

THE DUNSTAN RUSH IN OTAGO.

BY CRAW LINN.

THE great rushes of Gabriel's Gully and Weatherston's Flat were over, and the miners who had been fortunate were returning to Victoria in 1862 as fast as they had come over in 1861. There was a lull for a time, and the speculative business men of Melbourne, who had leased lands from the 'old identities' of Dunedin at fabulous ground rents, and run up stores and hotels regardless of cost, began to doubt the wisdom of their investments. Thousands of men were on their beam ends in the Caledonian Camp—as Dunedin was called in those days, and numbers were employed by the City Council at five shillings a day to assist in shifting Bell Hill into the sea, and making the main street of the city which runs now from the south recreation ground to the Water of Leith. But a sudden change came o'er the spirit of the dream, and one and all awakened to new life when Hartley and Riley arrived in town with seventy odd pounds weight of gold obtained from a bar of the Molyneux river. The story was that there were hundreds of bars jutting into the river, and the gold washed down by the floods lodged in the crevices of the rocks; anyone could get it; there were a hundred miles of river, the banks all full of gold. Ballarat, Forest Creek, Bendigo, the Obens were nothing to be compared to this new El Dorado. Dunedin went mad—nothing less—it was Melbourne in 1852 all over again with Scotch variations. Parties were formed and hundreds of men without money or provisions or the slightest knowledge of the country set off for the interior of Otago,

LURED BY THE IGNIS FATUUS OF GOLD

they were reckless of consequences.

I formed one of a party of eight. It don't matter who they were because they are all dead now except myself, and one other fellow who has become a baronet, and knows how to wear the title because he and his forefathers were apprenticed to the trade. We left Dunedin in the old paddle steamer Samson for Waikouaiti, and landed on the Spit by the aid of Maoris, who carried us ashore on their shoulders for half a crown a head. I am ashamed to say that a magnificent native girl, called big Mary, had me in charge, and insisted upon having my pipe instead of the half crown I offered for the hug ashore. I had kissed her dusky cheek and begged her not to drown me, and her glorious eyes danced and her gleaming teeth shone like pearls as she scorned the filthy lucre, more credit to her noble instinct. I have loved the race ever since.

There was one bush pub then at Waikouaiti and little else, but we made acquaintance with a baker and got him to make us a hundred pounds of biscuits, and as his brother had a bullock dray several parties joined together and chartered it. We were

A CONSIDERABLY MIXED CROWD,

all in high spirits, as there was no doubt about the gold. Indeed, I had promised one of my mates, a married fellow, to let him have my share of the first week's gold to send to his wife in Melbourne. My party had a 16 x 12 tent, tools, provisions, and a cradle in sections, which could be screwed together on the field. We were mad with impatience to start, but our bullock driver was a cool Scotchman, and would not be hurried. We got underweigh at last on a track that led to where Palmerston stands now; it took all day to get about ten miles, as the dray got bogged about every half hour, and sometimes had to be dug out. But there were enough able-bodied scamps to haul the dray without the aid of the bullocks, and if profanity is of use under any such circumstances, the atmosphere was full of it; and what exasperated us more than anything was that men were passing us all day long carrying light swags, so that night we held a council, and it was agreed that some of each party should go on and carry all they could, and the others stick to the dray. Four of my party and four other fellows agreed to travel together and share expenses and our big tent. So as soon as it was daylight we were on the *qui vive* making up swags and arranging for our tramp over the mountains of Otago. I carried the tent, and a 16 x 12 canvas tent is no joke of a load of itself, but this one had a leg of mutton in one end and a lot of biscuits in the other; it was rolled up in the form diggers call a collar, and I wore the concern round my neck. My particular chum, the married fellow who had never roughed it in his life, being of the merchant clerk persuasion, carried the tools, or he would have carried them if he could, but he had managed to tie them up so ingeniously that he and they got mixed together and had to be constantly separated. He was in trouble all day long. No sooner had he got the point of a pick out of his eye than a long handled shovel was between his legs. His remarks were equal to the occasion if he were not. He went nearly crazy when a fellow got off a joke at his expense. His name was Matthew Barrasa, and once when he was

quarrelling with his load the fellow remarked: 'Those tools seem to M-Barrasa you very much.' Mat boiled over, and said he would carry the tent and anything he liked to put into it. I took the offer, and he collared the tent and so, of course, it rained nearly all day, his load did not get lighter towards camping time, but as he was as strong as a horse it did not matter.

