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A BUSHMAN AFLOAT

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ADELAIDE.

Arrived at Largs Bay on March 14. A train-ride of seven or eight miles through several sand-ridden suburbs brought us to the capital of S.A. Adelaide is without doubt the slier-tail of Australian cities. It is piquant and more respectable than the average vestryman. The near hills that stared out so sharply in the morning air, the jingle of the horse-trams, give it the appearance of a Mexican city.

We found parks and churches, and more parks. In our haste to be rid of a telegram we mistook the G.P.O. for another church. The hurrying crowds and gangs of loiterers so apparent within the precincts of Melbourne and Sydney Post Offices are nowhere visible here. Two or three boys idled within its court-like entrance. A strange man with American whiskers and accent stated in a loud voice that we were in the city of the dead. He said that several more or less dead people haunted the Post Office during business hours in quest of stamps and other refreshments.

He walked round us deliberately and offered to show us where to put our letters. He was sorry, he said, for people who came to the city of the dead. He had come there himself, only a month before, under the impression that it was a living, breathing place where men could address each other in loud voices and get drunk. He told us in his best Chicago voice that he had offered a patent nickel-plated, stamp-licking machine to the S.A. Government for £600. Nothing had come of it. The Government had merely offered him its silent respectable ear.

Ten minutes later he tried to sell us a gold watch for £3 15/- the one that belonged to his dead wife.

Adelaide is not so tame as it looks. It rose early one morning, recently, and gaoled its ex-mayor on a charge of fraud and embezzlement. Sydney would sooner die of plague or tramar sare than see one of its councillors safely inside a healthy stone gaol.

Some difference between the men of the South. The Sydneite will borrow your last shilling. The Melbourne man is satisfied to toss you for drinks; but the Adelaide chap is simply artful—he waits for you patiently and tries to sell you his grandmother's gold watch.

We heard several girls singing inside an up-to-date restaurant. We entered and ordered breakfast hurriedly. Steak and poached eggs. A red haired girl tripped in singing "Mollie Riley" as she took our order. She told us frankly that she could not help singing when she waited on brown-faced strangers from the Backblocks.

We felt glad. Bill reckons that we ought to give Adelaide a good character. Therefore we take back the opinion ament the artfulness of the city, and apologise by saying that Adelaide is the place where "Mollie Riley" sounds well with poached eggs.

THE BOAT CATCHER.

We returned to the station in time to see the 12.30 train depart. Nice fix. Steamer bound to leave Largs Bay at 2 sharp. We fretted up and down the platform until the 12.30 started, hoping that some unforeseen accident would delay the Orotava another half hour.

Mail steamers have a sticky habit of sailing on time. When we arrived at Largs Bay we observed the Orotava moving slowly and gracefully from her an-

chorage. Here was a dilemma! Only a few shillings in our pockets, and no possible hope of catching her before she reached Marselles. Our luggage, circular notes, etc., were steering cheerfully towards the horizon.

While I was staring dumbly at the departing vessel, Bill had leaped down the pier-steps and button-holed a grey-whiskered plub of a man squatting in the stern of a small motor-launch. I heard Bill's voice rise above the thrash of the tide; I saw his hands poised between heaven and sea.

The man in the motor launch sat still as could be; his glassy, sea-blown eyes gazing into space. And Bill's voice was round and above him in nine different keys. He explained that all his hopes of future salvation lay aboard the fast-moving mail steamer. Would the kind gentleman, who owned the launch give chase and put us aboard for a reasonable sum—five shillings, say?

The light of reason came slowly into the launch proprietor's eyes. He drew a short pipe from his pocket and scraped it carefully with a knife. "Blamed if we ain't goin' to have some weather!" he said huskily. "Hit black over Semaphore way."

Bill sat beside him and held his hand half fiercely. He explained that the mail boat was leaving us behind. He repeated his argument in a voice full of suppressed rage.

The little old man heard him sorrowfully, but made no attempt to put off. He told us that the business of catching mail boats was full of peril and hardships. Only a month before his launch had been struck by a departing steamer's propeller while endeavouring to put a couple of desperately-belated passengers aboard.

"We'll make it half-a-sovereign, then," said Bill, hoarsely. "And we'll take all chances."

The launch-owner glanced dreamfully at the skyline as though it were a distant relation of his. By no word or smile did he acknowledge Bill's offer.

We breathed miserably and waited for the old man to speak. "If it was for me own child I couldn't do it," he said at last. "It's a terrible long way from here to the steamer. An' she's tearin' up the water more'n I care about."

