birds were of course based on the Castlereagh River a few miles to the westward. No doubt they camped in the big gums and coolabahs along the banks, every night. Bill remembered the Castlereagh River, his first droving trip converged on the "River" stock-route to Coonamble, west of Wingadee homestead.

Directly our traveller pulled up for a spell, which meant of course filling the pipe for a smoke, meanwhile sitting or lounging on his worldly belongings. He got thinking of the time he came along this same track some months earlier on the way to Come-by-Chance via Wingadee; also the short droving trip through this country. Where were all those fellows now? Where was Splinter? Probably somewhere round
Come-By-Chance. Bill was inclined to look Splinter up, but probably because he was broke he decided to keep right ahead for Walgett, unless some job turned up.

The homestead and outbuildings were sighted slightly before sundown, and Bill made camp in some thin scrub adjacent to the quarters. A couple of chaps who must have dawdled over the meal were sauntering toward the huts. Very soon Bill casually walked toward the mess hut galley and broached the cook. He was made very welcome: "What a pity yer hadn't been half an hour earlier, yer could have got yer legs under the table," etc., etc., remarked the "babbler". However, the "babbling brook" (bush slang for cook) slapped up a cold feed for the traveller, finishing off with a huge lump of plum pudding (not quite like Mother used to make!), insisted that Bill spend the following day, Boxing Day, in the quarters, and so on. A gang of fellows sauntered into the mess tables for a game of cards and greeted the stranger vociferously, and in no time confirmed the cook's invitation to stay over the holiday. Bill declined a game of cards at first but after the company insisted on him joining them in a couple of small whiskies, albeit drowned in much water, he joined his hosts in the game, and had a merry enough night. All the same, our hero was particularly careful not to have too much of their firewater: he had tasted the foul stuff before, and hated the taste of it. Of course he was excused not joining in heavily in the drinking, on account of his youth. The station "horse-tailer" whom he chummed up with (a young fellow like himself) joined him in this stand. This lad turned out to be named Tom, and Tom helped Young Bill, toward midnight probably, to gather up his earthly belongings from his camp, and instal him in a spare bunk, three others being camped in the same room.

Young Bill enjoyed a lazy Boxing Day amongst friendly company, and the
following day was off on the track again heading northerly for Walgett, which was reached by steady stages and full tuckerbags, via Coombogolong station and Toolooora bore. Everyone seemed friendly enough toward a young fellow on the track around Christmas and New Year time, and although no work was doing, everybody was sociable and hospitable.

Our hero struck out north-westerly from Walgett toward the opal field of Lightning Ridge, and put the New Year period in with an old retired couple and a middle-aged friend of theirs, living in an isolated building that had been a rambling old hotel of many rooms: really an historic pioneer relic, built of pise (mud and straw), iron roof and entirely surrounded by a broad verandah. Only one floor of course, just a huge bungalow. It so happened that a plague of fleas just about had possession of the place, most of the rooms being empty. Young Bill helped the old couple make war on the fleas. The family friend, a typical quiet easygoing bushy type and a bachelor, was busy on a handy enough line of fence. He was working over the holidays as he was pushed for time to keep up with his contract agreement. The old man, who must have been eighty and wore a patriarchal beard, smoked incessantly and gave advice, whilst his elderly wife mixed up buckets of strong lysol, and Young Bill hopped into the mopping of the floors with a will; gave the whole place a hiding within two or three days, and in his spare time helped Dave with running the wire in his fence.

And so New Year went by happily enough. In the long evenings, everybody (that is the four people mentioned, there were no visitors) sat on the edge of the front verandah facing the stock-route and road some way off, and smoked and yarnd till all hours. Our hero became impatient to push on and find a job, but the pathetic old couple (they had reared a family who apparently were settled far and wide and whom they seldom saw or heard from) implored him to stay on, and guaranteed
to find him a job in due course. Young Bill didn't have the heart to refuse, and low and behold in a couple of days a job turned up.

Some chaps from a boring plant on Gerongra station had occasion to pull in off the road for some reason or other on their way to put in a weekend at Walgett, and Bill's old lady host canvassed them for a job for "this young feller". Yes, there was a job going at the station right then, watering a mob of sheep from a drying up tank (that is, an excavation of a few thousand cubic yards in the ground, always referred to in grazing country as a "tank"). The job was worth twenty-five bob a week and tucker. Young Bill hit the track again the following day for Gerongra station some ten mile further out.
Inverell Station: "The countryside was beautiful..., rolling green hills and valleys, valuable wool-growing country."
(The Pastoralists' Review, Vol XX, 1910, p.270.)

Mining opal: two miners and their windlass: "They were the easiest lot of men to get along with, staunch mates and socialists to a considerable degree; easygoing and friendly..."
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Chapter 9

A LONELY JOB AND OPAL GOUGING

As Bill walked along the road he thought of the probabilities of the prospective job. Apparently it could be a very lonely one, camped out on the run somewhere, at perhaps some ever so quiet and out-of-the-way spot. But anyway, he wanted to try himself out on a job like this, just to see what it was really like to be isolated from any company for weeks at a time.

Young Bill got his wish: it was just such a job. He was dumped a few miles out on the run, with tucker, tools and camping gear, and the information that he was about five miles from the nearest habitation, a camp of Chinese ringbarkers; otherwise he was ten miles from anywhere. However, our hero wasn't worried about anything, and the chap who accompanied him out to "Big Paddock Dam" with the spring cart gave him a hand to pitch his camp, promising he and some of the other fellows (station hands) would ride out and visit him occasionally. The station blokes had fixed Bill up with some sort of a dog for company, same being much appreciated.

The first thing to do as regards the job was to renew the fence round the tank, which had been built years before for just such an occasion as this prolonged dry summer when the water dried up rapidly, especially if the sheep were allowed to wade into the water to drink. The idea was to pump the water, in most cases by hand (those days) into long troughing,
and so conserve the supply for as long as possible. Sometimes, when the necessary timber and brush were available, it was even deemed necessary to cover the whole surface of the waterhole over with shade: it was really surprising how much stock water could be conserved by these methods.

The hand-pump and troughing had already been overhauled and renovated, so Bill hopped right into the pumping. The work wasn't hard, but of course it was monotonous, even had a fellow been one hundred per cent moron. There were probably some three or four thousand sheep to be watered, and didn't they just lap it up; particularly of course, on the hotter days. However, come to think back on it, Old Bill thinks he only averaged perhaps three hours a day actually pumping, the remainder of the day being passed mainly reading and smoking, and the usual camp chores such as cooking etc.. To say that our hero was never lonely and therefore dispirited in this environment would be a long way from the facts; but considering everything, he was agreeably surprised to find he was sticking to it stoically. Somebody or other from the station dropped in on Bill every day for about a fortnight, and thence onwards once in from two to four days. No doubt, thought our hero, the station management had decided that Bill could be trusted on the job for at least a few days, and barring accidents he could be relied on to keep the water up to the stock in sufficient quantity. Bill read a lot in his spare time, the station people keeping the literature up to him. Mostly "light" stuff: bush stories from the Sydney Mail (a weekly pictorial long since defunct), the Sydney Bulletin and such like publications. Young Bill got an idea somewhat of the sort of life boundary riders, old-time shepherds and lots of other lonely bushies experienced. He never got as far as placing his hat on a stump and imagining he had company to yarn to and entertain, but he did try a
diversion or two. One of them was to make friends of two or three huge goannas.

There were a lot of old hollow box trees around the place, thick timber that had been ringbarked many years before, and every second hollow was the home of one of these fierce looking but harmless enough reptiles. When Bill would be at a meal, which invariably included mutton, generally salted and boiled, he realised these lizards with their keen smell would get a whiff of the meat and warily approach the camp dining table. The diner continued quietly at his meal, interestingly observing the movements of the visitor. However, during the last couple of days the callers (just then there were two dropping in) kept a respectful distance away and scampered off when thrown the meat scraps. But eventually, after a day or so, one of them returned to grab and run off with a bone. At the next calling there was no running off when thrown scraps, they just about caught them in their mouths. The next advance was to cautiously take a bone when held out. After a couple of days of this they had to be hunted back from coming too close. Next they became a nuisance, daringly cleaning up any tucker left handy during the camper's absence.

The experiment had gone too far by this time, and the "pets" just had to be hunted out of hand. One or two who persisted too inquisitively had to be destroyed. One of the latter that Bill guessed was only stunned was dragged down to the water by the tail (the brute was about six feet long) and pitched into the water, as an experiment to see what would happen when the reptile recovered. Bill knew that if said reptile did not recover, it would eventually be found floating belly up. This experiment occurred about mid-morning, but although a keen watch was kept nothing at all was actually seen of the "go." Young Bill had learnt that goannas can live submerged under water for a considerable
time, just as a snake (or some snakes) will. Our "pet" must have laid there jacko all day, and during the night crawled out to his proper environment. The following morning when the mud around the water was examined for tracks, there was the usual goanna pads to and from the water, and no doubt one of these was of our go...

Sometimes these creatures would be thrown the remains of a large mutton shoulder blade, and during the quiet of the night could be heard scraping the bones against some log or tree, which helped the animal to force the five or six inch across bone down its throat. Sometimes the knocking and scraping of this operation continued for an hour or so. The goanna retains the bones in its stomach until the meat is digested off them, and then expels the bare bones. Young Bill occasionally found bare fresh bones in this way, that had been thrown to the reptiles some days previously. It is a known fact that snakes and goannas are deadly enemies and where goannas are found in any number, there are few or no snakes in the vicinity. Well, at least no snakes at all were encountered at this particular camp.

Incidentally, whilst on the subject, Old Bill feels loath to drop it without relating the following incident which happened whilst "on the land" down Riverina way, shortly after the First World War. Our hero was breaking up freshly cleared ground, otherwise ploughing with a ten horse team, same being yoked five and five. The team was pulled up at a point some two hundred yards or so from the hut, and left standing (a foolish act under most circs) whilst the driver strolled over to the camp to attend to the roast in the camp oven. The only excuse the driver might have had for leaving the team was that the horses generally were quiet enough, and had been working fairly hard on soft feed "off grass" and were glad enough of a spell. The fact that there were hundreds of acres of old ringbarked trees within a hundred yards of
where the team was left standing and that plenty of old man goannas were
camped in the hollows, and moreover it was early summer and they were
moving around lively enough, was overlooked.

However, on approaching the team after a longer absence than
anticipated, the driver realised by their shiftiness that something was
wrong. There certainly was. An old man goanna was actually in the
middle of the team, and was moving about so warily without touching the
horses' legs that one could be certain he had brushed against them once
or twice and felt the reaction of the horses fearfully shifting their
limbs out of the way. Driver Bill made the mistake of approaching for a
better look, and the reptile spotted him and lay doggo. After a few
minutes of this, the "man-animal" cautiously withdrew, allowing the go.
plenty of room to move away, and after a while he did. However, he was
not allowed to get far enough away from the team, and in the direction
of the closest timber, before the man-animal, now anxious to get a move
on, approached his team with that intent. This frightened our go.
again, who of course made for the nearest cover, that is the team. This
manoeuvre happened a couple of times, so Bill stood well and truly back
and sat down for a long wait, and well out of the line the go. would
make for the nearest timber, and by and by patience was rewarded, the
man-animal not approaching his team until the enemy was well and truly
on his way toward the timber and safety.

On examining his team Bill could see they had moved about from side to
side quite a lot, avoiding the goanna of course. There was this about
it, these horses had been grazing for years amongst the dry timber
mentioned, and knew all about the harmless goannas; they must have
become accustomed to them and were just not over frightened in the
particular predicament. All the same there was a couple of wildies in
the team, and why they never started the rest out in a pannicky gallop,
Bill will never know. He could only feel very thankful that the horses remained quiet, and adversely criticise himself for being such a fool in leaving the team unattended.

Getting back to the story, another diversion practised in this lonely camp was making friends of the birds that regularly visited the water to drink. Prominent amongst them were a family of bower birds, common enough over vast areas of Australia. They became tame enough and appreciated the scraps thrown them. They are great mimics, and also keen souvenir hunters for nick-nacks to decorate their playgrounds with. One day after these birds had begun to hang around the camp, a bright coloured knife went missing. It was a cheap light-weighted table knife, with a hollow "silver" handle. When a day or two later a similar fork was missing, Young Bill felt sure the bower birds were up to their souvenir hunting. The flight of the birds to and from the water was carefully watched for and it was reckoned their dancing bower should be in a lignum scrub (a favourite place for these birds) some half mile or so from the camp. Bill went looking for it, and sure enough after several attempts was successful. There were lots of curios decorating the bower, mostly pieces of bleached bone. There were also bright pebbles, mostly whitish, a couple of same being close enough to topaz; also some pieces of glass from broken bottles and a few bits of what the finder later realised was "potch", found adjacent to opal. The nearest opal was at Lightning Ridge, some fifty miles off as the crow flies, and Bill surmised the birds had stolen it from a bower, that had in turn stolen it from other bower birds, and so on in relays, the original souvenir hunters collecting the potch from the Ridge where there was plenty of it laying around. And wonder of wonders (or was it?), decorating the dancing bower in the most conspicuous places were the missing knife and fork. Everything was left strictly alone, and
although at times tempted to collect some of the decorations as souvenirs to send home to friends and his folks, along with the story, Bill never had the heart to interfere with the birds and their quaint loveable habits.

Our hero examined lots of these playgrounds all over half Australia, but the one mentioned above was by far the most quaint and novel. Our naturalist now deliberately left bright objects lying about, bright pebbles and pieces of coloured glass etc., and sure enough several of them disappeared into the bower. These birds were great mimics, and more than once Bill hurried out of his sleeping tent to ostensibly hunt the crows away from his too handy tucker, or to see who had arrived in camp and was whistling his barking dog, but in each case it was only the bower birds.

Young Bill now got busy and caught up with his mail from home, and it was months since he had written to his folks. Ere many days had passed he received lots of mail which had been following him all round the country. His parents made yet another attempt to induce their eldest son to give up his "careless way of life" and endeavour to "make something of himself". His father was at that time one of the original three partners proprietoring a country circulating weekly newspaper (incidentally still in circulation today).1 Would our hero "care to set himself up with a horse and sulky turnout, and tour the country canvassing for new subscribers" etc. and so on. "He could work his way home in this manner, and develop the personality of a commercial traveller at the same time." No doubt had Bill more commonsense at the time, he would have given this proposition a go. However, he didn't

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1The Farmer and Settler. See Introduction, Ch.2, p.11.
even give the matter a second thought, much preferring to stick to his own plan of life. He hadn't even started to experience bush life in the real outback, and was determined to stick to his own plans and ambitions, for what they were worth.

One day after being on the job some three or four weeks, Bill rose early, watered the jumbucks as usual, and leaving the troughs a-banker after all stock had quenched their thirst, set off on a walkabout, taking the dog and waterbag along of course. Bill reckoned he could find the Chinese ringbarking camp, and have a bit of a yarn anyway. However, the day became somewhat overcast and it was difficult to keep direction. Our hero became properly bushed for a while, all flat, timbered country with patches of scrub, not much open space. After walking "blind" for an hour or so, a fence was followed in an easterly direction, with the assumption that it would sooner or later come out on the Walgett road, and the wanderer was right this time: it eventually did. From this position he got a line on his direction, and after walking some hour or so, there were the white tents of the encampment. It happened to be a Sunday, and the Chinese were loafing about for the most part. A few of the younger men seemed pleased with the visitor, but only one of them other than their ganger (a surly enough boss Chinaman) spoke English it seemed, and atrocious English at that. The boss seemed pleased when the visitor enquired his way back to Big Paddock Tank. Bill was able to follow his directions somewhat: "Go longa that fency, then this way longa that one," meanwhile squatting on his haunches and illustrating his points scratching away at the time honoured bushman's "mud map". Bill made his camp eventually in the late afternoon, and was glad to call it a day.

Shortly after this episode life brightened up somewhat in that Young Bill acquired a neighbour, one Fred, who took up camp in an old hut some
three miles or so off and on a similar job as Bill's, nursing the drying up water for the jumbucks out that way. It was known at Big Paddock Tank that Fred would be installed at "The Old Hut" and minute directions were given how to locate the place. In this sort of scrubby enough country where one could not get a clear look around too often, it was generally a matter of following this and that fence and going the long way round. However, the first Sunday afternoon following the news, Bill, leaving the troughs a-banker, made the Old Hut without too much trouble, and was made very welcome by Fred who like Young Bill was a Sydney lad, but some two or three years older. These Lads cobbered up immediately, both being fond of the bush life, but hungry for company and young companionship. The visitor had to stay for the night of course, and a shakedown was made up from some of Fred's bedding. Bill could return to his own camp the following afternoon, and in plenty of time to water the stock.

Next morning, Fred led the way to a small excavated tank a mile or so off that was fast drying up, which he reckoned had plenty of fish in it. There certainly was plenty of fish, continually disturbing the surface of the water. The Lads stripped off, and found there was some two feet of water at most in the tank, and about the same depth of soft mud. The water was now stirred up as much as possible by wading about and disturbing the mud, which compelled the fish to come to the surface and behave in a numbed stupid fashion, and they were easily enough caught with the hands. The lads threw about half a hundredweight out on the banks. They were fat enough and looked like black bream, some of them up to three pounds or more in weight. About midday a tremendous pan of fish was put on the open fire: the company would gorge themselves on the best of the land. But would they? The fish straight away tasted over-rank and oily: bitter disappointment. They were no good at all,
nearly all bone and oil, very little flesh. But the Lads very soon got over their disappointment, had a good laugh and hopped into what tucker was going, without fish.

Some time later Bill learnt these fish were known as "boney" bream and were considered no good at all. The Lads saw a good deal of each other during the next few weeks, returning visit for visit, and if the jumbucks did go short of a drink for an hour or so once in a while, the boss was none the wiser, nor did the stock suffer any significant setback in consequence. It appeared neither of the lads were tied to Gerongra station, and as time passed they planned to try their luck out at opal gouging on Lightning Ridge. Then the rain came sufficient to fill all tanks to the extent of cancelling the pumping operations. The Lads had a "tarpaulin muster" and with Fred's extra few quid (he had been employed at the station longer than Bill) it was decided there were sufficient resources to give the Lightning Ridge project a tryout.

"The Ridge" was a straggling camp settlement. The busiest part of the "Field", the "Flat", "Gully" and "Hill" were adjacent to the township, but most of it had been worked out and opal was being found further afield. No pub at all on the Ridge, so much the better! A couple of stores, a butcher's shop, opal valuers' and buyers' humpies just about made up the little township. On the whole they were the easiest lot of men to get along with, staunch mates and socialists to a considerable degree; easygoing and friendly, they didn't seem to care to advise the new arrivals where to sink or where not to: "Yer might try among those 'duffers' over there and strike it right away, or yer might sink amongst the gougers actually 'on' opal and get nothing at all."

In the event the Lads did what most of the gougers did, pitched camp handy to the township where water and wood etc. could be more
conveniently bought, and after investing in the necessary tools, windlass, license etc., made a start about a mile and a half out along the gully. Matters went along merrily enough, no hurry: "Probably working for nothing anyway." The work under any conditions wasn't overhard unless one made it so, but cramped enough conditions at times. Most of the field had been worked out where the Boys were trying, but it was supposed there was still some opal left there. The old hands gave the lads to understand they could expect to "bottom" on thirty or forty feet. After a few feet digging, sandstone was reached and continued to a depth of about thirty-five feet, and then the layer of opal-bearing dirt up to a few feet thick. It was the usual thing to get a little excited when nearing the opal strata. One could suddenly come on half a fortune, but the odds were heavily against it.

The Lads put down a couple of duffers during their few weeks on the Field, and worked a couple of old shafts that for some reason or other had been abandoned before bottoming. All they got for their work was some attractive looking potch worth next to nothing, except to bower birds as previously related. Probably the boys would have worked until stony broke, but the following happening forestalled it. Jim [?Fred] met a cobber on the field, another young fellow from Sydney whom he had worked with around Walgett. "Little Bluey" was the name (and very appropriate too) and Bluey had been a fair while opal gouging to no good advantage and was fed up with it. He was about to send a deposit down to the Federal Sheep Shearing Company to secure him a rouseabout's job at an early shed, Noondoo, which was about to start in three or four weeks' time. "What about Bill and Fred coming in on it": the deposit was only 15/-, and if one changed their minds, well! they wouldn't stand to lose much. On the other hand, the boys would have something to turn to before going broke altogether. So the deposits were sent off and
were successful, the trio securing a job which would start just about the time they would be requiring more money to carry on. The Lads had no regrets leaving the opal gouging, and they had enjoyed the experience.

They were a splendid lot of fellows, the gougers, from all strata of social life, some of them very well educated, and from the four corners of the globe. But many of them had been gouging for so long that it had got into their blood, they couldn't leave it alone. Many of them had been ten or twenty years on the fields, and never had any break worth a bumper. Our trio didn't feel that way about opal, and didn't want to. So one fine morning in late autumn they rolled their swags and set off for Noonoo station some few days' tramp off.
Noondoo station was well over the Queensland border, and Young Bill, accompanied by his two mates, crossed into that state for the second time. The country continued level for the most part, and generally timbered and scrubby. The Australian Pastoralist Company owned vast tracts of good woolgrowing country out this way, and vernacular gossip had it they drained all the wealth out of the countryside, returning no more into the holdings than was absolutely necessary. The shareholders and owners for the most part never saw Australia at all, and that was the reason for so many hundreds of thousands of acres being in its original state, vast areas of it never "rung" at all, let alone "scrubbed" or "suckered". The station homesteads were only glorified boundary riders' huts, but albeit the managers were on a fair wage. It would take smart men who knew the game to get the best out of this neglected "standstill" grazing area, which must have had enormous potentialities for improved stock carrying.