The way we travelled was through Captain Hamilton's station on the upper Taieri River—there was no township then. About three hundred of us crossed the river one morning and made across the Maniototo Plains for Marison's station to get meat, and it was here that the first trouble took place. It was nearly sundown when my mates and I reached the woolshed near the foot of the Rough Ridge, a range of mountains well named. We pitched our tent in the usual fashion—two long handled shovels for uprights, a clothes line for a ridge pole, secured with a guy and a stay. Then two of our party went up to the station homestead, two miles away, to buy meat. They returned with half a sheep, and an account of how a lot of roughs were threatening the station people and

INSISTING UPON HAVING PROVISIONS WITHOUT PAYMENT.

The fact is that the whole of the seam of Dunedin, the dregs of the former goldfields, were *en route* for the Dunstan, and knew that they had to pass through a sheep station country, and meant to lay the station owners under contribution. The squatters had to stand it as far as their stores went. Men would have starved but for them, and I bear testimony that the runholders of Otago acted like men on the occasion, and gave all they had—did it well too.

On the particular night at Marison's woolshed the men kept rolling up till there must have been five hundred camped in and around the shed. As there is no firewood of any description in that treeless country of course the sheep pens were soon doing duty for cooking purposes. My mate—the baronet that is now—looked on and frowned, but said nothing. He was a splendid made fellow fully six feet and a perfect athlete. He and I had met in Melbourne and knew all about each other, so that when I saw a dangerous gleam in his eyes I was prepared for something to happen, and followed him into the woolshed. A rough-looking fellow with an axe in his hand was just about to demolish the wool sorting-table when Sir Philip said quietly, 'Come now, there is enough damage done to private property already. Leave that table alone.'

'Who the blank blank are you? Get out of the road or I'll drop you.'

The words no sooner left the man's mouth than out went Phil's left, and down went the fellow and lay where he fell. Then Phil sprang upon the wool press and addressed the crowd.

'Listen to me, boys,' he said. 'I call upon all worth the name of men to assist me in protecting the property of the man who owns this wool shed. Do not allow any wanton or unnecessary destruction. Burn as little timber as possible in boiling your billys, and don't allow yourselves to be set down as a lot of cowardly blackguards who took advantage of the unprotected position of the squatters to burn and destroy their property.'

The respectable element prevailed after all, and only the sheep pens and some of the flooring were used for cooking purposes that night and the following morning.

We began the ascent of the rough ridge by a track that led, we were told, to McPherson's Station in Ida Valley, some twenty miles distant. It was a climb. No sooner had we got to what we thought must be the top when another mountain stared us in the face; this happened so often that Barrasa sat down on a boulder and said it was no use travelling any further in a country that had no top to it. We managed it at last, and the view was almost worth the fatigue. The Maniototo plains lay stretched out below for twenty miles or so with the Taieri River winding through them like a silver thread. All was in a state of nature then. Now there is a large population along the banks of the river, which rises occasionally when the snows melt and makes it lively for the settlers. We reached McPherson's in the valley nearly dead beat, and found

THE SQUATTER AT BAY.

so to speak. Phil made a proposal that he should kill sheep for the men and charge a shilling a pound for the mutton. Those who did pay would help to make up for those who did not. I do not think much advantage was taken of this arrangement, and the good-natured Mac handed out his stores as far as they would go, and started two bullock drays to town for more. After about a week of the roughest travelling I ever experienced, we just arrived at Mr Stranach's station on the Manuherikia River, and were informed that Mr Black, another station owner, was

expected on the following day with a dray load of potatoes. Black's No. 1 and No. 2 diggings were named after this same gentleman afterwards. About three hundred men waited for the potatoes, and Mr Black brought two loads instead of one. By this time Phil had become a kind of authority, and he arranged the price of the potatoes with Mr Black, but not before he had to give another lesson to the fellow who wanted the wool table to boil his billy. This free and independent individual proposed that the men should have the potatoes for a penny a pound or help themselves, but he collapsed when Phil got on top of the first dray and told the men that the price agreed upon was sixpence a pound, and those who were prepared to pay would be served first. About two-thirds were paid for, and there was a scramble for the balance.