However, these matters didn't worry our travellers one scrap. The weather was pleasant, the country interesting with plenty of beautiful shade, and the homesteads, where hospitality was turned on in the the old bush tradition, not too far apart. The Lads made Noondoo station a few days before rollcall and enjoyed meeting some old mates from previous sheds and stations, also new associates they were to work with.
It was here that Young Bill had it confirmed he was lucky to be an extraordinarily strong youngster. Staggering to the cook's galley fire where most of the company were gathered around a roaring fire, came Young Bill carrying (with much pride and showing off) a huge log from the immense woodheap. Bill laid one end down at the end of the fire when the crowd opened out to make the necessary room, and two big enough men (who incidentally were shearers and would be no weaklings) casually took the other end from Bill's shoulder to let the log down along the fire. Apparently they assumed a lad could not be so strong, and they took it too lightly and nearly dropped their load, Bill moving smartly from under it. It took a fair effort from both of them to let their end steadily down on to the fire. Our hero was proud of the way these two fellows looked at him, one remarking surprisingly, "Jingo he's a strong lad," and his mate heartily concurred.

Came the rollcall, and Bill got the job of wool storeman by putting his age up two or three years. This job included branding the bales as they came from the dump (this shed had a "dump") which compressed the bales to half the size after they had come from the press. Most sheds carried on without a dump. A few days went by, when suddenly there was a distressing cry from the chap operating the dump. On looking round, the poor fellow was observed to have his foot jammed underneath the edge of the dump, at floor level. The bookkeeper was the first at the controls, reversing the dump to the upward movement and so releasing the fellow's foot. The point of the chap's boot had been cut clean off, including the end of his big toe. This same ghastly exhibit lay about on the floor for some time, everybody viewing it with more or less curiosity and horror, including Bill (nothing at all, of course, to what he experienced at the war two or three years later!). The poor victim was eventually lifted into a buckboard and hurried off to Mungindie, some forty-five miles away.
The bookkeeper, on behalf of the Boss of the Board, asked Young Bill if he would take the disabled man's job. This meant that Bill would be one of the team of four wool-pressers who were making good money, as much as the shearers on the average.\(^1\) The three pressers were willing to let him have a go with them, so he hopped right into the job. Fortunately for our hero, his three mates let him attend to the dumping, which was much easier than the pressing, but daily for some two or three hours including one or two after tea, Bill worked as one of the team quartet and did his best to pull his weight with the others. Of course they must have realised from the start that he was only a lad, but they certainly registered surprise when their young partner eventually admitted he was still only seventeen. Well, Young Bill must have proved good enough, because one of his mates, a huge German (a bit of a professional wrestler) who had a following shed to go to, and as yet no mate to go along with him, [asked] would Bill "care to come in on the job, and on halves?" That was, half the earnings. Our hero was glad to accept the generous offer. To make prospects brighter, quite a few of the fellows were going along to the same shed. It had a salty name, Coomrith, and was away up the romantically named Moonie River, some one hundred and fifty miles to the northward. Young Bill remembered Gundabluey station was adjacent to the Moonie River, away further down south from Coomrith.

At the cut-out of Noondoo, Bill's two original mates Fred and Bluey went south-eastwards to Mungandie on the trail of some intriguing station work, whilst the former joined a gang of about ten who were determined to hump bluey to Coomrith, it being a most out-of-the-way place, entailing hundreds of miles around by the railway. The

alternative to walking meant going per rail via Brisbane round to Miles on the Charleville line, thence southerly for about a hundred miles with the chance of having to walk same.

The gang "padded" north through the township of Thallon, a one pub show on a new railway creeping westwards. After leaving this township and thence Mindilly pub (a solitary bush roadside habitation some twenty miles out), more and more wild unsettled country was travelled through, running a few cattle. At one stretch the gang walked from fifteen to twenty miles without seeing a fence of any kind. The road of course was just a bush track at times, for many miles through the thick scrub and prickly pear, just wide enough to allow a wheeled vehicle to pass.

For the first time our hero saw prickly pear at its worst, tens of thousands of acres of it without a break, and that thick it was impossible to leave the track cut through it. Signs were observed of the numerous wild pigs that apparently thrived amongst this imported pest, but none were actually seen. The pear seemed to thrive most where human habitation had come and gone, probably driven out by the curse. Passing the skeleton remains of an old deserted pioneer homestead some one hundred yards from the track, the pear grew taller and more luxuriously than ever. Only the roof rafters could be seen, other than the top of the slaughtering gallows.

Amongst the "mob" was the cook "Dublin", so called because he came from that city in Ireland. As previously related, Dublin had gambled

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2Prickly pear was prevalent in southern Queensland by the eighteen eighties, and spread rapidly after the 1902 drought. Between 1900 and 1920 it was spreading at a rate of 500,000 hectares per year. The Australian Encyclopaedia, Vol. VII, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1958), p.277.
all his pay during the previous shearing at Gundabluey, and his luck had been just as "lousy" (as he described it) at Noondoo also. Dublin carried his alarm clock in his billy, and was designated "official timekeeper". By arrangement the mob walked for an hour, then sat on their swags for ten minutes or so, then on again for another hour. The travelling was fast, and some of the youngest of the party, including our hero of course, were racing for the lead and holding it. The older and wiser men were content with steady pegging, and at the end of the day seemed less tired than the racing younger men: some of them anyway! It was a surprise to all that Young Bill's presser mate, the powerful Karl, lagged behind, complaining of new shoes and sore feet. However, he came good the last couple of days or so, and outstayed the rest of the company. As usual Karl (the German) came in for a fair amount of chiacking about the hiding Germany was going to get from England when the war came. Karl took it all in good part, but warned the party again and again that if England didn't improve her discipline (a word of great meaning with Karl) and hold it, she was due for a fall. It was easy to see that Karl expected his native country to at least hold its own in the coming war. This proved true enough when the war came some two or three years later.

Yes, the travelling was a cracker, sixty miles being covered in two days, and twenty five on another. One break the mob rested alongside a large, deep and pretty enough pool of the Moonie, which river now petered out toward its source, the travellers more or less hugged for a couple of days of their journey. One fellow happened to have a fishing line and now tried it out, using practically anything for bait. Some sizeable enough fish were caught including yellowbelly and some small Murray cod, and were sliced and grilled on the hot coals. They made excellent eating.
Occasionally a mob of half wild cattle were surprised. They would either gallop for the scrub immediately, or their curiosity overcame their fear. They were not at all used to seeing men on foot, but were somewhat used to humans on horseback and would excitedly gallop around, edging closer to get a timid and frightened look at the human strangers. Sometimes, if one did not understand wildish cattle, one could become scared when they would appear to be about to charge right over the top of the party, but they always veered off before closing with the man-animals, especially as the latter would be shaking their hats at them and jumping and yelling out to no end, particularly those less experienced with cattle and more than a little nervous in consequence. These cattle reminded Bill of his experiences amongst such way back at Come-by-Chance.

There were plenty of one hundred per cent wild cattle and horses too in these parts so the travellers learnt, well back from the beaten tracks. Two of the cattle stations called at were Teelbar and Tabletop: they were about twenty miles apart. Poor old stations they were, wouldn't make a decent pioneer selector's home; appeared to be run by just a family and perhaps one or two stockmen. Apparently the country was too wild and barren, too much non-edible scrub and pear to be other than very "light carrying" country. Just as darkness was closing in, our band of bagmen or swagmen or travellers, according to the whim of the prevailing vernacular, made camp adjacent to one of these homesteads, all feeling fairly done after a thirty mile walk. As there were so many mouths to be fed and these homesteads seemed so poorish, the party insisted on paying for flour and meat procured.

Of course it fell to the professional cook Dublin to make the damper, which was a huge one, probably the largest the company would ever experience of a damper baked in the ashes. Dublin first ordered the
company to make a huge log fire of suitable timber, and whilst this was
burning down to the necessary ashes, some sort of a feed was partaken
of, and then Dublin spread a clean folded tent fly (anyway, clean
enough) and mixed up and pounded into dough, goodness knows just how
many pounds of flour, and when at last he flattened it out it was about
three feet across and some three inches deep. How the dickens he picked
it up and placed it in the ashes, well, only a professional camp cook
like Dublin could do it. It took a long time to bake. Most of the
company were well asleep, and Young Bill and one or two others were
feeling that way too, but they felt sorry for poor Dublin, who had to
sit up and wait for the monster to bake. Bill could see the cook was
very tired and probably wished the baking further. A couple of times he
cleared the ashes away sufficiently to tap his handiwork with a stick to
judge progress, and in the finish tiredness beat him, and with an air of
"could do with another twenty minutes or so but I'm sick of it", he drew
the huge thing from the fire, and stood it up against a stump for the
night, where it looked like a log wheel one sees at times on bush timber
hauling jinkers. Dublin knew it would probably be a bit soddy, and so
it was, being not quite cooked. However, after breakfast the following
morning, "Dub" (for short) carved the monster into ten pieces, so that
all hands carried their share. Some of it was carried to Coomrith, and
not a crumb was wasted.

Wool-pressing was hard work for any man, and it was necessary to
possess good stamina and be in good health and working condition at all
times. Young Bill was in possession of these priceless natural physical
gifts and was making a success of the job, helped out in any
shortcomings (he was a bit young for the job, some months yet off
eighteen) by his powerful partner, "German Karl". But Bill had the bad
luck just then to contract a very heavy cold, and after a determined
attempt to carry on for a couple of days, was disappointingly obliged to turn the job in. The chap who took Young Bill's job over was a tough local bred fellow whom Bill got along with very well: a laughing and joking carefree simple bushman, and he looked it. The lively lads of the shed affectionately dubbed him "Crusoe", after Robinson Crusoe, and when our young hero began to pal up with him, he was nicknamed "Man Friday", or "Friday" for short. These nicknames stuck for several months, until the partnership was eventually terminated by Young Bill leaving the district.

The routine of work at Coomrith was the same as at any other shed except for the wool being badly infected with the prickly pear. It was terrible stuff to handle, the prickles piercing the skin then breaking off and remaining there. The effect was more or less skin poisoning, with tremendously uncomfortable irritation. However, after a few days men became cunning in the art of protecting themselves from the pest, and worked with arms well covered instead of effecting the popular "Jackie Howe": a shirt or garment with the sleeves cut out at the shoulders, named after the famous "Big Gun" champion shearer Jackie Howe. Young Bill took over Crusoe's job of penner up; that was, yarding the sheep into the shearing pens from the larger outside yards, a very much easier job than pressing, and our hero was glad of the easy break, as by this time he was a sick enough man. After a few days he was pretty well his old self again, and very thankful to be rid of the horribly heavy cold. (These days, some fifty years later, one would probably boast of having the "flu" and take a few days off in bed.)

A rather sad occurrence happened at Coomrith toward the cut-out.3 A

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3This paragraph and the next appear after the paragraph ending "... at Brigalow Plains for some time" (below) in the original typescript.
big lump of a middle-aged shearer whom it was subsequently learnt had previously suffered from heart trouble, became ill during the before breakfast run, and lying down on the board in a corner of the wool-store, died just as the breakfast break came at eight o'clock. The poor fellow knew he was done, and whilst lying there, dictated a simple verbal will to a couple of his mates ref. the disposal of his few belongings, and "would they see" that a couple of petty debts he owed were paid from his earnings. It seemed as though he had ruptured his heart in some way and inwardly bled to death. He certainly quickly turned a very dark colour, just as if the blood had rushed to his head, discolouring his face. Of course there was no further work that day. The Boss of the Board and the station manager must have worked very quick, the latter being a justice of the peace. Neither police or doctor (it was probably fifty miles to the nearest of either) appeared on the scene, and apparently there was no post mortem, as is generally carried out, but the station homestead had the phone on, and probably matters were arranged with the authorities through this medium.

A rough coffin of timber and sheet galvanised iron was constructed, and meanwhile volunteers were digging a grave some two hundred yards from the huts and just in the open paddock. If there were any previous burials there, Young Bill and his mates could see no trace of them. Probably the regular station cemetery was up around the homestead some mile or so off. The ground was pretty hard, but by about three p.m. the same day of the decease, it was considered good enough at four or five feet deep. Came the funeral, the coffin being brought along on a wagonette. The whole company stood around bareheaded whilst the boss read a passage or two from the Bible, and offered up the Lord's Prayer. The rough company were deeply impressed. It was a lonely spot for anyone's last resting place: the deceased's people were probably enough
many hundreds of miles away. Likely enough the mound would flatten out with the years, and become indistinguishable and lost, just as hundreds of bush graves have down through the decades. Work as usual the following morning, and in a couple of days the workmates, except the deceased['s] couple of intimates, had mostly forgotten the unpleasant affair.

Karl asked Friday if he would care to partner him with the pressing at the next shed. Probably Bill would have, but in the meantime Crusoe had invited him to go mates with him in running some wild brumbies in on an adjoining station and the prospect appealed to him very much. Crusoe explained there may not be much money in it, depending a lot on luck and how they "broke" and eventually sold as "non" brumbies. Crusoe "hadn't seen the particular mob for years and believed there were a lot of mongrels amongst them." However, Bill wasn't at all worried about the money; he would have gone along without any prospects of payment at all. Crusoe wouldn't hear of anything but halves, but this was an overgenerous offer and Bill could not conscientiously accept same. Eventually he was to receive one third of any profits.

A station hand on Coomrith was selling out his "plant" preparatory to a long holiday down Melbourne way where he had originally come from years previously. With the help of Crusoe's advice Friday bought a riding- and pack-saddle outfit complete, cheap at thirty-five pounds: two decent enough quiet hacks, riding- and pack-saddles, with such camping gear as hobbles, bells etc.. Crusoe already had a mob of horses and good pack plant. Brigalow Plains (so called because of small plains amidst the dense brigalow scrubs which overrun the adjacent country) was some twelve miles to the east of Coomrith and was a small cattle station. For some reason - Bill never actually learnt why except that "it was the old name" - the place was often referred to as South Glen.
Crusoe knew the manager and his family well enough and whilst at Coomrith used to ride off to visit them some weekends, eventually taking Young Bill along for a call.

The Brigalow Plains folk were just plain hardy bush-bred people (like Crusoe), so called the "managers". "Caretakers" may have more aptly explained their position, for a wealthy grazing family's representative dropped in on them for a few days a couple of times a year. There were two well-grown youths in the family, and three girls, two of them being old enough to be interesting company for Crusoe and his Man Friday. Young Bill could discern at a glance that Crusoe was well liked by these folk, and Friday was made welcome in the family circle on the strength of being Crusoe's friend. The family greatly enjoyed the tale of how the visitors came by their nicknames: Crusoe could scarce get on with the story for the loud and hearty laughter of the company. Later in the evening some neighbours rode in visiting and of course they were told the story of Crusoe and Friday. It was good to watch the faces of the listeners and hear their simple remarks and laughter. The highlight of the evening was when Friday and Crusoe were secreted to the kitchen (detached as usual), Friday blackened up and Crusoe dressed and hatted in a couple of sheepskins. Young Bill never forgot the merriment that was registered when he and his mate entered the large living room in this guise. There was also music and dancing from the accordion and fiddle, and gramaphone music, the machine being fitted with a megaphone, and some plain singing and reciting: the popular home entertainment amongst simple bush folk of those days. Cards were also included, of which euchre - the "blackfellow's game" - was the most popular. The family and neighbours were very pleased that Crusoe and Friday were later to be at Brigalow Plains for some time.

After the cut-out Crusoe and Friday leisurely mustered their horses
from a station paddock, and prepared for the short ride to Brigalow Plains. Friday was well tutored up by his new mate in the assembling of gear about a pack saddle etc. [Having] arrived at the Plains, a couple of lazy days were spent assembling gear for the brumby yarding, but most of the time just idling about loafing and yarning. A mile or so of coarse calico about four inches wide was resuscitated from the shed rafters where it had been rotting for some years. This material was referred to as “running tape” or “lines” and was used in the brumby muster as later described. This lot of running tape however was found to be too rotten in places and would require going over carefully and mending. However, some neighbours were believed to have sufficient to make the length Crusoe would require. In the event about a couple of miles was salvaged. Mac's two girls, Gwen and Jo, the former about sixteen and the latter some eighteen summers, insisted on getting this gear ready, and there was much bantering as to what their share of the profits would amount to.

The Mates then got a packhorse outfit together to ride out and have a look at the brumby mobs and select a position for the yards and spot out the running tape lines etc. Crusoe knew a little of the brumby country and described it as "wild and difficult", and so it proved, being terrible country to get bushed in, and Crusoe advised his less experienced mate to be very careful not to become so: that is, bushed. Friday's horses were discarded as they were unknown as "campers" and it was necessary to have good camping horses in this type of country. Crusoe picked half a dozen well-known suitable types from amongst his own (he owned about twenty), including hacks, "packs" and spares. One or two of them would just about follow him anywhere. "Crus" (a short nickname often used) of course had a good stockwhip, and a second oldish one he loaned his mate. A couple of rifles were taken along in case of
a shot or two at the unwanted stallions. Mac loaned an old single shot carbine and Crus had his .44 repeating rifle.

The track wasn't bad for about ten miles, which was the edge of the country useful to the Macs, and here was a barb wire fence to keep the station stock from going wild in the "dreadful" country (that is, dreadful as far as the unimproved grazing land was concerned). The only good point about it was that it was very flat country. The two Mates passed through the sliprails here and were quickly swallowed up in the almost impenetrable brigalow scrub, with now and again a break in the way of a small plain or claypan, on and around which certain grasses and herbage grew. And already Crusoe pointed out the "cards" of some of the quarry, but mostly that of wild cattle. Apparently the brumbies invariably kept to the country further out.

One could be bushed in a hundred yards here, but Crusoe knew his way about instinctively. He now explained to his mate that the apparently slight depression they were following was one of the sources of the Moonie River. It continued on to its ultimate source some fifteen miles in this manner, about easterly and northerly. As it joined up with the Moonie to the west the depression became more pronounced. The depression varied from fifty to hundreds of yards wide. Somewhere about this locality the travellers struck another barb wire fence. This meant the end of the wild scrubber and brumby country, and the beginning of small cattle runs once more.

Every three or four miles along the creek or depression (it was known as Brigalow Creek) was a waterhole or a string of same, and some of them, so 'twas said, never went dry and were supposed to have springs or soaks along their bottoms: a fine hideout for wild stock and native fauna of every description. All this country was, in the main, flat,
and would be flooded during heavy sustained rains as was apparent from the rubbish caught up in the trees, sometimes several feet from the ground.

Presently, a mob of wild cattle was surprised, the breeze of course blowing off the cattle toward the travellers, and toward sundown as they were looking for a suitable waterhole to camp on with a bit of feed for the horses about, the first brumby mob was surprised. There could have been a couple of dozen in this mob, including a stallion of course. The latter was on the cheeky side, advancing a little to have a stare at the strangers, but when same reached for their rifles, off they galloped and were lost in the scrub in a few seconds.

Camp was made and as night closed in cold but with prospects of fine weather, a cheerful fire was got going. Crusoe was good company always, and seemed to appreciate his city-bred mate. Strange to say, the prickly pear was not in much evidence in this country, but patches of it were noticed in the open spaces along with some decent enough "pick" (stock grazing), and so the domesticated horses were carefully hobbled and belled and turned out to make the best of what the myall stock left them. Over a good camp fire the Mates yarned far into the night, and Crusoe was much interested in all his mate had to say about the "big smoke" (Sydney) and all about his home life down that way. Young Bill couldn't help guessing that Crusoe had an idea his mate had come from a good home. Bill couldn't help overhearing prior to this, a conversation (although whispered) between Crus and Mrs McGregor, the former whispering, "You can see he comes from a good home," and other complimentary remarks that flattered our hero and caused him to feel a little self-conscious: but Bill hadn't heard anything(?). Crusoe, as previously mentioned, was a simple sort of fellow in a way, but he had never been past a country town in his life and hadn't read
much. The two Mates talked a lot about the trip they would have to the city later on, and Friday felt that Crusoe was relying on his mate to see him through the venture. Crus made no bones that he would be somewhat nervous of tackling the trip on his own. On the other hand, Young Bill was very keen on all his mate could tell him of the bush life he had led.

Crusoe made it a point of telling Friday and impressing upon him that should he become bushed, which could be easy enough, he must compel himself to keep calm and wait for the setting sun to give a westerly direction, or until after dark and pick direction from the Southern Cross constellation. Crusoe was pleased to learn his mate knew all about the Southern Cross (something he'd learnt as a lad in the Boy Scouts). Friday "must pick up the lay of the Brigalow Creek country well enough to know it in the dark, as once it was located the rest would be comparatively easy." However, the younger partner was no mean bushman and almost immediately got the lay of the country. This was just as well, as it served him in good stead on at least one notable occasion, as will be related later on. It appeared in the years gone by many a bushed person had experienced unpleasant adventures in this country before being rounded up by the searchers. A couple had been found too late, and two or three, generally under the influence of the horrors (delirium tremens) after much boozing, of whom no trace was ever found. Probably eaten by the wild pigs and dingoes, opinioned Crusoe.

Then there was the legend handed down from the original pioneers of the extermination of the blacks, many of them rounded up through this country and shot. Yes, Crusoe would show his mate the remains of the burnt and rotting bones where the last of them were rounded up by the white settlers, men, women and children shot down, and their bodies incinerated to destroy evidence of the foul affair as it was apparently
becoming civilised enough at the time in those parts for the arm of the law to be interested in such infamous goings on. Yes, continued Crusoe, a complete blackfellow's skeleton could still be found, sometimes with the skull well holed by bullets. Crusoe remembered one being found by a part of which he was a member some years back, but it was becoming rare nowadays.

Sure enough, in due course Young Bill was taken to the place of the blackfellows' bones, and after searching about a bit, old broken bones were certainly found, and Friday was convinced they were human alright. What was assumed to be a piece of skull, a pelvis bone and other samples were kept by Young Bill with a view to having same authenticated as human etc.. These relics mysteriously disappeared from the homestead where they were left for safekeeping. Crusoe reckoned a descendent of one of the original pioneering families of the district probably did away with them, some person who was probably sensitive of his great-great-great grandfather's part in the early roundings up and killings of the Aboriginals. Friday thought Crusoe had an idea who the person actually was, but he (Crusoe) kept dumb. On the other hand, as Crusoe explained, there was another side to these killings. Many a pioneer family and lonely rider or camper were butchered by the blacks, perhaps through no provocation whatever, at least by the particular victims. Neither Crusoe or Friday were well enough versed in these matters at that time (some half century back) to be convinced that the blacks rarely attacked the settlers unless under provocation, more often than otherwise interference with their women. And when the blacks were aroused they killed indiscriminately, an eye for an eye etc., as it were, the innocent suffering with the guilty. The whites were worse,

4The word "of" is here deleted.
often slaughtering for no reason other than they wanted the blacks' own native land so as to acquire more wealth and security for themselves.

Today, 1964, all this Moonie River country has been found to hold at least payable oil deposits. As already mentioned, boring for oil was then in progress near Roma, some hundred miles or so off north-westerly, way back in 1911. But not by any stretch of the imagination was oil suspected to be under the Moonie country (or anyway not amongst the local people). The tremendous brigalow scrubs are now being treated like the mallee areas, rolled and flattened by powerful bulldozing machinery, and crop and sheep farms are fast ousting the brigalow scrubs.

Crusoe's master plan for yarding the brumbies was now explained in detail to his mate. When everything would be ready for the day of the actual yarding, Crusoe felt sure there would be a muster of up to anything like a couple of dozen riders from the surrounding grazing country, as naturally they were very interested in the project, both economically (the fact of having lost stock, and of losing more) and for the pure love of the undertaking. These riders would be fanned out some miles at the far end of the creek and on either side. They would then beat down the creek toward the running lines, the advanced wings of the fan driving the brumbies forward and into the centre - the creek - and so forward until galloped some miles and positioned against the running line. They would then be somewhat galloped out and should give little trouble in being manoeuvred along the "tapes" and eventually into the camouflaged yard against the Plains boundary fence, and helped into that trap by a few quiet station "coachers" picked up near the yards, a few of the latter being actually settled in same.

It was realised that a fair few brumbies would slip out of the cordon
on account of the thick scrub. It was going to be difficult too, cutting the wild cattle out from the horses, as of course it wasn't wise to yard both together and anyway the "lines" were not much good with cattle, they would just gallop through them. However, Crusoe and Friday consoled themselves in that they would have a go at the cattle after they had fixed the brumbies. Meantime, other than shooting some of the stallions it was decided as far as practicable and as opportunity offered, to drive the cattle outwards from the creek, and the horses in toward it.

The following few days, the mates blazed out a line for the tapes, picking any open space as much as possible, and otherwise cutting through the thinnest and narrowest of the scrub timber. At the same time the lines were kept as straight as possible, making any bend as gradual as permissible. An ideal spot was selected for the yards, in a clump of dense enough scrubby timber against the station boundary fence where the mob would be left after yarding to cool off for a couple of days before being released into the station barb wire paddock, preparatory to being broken in at the homestead yards, which happened to be pretty good ones including the "round" yard.

Three or four mongrel looking stallions were shot in the first few days. A couple of fine looking ones Crusoe didn't have the heart to shoot, and in the event of the yarding, they and a couple more good sorts were toward the end of the run, allowed to drop out. It was forgotten to mention that the mates' hacks at this time were also picked on account of their being well used to firearms, and as a matter of fact Crusoe's mount was trained to stand perfectly still whilst the rider in the saddle rested his rifle on top of the animal's head between the ears, and fired from that position. The ideal shot for bringing the brumbies down was in the centre of the forehead where the curl is
situated, the bone being more piercable thereabouts. As the stallions had a habit of placing themselves between their harem and the danger seen or heard, and faced the potential enemy with a bold head held high stare of interogation, it wasn't so difficult at first to get a shot at the best target, and several were bowled over in this manner. But the mobs soon became shy of this inquisitiveness, and in the end they had to be fired at indiscriminately, a cruel and ruthless practice, as some of the poor beasts would take days or weeks to die. However, under the then environment and circumstances it was the accepted procedure.

Crusoe reckoned there must be a couple of hundred brumbies at least in the area, but what with the thick belts of scrub and giving the cattle a chance to drop out, they would be lucky to yard fifty. In the event, just forty-seven met that fate, including three stallions.

Back to the homestead for the weekend, with more fun with the family and visitors. Crusoe let it be known he wanted plenty of volunteers of the right sort: that is, with the necessary experience and ability for the job in hand and not getting lost while about it. After a couple of weeks it became apparent the mates would have not a little help with the final yarding.

Now came the job of making the yards. As stated, a good position had been chosen, and now every care had to be taken to have the whole "show" disguised or hidden from the brumbies until they were actually in the yards. As Crusoe explained, by the time they had galloped a few miles they would be tired and somewhat listless, just cantering along steadily and into the trap without balking, and in the event that's just what happened.

The yards were ready in a very few weeks, the mates working along
steadily without "busting" themselves: there was plenty of time. There was only one spasm of unpleasantness between the partners. It was a rare occurrence for either of them to get "livery" or glum, but it so happened during the hard work on the yards, that both lads had an attack of liver and blues which lasted for a couple of days, "picking" at each other, and culminating in a ding-dong fight, but of short duration. Both lads were tough, but Crusoe the more so. Crusoe stopped a few wallops, but Friday stopped more. Presently Friday was knocked back into a clump of low brigalow, and lay there blowing with his legs in the air and feeling extremely ridiculous. Furthermore, he had had enough, and looking up at Crusoe he whimsically remarked, "Blank yer, you win, I've had enough." The expression of anger left Crusoe's face immediately and he started to laugh, and laughing all the while he helped his mate up out of the scrub, controlling his mirth enough to remark, "Aren't we a couple of silly b---s." The mates shook hands willingly, and settled down to dinner, but it was a long time before Crusoe controlled his laughing. Crusoe in this humour always reminded his mate of his old Come-by-Chance pal, Ted the boundary rider and horse breaker, but it was surprising how many bushmen had this happy disposition. They could laugh at anything, and themselves in particular. This scrap gave the mates something to talk and joke about. It was Friday, and the following day they would be off into the homestead. Crusoe's eyes were showing up by sundown, and Friday had a cut lip and swollen nose.

Sure enough, next morning Crusoe had an unmistakeable black eye, and the other one had had enough, while Friday's lips were swollen like a Negro's, and his nose was distended and sore. The mates decided it was no good trying to hide their dust-up from the homestead folk, and so they were told the facts with much humorous gusto. Once again the boys
were the butt of much joking and chisacking, and seemed to be more popular than ever.

It was on this trip into civilisation that Young Bill was surprised and pleased to meet a friend from Coomrith days, one Harry Leper, whom he had got on with very well. Harry had taken a job of fencing on Coomrith after the cut-out, and had ridden over to the Plains to renew the acquaintance. He had hoped Young Bill would join him in the fencing job. However, he arranged to be in on the final round-up and yarding.

After building the yards came the job of lining up the tapes. The line, having been previously spotted out, was now pegged: that is, a suitable stake was driven in about every half chain, the lines not being attached until the last moment, so that any stock would not become over used to them before their usefulness was finished with. The mates were meeting a few wandering horsemen these days, neighbours near and indirect, who intended taking part in the coming gallop, and had come along from as far as fifteen or twenty miles to have a look around and get the lay of the country, although most of them already knew the wild locality.

It was about this time that Friday had the most unpleasant experience of being bushed overnight and alone, in this lonely locality. Crusoe was due for an appointment at the homestead on a certain day, a business deal over some stock he hoped to sell, so off he rode in the early morning, expecting to be back in the evening or if not, the following morning. Friday was to carry on cutting stakes and driving them in along the running lines. As the meat supply was low, it was resolved over the camp fire the previous evening that Friday keep a rifle handy and see if he could bag a suitable scrubber as usual, and cut some of the choicest meat out of it. Sure enough, in the early afternoon, a
light breeze brought the sound of a mob of cattle some hundreds of yards away in a northerly direction. Friday first tied his cattle dog "Snapper" up to a sapling, [and] admonished [him] to keep perfectly quiet. He then took up the old single-shot carbine and buckled on the cartridge belt. Filling his pipe as he went, he set off in the direction of the scrubbers. It was the general rule to take along on such an occasion knives and steel and a suitable meatbag. However, Friday had forgotten to have same handy, and went off without them.

Coming on the mob in due course and stalking close enough for a reasonable shot, not so very difficult with the breeze in the right direction and plenty of scrub to hide in, Friday found the small mob busy feeding in one of the narrow clearings characteristic of those parts, apparently not even sensing they were in danger. Yes, there was the gnarled old scrub bull, the leader, feeding away with the rest. Under ordinary circumstances the mates would have been lying together and would have both fired together at the old bull, and continued to pump lead into him until he dropped or disappeared. In the latter case he would most certainly die hours or days later. At the same time this would have scared the scrubbers away from the job, as previously explained. However, Friday lay in the scrub about a hundred yards off the grazing cattle, and patiently waited for a good shot at a young beast, heifer preferred.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour went by before Friday's rifle cracked. Yes, it was a nice young animal but whether heifer or "mickey" (young male) could not be discerned because of patchy low scrub. A careful sight was taken behind the withers, and the hunter knew it was a fatal shot by the way the poor animal limped in the rear of its mates who were off like a shot. Friday put a second slug into the young beast's groins as it disappeared. They were terrible bullets, larger bore than a .303,
any wonder the kick would just about dislocate one's shoulder if not prepared for it. After trailing the stampeding cattle for some hundreds of yards the wounded beast was found sprawling, quite dead. Good. The huntsman set off back for knife and steel etc., taking the rifle along, intending to leave same at the camp.

It happened as simple as anything. Friday, after travelling perhaps half a mile, suddenly realised he was just walking along instinctively as it were, not bothering to be sure of his landmarks. Come to look round he couldn't recognise any of the features of the surrounding bush and scrub at all. However, he felt pretty certain he was going in a southerly direction and would cut the line and billabong depression any minute, in spite of the fact that he was getting very little assistance from the assumption that moss generally grows on the south side of tree trunks - for some reason it was not particularly pronounced thereabouts - and was somewhat confusing. So our hero did some more walking, probably another mile, then he knew he was bushed. The sun was too much overhead to be of any assistance as to direction, and although a certain element of panic urged Friday to hurry on walking in an imaginary right direction, commonsense and his bushman's instinct and all he had read and heard of men in similar predicaments, forced him to halt and deliberately think.

He was not in any real danger. It was mid winter and if necessary thirst need not worry him for days. It took a long time to starve to death anyway. Meantime he had a rifle, and very important, matches, tobacco and pocket-knife. Our Hero would wait until the sun was low enough toward setting in the west. He felt sure he was to the north of the dry creek: he could hardly have crossed that belt of country without noticing it.
The afternoon dragged on painfully slow, and several times the lost one had a strong urge to start walking, but to his credit this foolishness was overcome. Now the luck turned against him: the weather somewhat inclined to be cloudy now became more overcast, eventually blotting out the sun altogether. Alright, there was nothing else to do but wait for darkness and the stars, and hope for the weather to clear.

Young Bill was very lonely and downhearted now, and did that which he had only done at rare intervals the past years: he prayed, and meant it. (Reflecting on this matter in later years, although perhaps it was even somewhat of a cowardly act, it was certainly human enough, it being practised much by Young Bill and his mates when in tough spots during later war experiences.) At last came darkness, still a worrying time. However, the clouds were inclined to disperse and a few stars could be seen. Friday put some more wood on the fire and listened to the noises of the night. A pack of dingoes howled, scrub bulls bellowed defiance at each other, and curlews and mopokes made up the chorus. A brumby mob moved on to the locality in which the wind was blowing from the camp fire, and at the man-smell and fire (they were probably two or three hundred yards off) stamped their feet and snorted, and on Young Bill hollering at them, galloped off. Our hero warmed himself by the fire and smoked on. A shot was fired from the old carbine now and again in case Crusoe was within earshot, but as it happened Crusoe was delayed on business overnight.

Friday also thought of poor old Snapper, his dog, left tied up in the scrub, and hoped Crusoe had arrived back to release him. Presently more stars appeared, the clouds were breaking up, and yes, there was the

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5The word "hearing" is here deleted.
Southern Cross in view, at least for a while. Checking up on same, it was realised, as usual with most bushed people, had Bill given way to earlier panic and continued walking, it would certainly have been in just about the opposite direction. And so guided by the Cross, a southerly course was taken, there being luckily just enough moonlight to travel comfortably through and around the scrub.

It seemed as though our hero walked for a couple of hours, being held up two or three times waiting for the clouds to clear away from the Cross. A shot would be fired during these delays, as Crusoe may have returned and be searching for his missing mate. At last came the lay of the land and the timber which told him unmistakably he was in the creek. Good, but in which direction did the camp lay? East or west? Bill fired another shot and listened. Only a dingo howl answered. There it went again, but was it a dingo? Amidst an upsurge of emotion Snapper's mournful howl was now unmistakably recognised. The poor devil was apparently still tied up where he had been left and was by now cold and hungry. The direction was easterly, and this time Friday was right in surmising (previous to Snapper's howling) that camp lay in that direction, but as to whether this surmise was just a fluke or a sixth sense or instinct, he will never know; probably the former.

Every now and again Bill, now lighthearted and carefree, would whistle and cooee, and poor old Snapper would bark with delight; and yes, sweet music, there was the tinkle of the horse bells. Thank goodness they were alright. Now Bill knew he was within two or three hundred yards of the camp, and here came Snapper crashing through the scrub, dragging a couple of hobble chains. However, Snapper was no more delighted at the reunion than his master. Young Bill made up the fire and had a good drink of tea and a meal. Meanwhile, dawn was breaking, and as the sun rose he turned in standing and was very soon dead to the world for hours.
When Crusoe arrived about midday and saw no sign of Friday he thought his mate must be ill and hurried to the tent; found him just awake and drowsy, having been disturbed from slumber by Crusoe's cooees. Crusoe was pleased enough on learning his mate was well enough, and when the story of the "bushing" was told the reaction on Crusoe was as usual, and his mate could only complete the tale at intervals for the hearer's mirth. "What a tale for the homestead," roared Crusoe. "You're in for a hell of a time you are." And all this came to pass, but Young Bill like his mate was learning to laugh at his own shortcomings, and enjoyed it all.

Now the job was ready for the run and yarding: the line running out for a couple of miles, with light streamers from it every half chain or so stirring in the breeze. The yard had a final camouflaging with boughs and bushes, and the fence running in a southerly direction from the yard was also well "streamered" so that any brumbies running too wide from the main running line and entrance through a break in the scrub to the yard could be forced down along the fence toward same without danger of crashing through said fence. The breeze was from the right direction, south. Most of the scrubbers, it was hoped (and in the event proved so), had been worried during the past weeks over toward the southern side of the area, and these two factors were expected to manoeuvre the galloping mob along the south side of the lines. The man-scent coming to them from the south would prevent them from breaking in that direction, and with the riders forcing them from behind they were expected to go straight for the trap.

There was a roll-up of about twenty men. They seemed to be cooperative for the most part, and those very few who were inclined to be otherwise were soon told by Crusoe where they got off. There could only be one boss, and naturally he was the one. He gave every man his
job the previous night over the camp fire, and those who were not present at that camp fire meeting were barred from taking part in the gallop. Crusoe made the point too, that every beast that was yarded was the property of himself and Friday, and nobody objected to that. It was also pointed out for the benefit of a very few that they were not actually invited to come along, and anybody could stand down from the yarding if they so wished, but would they make up their minds at once so he, Crusoe, could make other arrangements. Nobody withdrew, and a few less willing or inexperienced or both were allotted the less exacting tasks. Friday’s old shed mate Harry Leper (who was now doing a little ringbarking on the Plains) borrowed a good scrub horse and tagged along beside Friday, who was to start in charge out on the right wing, Crusoe watching the centre and left wing. The riders would be positioned some one hundred yards or so apart to start, according to density or openness of the country, and running line, and so for the final gallop to the yards. The run would be about ten miles in all, the last three at a gallop wherever the scrub made it possible.

Breakfast by several camp fires next morning, an hour before piccaninny daylight. As soon as it was light enough to see, Crusoe led about twelve out toward the left wing, dropping a rider here and there as he went, and Friday, with the balance of the riders, did the same in the opposite direction. Of course Young Bill was accompanied by several men old enough to be his father, and two or three of them had forgotten more about running brumbies than he would ever know. Crusoe and Friday had discussed this phase of the enterprise and in effect Friday was in charge of the right wing as a figurehead only. Crusoe knew Friday would take the advice of more experienced men when necessary, and in the event Friday was glad to.

The musterers were ready in line, strung out probably three or four
miles, an experienced man and one less so alternately. Then came the signal from Crusoe away out on the left wing, three whip cracks in quick succession, taken up right along the line, and the advance started. The idea was to keep the pace steady for a few miles, a fast walk keeping touch by sight, whip crack and cooee. As the riders approached within a couple of miles of the running line, it [the party] was to converge: the wings foremost, the right entering the left or southern side of the lines, a couple of riders only taking the right side in case any brums tried to crash through (remembering the lines ran approximately east and west, the yard being at the western end). Young Bill's position was just inside the line. The brumbies were to be galloped at full speed for the yards. This was the plan, but it didn't work out nearly so smoothly, yet it worked better than may have been expected under the circumstances. As the line of horsemen advanced and once the quarry was scented and sighted by horse and rider, it was hard to control the excitement, this especially when brumbies got too far over on the wings and had to be headed in toward the centre.

The cattle were gradually cut out, mostly by riding round same and turning them back. As a matter of fact the wild horses had a good old romp for a couple of hours, the stallion leaders bossing the mares up and down between the two wings, throwing their heels in the air, snorting and passing much wind, and galloping for their lives. It had been planned to encourage this state of affairs for a few miles to help tire and wind the wildies, and then later take every chance of shooting the stallions down. The best shots from horseback took their rifles along for the purpose, the signal to start shooting coming along the line in the same manner as the three whip cracks, except that these would be rifle shots fired by Crusoe. The rifles were carried in gun buckets, and most of them homemade from greenhide or canvass, slung up and down the wither adjacent the saddle.
At last came the gallop. What a ride! Once one warmed to it and fear of a spill and injury vanished, what a glorious thrill. Young Bill found he had to prevent his mount from galloping furiously straight through the thick scrub and timber. In no time the riders were on the tiring brumbies, lashing and frightening them straight ahead for the yards. Came a crucial time now, the scrubbers should enter the yard as one mob, far as practicable. However, the poor brutes were that blown by this time that the leading sections entering the yards first cantered straight in without hesitation and on finding they were trapped, were too blown to fight their way out again. As a matter of fact, things were going so well that the last mile or so the riders lay off a little from the poor blown wildies. It seemed unnecessarily cruel to force them unduly, they seemed so distressed. Friday was having the time of his life: this was one of the moments he had dreamed of for years.

Everyone was in good spirits now, laughing and joking and congratulating each other excitedly on the apparent success of the muster. One was going to buy the fiery looking chestnut with the foal: the latter had been allowed to dropout miles back, along with other youngsters. Another declared he would go to fifteen quid for a fine looking red roan, and so on. However, after the yarning and counting a tally of forty-seven, many experienced locals declared anything up to twice as many should have been yarded. All declared it would be folly not to give it another go in a few weeks' time. The scrubbers were a long-haired, wild looking lot. Three stallions were amongst them. Several others had been shot or allowed to drop out when they showed a desire to do so toward the end of the gallop. One of the yarded stallions, although a good sort and fairly young, had to be shot just after the capture, becoming too vicious as he regained his wind and fought and lashed out too dangerously for the good of the remainder of the mob.
It was interesting to hear the adjacent settlers picking out some of the brumbies, apparently descendants of stock they had lost to the wildies years previously. An odd few older ones actually carried brands belonging to cattlemen there present, but there was no talk of reclaiming same. It was apparently against all unwritten law to do so. Several of the stallions, including the one destroyed in the yard, were also recognised as escapees over the previous few years. However, the scrubbers were now left in the yards a couple of days to quieten down. The weather being comparatively cool, this was considered not over-hard on them, and it was winter. The two Mates (now left to themselves) eventually watered them nearby without any trouble, and then when their bellies were too full to trot, let alone gallop, they were returned to the yards where some bush hay had been thrown down adjacent to and into the yard itself, where plenty of it was laid on for the hungry and at present docile ex-scrubbers. They were next given the run of a comparatively small paddock with plenty of feed and water, and eventually were coaxed to settle down quiet enough. A couple of days later they could be yarded with very little trouble.

That night over the camp fire the Mates reckoned (or at least Crusoe did) that it was good enough now to start breaking the brums in properly. It was expected most of them would make hacks and stockhorses and a few should be good enough in harness, including some on the heavy side for spring cart or team work.

Ah me! Men make plans and providence often intervenes, and like a bolt from the blue and as simple as anything, poor Crusoe, the bushman born to the saddle, sustained a badly broken leg. Heading a breakaway toward the yard, and at a half gallop, his horse let a forefoot down through a crust of earth where a root had burnt itself out, and Crusoe was thrown heavily in a certain manner, his right leg coming into
violent contact with a log. As Friday galloped up he could see his mate try to rise, and sink down again, pale and apparently in pain. Crusoe lay out full length softly groaning (and swearing a little) whilst Friday removed his legging, and on pulling up his trouser leg even an amateur in first aid could see the leg was badly broken.

The victim was made as comfortable as possible and Friday galloped the few miles fast to the homestead for help. Luckily Mac. and the boys were working close by. Mac. questioned Friday briefly and pointedly as to Crusoe's symptoms, and realising they were serious. Like many old bushmen, Mac. was a good first aid man and could act quickly and wisely. One of the boys galloped off to poor Crusoe immediately, carrying tea, food and water etc.. A little brandy was included with the necessary instructions: "Not too much". One of the girls was sent off on a fast horse to Coomrith and the phone with the instructions that a motor car (there were already a few dotted through the west) be procured if possible, from anywhere. Fortunately one was available from a station some sixty miles away, and with a driver-engineer complete. (Mechanics were called engineers in those days. Nobody ran a car in up-country parts unless they could afford an "engineer", and a good one, to look after the modern luxury.) A doctor must be contacted and arrangements made if possible, to meet the motor and patient along the track, and soon.