The Manuherikia runs into the Molyneux about five miles below the first township formed on the Dunstan, which was called Matton Town, situated on the flat about 200 feet above the river, and within a week of our arrival there was a long street of stores all doing a roaring trade at gold prices—flour, half a crown a pound; meat the same, and all the other articles in proportion. Cartage was a hundred pounds per ton, and horses rose to fabulous prices. Two young Scotch fellows, sons of a small farmer, on the Taieri plains near Dunedin, did a smart thing. Their father had a big old bullock that would draw a sledge. They improved on the idea and packed him; he carried four hundred-weight of flour and stuff up to the Dunstan, and then his masters slaughtered him and opened a butcher's shop with his body.

The Molyneux was not all that had been stated of it, but the gold was plentiful, and, as usual, some got it and others didn't—more didn't—amongst the latter my party. We pitched our tent down on the river bank, having first to clear away the long tussock grass, and took possession of a small bar which we worked with indifferent success for a fortnight, in fact we had not paid expenses when our mates arrived with the bullock dray, and in less than a week the party broke up and each went his separate way. Phil and I agreed to stick together and bought out the rest.

We two fellows lay in our big tent calculating our resources the first evening we were by ourselves when we heard an uproar of voices. We were out in a moment and not too soon either. Somehow the grass had caught fire on our side of the river and

A SHEET OF FLAME WAS TRAVELLING BEFORE THE WIND towards us at, I don't know how many knots an hour. Phil gave one look, whipped out his sheath knife, cut the strings of the tent fly, and dragged it on to the bar of the river. I followed with his opossum rug and my own. The next minute the fire reached our camp and Phil said, 'Lie down in the water, I forgot the powder.'

We both soused in and awaited results; the suspense was of short duration—an explosion, and all was over. We crawled on to the bar and looked round us. Our tent was blown to smithereens, and the fire was dancing away down the river bank clearing off everything that would burn. It was the quickest bit of mischief I ever saw in my life.

'Now, what's to be done?' said Phil.
'Go up to the township and get some dry clothes,' I answered.

'Let us see if my brandy flask has escaped the general wreck,' he said.

It had, and we found it in the smoking ruins, and took a good pull each.

The fire was not an unmixed evil, for it cleared the river bank all the way to the junction of the Manuherikia, and saved the miners a lot of work, though it left Phil and I what poor Artemus Ward would call a ruined community. Our cradle was all right because it was on the bar; but that, the rugs and the fly were about all that we owned except the money in our pockets, which did not amount to twenty pounds altogether, nevertheless we laughed and went up to the township and got dry clothes. We avoided the liquor because that sold on the Dunstan at the start was the most villainous poison that ever was retailed on a goldfield at a shilling a nobbler.

The fact of the gold being plentiful and easily obtainable was now thoroughly established, and the new town situated where Clyde is now grew like scarlet beans. Paper hotels, stores, dance rooms were run up regardless of expense, and all the hangers on of the gold miner appeared upon the ground like magic. Timber was 2s 6d per superficial foot, waggons laden with boards and scantling arriving every day. One great pest there was in the form of rats; they swarmed everywhere, and a well-known Dunedin character, one Jock Graham, stole all the cats and kittens he could lay his hands upon, carted them up and sold them to the storekeepers at £4 and £5 apiece. One fine tabby he refused to sell for less than £7, because, as he coolly stated, the animal belonged to the Provincial Hotel, and he had shepherded her for two nights before he could catch her. Everyone laughed, and Jock sold his—or rather other people's—cats well.

As soon as the news of the good field arrived in Melbourne

THE MINERS BEGAN TO RETURN TO OTAGO IN THOUSANDS, and very soon all the easily obtained gold on the river bank