Whilst these arrangements were being made, Friday and the Mac. family were running in horses and harnessing four of the most reliable to the big buckboard, and saddling others, including a fresh mount for Friday and others of the family. Mac. loaded his first aid kit into the buckboard, also certain boards for splints. Mrs Mac. and the girls saw that the billy and tuckerbox also went aboard. Friday was made eat a light "feed", the family having had their smoko just prior to his
arrival. All these preparations took place little over half an hour and the party was off at a gallop, buckboard and all, Mac. and the youngest daughter Linda waving from the homestead until the party was out of sight.

The mounted Friday and young Mac. soon left the buckboard behind and the mounts were not spared. Crusoe was lying pretty well as left, but the first Young Mac. had allowed him a pretty liberal amount of brandy, and he was flushed and talkative. He kept on mildly apologising to his mate: "To think that he had let him down in this way at last."

Crusoe had a tale to tell too, one which apparently amused him greatly. It appears his mate had not long left him before the brumbies, hanging around the entrance to the yard, probably for the accustomed handout of bush hay, found Crusoe, a man-animal as it were, lying on the ground, their first sight of such an object. Like all other wild animals, scrubbers are curious. They trotted round and snorted, staring and pawing the ground to no end, the stallions being in the forefront of all this play. Crusoe played at "doggo", and eventually when they came too close, yelled out and made some sort of a movement. They turned tail immediately and galloped off with much snorting and windbreaking. However, they came back again at some distance, and Crusoe was wondering how close they would approach now this second time, but when they observed a strange rider approaching, something they understood as danger, they galloped off for good.

Poor game Crusoe, he didn't know what pain he was in for, and here came the buckboard now, the team blowing and perspiring. Old Mac. lost no time in getting to work on his patient, but first of all he saw that all, including Crusoe, had a nip of brandy, and even the daughter had a diluted couple of fingers. Her dad apparently thought all hands would
want it, and he was pretty right. Doing so, he made out to Crusoe (and the others caught on to the idea) that it was just a cheerful gesture, nothing to worry about, as it were. Mac. then ordered Gwen boil the billy and prepare the tucker for a drink and snack directly.

Now came the examination of the patient, and any movement was straight away painful to him. Just as well he was a natural stoic. Mac. found he probably had a broken rib or two. It was very painful for Crusoe having the splints applied, but he stuck to it like a Briton, gritting his teeth and hardly calling out once. No doubt the brandy helped him out too. After his ribs were strapped up, poor Crusoe lay exhausted, pale and perspiring.

Whilst all this was going on, one of the Mac. boys and Friday built some sort of a stretcher the length of the buckboard out of chaffbags and saplings, using plenty of bag padding where the ends of the saplings were bound to the buckboard, the latter being done after the patient had been placed on the stretcher and lifted by the four men onto the conveyance.

The men folk now had another light-up, and all hands hopped into the snack, Crusoe being waited on by "nurse" Gwen. Then the few miles to the homestead, slowly and carefully, not too much trotting for the horses. Another hurried drink of tea with Mrs Mac. and the other two sisters, Jo having returned from Coomrith with the news that the manager promised to do everything he could to help. He expected to get a motor along from a friend, and failing same would have ready his own wagonette with special sprung stretcher built by his blacksmith etc..

Thence away to Coomrith: the boss Mac., Friday, the eldest boy Jack, and Gwen to nurse Crusoe. The going was easier now, a much better
track. Jack rode ahead to let the Coomrith people know the patient was coming. He rejoined the casualty party shortly before they reached Coomrith with the news that all was ready, and the motor car [would be] along in no time. This was good news. Poor Crusoe was very pleased to arrive here: he had been assured and convinced that the journey would be a little easier in the motor car, the first ride he was to have in one. The boss Mac. and a stranger to Coomrith who was apparently well up in first aid had a long conflab and examination of the patient, the stranger eventually remarking that Mac. had made a good job of the first aid, and there wasn't much he could do to it. The examination brought pain to Crusoe and he was administered some anti-pain sleeping drug from the Coomrith first aid box, and went off into a restless sleep. He was in somewhat of a stupor when about an hour later he was put into the specially made stretcher along the motor car top (hood down of course, no sedans in those days). And so the patient set off for the sixty miles off township of Condamine, where there was some sort of a hospital with at least a visiting doctor. It was a very quiet little party that rode back in the moonlight to the Lea, and Young Bill was feeling downhearted and a little stunned.

Friday now carried on yarding the brums daily with the help of one of the Mac. boys or his old Coomrith mate Harry Leper. For the rest, and for the meantime, he "hopped in" with Harry, for a consideration of course, and helped him to finish up his ringbarking and suckering job, as Harry was due to get away to a cane cutting job way up the Queensland coast. Friday missed the company of his mate Crusoe very much for a few days, but Harry was providing lively enough company and a good mate. Word had come through that Crusoe had gone on to the railway township of Miles, and after a few days in hospital there had been taken to the big hospital at Toowoomba for special treatment, as complications and fear of gangrene had set in.
Friday began to be persuaded by Harry (and Friday no doubt began to feel like a walkabout again) to go along with him to the canefields for a change. After a couple of days of this talk, Friday knew he was off for a change. But what about the brums? What about his loyal mate Crusoe? Harry was sure everything would go alright, Friday could come back after the cane season and Crusoe would be well again. Meanwhile the young Macs would keep an eye on the scrubbers. And Young Bill was convinced: he would see the Macs the following day.

The young Macs were taken a little aback a little at first and hinted, as expected, that Friday was walking out on his injured mate. However, they saw Friday's point of view when all was fully discussed, especially when he came clean and owned up that he wanted a change for a while. The Macs thought it over for a day or so, and as they submitted, the brums could not be turned out and would have to be "broken" straight away. They offered Friday forty pounds for his share of the mob. They agreed with the vendor that the price was low, but they, being neighbours, would have to return the branded "stuff" to the neighbouring owners. Also, there would be trouble over some of the branded stallions being shot, etc. and so on. Bill thought they were probably sincere enough in these surmises. However, a deal was made, providing Crusoe was agreeable, and Crusoe eventually was.

Friday bade a pleasant enough goodbye to the Macs and others, but he couldn't help thinking they considered he was somewhat "walking out" on poor Crusoe, and as a matter of fact he did feel a little that way himself.
Chapter 11

SUGAR CANE DIVERSION

Young Bill and Harry Leper now made north with their pack train for Miles railway station some eighty miles travelling: more lonely and unsettled country, but getting away from the prickly pear curse. However, the country became more settled toward the railway, with much more fencing about. The cattle country was also left behind, giving place to all woolgrowing holdings.

All horses and plant were sold at Miles, a two pub town. There was always a dealer or two in these places who would buy one right out, at a price: his, the dealer's. And so the boys "slaughtered" (sacrificed) their stock and plant, couldn't be bothered hanging round the "one horse town" for a better deal, were anxious to be on the rattler now, and away to the big towns and the sea coast.

Harry was a fair-haired Englishman (a Pommy), a Londoner, not a true Cockney, being born outside the hearing of the Bow Bells, a few years older than Bill. He had been a somewhat wild lad apparently, and like Young Bill, his parents had been unsuccessful in making a gentleman of him: had been a few years in North America, and had now been in Australia some two or three years. Young Bill also learnt after arrival at Miles that his new mate was far too fond of bending the elbow. Incidentally, Harry's new mate was always Bill, and not Friday as he had been known, and so the nickname was left behind for good.
Harry was good and light-hearted company, and in due time the Rattler was caught for Proserpine, way up the Queensland coast via Toowoomba, Brisbane, Bundaberg, Rockhampton and Mackay. Mackay was the termination of the coastal railway going north from Brisbane, and the boys were obliged to continue their journey per small coastal steamer which catered for this break in the railway of some hundred mile or so. The lads actually had to pass their destination by some fifty miles, there being no port at the mouth of the Proserpine River, and land at Port Bowen, a two or three pub town, where the coastal railway coming south from Townsville and on to the terminus at Proserpine enabled the lads to at last reach journey's end.¹

Bill was able to see Crusoe for a while, trussed up in the hospital at Toowoomba. He was doing alright and would come out of it sound again in limb. Friday was expecting to find his mate a little sour over his withdrawal from their partnership, but strangely enough Crusoe understood his late mate's point of view very well, and didn't seem a bit cut up about it. Indeed, it seemed to Friday that Crusoe was to be the only one of the Yarren Lea crowd who was big enough to see things in that way. Crusoe thought Friday a sap accepting so little for his share of the brumby mob: "Should had got sixty or seventy pounds," etc. Crusoe was keen on a new venture also. He had a chance later of taking over, with a friend, a line of Cobb and Co. mail coach "runs" further out west, and was considering giving it a fly. "Yes," he would sell his share of the brumbies too, and he B.'d [sic] to them, "A bloke could easily smash his other leg or his neck for that matter." Friday could see Crusoe wasn't over eager to get back to the brumby mob.

¹Queensland Commissioner for Railways annual reports (Queensland Parliamentary Papers) show that in 1913 the line north from Brisbane only reached Rockhampton.
Apparently the smash took some of the rugged confidence out of Crusoe, and well it might.

What with a round or two of the mysterious firewater flask produced from nowhere by Harry (just one for Crus) the party broke up in happy mood, vowing to keep up eternal correspondence etc.. Crusoe would let Friday know in good time if an opening appeared for him in his new Cobb and Co. venture, and so on. However, Friday never saw his bonzer mate again, and after receiving an answer to a letter some months later, that he was leaving the hospital, and after a spell at Yarren Lea he was to have a look over the proposed Cobb and Co. proposition, and that he had sold his share of the scrubber mob to the Macs. on a percentage basis to be finalised later, the "Great" Crusoe faded gradually from the picture. But that was the way bush blokes met and parted in those days. Still, Friday could have done much worse than stick to his mate longer, but young fellows of his nature just had to be moving about travelling.

The lads were glad enough to arrive at Proserpine after a long, tiring journey in second-class dogbox carriages. The change on the coastal steamer was not too welcome a break either, just a tiny tenth-rate tramp steamer, name forgotten, that rolled and pitched in a bit of a swell for a few hours between Mackay and Bowen, causing both lads to be seasick and pleased to get on to dry land again.

The train just crawled the last couple of hundred miles or so getting up toward Mackay, just as they had done out west Queensland, pulling up at times in the open country for no apparent reason at all. However, this allowed all hands to get out and stretch their legs and even boil the billy occasionally. A couple of blasts of the whistle was the signal that the rattler would be moving on in a few minutes, and all hands would get seated once more. The lads were intrigued with a view
Proserpine: "A small three pub town, the most important activity of the village itself being... the sugar mill."
(The Petrofski Collection, James Cook University of North Queensland. Reproduced with the permission of Mr J. Petrofski.)

Townsville, 1912: a "fair lump of a town."
(Reproduced with the permission of Professor Brian Dalton, Department of History, James Cook University of North Queensland.)
of the ocean occasionally, after not having viewed same for a couple of years.

Proserpine was a small three pub town, the most important activity of the village itself being of course the sugar mill, and outside the town itself, other than the dense bush and jungle, practically nothing commercially was grown but sugarcane.\textsuperscript{2} Here in the next week or two Harry met his old gang. They came from half over Queensland and were an easygoing and tough lot of fellows. One of the gang couldn't get along for a couple of weeks, and they agreed on Harry's recommendation to give Young Bill a "fly" pending their old mate's arrival. However, the cane was ready to be cut, but labour troubles which apparently had been brewing for some time came to a head and held up the harvest. More money and better conditions were demanded, mostly by the mill hands and day workers. The employees seemed to have a good case and were in a good position, as of course no labour at all was forthcoming to break the strike.\textsuperscript{3}

However, some three weeks had to be passed in idleness pending the winning by the workers of the battle of words and bluff. Young Bill and his mates had set up camp on the job some miles out of town in a jungly gully called Cannon Valley, and to help put the time in Young Bill and Harry, joined sometimes by some of the others, put the time in wandering the wild gullies and mountains in the locality. One day they climbed an outstandingly high mountain, and there to the east was a magnificent

\textsuperscript{2}See Introduction, Ch.4, p.59; \textit{North Queensland Register}, 19/1/14, p.83.

\textsuperscript{3}On unionism and industrial disputes in the sugar industry, see Introduction, Ch.4, pp.61-62.
view of the Whitsunday Passage, and well out to sea the large island of that name, and other smaller ones. It was a day of clear visibility and the wonderful panorama was very much appreciated. Little did Bill know that he would be sailing south through the same passage on his way from the Northern Territory to World War One via Sydney.

Another walk was along the valley to the sea, where a beach of sorts and swimming was enjoyed. As regards "bogeying", the beach had a sinister history. A few years previously a few settlers and their families gathered there for a Sunday school picnic. Suddenly the swimmers were attacked by a swarm (or shoal) of bluebottle jellyfish, and a number, including children, were stung before they could leave the water. Two of the youngest died in a few minutes and others experienced a very bad time. What a tragedy for these few battling, hardy cane settlers. They lived and worked under such tough conditions in that valley and on the ranges, at that time, that they would be classed as dinkum pioneers.

Looking up any gully in the evening, it was a pretty sight to see the flying squirrels volplaning from one side of the gorge to the other, fifty yards or more away, and landing in a tree much lower down than the position of starting. The flight looked extremely graceful. Dingoes in the ranges howled at night, packs of them. Mosquitoes and other pests were there in billions, and without burning cow dung etc. at night, life was hellish and sleep impossible. There were plenty of snakes too. The notorious taipan was not known as such those times, but no doubt some of the large size king brown snakes seen and killed were the now dreaded taipan.

The cook in an adjacent camp was bitten by a fair lump of a snake about this time, the tale being told first-hand to Bill and his mates
when arriving back in camp late one afternoon by the chap who the cook first approached after being bitten. It appears the cook walked into his tent and stood on a loose bag that was lying on the floor. He was immediately bitten on the shin by a three foot black snake that was hiding under the bag. The victim rushed or staggered into the men's quarters where our storyteller happened to be alone resting in his bunk, and in a shaky and hysterical manner, deathly pale the meanwhile, was trying to explain something to him. Our narrator at first thought the cook was drunk and overwrought about something, but gradually got the idea that he wanted a piece of string, and a little later that it was wanted as a tourniquet. Realising suddenly that the man had been bitten by a snake, the chap quickly got busy on a couple of tourniquets, calling out for help in the meanwhile. The bite was cut freely and sucked by his special mate, and he was hurried off per sulky the few miles to the township and medical aid. Fortunately, a bottle of whisky came to light from the "cane-cocky" and the patient was half drunk before he left and inclined to collapse in sleep. Apparently his accompanying mates eventually had great difficulty in keeping their charge awake. However, the victim recovered and was back on the job in a very few days. Diligent search was carried out for the cause of all the trouble, but not a trace of the snake was found.

After a couple of weeks the strike came to an end, the cane employees winning right down the line. On the whole, it seemed that the men deserved their win, many phases of the work being definitely underpaid and conditions unnecessarily rough. It was perhaps somewhat hard on the struggling settlers, battling so hard against appalling conditions to get ahead and own their own farms and home, but in another way they got it all back as most of them were also doing a lot of work for other growers in a better position than themselves when absolutely not necessary to be on their own farms.
In the meantime, the chap whose place Young Bill was to take for a couple of weeks arrived on the scene and Bill had to look around elsewhere for a job. This he found with a cocky who had a good enough crop on the side of a fairly steep mountain, half of it being large rocks, but it was marvellous how the cane grew in the actual cracks. The contract cutters were not interested in this proposition, the cutting being too laborious, which made them demand more for the job than the grower was prepared to pay. So the cocky put a gang on and paid them by the day: twenty shillings per day and tucker. The grower offered to give Bill a job cutting if he would take on the job of cooking until such time as he could procure a professional cook. He, the cocky (somewhat crippled with a bad back), would help Bill with the cooking. Bill gave it a go.

In a few days the regular cook turned up and Bill carried on with the cutting gang. Good job for Young Bill he was naturally tough, for the cutting proved very exacting work for a few days, after which one hardened to the work and managed it OK. All cane anywhere was cut by hand those days, then carried to a position where it could be put on a cart of some sort, then taken to the lightweight train-line and loaded on to the waiting cane hoppers. The draw from the cutting to the hoppers would be from a few hundred yards to a mile or so. The light train whisked the cane to the mill, and didn't the hungry mill just eat it. The wages were about seventeen shillings and sixpence a day plus keep. When this particular cane-cocky's job cut out, the same gang moved on to a similar one. At the cut-out of the particular job our hero was on, the season was somewhat on the wane and the gangs were all

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4If this figure is accurate, these would have been very good wages by contemporary standards. See Introduction, Ch.4, p.61.
filled, so Bill tried his luck in the township of Proserpine's sugar mill and got a start on the "fugals" (apparatus that dried the sugar). Anyway, Young Bill had had enough of cane-cutting for a while, was getting itchy feet again and on the lookout for a change.

There were all sorts at the mill: low down at heel drunken wasters to decent people including pioneer settlers out to make a few pounds to help them along with their virgin properties. Among the latter were some Italian settlers (and there were quite a few in the cane country) and they were decent and quiet enough folk.5

Young Bill was later joined here by his mate Harry. There was a good (for those days) library available to the barracks, and Bill did a lot of reading. Of course there was billiards and "booze" too up the town, but Bill wasn't keen on either. Gambling wasn't nearly so popular as in the sheds out west. There was the usual fun and chiacking, especially in Bill's age-group. Old Bill can remember an English emigrant being howled down (half in fun) when he complained that life in Australia had been misrepresented to him. He had been shown pictures for instance, of pineapples (so dear on the London market) being fed to pigs in sunny Queensland, and now that he was in that seemingly desirable country, if he wanted a pineapple same would cost him three or four shillings, etc., etc.. The irony of it was that it was quite true.

It was noticeable that in the likes of these small out-of-the-way country towns, what few professional businessmen there were seemed to be

5Planters brought 320 Italian workers to Townsville in 1891, after legislation had been passed in Queensland to curtail the employment of Melanesians. The Italians were to work under indentures for two years before taking up small holdings. See Introduction, Ch.4, p.57.
banned to eke out a livelihood in that particular environment (as against a large town of comparatively considerable amenities and social attractions) because of some physical or characteristic shortcomings such as drunkenness, the most notable, or excessive gambling, or perhaps just ex-gaolbirds making a new start. The local dentist for instance, a bloated faced fellow in smart excellently laundered white tropical suit and heavy topee to match, looked like an influential potentate Sahib from, say India. Quiet and respectable enough too, for a fortnight or so, and then would "come out" as one of the wild boys of the town, gloriously and hilariously drunk, shouting for all hands over and over again and refusing to allow anyone at all to shout back. What a birthday for the town loafers and hangers-on, who hung on to "The Potentate" (as he was nicknamed) like flies. The following day or so, probably the Potentate would vanish and go into hiding for a couple of days, no doubt suffering a recovery. The next day he would be "on deck" again and thoroughly sober, quiet and gentlemanly as ever.

The town solicitor was of the same vintage, but on the spree more often. He wasn't the harvest that the Potentate was, didn't shout so freely nor take every smirking free booze hunter to his bosom; generally selected a circle of three or four and insisted on all the talking. Simmons the Mug Barrister was his nickname. (As a matter of fact he was a good man at his profession, when sober.)

One of the pastimes around the town was to attend the law court cases and look on from the public gallery. There was one particular case Young Bill and his mates enjoyed in this way, when the Mug defended three men who were up on assault and horse-stealing. The poor Mug was properly under the influence, and Bill could not understand why the magistrate (a senior local justice of the peace) allowed the case to go on and later would not accept the defence spokesman's plea "that the
case be adjourned on account of their counsel being in no state to carry on." Their "counsel" meanwhile just sat there goggle-eyed and went on smoking a cigarette. He even called witnesses that knew absolutely nothing about the case whatever. No doubt the magistrate knew his business. Perhaps he knew that the prosecution was a watertight case anyway (or so it appeared to Bill), but it seemed contrary to British justice not to postpone the case as the defence seemed so heavily handicapped with a solicitor in court so obviously under the influence. Of course, one couldn't help feeling sorry for the likes of these two weaklings (anyway, weaklings as far as the booze went) but there were hundreds like them around these places, though it didn't seem so bad in the great majority of cases as they were just ordinary knockabout "bagmen".

[There was] another diversion that took place about this time, one that happened every so often in the bush towns, but more so out west on account of the isolation and more open spaces. A lean, wiry sort of a chap, for obvious reasons called "Deafy", a few weeks earlier had won fame in the town for beating in fair fight a bullying settler in for a spree from out Cannon Valley way. Bill often saw the fellow whilst out there himself, carrying provisions from the roadway, or rather track, where the "sulky" mailman had dumped them, to his farm half a mile away up the side of a mountain. Deafy celebrated with a spree, a long one, and wound up with the horrors (delirium tremens). Suddenly he was missed. Then it appeared he had been seen heading for the bush as if someone was after him (probably the devil). A manhunt was organised, Young Bill and his mate missing two or three days' work to take part in it. Eventually, with the help of a blacktracker, he was located up a

6 The word "who" is here deleted.
tree minus his clothes, way out on Salisbury cattle station, very many miles north-westerly.

All this was right enough, but Young Bill was glad when the cane season terminated. He was getting itchy feet again for a walkabout out west. Harry Leper also declared for the back country again, so the mates decided to entrain for those parts. The train journey was up the coast a bit to Townsville, then west for some hundreds of miles. Anyway, the lads reckoned they were chequed up enough and deserving of a few days' big town holiday at Townsville, and so their journey was broken there for that purpose. The stay in that fair lump of a town was longer than anticipated, and a couple of weeks flew by in no time. The lads' money flew too, especially Harry's, who would bend the elbow to excess, putting his younger companion well under the table whenever he tried to follow him. Young Bill was still boyish enough to be ashamed of himself not being able to take his "licker" like any hardened bushwhacker.

And so the time came when the lads realised they would have to get away from the coast quick, unless they were satisfied to walk back to the west. When a tarpaulin muster was made of the remaining cash there was barely enough to finance the rail fare as far as Charters Towers and still have enough not to be flat broke at the other end. The lads swung their "blueys" at the Towers (incidentally, the last time Bill was to do so) and began tramping along the railway line. They planned to jump the "rattler" at first opportunity; that is, scale a free ride on a goods train. This chance came at a small township station after a couple of days' travelling, where the railway official in charge proved a friendly cove toward the mates, and on the latter hinting what chance of a free ride on the expected goods due that night, the official hinted there was "every chance, but don't get caught, and if you do, don't let me down."
There was a lot of shunting and backing and filling when the goods arrived early in the night. One would think it was done with the express purpose of giving the lads a chance of getting comfortably aboard, which is exactly what they did. It was a glorious starry night and the mates lay back on the tarpaulin-covered wagon and enjoyed it. "This was the life," etc., etc.. After an hour or so it became cooler and Harry, who was an old hand at this game (having done much of it "hoboing" in Canada), untied a corner of the tarp covering and the travellers wormed their way underneath and enjoying the warmth, settled down for a nap.

After a couple of hours the train pulled up, and peeping out the boys observed they were at a fair sized station. Much shunting etc. went on once more, and then the train could be heard moving off, minus the travellers' wagon. Now a conversation ensued alongside, three or four railway men apparently discussing routine matters, and worse still a commanding voice seemed to be ordering the truck (the lads') unloaded. The rattler-jumpers held their breath, then to their great relief all was quiet for some time. The lads reckoned it was time to clear out whilst the darkness lasted and made a move to do so. Suddenly a startled and surprised voice came out of the adjacent darkness: "What the hell are you blokes doing here?" One of the "blokes" answered coolly enough: "Goodnight mate, jumping the rattler of course." The railway chap answered still in the startled and excited voice: "By cripes you blokes are lucky, you've had a narrow shave. Now get for your lives quick." Young Bill reckoned from the ensuing remarks that there must have been a railway "head" or "heads" amongst the group conversing alongside the truck a few minutes earlier, and taking the scared railwayman's advice seriously, both lads lost no time throwing their swags out, the billies making all too much row, and thanking their
benefactor (who again remarked how lucky they had been), "skedaddled" into the darkness quick as possible.
When morning broke, behold the two pub town of Prairie. The lads' overnight adventure had gained them well over a hundred miles. Matters moved fast enough now, the travellers being approached by an elderly enough horseman who looked just what he was, a boss sheep drover. The lads could "feel" the old man (or old by comparison with the two young fellows he approached) sizing them up, and not being quite satisfied about them. After a salut[at]ory greeting and a word or two about the weather, then, "Care to join me in a drink," and, "Yair, don't mind if I do," from the lads, who of course in due course returned the "shout". After a few minutes' conversation whereby the travellers let it be known they were looking for work, "any sort of bush work or stock riding," the stockman apparently realised these were the men he was looking for, and asked the lads what they somewhat guessed (some sort of stock riding work) was coming. "You blokes care for a few weeks' drovin'?" And the blokes did.

The mob of about nine thousand wethers from some hundred miles north of 'Ughenden (Hughenden) were only a few miles south of our Prairie township and were going south along the Towerhill Creek and Landsborough River stock-route at least as far as Longreach, and probably further. The old man explained all this on the trip out to the mob per the plant buckboard. The wages fifty bob weekly and keep, and the boss drover
claimed the tucker wasn't too bad. In effect, it wasn't either, at least for a drover's camp. [The camp consisted of] seven or eight men including the old man (or "Boss" as he was always called, of course).

The lads were only a couple of weeks droving when they decided it wasn't much of a game: alright for a lazy man not caring much for work, if he didn't mind the inconvenience and hardship of being out in all weathers and eating under all sorts of rough and ready conditions. The rainy season was on and half the time one was either damp or soaked through. The company was mixed, but mostly middle-aged and elderly men, the majority being pretty well permanent sheep drovers. These fellows of course nearly all had a dog or two each, some of them being very good, doing most of their masters' work for them. On the whole this type were not good company for young fellows. They had been at the droving game too long, were eccentric and taciturn through too much loneliness and companionship of dogs, horses and sheep.

The country traversed was flat and timbered, but not heavily, being on the edge of the "desert" country to the east, and not far from the open downs country to the west. This so called "desert country" in toward central Queensland was in fact nothing like desert one would imagine. It was mostly dead flat, heavily scrubbed and timbered country with little or no permanent water, no artesian water at all (that is, deep high-pressure bores, say from three to seven thousand feet or more deep) and not over much sub-a rtesian water (nil-pressure bores approximately two hundred to say five hundred feet deep which required the water to be pumped to the surface, as against the deep artesian water which was forced to the surface by the many thousands of gallons of water pressure from underneath).

Pushing the sheep along at least five miles a day (which was the law
of the land) soon faded into a monotonous enough job. However, the
wages of fifty bob a week and tucker were not to be sneered at, so the
boys decided to stick it out as long as possible. It was lonely enough
country, what homesteads there were being well out of sight owing to the
timber. The watch at night was of course the worst part of the job, but
as the mob were often camped behind a rough-built bough yard, or in a
narrow bend of the creek on the "neck" of which was the drovers' camp,
the watch - one or two men as the occasion required, doing a one or two
hour shift - had a fairly easy time.

Lammermoor station was passed.\(^1\) The story of Lammermoor is pretty
well the history of the district and its pastoral holdings throughout an
area comprising Hughenden, Prairie, Towerhill Creek, Mootaburra and much
country to the eastern coastline, and westward for hundreds of miles to
the Diamantina River. Towerhill Creek acquired its name from a
tower-shaped hill well to the south of Lammermoor, at the eastern end of
the big Rockwood station, and the town of Mootaburra from the slurring
of the name of the local Mootaburra tribe.\(^2\)

Over fifty years back, the writer observed the peculiar formation (not
uncommon in the western country) called Tower Hill (most appropriately
named) about half a mile from the eastern outstation of Rockwood and

\(^1\)Several pages of text, which were appended to the original text at
some later date, are here inserted. They deal with the history of
Lammermoor station, the information being drawn from M.M. Bennett's

\(^2\)Tindale's map (published with Norman B. Tindale, Aboriginal Tribes of
Australia, (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974)) Is
used as a standard for the spelling of tribal names. However, nothing
resembling "Mootaburra" appears on Tindale's map. The Iningai tribe is
shown as occupying country centred on Mootaburra.
named (of course) Tower Hill outstation. Same was some fifteen or twenty miles from Rockwood.

Lammermoor was taken up in 1863 by Robert Christison, an exceptionally fine type of pioneer squatter not long out from Scotland, the papers ref. same being negotiated at the Bowen (Port Dundas) Lands Office, on the coast some three hundred and twenty miles to the eastward, and one can imagine the pioneer shack the office would be in the new "furthest north" settlement of those days. This original settler rode a magnificent saddle-horse (apparently named Jack Straw) to Bowen, riding hard to beat another contender on the same errand (the "taking up" of Lammermoor) and rode the distance of three hundred and twenty miles in four days. He rode cross-country near as possible "as the crow flies", and conditions being droughty that year made the going harder for him. He won the race. The other landtaker had a little start on Christison and he also rode hard, but he didn't know he was being so closely outpaced by a rival.

Explorer Landsborough had discovered Towerhill Creek whilst searching for lost Burke and Wills, and had marked a tree thus - MARCH 1862 - (probably where he crossed) and had remarked to an acquaintance a couple of years later, "With waterholes large enough to float the Great Britain" (a leviathon of probably two thousand tons). Christison selected a large "permanent" waterhole in Towerhill Creek which the local Dalleburra tribe called "Narkool" (meaning not known, but it was the tribe's main bora ground) and on the adjacent ridge to the west the settler made his main camp, where Lammermoor homestead emerged in due course.  

3Tindale has the Jirandali tribe occupying this country.
Terrible privations and hardships were experienced during the first few decades, and some fearful droughts were overcome, the worst being of five years' duration, 1897 to 1902. Even the hardy ironbarks on the ridge died, whole clumps of them, and only [had it not been for the fact that] the sub-artesian water had become available, the run would have been totally abandoned with enormous loss of stock. Incidentally, fencing wire (single strand) became available about the early sixties.

Unlike many squatters, Christison quickly made friends with the blacks, and through scrupulous but firm and fair dealing compelled their cooperation and loyalty, almost from the initial forming of the station. The writer remembers passing through Lammermoor with sheep about 1912, but cannot remember other than rare old blacks about the station or along the creek. Probably the remnants of the once numerous Dalleburras finished up in the missions and reserves after Christison had sold the property following the turn of the century.

An enormous area when taken up, Lammermoor was gradually cut up by the advent of the smaller graziers, or "grazing farmers", the latter acquiring areas of from ten to fifty thousand acres, whereas the original run would comprise some thousands of square miles. Most Australians will perhaps give a sigh of regret at the "going out" of the big runs with all their heroic pioneering romance, but are more than consoled with the brighter alternative of dozens of families settled on comfortable areas, as against the comparative very few people occupying the one prodigious area. And so the story of Lammermoor serves as an example of the thousands of stations originally taken up and pioneered right throughout Australia. 4

4The original text is resumed here, and the word "and" removed from what is now the beginning of a new paragraph.
Later the smaller holding of Birricannia, pronounced in the vernacular as "Billycannya", [was passed]. The tale was told round the camp fire that night how recently a jackaroo was left in charge there with only his own company, but was too weak to stand up to the lonely environment: blew his brains out after making a thorough mess of things through booze and a flash barmaid in Prairie. Then Tower Hill outstation of the big run Rockwood, thence on to Mutturaburra township. Between the last two named, Christmas of 1912 came and went quietly enough. Young Bill had now been away from home well over two years and he was still having the time of his life, still putting off the day when he should settle down permanently and learn something worthwhile about grazing and save some money. However, Young Bill gave little thought to this state of affairs, he was still quite happy to live for a day at a time.

The desert country was left behind quite suddenly at Tower Hill and the travellers were on the famous rolling downs and Mitchell grass country of central and west Queensland. Approaching Mutturaburra (a four or five pub township a hundred mile or so from the Longreach railhead), a sometimes pleasantly talkative old chap (Old Bob), having guessed Young Bill was particularly interested in such matters, pointed out away over to the left a somewhat higher hill in the low range that was running roughly north and south. The hill was on Mount Cornish country (though some reckoned it was on the adjoining station, Bowen Downs) and was the famous "Redford's Lookout". Bill had heard of the place of course, where the notable cattle duffer (and the world's champion at the game) had collected a thousand head of Mount Cornish cattle preparatory to droving them right across to Adelaide and selling same. This happened way back in the seventies or eighties. Old Bob confirmed what

5Even allowing for circuitous routes, this would be an exaggeration.
Young Bill had heard several times, that some of the old posts of the yards that Redford and his mates had themselves built thereabouts were still standing. Also a phase not so often mentioned, that the duffing was carried out whilst the Landsborough River was in flood and unpassable, and the Cornish homestead being on the opposite side of the river considerably helped the duffers to get away with the enterprise undetected for some considerable time. Nevertheless, one could imagine (thought Young Bill) a high position handy for a good look round would be handy in such an enterprise, and no doubt Redford and his merry men often climbed the hill for the purpose. (About half a century later, Old Bill learns of the organised tourist excursions from Longreach to view this "Redford country". No doubt the tale in the meantime has lost nothing in the telling.)

Young Bill couldn't help thinking of the time at the outset of his travels when he fell in with the group of actors (amateurs for the most part) way back in the Hartley Vale who were making a "movie" (no talkies those days) of Robbery Under Arms. It will be remembered that author Rolf Boldrewood included Redford's famous duffing escapade in his classic work. If Young Bill could have looked into the not too distant future, he would have envisaged himself again passing through "Redford country", Brunette Downs on the Barkly Tablelands, Northern Territory, anything up to a thousand miles away to the north-west. Here the popular duffer (but not so popular with the big squatters) found this great station, some time in the eighteen seventies.

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6Redford continues to generate interest in the district. Between August and October 1982 the Longreach Leader was the forum for a debate on the location of Redford's yards, and in October 1982 Redford's trial was re-enacted in the town.

7"Barclay Tablelands" in original. All subsequent incorrect spellings have been changed without notice.
Within about a week of reaching Muttahura, the two mates decided they'd had enough of sheep droving, so gave the boss a week's notice. They now caught Cobb and Co.'s coach from the 'Borough to Longreach, some eighty miles or so to the south. The coach was rather overloaded, so the mates and a couple of other fellows were put on the roof to hang onto the strapped luggage as best they could. Amongst the passengers was a young fellow about Bill's age who had been on the spree in the 'Borough for a couple of weeks, and the poor fellow seemed pretty sick on it, being administered a nip of spirits every hour or so by a mate who accompanied him. Later in the day, whilst the coach pulled up in the shade beside a waterhole to allow the passengers to stretch their legs for a few minutes, the booze suffering young fellow, quietly and without being particularly perceived, grabbed a billy and walked down to the water. He was then observed, and the crowd stood watching him. Just as he was about to dip the billy, he dropped it and started back with a cry of terror, and keeping it up, ran back for the coach seemingly breaking even with any champion sprinter in the process. Rescued by his mate and others, it took a long time to console and quieten him. He continually declared a mass of huge snakes suddenly came up out of the waterhole at him. He was eventually treated for the horrors in Longreach hospital. Young Bill enjoyed a few drinks with him later in the year. He was good company too.

Shortly after leaving the 'Borough it became known that a young fellow on the coach was named Lavender. Apparently at once this was important news. Was Young Bill any relation to the Lavender shearing at -----(Young Bill, half a century later, has forgotten the name of the station some fifteen miles or so south of Muttahura) and when Young Bill denied any relationship he was almost regarded as a liar, as the name was so uncommon, at least in those parts. But the prevailing code of ethics on
such matters of course prevented the doubters from further satisfying their curiosity. They adopted the attitude of, well, if he don't want to own him as a relative, it's OK with us; no doubt he has his reasons. It appeared the station had been crutching and serious labour trouble had arisen, the crutchers going out on an illegal strike. It was learnt later by the coach travellers that the graziers had called the strikers' bluff and refused to allow them to return to work, and immediately took the necessary legal action to have the lot individually summoned.

And now the coach drew up alongside the station mail box where a small group of men stood waiting, hoping to get on the coach. A fellow traveller at once pointed out to Young Bill one of the waiting group as the bloke Lavender, watching Young Bill the meanwhile, closely, for any reaction (or so thought Young Bill himself). However, Bill was quite intrigued about this other Lavender, having never yet met another of his own surname face to face. He was not impressed. The other Lavender seemed just an ordinary decent sort of bloke, and of course he was ignorant of the fact that a fellow [with] the same surname as his own was observing him from on top of the coach. Our driver had no chance of helping any of these fellows with a lift, which they could plainly see for themselves, and so they were left there disappointed. The latest news had been picked up however, from one of the group more talkative than the rest, to the effect that the shearsers were about to scatter to the four corners as quickly as practicable, and so make it as difficult as possible, if not impossible, for them to be served with summonses.

However, the sequel to all this was that Young Bill, some hours after booking in at a Longreach pub (Mrs Denton's Club Hotel), was accosted by a young policeman in plain clothes who wanted to serve him, Young Bill, with a summons ref. the shearsers' strike affair as mentioned. Young Bill was tickled to death. The policeman took a lot of convincing that
Bill was not the Lavender he was after. "Didn't you get on the coach at Muttaburra the day before yesterday?" the "john" enquired, and when he began to regard his suspect doubtfully, Young Bill, who was enjoying the limelight of all this, remarked, "You can give me the summons if you like old fellow, but I'm definitely not your man, you're making a mistake." Then Bill told him all about the two Lavenders back at the station mail halt. The young constable seemed more satisfied at this explanation, accepted an invitation to join Young Bill and his mate in a drink, where much free and easy talk took place over the incident, the gossip spreading through the pub and eventually through the town. The 'Reach had some eight or nine pubs: the town was not that big, just overpubbed as it were.

The lads now got a job at piecework fencing on Maneroo station with old Tom Davidson. Maneroo was a big station out along the Winton road about thirty miles. Tom's fencing plant was already on the station, and the boys went out by Cobb and Co. coach. Old Tom had done hundreds, possibly thousands of miles of fencing in central and western Queensland. He paid his fencers one pound per hundred for post cutting, mostly gidgee but also boree and a little myall: four inches at the small end and about five feet six inches long. The post erecting was paid at thirty shillings per hundred, the sinking being generally twenty-two inches. Old Bill forgets the boring and wire-running allowance. Tom had a cook on, and his pieceworkers were charged about a pound a week for their tucker. Tom employed six men on this particular line of fence. Many fellows out in those parts followed this class of work only and became very efficient at it, making good money, and of

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course some excelled at some particular phase of the fencing game. A chap who was good at post-cutting say, generally stuck to that particular job. Some of them were very clever with an axe and could cut the top of a post off in such a manner that it appeared to have been sawn through at an exact right angle. A post-cutter would average at least say a hundred a day comfortably enough: that is, a minimum of twenty shillings a day, very good wages those times. And so Young Bill was very proud to earn the commendation of his mates one particular day when, amongst excellent timber of course, his tally was one hundred and seventy posts. Young Bill could hold his own also at putting up posts, and good enough all round at the rest of this "game", and he liked this particular type of bush work.

Whilst on the job when the "line" (fence being erected) ran along a stock-route for a while, a big mob of cattle from out the Territory way passed by. Bill was very interested in them. They were quiet enough, but they would be after a thousand miles or two of travelling. A yarn with a couple of the drovers on that particular wing was indulged in, and Bill let it be known he intended to exercise the prevailing hobby of young men of his type those days and catch up with a big droving trip "in" with cattle. The drovers, a middle-aged and an elderly man, didn't seem to think there was any romance in their occupation at all. "You stick to your own game young fellow," they advised, "and you'll be better off in the long-run. Once this droving game gets hold of yer, yer good for nothing else. A trip or two's alright for a change, but there's nothing in sticking it." Perhaps it wasn't so strange that this advice just about tallied with Bill's conclusion when he eventually caught up with a couple of cattle droving trips.

There were plenty of 'roos and wallaroos through this country, the former roamed over the open downs, the latter sticking to the basalt
country, stony timbered hills and ridges, and the areas of tablelands that went with them. The skins were bringing a fair price just then, something like two and sixpence or three bob a pound. Of course there were a few professional 'roo-shooters about, their plant generally consisting of a buckboard turnout including three or four utility horses with saddles etc.. Point thirty-two repeating rifles were the most popular firearms, the larger bores making too big a hole in the skins. Nothing loath, Young Bill and Harry had .32s sent out from the 'Reach, together with powder and lead, bullet moulds and other necessary reloading tools. Nobody out there bought ready-made ammunition: too expensive. The lads put a fair amount of time in shooting now: wonderful pastime for young fellows, and there was a fair "thing" in it too. The mates even thought of going it one hundred per cent, but didn't catch up with the plan. Strange to say, many months later when Bill and his new mate Harry Jones were off to the Northern Territory, a 'roo-shooter (poor devil), properly on the booze in Winton, wanted to sell the mates his shooting outfit at a ridiculously low figure. The lads would have rushed the offer without a doubt, but they were then too keen for the Northern Territory trip.

It was most fascinating to be making "up wind" (facing the wind, for obvious reasons) and to suddenly come on a mob of big wallaroos basking about on the rocks like a mob of lions one sees in a jungle picture. The move was to keep well hidden and take up the best vantage point before opening fire, when sometimes the shooters would secure the lot before the poor things could realise where the danger was coming from. They would stand up and look around like great hairy-chested apes, trying to smell and spot the danger out; would hop a few yards in any direction, as likely as not toward the danger.

Of course more often than not they were off all too quickly, having
speedily and correctly sensed the danger out. One great drawback of shooting in this basalt country was that sometimes the pelt would be lost notwithstanding a vital shot. 'Roos will often travel hundreds of yards when vitally hit (even through the heart, sometimes) and of course make for the thickest of the scrub before dropping in their tracks. A good trained dog was essential in this country, one that kept perfectly quiet, gestured in pantomime (as it were) when the game was imminent, and most important of all, would lead the hunter to the collapsed game when they sprinted after being hit. More often than not the 'roo just folded up when once hit in a vital place. Old Tom Davidson had just such a trained dog, old "Yapper". Tom didn't mind lending him and Yapper loved to go along with the shooters, sensing what was doing before the hunters handled their rifles at all. However, there was very little basalt country on Maneroo, nearly all open downs, but a young fellow working on the station who possessed half a dozen or so horses would often go along with our horsemen for a shoot, and all would be mounted on the said young fellow's horses and borrowed saddles. Sid had a couple of his mounts well trained to the rifle, at least one standing steady as a rock whilst the weapon was rested between its ears for firing from the saddle, (made Bill think of his old mate Crusoe's shooting horse). The lads "shot" the downs country when mounted. It was difficult to get close enough to the quarry on foot, but comparatively easy when mounted. The 'roos ignored horses, even when mounted by the enemy man, providing the wind was in the hunters' favour.

They were an exceptionally fine lot of mates at this camp, Young Bill always reckoned, but they drank too much too often. Bill knew this state of affairs was bad for him, the boy of the party, eighteen or nineteen, the others ranging from some twenty-four to thirty. Our hero was a bit worried over the matter when he did think of it, for although
he had not learnt to drink heavily, he found from experience it cost him just as much although partaking comparatively lightly of strong drink, in merely keeping company with these otherwise altogether jolly company fellows. Bill had previously realised he would have to break with Harry Leper sooner or later, and the sooner the better if he ever hoped to save and get ahead a bit. Still, they were great fellows. Bill Stewart, the fiery, light-hearted Scotsman, powerfully built champion axeman: the two Bills used to skylark around the camp fire with the gloves a lot, padded their fists with bagging until genuine mits were procured from the 'Reach, belted into a stuffed sugarbag for a punching ball. Bill Stewart knew a bit about boxing, and Young Bill was an eager pupil. "Boxing" on with the Turks a couple of years later, poor Bill Stewart left his bones on the Gallipoli Peninsula, fighting with the Scotsman's battalion, the fourth, A.I.F.. George Saint the ex-London bobby: greatest "bull's wooller" and liar on earth, especially when happily drunk, which he so often was. These four fellows all went overseas eventually with the A.I.F., three having the luck to get back.

The dog Yapper has been mentioned. He was a one-eyed rusty, mottled, stumpy-tailed cattle dog (as against almost all of his kind being blue-tinted), had lost an eye when a youthful puppy, before he had learnt to nip and duck under a horse's kick quick enough. He had made up for all that later, being a champion at rounding up the horses and holding them on the camp until otherwise needed. Like most dogs out in the open spaces, Yapper had a terrible set on bush cats (domesticated cats gone wild) and would "tree" all and sundry in quick and lively manner. He would then bark around the tree for someone to come along and pelt waddies etc. at the unfortunate cat until out of desperation it jumped out of the tree, sometimes from an unbelievable height, and landing square on its four paws and generally escaped to another tree, having the advantage of Yapper's blind side.
Cobb and Co. Stagecoach: "...the mates and a couple of other fellows were put on the roof to hang onto the strapped luggage as best they could."
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)

"The prosperous town of Winton."
(The Petrofski Collection, James Cook University of North Queensland. Reproduced with the permission of Mr J. Petrofski.)
Chapter 13

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND TWELVE: EXPERIENCES IN THE QUEENSLAND DOWNS COUNTRY

About this time a couple of bush stories got around per mulga wire which somewhat vividly pictured life in this lonely country. Of course dozens of news items of this nature were passed on from bushman to bushman, but the following two happenings were later confirmed in the pages of the widely read North Queensland Register, a weekly paper, indeed generally enough the only newspaper read in very many camps and homes in those parts at the time. And the likes of these two local happenings were so well understood by these folk, arousing their native concern and sympathy.

Old Bill is not sure of the actual localities after all these years, but 'twas within a couple of hundred miles or so of Maneroo station, and he thinks the first misadventure was in the vicinity of Alpha township. A station hand had been having somewhat of a spree in town and started out on the return trip three sheets in the wind, mounted of course, probably on an otherwise quiet enough horse. Jogging along happily drunk, no doubt singing and talking to himself, he spots a rare species of parrot enter a tree hollow with food in her bill for young ones; and they are pretty well grown by the sound of them, should be ready to

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1Lavender would have been in this district in 1913.
leave the nest. Well, here's a lark, as the hollow is low enough and his horse quiet. He pulls up under the nest and stands up on the saddle, supporting himself against the hollow limb or tree trunk, the hole being just reachable. Our amateur naturalist does a very foolish thing indeed, one that he would never dream of attempting had he not been well under the influence, and even at that it is hard for anyone of any experience at all of the bush and such matters to imagine how a rider could contemplate such a foolhardy act. However, admonishing his prad to "stand steady", he put his arm well and truly into the hollow. Nobody will ever know what started the horse (although it could easily enough happen) but the poor rider was left hanging with his arm well and truly caught, and the bones well and truly broken. One can imagine his agony in such a terrible predicament, and it was such that he procured his penknife from his belt or pocket and somehow managed to open it, probably with his teeth, cut through the stretched flesh of his arm, and fell to the ground. And that's where he was found dead at the butt of the tree the following day. A simple but terrible story!

Another wire per the grapevine\(^2\) about this time was: a boundary rider away on the back of the run and far from human contacts became very ill with bladder trouble. There was nobody to help him, and after laying suffering in his lonely hut for days, and probably half off his head with pain, he pierced himself with his penknife in the region of the bladder, no doubt thinking in getting rid of the tormenting urine in this manner, the pain would ease up and enable him to make an effort and procure help. However, the poor fellow was found dead in his bunk, and

\(^2\)The phrase "grapevine" was then a few decades off being used. People remarked instead, "I heard", "they say", "they reckon", or "I eared" etc., etc. [This note appears within parentheses in the text, between the words "was" and "a".]
one can imagine the agony he must have endured before death claimed him. But of course hundreds of similar cases to these must have happened in the outback during the previous century odd of pioneering.

One winter's day during a keen wind from the south-west (and it can get bitingly cold under those circs in that country), Young Bill left his post erecting on the line of fence and walked over to the pretty, solitary tree on the open plain where he had hung his water- and tucker-bags, to boil the quart pot for midday snack. Procuring some sticks for the fire, Bill noticed a large carpet snake coiled round a fork a few feet from the ground, asleep and thoroughly torped with the winter's cold. Bill was working on his own that day, and sat in the weak sun (no getting away from the cold wind) and watching the "Joe Blake", remunerating [ruminating] on same and enjoying his mutton sandwiches. Surely the poor thing wouldn't stay out in that exposed position all winter when he could be curled up in some hole or hollow log! Must have been caught out on the open plain before he could travel to and find a hideout. Bill prodded him soundly with a stick but could not detect any movement at all. Well, well, thought Bill, hope he enjoys his winter sleep, takes all sorts to make a world.

Young Bill told the tale over the camp fire that night, and as may be surmised, other snake yarns followed. The best one was a happening on Vindex station, a bit further out toward Winton. A boundary rider was in the habit of feeding his hacks pieces of bread etc. from the verandah of his hut. One day he called to them as usual and they started toward the hut and the promised edible luxuries, but pulled up within a short distance of same, suspiciously sniffing and snorting. They just would not approach any closer, although the chap held the bait up in encouragement. This happened on two or three occasions over as many days. The boundary rider could not make sense of the matter until a
couple of days later he found and killed a couple of large snakes in and about the hut. He wondered then of course, why he had not suspected as much in the first place. The prevailing breeze had carried the snake smell to the horses who had sensed the danger and reacted accordingly. This story was vouched for as true by two or three of the company, Old Tom being on Vindex at the time.

Eventually Tom Davidson drew a grazing selection way "down the river" somewhere, and wanting to have a look at it, closed down the job for a few weeks, paying off all hands. Young Bill got an opportunity here of breaking with his present associates as he had planned, especially Harry Leper. These fellows were returning to Longreach where of course they would soon be broke. They intended waiting the return of Old Tom Davidson and a renewal of the fencing. Bill planned to go westward to Winton, hoping Harry would not be interested. But luck was Bill's way. Harry was expecting a relative to arrive in Brisbane from overseas at any time, and now planned to meet him at the boat. [He] tried hard to get Young Bill interested in a trip to the big smoke, but that young fellow wasn't having any.

So one cold, frosty morning, our hero waited with his port and swag alongside the track (a main road and stock-route really) and caught Cobb and Co.'s coach coming from Longreach and bound for Winton. This time Bill was the only passenger and the driver was pleased to have him alongside him on the driver's seat for company. Cobb and Co.'s coaches were drawn by from four to eight horses, according to the state of the roads with the weather. On this occasion there were four or five, and a youngster was being broken in to the off side lead. Bill thought the driver was a bit hard on this young horse, punishing it continuously, but the whips used for this work were too light and slim for heavy punishment and Bill later realised it was done to help wear the near
broken animal in. But for what his opinion was worth, the driver had the wrong idea (and Old Bill is sure of that opinion now).

Now later came a thrill for Young Bill. It appeared the driver had been missing out on some sleep and wanted to make some up. Realising his young acquaintance was anxious for a go at the "ribbons", he handed them over and took up position inside the coach where he could stretch out somewhat. Young Bill was on top of the world: he was driving one of the famous Cobb and Co.'s coaches. It was now a sunny afternoon with a nip in the air. Open downs all round, very few trees, just the well-worn wheel tracks through the Mitchell grass, and one could see for miles ahead. And that's where our amateur driver saw a cloud of dust approaching in the far distance. As it came closer it was seen to be a motor car, a rare enough sight in those parts at that time. Bill wondered whether he ought to call the driver. The young horse and perhaps his mates too may be scared stiff of a motor car. However, Bill decided to pull off the track, continuing at a walk through the Mitchell grass and so allow the potential scare monster to pass the horses quickly, probably touching the then amazing speed of twenty-five or thirty miles an hour. In the event nothing happened, the youngster shying slightly and the other horses took no notice, but of course they had had a pretty fair run by this time and were getting a little tired. Bill leaned over and looking back at the coach door, saw just what he expected to see, the dinkum driver leaning out of the window and grinning up at him. "Woke me up jolting over the Mitchell tufts," he said. "Yer did the right thing pulling off," he continued encouragingly, which pleased Young Bill very much.

Later a change of horses (an approximately twenty mile routine) and dropping mail every ten mile or so along the track at the station mail boxes where more often than not station people, mounted or per
buckboard, would be waiting to collect and dispatch mail. Much yarning and "mulga wires" were indulged in at these halts as can be imagined, our mailman telling the same old news over and over again, meanwhile collecting fresh local gossip to pass on. The team changing posts ("mail changes" they were called) were generally just a rough galvanised iron hut and horse yards, the attendant being employed part-time as it were, putting his time in otherwise working round the adjacent stations horse breaking, 'roo shooting etc.. The mailman started out from Longreach and did the roughly approximate trip of one hundred and fifty miles to Winton in two long days. The overnight camp was the Evesham mail change (a few miles from the Evesham station homestead) which was about halfway between the two towns. There were no townships in between except a couple of lonely pubs and stores.

The Evesham mail change was reached about sundown, and as it was meant to cater overnight for the coach passengers, it was a little more habitable than the other changes mentioned. Three or four passengers for the coach were camping overnight at the change, as the coach was due to pull out about sunrise the following morning. An advanced middle-aged couple and their sprightly daughter of perhaps some nineteen or twenty summers were running the change, and the family were apparently entertaining a visitor, a young man about the same age as the daughter, who had travelled some couple of hundred miles or so from an insignificant township somewhere way down toward the "corner" (junction of Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales, and Old Bill has forgotten the name of the township) to convalesce and holiday with old family friends. They were just simple bush working people who had been all their lives in these outback areas, and their contemporary gossipy conversation was very amusing to Bill and his associates of that night. There was very little privacy, one room for the male passengers and one
for the women, seven foot high corrugated iron partitions dividing the pilkey little rooms, including the family's dining- or living-room. The men passengers (there were no women this trip) for the most part just lay standing in their bunks, drinking in the quaint family conversation, now and then sniggering and enjoying the choice morsels of gossip. Apparently it was hoped the young people would make a match of it during the young fellow's holiday, and as the evening advanced it seemed that event would very likely mature.

The gossip got hotter and hotter, but was always dished up with almost early Victorian mock modesty. "The awful occurrence" of the passing stranger (probably some flash drover or shearer hanging around for a few weeks) "coming between the man and his wife;" the highlight of the evening being the episode of a respected citizen of the young fellow's miserable home village, whilst out riding and looking for lost horses (we wonder), almost rode over the shameless couple "lying alongside the bore drain". (The local stock reserve bore drain was always the lovers' walk at these lonely townships.) The story of this anecdote was enjoyed with much tongue clicking and sanctimonious shaking of heads. And so the like conversation went on for hours, the listening outsiders wondering if the family realised the extent to which the strangers were being entertained. But what could one expect of these folk? Probably an extremely simple education, limited contact with the outside world, telephones confined to post offices and the big stations, the weekly newspaper ('North Queensland Register') a week or two old, no picture shows, and of course the wireless let alone television not even dreamt of. It might have been mentioned earlier that the change was also a sly grog shanty, the old man (head of the house) handing out the bottled beer at about three times the cost at the 'Reach. Of course all hands shouted in turn, Young Bill and no doubt the others eventually subsiding in happy semi-intoxicated sleep.
The coach pulled up with a flourish at Winton just after sundown. Young Bill put up at the Club Hotel, that being the pub alongside the little Cobb and Co. office where the mail terminated. The following day Bill ratified what he had already heard: Winton was a town perhaps a little smaller than Longreach, was on the Western River, and only a few miles from the famous Diamantina River. Magnificent downs country and a fair amount of rangy basalt country too. Winton was the south-west terminus of the railway linking with Townsville some four hundred miles away down the coast. Bill awoke to a rowdy party going on in the bar, which officially opened at six a.m. those days, but was as often as not open all night. It was a drinking party rather unique in its way, had been very popular in the days gone by, the old hands were wont to tell, but was rapidly fading out (and well it ought to). A poor old bushman had arrived in town chequed up after being out in the wilds for months, or years, and had handed his cheque over to the publican with the usual instructions (under the circs) to "let him know when it was cut out". (According to the old hands these cheques would sometimes be a couple of hundred pounds.) This old greybeard already had a large following, and so early in the morning, and they would cling to their man until the cheque was "knocked right down", which always happened in a remarkably short time, as this case did. Of course everybody felt sorry for the poor old fellow, but nothing could be done about it, and the sooner he spent his money the better for him.

But Young Bill heard of one scurvy trick played against the old chap when he was later recovering, sick, broke of course, and probably on the verge of the horrors. He had approached a flash shearer fellow (a repulsive looking bully type) for "just one drink" (and that's how those types of drinkers got over a bout, the publican and others sticking to them for an occasional drink until they gradually recovered) and the
sadist fellow let him know he would shout him a pint of beer if he would drink a pint of water straight off, and then treat the pint of beer the same way. The old chap met both demands without showing any distress apparently, but Young Bill and his mates never forgave the sadist bully. Many of those similar old chaps cleared out into the bush in the horrors after such a bout, and died an awful death before they could be rescued. Bill supposed that as they knew themselves well enough to know they would spend the lot on booze in any case, the quickest way out was to take the course related. In passing it is sad to reflect that so many good bushmen went that way. Of course environment very often lent itself to that course. A fellow weak and fond of the booze in the first place, a lonely wayside pub a hundred, or hundreds of miles from civilisation, encouragement by the publican (the only one who would stand to gain anything lasting) and hangers-on to spend their money with and on them. No other facilities for enjoyment after the many hard-living months in the bush: all this playing on the weakness of some, too many. Booze was the only way out.

After a day or two loafing about, Young Bill made up with a tall young fellow a little older than himself, out from Ireland a couple of years, and he'd brought his brogue with him: a breezy, likeable sort of a chap, and for some reason or other Bill's fancy for Harry Jones was reciprocated in kind. It appears Harry was in a bit of a fix. He had taken on a contract fencing and yard-building on Phillott's new grazing selection, relying on a certain mate for experience, and had been disappointed in the latter mate's meagre knowledge of the work, and also realised he would never be able to get on with the chap. The partnership had busted up with the job only fairly started, and Harry was looking for a new mate of the necessary experience. Perhaps for a start that was the shrewd Irishman's idea of taking a liking to Young
Bill, when he realised his new acquaintance apparently had some experience in this work. The upshot was, Harry paid off his original partner and accepted the willing enough Bill to come in on the job as it stood, on equal shares.

Phillott's grazing selection was about twenty-five miles out from the town, comprising some beautiful open downs and a lot of indifferent scrub country. Bill found Harry and his late mate had made a start on a new stockyard, cattle and horses, including a round or breaking in yard, and a crush. It appeared now the arrangement with Mr Phillott the grazier owner was that if a good job was made of these yards, any amount of work would follow, including a sheep yard and some fencing, even tank sinking later. So the new mates put their best into this job, very solid bush timber going into it, some of the round posts, river gum of a sort and bloodwood being enormous, fifteen inches clear of sap at the small end; and as good heavy timber was scarce in that country, some of the posts went as much as eighteen inches C.O.S., and at the small end. The rails were very sound and heavy too. It was the joke of the countryside that the builders apparently expected to yard elephants. (This happened nigh on half a century back, but Old Bill thinks those yards would still be serviceable.) Bill learnt to use a new tool here, a mortising axe, a peculiar shaped tool on a short handle, chisel and axe in one as it were. However, Young Bill was surprised how quickly he mastered the use of it. It was ever so much quicker than the brace and bit and chisel method of mortising. Boss Phillott was pleased with the job, and next came a set of sheep yards, and finally a "home" horse paddock.

3 Clear of sap.
Incidentally, the boss found all plant and tools. He was a frank sort of a bush gentleman (and by nature and bush rearing, and of course enough education, probably acquired through the station's governesses and tutors, and some years at a large country town grammar school), told the lads straight out his finance had run out for the meantime, but if they cared to keep in touch with him he would set them up later with a tank sinking plant, giving them plenty of work for a start on his own place.

Mr Phillott had lately drawn this grazing selection, as previously remarked, probably some ten or twenty or more thousand acres, and had just moved into the new cottage homestead with his young family and faithful Aboriginal household and station retainers. Phillott apparently came from an old pioneering grazing family.

One of Old Bill's vivid memories is of the emu mother and her brood of several pretty young chicks, only a few inches high, which used to come quite close to the camp daily to pick the numerous small blue berries that grew on the bush the lads used to hang their washing out to dry on. They got to know they were welcome about the camp and enjoyed the damper and scraps left or thrown to them. Some kangaroo shooting was indulged
in here, and Harry was rapidly being trained in bushcraft.4

Back in Winton again, the lads almost immediately pallied up with Old Fred Wheelhouse, the chap who had lost his left hand when a youth through an old muzzle-loading gun exploding "the day before Ned Kelly was hung", as Old Fred was want to remark in relating the incident. Fred was on a bit of a spree; was good company himself and fond of much human companionship, although he had experienced many lonely camps in his day. He was a contractor of fencing, yard-building etc., having had his own plant all his life apparently: a typical bushman of the old school, a most original character of much native talent and "bush" integrity. The boys were greatly taken with Fred. No, he couldn't give them a start, he was spelling between jobs for a while and intended building a temporary round yard out at his camp and breaking in several of his young horses: this when he could tear himself away from town and the booze. "But what about you blokes coming out for a couple of weeks and doing some kangaroo shooting?" Fred had learnt the boys were very keen on this remunerative sport. "You blokes" were immediately all for it. Fred guaranteed altogether good shooting, and mostly the more

4Edward Pender Phillott was born in 1860 at Parramatta, N.S.W.. His English father owned land at Coonamble, which he had to abandon, and became a station manager and mail coach contractor. E.P. Phillott was indeed educated "within the family circle", but at the age of ten was required to work with his father, and at fifteen became a drover. In 1896 he selected 20,000 acres from Elderslie station near Winton, and through further purchases had acquired 100,000 acres by 1923. This was Colane, where Lavender worked. The station ran 20-30,000 sheep. Phillott's daughter-in-law, Mrs Olive Phillott, describes him as having been "a gentleman in his ways", who would allow no alcohol on the station, and was particularly strict in applying that rule to shearers. Matt J. Fox, The History of Queensland: Its People and Industries. An Historical and Commercial Review. An Epitome of Progress, (The State's Publishing Co., Brisbane, 1923), Vol.III, pp.270-75; personal communication with Mrs Phillott of Winton.
easily bagged wallaroos. The lads wanted to get away immediately and Fred reluctantly agreed, although the lads sensed he was grateful of the urge to get away.

And so after breakfast the following morning, amidst several shouts all round and much advice and banter from the pub company, Fred and the two lads set off in Fred's heavy buckboard. The boys took only that which was necessary for the holiday, the remainder of their gear being left in the care of the hotel proprietress whom (by the way) the blokes suspected of having them a little "set" for dragging a good customer away from her bar. Fred was happily drunk of course, with a couple of scotches under the seat, and the boys also had a couple hidden away which they intended to hang on to, to wean Fred off the booze reaction over two or three days.
Fred's camp was out the back of Bladensburg station (sheep and cattle), some twenty mile or so south of Winton. The going was steady as the buckboard was heavily loaded, not the least being plenty of good tucker. The camp was in wild and lonely country on a Mitchell grass plateau amongst the basalt ranges (hills would be more appropriate). Water was obtainable from a natural hidden deep "rock hole", almost hanging on the side of a fifty feet basalt cliff. One almost climbed down a little to draw water, unassable [?inaccessible] to stock, but marsupials got down occasionally. One of those waterholes that never go dry, fed by underground springs. Heaps of bleached bones lying about told of the dry times when the 'roos and other animals smelt this remaining waterhole out, converging on it to be shot by the cunningly concealed shooter taking advantage of the droughty and natural condition prevailing, which brought the game to him to be slaughtered. And one could imagine the wild Aboriginals in the days gone by having practised the same methods right there for thousands of years, doing their remarkable best with spear and boomerang.

However, there was also other water within half a mile of the camp where Fred's horses, some fifteen or twenty head, drank, keeping to the choice bit of grazing on the plateau. Young Bill and Harry suspected that old Fred had preserved this bit of camp grazing by "beating" back
the station stock off the particular patch of choice pick. The lads quite understood Fred's urge that they clean the 'roos out of the "home paddock" first. Fred just couldn't stand the 'roos robbing his precious horses of their grazing rights, let alone the station stock.

Old Fred was pretty seedy for two or three days recovering from the booze, but from then onwards was good company all the time. The lads gave him a hand to build his temporary breaking in yard and riding the youngens when they were ready, and for the rest, Fred was happy day after day breaking in his colts and fillies, and the lads put their time in shooting, and there was plenty of it. Time went by quick enough though lazily, early dry spring weather of August and September, and Young Bill turned nineteen in this camp. Fred was a wonderful man with horses, they were his family (he never married). He was one of the few who could go out into wild grazing country where his "children" had been running for months, and whistle and call them up to him, and even catch certain of them there in the open. No wonder they didn't take much breaking in, and Fred handled them so thoroughly before allowing them to be ridden that they seldom gave much trouble for the first rider to mount them. However, the lads had one or two rides that did include a couple of genuine bucks, besides much pigrooting.

Perhaps the most fascinating phase of this remunerative holiday was lolling and yarning round the camp fire during the long evenings. Incidentally, the weather was getting warmer with the early summer, and although it wasn't now necessary to sleep "on top of the fire", the warmth was still acceptable. Fred was at his best over the camp fire and could "hold" any company for hours on end, yarning of his experiences and adventures in the lonely bush and open spaces. One evening he told the following tale. When a very young man he hired out on the "shares" a bullock team outfit, some twenty bullocks and heavy
wagon, from a big successful businessman and store-keeper down in the Victorian "Kelly Country" (his own "dunghill") and was doing well enough, in spite of being short of his left hand. Fred was ambitious and wanted to own his own carrying turnout, and was rogue enough (or shrewd enough, it was apparently considered by his contemporary associates of those times, he having nothing and the big man having more than he wanted) to scheme to acquire the plant without paying for same. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, one trip when Fred was supposed to go in a southerly direction for loading, he took a roundabout track from his start south, then turned north, and by a back track travelled fast and quietly for weeks and months way up into New South Wales, then on into Queensland before he felt safe. He was never caught.

Fred's number one enemy was booze. It didn't prevent him from owning his own bushworking plant, but it did block him from owning his own grazing selection, or even a full-blown station. He could have even pulled off the latter only for the handicap mentioned, his natural native talent and experience of stock would have carried him through. Fred would tell many interesting tales of his experiences whilst in the horrors, always referring to the latter as "it". "He went down to the creek to fill the billy," and when he turned from the creek to climb the bank, "it was there in the pathway at the top of the rise, and wouldn't let me pass." "What was 'it', Fred?" asked the lads, and the answer was that "It was a frighteningly ferocious devil, with a pitchfork and breathing fire. It stayed there for a long time threatening me, but at last disappeared and I was able to get back to the camp, a very sick, scared and shaken man to say the least." At other times he had been "in heaven with the angels," and it was a "lovely and very happy experience." He had even been in hell too, and "it was terrible, just a long, loathsome nightmare."
Fred reckoned the skeleton of a bloke who recently "bolted" in the horrors and was tracked to this locality of the basalt ranges, must be lying out somewhere here not too far away, and the lads could very well happen on it. He said the Winton police sergeant was out some time back on another matter (took one of his best men away in fact, charged with continually and wilfully failing to pay his divorced wife's alimony) and enquired if anything had ever been found of the lost "booze artist".

Like most bushmen, Fred was somewhat of a psychologist, having a fair knowledge of human nature. It was he who first explained to Young Bill that there was no such thing as a horse (or any other animal for that matter) being frightened of a ghost and bolting. It was the rider or driver that was scared of such, and his nervous fear was conveyed to the animal through the touch down the reins, and so became contagious. The same thing with an intoxicated person successfully mounting and riding a notorious buckjumper: if the rider is drunk enough to have plenty of confidence, the horse of course knows it by the "feel" (albeit he's not wise enough to sense his enemy is drunk) and some of the most noted buckjumpers will not perform when they sense the man has the confidence to call their bluff.

Fred reckoned a particularly outsized python hung out in this locality. He had stumbled on its tracks several times but had never caught up with a look at it. "If you do come across them," he remarked to the lads, "it should be worth your while to track him down; you might procure a skin that 'museumists' would pay a lot of money for." The mates caught an odd python sunning in the warmer weather, but never a glimpse of the big fellow. Porcupines abounded in this country, also giant tiger snakes near the waterholes.

One day the shooters saddled up two of Fred's hacks, picked for the
job of course, and descended on the plain; got a couple of large red 'roos, then climbed a lone, high hill with a splendid view for miles in some directions. There was good shooting amongst the wallaroos too, and now came the day's highlight. In a position of the best advantage to see miles all round in most directions was the remains of an old hut. The lads knew at once of course, it was all that remained of a boundary rider's camp of some decades back, when "cattle beaters" (predecessors of the boundary riders) camped in environment such as this so as to get a good view of the stock movements and take the necessary action to prevent their wandering off their own station preserves, and also seeing the neighbouring holding's stock were "beaten" back onto their own grazing. Fencing, which arrived generally somewhere around the sixties or seventies, some half a century before the lads' discovery, eventually put an end to this procedure of handling stock on the boundaries and ushered in the extremely utilitarian boundary rider. The boys were greatly intrigued with their find, and had a good look round. Gidgee studs, some of them good enough for second-hand fencing posts, probably another twenty or thirty years in them, some extremely rusted galvanised iron which fell to pieces when handled, a broken camp oven wearing the decades well: what tales it could tell of the pioneering days! Eventually, underneath an ancient and twisted gidgee tree, there undoubtedly was a grave: a mound (or the remains of one) and some suitable and large basalt gibbers. A pathetic feature was an ancient collapsed bush timber (gidgee of course) cross, almost rotted into nothingness.

Naturally this incident was thoroughly discussed over the camp fire that night. Fred knew all about it, although he'd never been there. First question he fired at the lads was: "Did yer find the grave? Yes, a bloke died up there a good many years ago." As the boys guessed, the
water was a spring rock hole similar to their present camp supply, although much smaller, some few hundred yards off the old beater's hut.

Then yet another snake yarn. Old Fred was making for his camp with his team, the big heavy dray lightly loaded, the horses travelling pretty fast, and Fred of course walking on the near side, open downs country. Suddenly he noticed a big brown snake lying full length across the track. This occasionally happened of course, the Joe Blake wriggling out of the way directly he sensed the vibrations of the approaching team. However, this one lay pat, and Fred suddenly realised it might allow the team to walk over it, his very valuable old leader first of course, so he pulled the team up quickly as possible. Too late. The old leader, who apparently took the snake for a stick, pulled up with it inches off his front feet. For seconds Fred didn't know what to do, and the snake slowly and deliberately lifted its head, opened its mouth very wide, and closed on one of the leader's shins, "just as if he was going to bite it in half." Fred rushed in and broke the thing's back with the butt of his long-handled teamster's whip. Now what could he do? Nothing much but let his valuable old slave die. However, if was only a couple of hundred yards or so to camp, so he hurried on there and quickly let the old horse go. It was just about dark and Fred never thought to see him alive again. So judge of the surprise next morning: the old leader was quite his normal self and suffered no setback at all. Apparently the old horse's hairy hide had absorbed sufficient of the poison to render the bite just about harmless.

Then the tale of the glorious bush spree Fred and his mates had had "down the river" (Diamantina) on Cork station. Under a giant shady gum tree, a dozen or so of them collected a few cases of grog and a couple of barrels of beer, and started on what was to be a few days' booze up, but grew into a few weeks for some of them. Eventually of course the
dreaded horrors caught up with these few and they went bush in all directions. Fortunately there was a general muster on Cork and neighbouring stations at the time, and most of the wandering sick men were rounded up with the sheep.

Two or three weeks went pleasantly by, when Mr Reed the station manager rode into camp to see Fred on business. The lads made themselves known to him, and "was there any work doing?" "No, there was not at present," but he explained he had heard from his agents in town (Winton) the "other" day, that a friend of his from Longreach, a Mr Edkins of Bimbah station, would be going through to Boulia (some two hundred and fifty miles west of Winton) in a few days to take delivery of a big mob of cattle stores (stock to be fattened before marketing) and intended having them "droved" in to his Longreach country. He, Mr Edkins, had wired his agents in Winton to have a few likely fellows ready to go out west with him (per his huge motor car) and take jobs at droving the cattle, as apparently some of the men wanted to pull out at Boulia and go their several ways. (No doubt they wanted to get back to the Territory, probably the Queensland police were interested in them.) Of course the lads were very taken with this project, and feeling that Mr Reed thought them likely young fellows for the job, they asked him straight out if he would use his influence with the Winton agents and secure them a job. Yes, he would, providing the lads promised not to let him down, and they would have to be back in Winton in the next three or four days. The boys earnestly promised to turn up in time, and Mr Reed said he thought everything would be alright.

The lads knew old Fred would be disappointed. He was too, but he was too much of a man of the world not to take it the right way. "Anyway," he said, "the old man (Mr Reed) wants me to sign some important papers at the solicitor's in town. You blokes better kick off in the buckboard
in the morning, and leave the plant at my pub. I'll ride in in a day or two on the business and can bring some tucker out; it's getting a bit low." The boys talking things over, thought it marvellous that men like the station manager and old Fred could put themselves out to help a couple of young fellows who were almost total strangers to them. But this happened again and again. It seemed that all the world loved more than a lover, and also appreciated youthful enthusiasm and light-heartedness, and put themselves out to show their appreciation.

Reporting at the agent's office a couple of days later (in Winton), the lads were questioned as to their ability to fulfil the job as cattle "punchers", but had no difficulty in impressing the agent that they were quite capable for the job. A couple of days later, the big man Rowly Edkins (and he was a "big" man in every way) arrived in his huge imported car, driven by an "engineer" (also imported) and accompanied by a couple of middle-aged chaps he had picked up on the trip, who expected to get a start with the mob out Boulia way. The two lads addressed the big man as "Mr Edkins", whereas the two older men as mentioned (rough bushmen and looking somewhat down and out) addressed him, as was the usual custom, as "Boss". Strange to say, the boss seemed to appreciate being addressed as Mr Edkins by Young Bill and Harry Jones, but accepted "Boss" from the general run of "knockabout" fellows as a matter of course, and quite as it should be. "Rowly" Edkins was a wealthy man, a partner in the firm of Edkins, Marsh and Co., besides having interests

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1This sentence has been reconstructed. In the original it begins: "'Mr. Edkins', and the two lads addressed the big man in that manner, whereas the two older men..."
in considerable grazing enterprises.² Mr Edkins gave the four hopefuls to understand he may not be able to give them all a start, but most probably he would be returning to Longreach within a few days and would give the unlucky ones a lift back if they so desired. In the event incidentally, all four got a start, and even then the outfit was a hand short.

Meantime in Winton, the lads had set themselves up in new concertina leggings, stockwhips, long fitting (for mounted work in rainy weather) oil coats, and Harry, always a bit flash, special smart-cut riding breeches. Bill couldn't quite come at the latter, being content with modest moleskins. And of course, new expensive mouth organs. Both boys could play, but Young Bill exceptionally well. The sweet-sounding instruments helped to make the boys popular in many a camp. They were imported from Europe those days, and could be obtained in any fair-sized country town.

Our heroes left the bulk of their belongings, ports, good clothes etc., with the hotel proprietor, and made themselves comfortable in Mr Edkins' car, taking swags only. The lads sat in front in turn, with the boss and engineer, the two rough blokes preferring to remain in the rear amongst a conglomeration of luggage, wishing of course to be as far away from the "heads" as possible. The two pub township of Boulia, on the

Burke River, was some two hundred and eighty travelling miles off Winton, and some one hundred odd miles from the Territory border. Boulia, as can be guessed, was the Aboriginal name for the district, or the slurred name, the original phrasing being Bul Bul. Bill has never learnt the meaning of the word, probably lost forever like only too many Aboriginal words and place names: a pity! The river was named after the famous explorer O'Hara Burke, who originally discovered it some sixty years earlier and travelled north along it for some distance in his dash to the Gulf.

The trip out was a long one, the road (or track) being rough enough in places, country similar to the Longreach-Winton belt, but becoming less downy and more flatter further out, with numerous narrow and wide dry water channels to cross, and the country for grazing becoming poorer in quality. However, the trip was a memorable one for Young Bill as it was positively his first ride in the new wonder, the motor car. Camped that night under the stars about a hundred miles from Boulia at the Hamilton River where there was a pub of sorts adjacent. The boss of course put up at the pub (also his engineer) but the rest preferred to camp out as the tuckerboxes were well stocked. A couple of bottles of hard stuff was procured from the "local", and the evening went off merrily enough round the camp fire, the strangers eventually winding up pretty full, and Young Bill and Harry had had enough.

Rowly Edkins' appearance anywhere was the talk of the countryside. He was apparently known to all the big grazing "pots" who wanted to talk pastoral matters with him, but he seemed anxious to travel on and gave most of them not much chance to talk.

The car seemed to eat up a lot of petrol, supplied those days in four gallon tins (Old Bill forgets the cost). The boss made sure of his
supply by ringing the stations well on ahead (service stations and bowsers were not even dreamed of those days), but to return to the camp on the billabong. About the second round of drinks, the experienced ears of the two older men (as they were both Jim, they quickly acquired the sobriquets of "Long Jim" and "Stumpy Jim", for obvious reasons) tuned in to the alluring giggles of Aboriginal women (black gins) converging on the strangers' camp apparently with a view to business, a not unusual occurrence in those parts. The Jims put in some time with them, coming back for more grog and disappearing again (they had previously borrowed a couple of quid on the strength of the anticipated driving job), voicing unfeigned disgust at the lads declining the invitation to join the party. "There were a couple more good sorts there, and the 'flyblown bucks' had been given a half bottle and a few bob to scram," etc., etc., but the lads just couldn't bring themselves to absorb this phase of outback environment, yet. But they were to meet their Waterloo later under the extremely trying conditions of the Northern Territory's "outback", practically hundreds of miles from anywhere, and the brooding and at times almost frightening loneliness and isolation claimed its toll, and any company was better than none at all.

The boss expected to meet his man, the boss drover, some miles this side of Boulia, and on the stock-route. Here they were now, a boss bloke well mounted, and another rough enough looking fellow not so well mounted and not so different from any other drover except that he wore a crummy old pyjama jacket. The two Jims knew him at once, "Hungry" or "Pyjama" Jack, and telling their tale to the lads as opportunity offered, it appeared they had all come a thud with their "good" droving job, as Hungry Jack always travelled with packhorse plant only, rough tucker, even for droving, and as shorthanded as possible. But he was a
good drover, "and don't pick a argument with him, he can fight like a thrashing machine and knows all the rough and tumble tricks" etc., etc.. However, it turned out not so bad as painted. The turnout also boasted a heavy spring cart, besides the dozen or so packhorses. If Rowly Edkins got any shock at realising what Hungry Pyjama Jack looked like, he didn't show it, and shook hands cordially. The second boss-looking fellow (who was later joined by a tally clerk) turned out to be the agent representing the cattle owners, and was to see that they got a fair go during the "camp count".

The camp (a very temporary one) was almost on an open plain, but under some decent enough shade, and there was sufficient shade in clumps too, for the cattle. The cook and several fellows were loafing about the camp and showed only casual interest in the new arrivals, who of course were expected. They right away seemed a little amused at the two young fellows, guessing at a glance they were near new to this game. Especially Harry in his smart new riding breeches and concertinas. Bill wasn't game to wear his new war paint for a while. Harry could get away with it with a hearty laugh (an asset of the Irish it would seem). Bill was yet to learn a lot in tact and personality etc. from this genial Irish mate.

Early afternoon smoko was put on. The new arrivals had been late getting away from the Hamilton, the motor car needed overhauling, and at that she had put on a good performance the previous day. Plenty of black tea and good brownie, sugar if one wanted same, and wonder of wonders under the circs, a tin of freshly opened condensed milk was passed over to the hands from the "heads'" circle who were grouped a little aside and conversing animatedly, about the cattle of course. They, the cattle, could be seen camping quietly a few hundred yards away, watched by two ringers also enjoying the shade. Large shady
enough timber, which wound handy enough to the camp, denoted a creek of sorts, and there was decent enough water from recent thunder storms.

Whilst the bosses were away having a look over the stock, the new arrivals learnt they were about to handle a big mob and that there would be a sure job for all of them, and then some. This was good news. The cattle were in from the big Alexandria run on the Barkly Tablelands, Northern Territory, fifteen hundred bullocks on starting, and all bore the famous three or four numbers and letters brand. The season coming in had been fair and the stock were not in bad condition and had become very quiet: "Wouldn't give any trouble now." Several of the company had pulled out earlier, off back to the Territory, and several more were pulling out here. It appeared "these parts were getting too civilised" for them, "no room to move, too crowded; and anyhow the cattle were getting too quiet now, it wasn't droving at all, might as well be pushing sheep along," etc., etc.. Others admitted straight out, actually boasting that they "were only looking for trouble, the police were too hot for them in this state (Queensland), should have turned back long before": meaning of course they were wanted by the police for some old law-breaking escapade, generally horse or cattle stealing, and were only "asking" for arrest coming in from the more wide open spaces of the Territory.

Hungry Jack put the new arrivals on straight away, and each did a "watch" in turn that night, along with one of the older hands. Well, the weather was warming up, but got a bit cold toward morning. The cattle were quiet of course after travelling some thousand miles or so, and as Bill's watch mate remarked, "Yer couldn't make 'em rush if yer tried."

The older hands mostly enjoyed the new company, especially that of the
two young "jackaroo blokes" as they were called for a while, on account of their mostly brand new outfits (leggings, whips etc., as previously mentioned). The lads were anxious to hear what the older stockmen had to say about everything out the Territory way. One of them, "Silent Jim", eventually told the tale of how he came to get the ugly scar on the calf of his leg: "Speared by the niggers years ago, the buggers had us besieged in a hut on McArthur River station, Northern Territory gulf country." Little did our heroes guess then that they would touch at that very station some twelve months later and have the tale verified. Yes, Silent Jim could be very interesting when he talked, but he frequently went for weeks without speaking at all. Strange to say there were a lot of old-timers of this description, but there were also some of them that talked too much, and the company got a bit tired of them.

The cattle were being held on the stock-route at a camp called the Three Creeks, some miles east of Boulia. The lads never saw that township, but apparently missed nothing thereby. There was plenty of water in the Three Creeks and sufficient feed about to do the cattle for a few days, although a bit eaten out.

Next day the cattle tally was on. Well, the cattle may have been considered quiet, but this was to be a very interesting day. All hands were in the saddle early, and the mob was loosely mustered onto the big open plain. Early enough, boss Rowly Edkins with a tally clerk, and accompanied by a couple of Boulia agents and their tally clerk, representing the vendors of the cattle. The cattle were now strung out in a thin line and dribbled past the bosses, sometimes fast enough to keep the pencillers pretty busy. Toward midday the first count had been completed, and there was a break pending a second count in the afternoon. A couple of ringers (cattle droving hands) were on duty with the mob for half an hour a "trick", the rest of the company retiring to
a good feed at the camp, the cook apparently having been given the "office" (word) by Hungry Pyjama Jack to put on a good show for the benefit of the bosses, or so the old hands reckoned.

The count went off OK after the midday spell, and toward the late afternoon the bosses seemed to be happy enough about things and the mere men were glad enough to finish up for the day, suddenly realising they were now all a bit tired. A happy camp that night, Mr Edkins had broken a bottle of whisky amongst the bosses and left a couple of the same for the men, personally handing it over. He seemed pleased that the two lads had held their own at the job. Toward sundown Rowly Edkins rode off for Boulia with the local agents.

After tea and round the camp fire of course, the second bottle of hard tack was broached, and the boss drover Pyjama Jack let it be known that he would now sort the hands out into their respective tricks (watches). He, the boss, sought the advice of two old experienced hands, and after discussion explained who would do the night tricks in pairs, all hands but the cook and of course himself, except on special occasions. That left seven hands for the shifts, but the boss promised to put another man on when procurable (he arrived next morning from Boulia). This made ten hands in all to manage nearly fifteen hundred head of cattle: enough now that the mob was thoroughly quiet, but for the first few hundred miles it had apparently taken up to fifty per cent more hands. The boss arranged that a good reliable old hand was mated with an unknown new man. This split Young Bill and Harry Jones up of course, but they expected and wanted it this way, not feeling so confident, naturally enough under the circs.

The horse-tailer and the boss did the "dog watch" (the first) and an hour and a half only, as that was considered fair, the "tailer" having a
fair amount of work looking after all the horses not in use, including
the packhorses, and was expected to give the cook a general hand also.
The idea of the boss taking a trick was not so unusual apparently, but
presumably his idea was to set an example and help sustain morale
amongst the men. The watch for the remaining eight men amounted to a
little over two hours trick for a few weeks, but as the summer advanced
and the nights shortened, the watches soon settled into about two hours'
duration. A drawing from a hat determined the rotation of shifts, and
then one from each shift or so moved round once a fortnight, and mates
could change over with the boss's approval. All this helped to make the
tricks less monotonous and more interesting. One met all the company
separately in turn and got to know them, and if one wasn't satisfied
with the company, the association didn't last long.

Bill's trick mate was a middle-aged fellow called "Coogee", a nickname
of course, but Bill never quite knew the why and wherefore of it. Bill
couldn't bring himself to believe at this time the rumour that Coogee
acquired this nickname whilst going "combo" (living with the niggers)
for a few years, further out in the Territory. He didn't seem that type
of a man, but one could never tell. Their trick was from two a.m. to
four, not exactly the favourite watch.

Young Bill and Harry couldn't help feeling they were going off well
enough with the company. However, the lads' demeanour toward this older
and more experienced company was not altogether spontaneous on their
part, as they had previously discussed the "line" they would adopt, that
of modest and quiet (even deferential) young fellows, willing to learn
and looking to their new mates for guidance: an idea of Harry's of
course, which paid off. As remarked before, there was plenty of joking
anent the lads' brand new everything, from their high-heeled tan
elastic-sided riding boots and black and tan concertina leggings, to
their leather saddlebags and quart pot holders; also waterbags to hang on the hack's chest by a strap over the pommel. But the lads had decided to absolutely laugh and joke off any remark at all about their being new chums etc., and the idea was a good one, the boys eventually emerging pretty popular all round. Incidentally, the lads were not by any means the new chums they were taken for, and this was eventually realised by the old hands, but by this time the boys had gained their point; they were already accepted by the company as a couple of decent young blokes. Of course these old ringers had all the trappings that the lads were sporting brand new, but all their gear had the vote years ago, and their old worn accoutrements were taken for granted.

And so Bill and Coogee were awakened by the previous shift and the boss's old grandfather of a watch was handed on to them. It was considered famous for keeping good time, and was supposed to be adjusted in such a way that the boss could detect if it had been interfered with. It was considered an extremely dirty act by anyone adjusting the time-keeper to shorten his trick. This very seldom happened, but when it did and was detected, it meant instant dismissal for the culprit, who also lost caste forever with his former mates. However, as far as Old Bill can remember, the boss drover was the only one of the company who possessed such a thing as a watch. (As previously explained way back earlier in the story, Come-by-Chance Scotty had raised the point that one reason why Australia was not a civilised country was because only about one man in fifty carried a watch, in the bush anyway.)

Incidentally, the boss coming off the dog watch shift with the horse-tailer discussed, surprisingly enough, the restless state of the mob with a couple of the more experienced hands. Apparently the cattle had been somewhat disturbed by the pushing around during the day and instead of being tired out and restful, the boss's "cattle knowledge"
instinct had discerned they were unduly restive and would require close watching: "They could even stampede into a dangerous rush." And so the boss instructed the horse-tailer to have the necessary horses saddled and tethered handy, a mount for all hands except the cook, and every ringer knowing which mount was his. Every man was also ordered to roll into his blankets "standing", even to his whip and spurs, those who wore them. Some of the less experienced were inclined to snigger at the boss's precautions, but as Bill's trick mate Coogee remarked when taking over their watch, that it was a well-known fact amongst those who knew him (the boss) [that he] had an uncanny instinct, a sixth sense as it were, with the peculiarities of cattle. He, Coogee, didn't expect any trouble, but he respected the boss's opinion sufficiently to "take no chances". One significant incident occurred when relieving the previous ringers. They expressed themselves that "the mob was acting a bit unusual, wouldn't rest (lay down) for long, too often rose together as one beast, as if they may be off at any time. "Watch 'em carefully," they advised, and funny thing, the older hand had an idea the camp was a bit "drummy", that is, limestone caves underground or something similar, caused a peculiar drumming sound when cattle moved over it, which would help to frighten them in their present mood. Incidentally, Young Bill and Harry discussing the prospects of a dinkum rush earlier in the evening, couldn't help wishing the boss's hunch would turn out one hundred per cent true, but then of course they were young and wishing for exciting experience. They had nothing to worry about on this score, they had all they wanted before the night was out.

With newly driven wild cattle it is a definitely established practice to sing, recite, whistle or converse, so as to let them know you are about, and it helps to lull them into contented quietness. As the cattle travel hundreds or thousands of miles and become thoroughly quiet
the practice is somewhat discontinued, except of course in an emergency like the present state of affairs. Incidentally, Bill and the others off trick could hear Jonsey (Harry) bellowing softly in his Irish brogue, about the only song he knew:

There's a pretty spot in Ireland, I'll always claim as my land,
Where the fairies and the blarney, will never never die;
'Tis the land of the shillelagh, and my heart goes back there daily,
To the girl I left behind me, where the River Shannon flows.

And so on for three more verses. Young Bill loved to hear him singing it in the bush some hundreds of yards off. What with his native brogue and the gusto he put into it, to say nothing of a somewhat passable though rugged voice, it was a little fascinating to listen to, and Bill realised some of his new mates were of the same musical taste too. However, Coogee and Bill yawned a little loudly for some time on commencing their trick, and the former went on: "They (the cattle) may rush at that, and if they do, it's anybody's guess which way they'll make. One advantage, it's a pretty big plain and they'll have miles to gallop in most directions before striking much timber of any consequence. Anyway, I suggest this plan, if it's all the same with you!?” Bet your life Bill was glad of the opportunity to agree with any plan drawn up by the experienced Coogee, and let it be known in no uncertain manner. So Coogee continued: "Just supposing they may rush, I'll make straight for the most likely wing and work well up to the lead and try to turn them. You gallop up closely behind me and let 'em have plenty of the lash with as much row as possible. If we don't turn 'em we'll be in a good position when the other[s] come galloping up, which should be in a couple of minutes, and the lot of us should have them ringing almost immediately. Well, they rushed three times between Alexandria and the 'Wheel' (Camooweal), a bad mess once, several had to
be destroyed, and one good stockhorse. Incidentally," went on Coogee, "should the cattle rush toward the ringers' camp, and sometimes they did, there were some good safe trees to shin up, a necessary safeguard if possible in selecting the ringers' camp."
Chapter 15

MORE CATTLE DROVING

Well, the cattle rushed alright, a "dinky-di" one with plenty of go in it. However, the good plan of Coogee's worked out well. After it was over and in discussion with the boss, Coogee denied the plan was his, but the boss knew better. However, the boss seemed to "think Bill knew something about the game", and commended him on his part in the handling of the rush. Bill didn't bother to belittle same (just couldn't afford to be quite as modest as Coogee). The boss now doubled the watch for the remainder of the night.

Well, the lads had got a great kick out of the mob rushing, Harry envying his mate being on trick when it happened, and that part of the tale lost nothing in the telling, Young Bill making the most of it. However, he did have a few scared seconds ("windy" it would have been called during the war shortly to come) before warming up to the thrill of one thousand five hundred head of cattle galloping off in a flash, their hooves fairly thundering over the hard "drummy" plain. They headed somewhat away from the camp, and Coogee immediately galloped along the near side for the leaders. Bill's mount (an old stockhorse of course) already, in the couple or so of seconds before Bill realised the rush was fairly on, was galloping behind its mate without waiting for the "office" from its rider. As "Cooge" (the Abo. name was in time cut short by his new associates, the old hands having earlier acquired the
habit) gained the lead after a very few minutes' galloping, using the lash plenty and loudly, Bill came fast behind following suit. As a matter of fact he was now thoroughly enjoying himself, and it was a continuous thrill, all thought of any danger in the way of falling from the saddle by some mishap or the horse going down being completely forgotten. Bill just couldn't help "working" in a "flash" of comparison with the wild brumby chase he had enjoyed some year or so earlier. He realised the galloping was adjacent to clumps of trees a couple of times, and once through a clump happily the coolabahs (that hardy favourite shade that grows in most parts of Australia) being widely spaced. But Bill knew enough to let his mount have its head, 'twould have been foolish to do otherwise. Every stockman knew a mount experienced at this game could be trusted to pick its way safe as practical through that sort of danger. Then just as Coogee and his mate had the lead turning, it was moonlight enough for the latter rider to discern his mate looking back and then gesticulating with his whip, and Bill knew the other ringers were coming up behind, and within a minute or so several of them were working vigorously to turn the lead inwards on the tail of the mob. In no time now they were "ringing" (that is, going round and round in a circle) and the spaced ringers rode round and round with them. However, the rush was over but as Young Bill and Harry Jones rode round on mounts that were just about human at this game, and smelt the powerful odour of heavily perspiring cattle and stockhorses and heard the roar of thousands of stamping hooves and the distressful panting and bellowing of the mob and the whipcracking, like rifle fire, they felt how good it was to be alive and "this was the game".

It was observed in daylight the following morning that one beast had lost a horn and several others some hair and hide. Anybody could see the boss drover had been pleased to report to the new owner of the good
handling of the bad enough rush resulting in no casualties worth a "bumper", and so the big man Rowly Edkins remarked casually enough to the lads: "Oh well, if ever I can help you fellows in any way, let me know." And Harry and Bill made sure to thank him. As already mentioned, the mob were some fifteen hundred bullocks from the Brunette Downs run, Barkly Tablelands, Northern Territory and carried the famous hatchet brand, and a combination of three or four letters and numbers.¹

Nearly all the country out this way was cattle country, and there was little or no fencing. However, one large station, Warennda, was going over to sheep proper, and apparently some tens of thousands of pounds were being spent in improvements. Only that the lads were wrapped up in their new droving job, this opportunity would have provided a great start for them. They did talk it over but the droving trip won easily, and anyhow the mates agreed this type of opportunity where one could learn to run a woolgrowing proposition whilst one earned the money to finance same, occurred over and over again provided one was willing to work, and ambitious with it.

As a matter of fact the world is small sometimes, and here was a fellow Young Bill knew, boring holes for a wire fence along the stock-route boundary. Did any one of them want a job? He "could get the lot of yez set if yer all wanted it." Bill answered he and his mate would be back after the droving trip, and the post borer answered it would still be on. It took a lot of capital and labour to convert raw cattle country to a one hundred per cent woolgrowing show. Warennda would become the largest sheep station in Queensland, some five thousand

¹This is contrary to the reference in the previous chapter, where the cattle are said to be from Alexandria Downs.
square miles.  

Now that the watch had been doubled, Bill and Cooge caught the daylight watch. However, the cattle didn't seem much like giving further trouble by this time, and the ringers had a quiet enough trick. Confidences were started already (a sure sign of good lasting mateship). Cooge had an interesting tale to tell. He was a city fellow originally, but he'd been out in these "cursed" outback parts for nearly ten years, but didn't Young Bill know the facts? How long had he been out in these parts anyway? "Three years!" Would it surprise Young Bill to know he probably had another four years to go before seeing "inside" again? All this put over serious enough, albeit a little self-consciously too. Yes, if a bloke didn't break loose from these parts within four years, he had seven to go before getting his chance again. Then if the break wasn't made in the seventh year, the poor bloke had another three to go: ten years in all, unless he was to be very lucky. Poor Cooge had done nine years, but was determined to hit the big smoke "this time", no ten for him. Didn't Bill notice the other night he hadn't touched the whisky at all? Bill could swear he saw him take a sly one or two, but wouldn't let on for anything. "No, grog would keep yer out in these parts all yer bloody life": no good to Cooge, wouldn't stop him getting in this time. It appeared the previous trip Cooge nearly got to Adelaide with horses. Then what would you suppose: "I'm b------- if the bloody horses weren't sold on the road a couple of hundred miles short of Adelaide," etc., etc.. Although Bill reckoned this tale a silly enough fabrication, he could only pretend to take his mate seriously.

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2Lavender may have consulted Henry G. Lamond, "Warenda", Walkabout, Vol.21, No.2 (February 1955), pp.40-42. The station was bought by the Australian Pastoral Co. in 1912.
The cattle settled down very quietly after a couple of days, too quiet altogether thought Young Bill and Long Jonsey. Yes, the presence of another Jones on the pay bill necessitated one of them having a distinguishing nickname (nuff said). The lads now came to understand more why some drovers only stuck to the mob for the first few months or so. The routine became too monotonous altogether, and so they'd pull out and make back a few hundred miles and pick up with livelier stock again. Many of them made it a practice (as already mentioned) to come in no further than the Territory border. "Things got too civilised," they reckoned, "once yer crossed into Queensland." As a matter of fact it had been well and truly whispered around that many of these blokes were not game to enter Queensland, they were too well known to the police. One could well imagine the truth of some of this gossip. So many young fellows years before had been mixed up in cattle and horse duffing, and a few in hotter trouble, even in such as a bit of bushranging or worse, so it wasn't hard to understand why this type of bushman preferred to stick to "no-man's-land", the wild Territory.

A peculiar casualty incident happened within a few days of leaving Boulia. A fellow Harry Jones was on with, fortunately in daylight, had occasion to dismount from a very quiet hack for the purpose of easing himself (and in a big way). The horse being quiet, the chap held on to the reins instead of hanging them over some bush or other, or just allowing them to hang loose. This action had probably happened thousands of times in the past pioneering century or so, and nothing unusual happened. However, this old quiet prad got a spot of restlessness, and meaning no harm for sure, playfully pawed at the stooping chap, who stopped a hard enough blow right in the forehead. The horses were still shod; not quite out of the stony country. He immediately collapsed groaning and insensible. Of course Jonsey, who
had been conversing with his mate from a respectful distance, dashed in and examining the fellow, realised the wound was serious enough and called up the boss, who after rough first aid, started him off mounted and supported on either side. The chap was still practically out to it. However, on travelling a very few miles a party of bush workers were able to run him in their light buckboard to the nearest homestead. Fortunately at Boulia was one of the famous Flying Doctor's Inland Mission Hospitals, and a few weeks later a "mulga" wire reported he was out and about again, but his mentality was a little hazy at times, poor fellow! Incidentally, what time the accident occurred [sic] and the whole company was upset and concerned about the poor victim, the author of it all, our "wicked, vicious" old prad was most unconcerned, and adopted the attitude that it couldn't care less. For sure, and in the usual way (the environment of the evening camp fire) the incident was thoroughly discussed. Nobody had ever heard the like, except for a restless or bored horse under similar circumstances pawing at nothing in particular. Their mate was just very unlucky.

Well, nothing much happened on the trip, what with the cattle being quiet, and plenty of feed and water about. Harry and Bill were fairly popular with their singing (such as it was), but the mouth organs were most in demand. The boys were also young enough to skylark a lot, and a set of boxing gloves caused a lot of fun too. Most of the company knew little or nothing of this sport (as against the rough and tumble all-in brawls most of them occasionally got mixed up in), and when Bill and Jonsey got going at it they would kid to be wild with each other and bore in properly. Of course not all the punches could be "pulled", and now and then a good heavy one went home. In turn, the lads actually pretended to be knocked out (albeit stopping a heavy punch or two made the sham more easy of accomplishment) amidst great excitement amongst
the company (off trick of course). Two or three "old narks" didn't appreciate the mucking up, all they wanted was peace and quietness all the time, but nobody considered them at all. The lads reckoned the only one of the company that was up to their jokes was the boss, Hungry Pyjama Jack himself. However, he never said anything or so much as batted an eye.

The country wasn't up to much the first couple of hundred miles or so, and included a fair amount of flat gilgai (flood water scarred) "channel country", with hilly scrubby ridges now and again which helped to break the monotony. But when this phase of travelling was left behind, came the beautiful open Mitchell grass downs once more, with patches of thick and prolific gidgee scrubs. Nearing Winton at last the mob crossed a very big station (even for those parts), Cadell sheep station. Old Bill can't remember the area now, some thousands of square miles. Of course a Cadell stockman was seeing the mob through their country (every station practised the same precaution, it was an unwritten law). Young Bill had a good yarn with this chap whilst travelling on the wing. He was a man of much experience, had been everywhere in Australia where a horseman could ride. Bill happened to remark that he and his mate were a bit disappointed with the present droving trip, finding it monotonous and boring. The man of experience said, "If you blokes want to see more life at this game, you'll have to go right out, don't mess around," he advised, "go down to Townsville and catch the steamer for Port Darwin. Then don't hang around in Darwin, get a lugger down the coast to the Victoria River, get down there just as the wet is taking up (wet season lasts up there from November-December to March-April). You'll have no trouble getting a mob 'in' from one of those big stations out there, preferably try Victoria River Downs or Wave Hill. They send tens of thousands away every year, and you'll find them lively enough. They'll
break every other night for weeks and sometimes in broad daylight. A fair proportion of them are still hunted by the niggers, and they're properly wild and frightened. They'll bolt every time they get a whiff of the 'myalls' (wild blacks)."

Young Bill was very pleased that Harry was keen on the venture, and of course they had been advised this procedure before, by men who knew what they were talking about. And so the lads planned to be off in time to arrive on the Victoria River by the following March.

At last the mob camped on the Western River, a mile or so from Winton. Bill and Harry approached Pyjama Jack ref. a few hours off in the evening to "do" the town. Pyjama Jack didn't exactly rush in to cooperate, probably suspecting all hands would follow suit, but gave his blessing, perhaps surmising they would go in any case, perhaps even resent his attitude and throw the job in. "In their own time of course, must be back for their tricks," which happened to be in the early hours after midnight. So the lads rode their usual mounts into Winton, and walked into their old pub where they had left their ports and decent clothes. They looked what they were: a couple of lousy, well dusted over "long range" drovers. A couple of drinks with the boys in this attire, then escape to a bedroom and their decent clothes. However, after a shower and shave, smart enough suits (albeit a little crumpled), collars and ties, the boys felt like squatters. Now the two hotel girls were hanging around, and weren't the boys willing too. As a matter of fact the girls were considered "good sorts", the only objection being (so the town lads reckoned) they were definitely not "good iron", meaning they were strictly moral. This was saying a whole lot in their favour, being as they were in an environment of a vast majority of men who generally had plenty of "dough" and of course were women hungry, having been starved for months and years of female society.
Well, as Harry said, better that they put their time in with these girls who didn't drink at all and stick to a couple of drinks only themselves: the girls wouldn't mind the boys having one or two, so long as it remained at that. If the lads put their time in with the boys they'd probably finish up too full to get back and do their trick round the mob.

Picture shows had not yet started in Winton (although Longreach had a comparatively good one). One of the lovers' walks was a stroll down to the famous Winton bore (which of course supplied the town water). It wasn't much different to any other bore except that it was actually boiling, or so the Wintonites reckoned. However, it was at least a very few points off boiling. Swagmen camped on the spot never required a fire for cooking. Even corned beef was thrown in toward the actual overflow, on a line and in a sugarbag, and cooked up in the usual time.

The pubs closed out that way at ten or eleven p.m. (that is, when they closed at all). About this time the boys changed into their rough droving clothes and the girls, who boarded at the pub, hanging round the door in the meantime, everyone getting the most out of the "change". However, the lads had a couple of final drinks and kissed the girls goodnight in front of everybody. Bill's partner actually whispered, "Like to see you again when you can manage it," and Young Bill intimated as much in return. And so, mounting their trusty nags they rode off into the night amidst much joking and chiacking from other girls and lads, most of whom Harry and Bill knew during their previous connection with the prosperous town of Winton.

It was a wonderful starry night, and just enough moon (but the boys had found that much out earlier in the evening). Only one thing wrong: the ride back to the mob was too short. The lads had imbibed just
enough liquor and were feeling good. "Been the life tonight," remarked Young Bill. His mate thoroughly agreed, and went on: "What'll we do out the Territory way for 'long haired mates', settle on the pick of the myalls' gins?" whereupon both laughed (probably at the want of a better joke). However, the lads hadn't witnessed all of Australian bush life yet, although they had heard enough of a certain side of it that wasn't discussed in the "naisest sacaeity", but they caught up with even that in due course.

And so the mob moved on, and approaching Longreach in the course of time were driven round to the north side of the reserve and onto the northern stock-route, and straight on for Rowly Edkins' Bimbah station, only some twenty miles or so out from the 'Reach. Here Mr Edkins with others of his kind who no doubt had shares in the mob, put in an early appearance and of course were very interested in their cattle. Easy to see Rowly Edkins was pleased with the mob's condition, would not take much "topping off" (fattening for market). That's why Pyjama Jack was a good boss drover: he could deliver the stock in as good condition as could be expected.

On reaching Bimbah station (valuable grazing country, and highly improved for those parts) the cattle were subjected to the same routine as when taking over at Boulia. The count was exactly no losses at all. This result was good for Pyjama Jack, and good for any of his hands whom he cared to recommend to Rowly for a job. Young Bill and Jonsey sensed this state of affairs some weeks before reaching Bimbah and were watchful that Pyjama Jack noticed they seemed to be keen on the job, and

3 Bimbah homestead is about twelve miles from Longreach on the Muttaburra road.
were always on the alert: some more of Harry's scheming; "crawling" some of the tough old ringers would have called it. So after drawing their few weeks' pay; three pounds ten shillings per week and keep was considered fair treatment, especially with a packhorse plant, which generally meant the tucker was rougher than when the outfit included buckboard or wagonette etc. [sic]. This contention was true enough, but a packhorse drover generally paid a few bob higher wage. Why a good drover like Pyjama Jack stuck to packhorses deliberately instead of collecting a good vehicular plant, nobody but himself would know. No doubt he was naturally a mean and hard man, but as is said, "It takes all sorts to make a world," and Pyjama Jack was one of them. Yet he always managed to muster good drovers (ringers) on the whole. Probably the extra ten bob a week had a lot to do with it.

Forgot to mention, Rowly Edkins turned up now and again in his big motor during the trip in from Boulia, just to see how the mob was getting along. He was generally accompanied by two or three other boss types and some of the most expensive brand of whisky too, so the ringers reckoned (and Young Bill and Jonsey reckoned it a good bet too).

The upshot was that Pyjama Jack, having no droving on at the moment and handled tactfully by Harry, got Pyjama Jack's guarantee to mention the two lads as good and reliable workers etc., who had apparently done plenty of fencing and yard building. The two mates (putting other hands on when necessary) built or rather added to the other horse- and cattle-yards at the homestead, and a fair lump of a sheep yard some miles out on the run. Then for good measure they built a couple of pigsties in near, too near, the homestead.

With a few days' break over the Christmas holidays at the 'Reach (Longreach), 1913-14, Christmas and New Year came and went. One trip
into town a little later, the mates were actually obliged to swim their horses for a few yards over a backwash of the Landsborough River. A fellow acquaintance accompanying them took a picture of them in the act, and it looked pretty good, the riders looking like the manager and overseer of Bimbah station in their smartly laundered linen etc. (although baching, the homestead housemaids for a consideration were attending to all the mates' washing). Bill was about nineteen at this time, and Harry a few years older.

Boss Rowly Edkins had plenty of work planned for the lads, but they were determined to carry out their resolve ref. the Northern Territory, and it was now time to get going. The boss was sorry to see them go. Mr Edkins was interested in the Northern Territory, and when he learnt they planned to go straight to the Victoria River, he explained he had an old friend out that way, a Mr Dick Townshend: "Think he's still out there, he was managing Victoria River Downs for years, lost his wife out there," etc., etc.. "I admire the pluck of you lads going out that far, believe life is very hard and lonely, but it's the land of opportunity I really believe, for young fellows like yourselves who are determined to get on. No doubt you plan to have your own property some day. If you like I'll write out a reference especially for Dick Townshend, and if you don't find him out that way, you can use it to advantage with anyone for that matter." "Thanks Mr Edkins, thanks very much indeed," from both lads together. Rowly had much to say about the Northern Territory and of course the company had to listen: it was quite apparent to the lads by this time, the boss had been imbibing in his "best brand", and now came an invitation to join him in a spot, which the boys did, and after some more light talk, cordially shook hands with the lads and

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4This would be the Thomson River.
Derelict Yards, Bimbah: "The two mates... built, or rather added to,... horse and cattle yards at the homestead."
wished them the best of luck. Yes, Rowly Edkins was a big man in every way.