Bill spoke again, and there was another ten shillings in his voice. Nothing happened. It seemed to us as though the grey-whiskered old battler had been bargaining with desperate passengers all his life. His old sea-blown eyes measured the horizon and the throbbing keel of the outgoing ship leisurely.

"I'll do it for ye," he said after a while; "if ye'll make it another half-crown."

We closed with the offer and sprang aboard nimbly, and were soon tearing homeward in the direction of the Orotava's black smoke-line.

"We ain't got no hope," drawled the old man dismally. "It's a terrible waste of time chasin' a 16-knot mail boat."

The motor-launch fretted and plunged in the wake of the leviathan. A crowd of inquisitive passengers gathered on the starboard side and watched us jubilantly. We could hear them betting on our chance of being taken aboard alive.

"They'll slow down when they sight us," said Bill hopefully. "They wouldn't leave us behind."

"Them slow down!" grunted the boat-catcher. "Why, if yer wife an' family was cryin' out to ye over the rail they wouldn't let down a pound of steam. Mail boats ain't got no feelin's, young man."

The great onrushing steamer was indifferent to our presence. Like a blind colossus she wore seaward, hooting and clearing the blue with her giant shoulders.

Several lady passengers waved their handkerchiefs to us.

"If ye'd make it another five bob," broke in the old man, "I'll open her out an' chance it."

We counted out another five shillings. The old man pocketed it lazily and smiled. "Hold on!" he shouted suddenly. "We'll board her on the port side."

The launch seemed to leap forward through the blinding spray, shivering and rattling as the seas slapped her hood and funnel.

Foot by foot we gained on the Orotava until we ran drenched and half-blinded under her port davits. The bos'n's head appeared casually over the rail. He regarded us coldly and with evident disfavour.

"This sort of thing's against the regulations," he said loudly. "Why don't you come aboard in the proper way?"

"Now, Joe!" cried our boat-catcher oilyly. "These two chaps are breakin' their hearts to have a bottle of wine with you."

The bos'n was silent. His head disappeared suddenly; then a long wet rope struck us with the force of a well-fung lariat.

"Up fer yer lives!" shouted the old man. "Up an' hold!"

Luckily there was no sea on as we clung tooth and nail to the line. Bill scrambled after me with the celerity of a man-o-war's man. Wet, but grateful, we tumbled over the rail.

An officer passed us smartly as we stepped on deck. Bill saluted sarcastically. "Yer might have waited half a minute," he said loudly. "Me an' me mate represent 80 pounds' worth of passage money."

The officer looked witheringly at Bill but made no reply.

"Suppose," continued Bill, following him leisurely; "suppose one of your fifty-pound lifeboats had broken loose; would you have stopped to pick it up?"

The officer turned, eyed him curiously, and vanished down the saloon stairs.

"My word you would!" cried Bill. "You'd have slewed round an' thrown the patent gasometer over the ship's par-alloegram."

The stewards are amiable fellows. Constant intercourse with passengers makes them nimble-minded and human. The ship's officer is a different fellow. If you address him suddenly he will look at you for 90 seconds without answering. And if you say things about his gold braid and unimpeachable pants he will retire and invite another uniformed creature to look hard in your direction.

Most of the firemen and sailors say "Haa!" whenever Bill passes along the deck. He doesn't mind. He told them the other night that he'd sooner be mistaken for a crow than a ship's greaser.

It must be admitted that he annoys these Cockney firemen. Whenever they come up from below he barks at them from the taffrail. It is a real kind of a bark that causes them to skip round and claw the air with both hands. Bill learned the barking trick when he lost his dog while taking a mob of sheep from Gunnselah to Narzabri once.

The run across the Bight from Adelaide to Fremantle is sometimes an uneventful performance. While idling below we discovered casually that our mattresses were stuffed with seaweed. No

wonder we sleep like Polar bears. Seaweed makes an excellent bed. It gives out a slight flavour of ozone not unlike St. Kilda beach at low tide.

We intend asking the ship's doctor whether seaweed mattresses are intended as a cure for insomnia.

Nice little article for a journalist.

Seaweed mattresses: A Cure for Broken-down Nerves! London likes to hear about its broken-down nerves.

"MAN OVERBOARD!"

Sunday was an eventful day. An Austrian gum-digger from New Zealand had been acting strangely ever since he came on board. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon he scrambled over the rail and plunged into the sea. His comrade, a big-bodied, black-whiskered fellow, tore round the decks snatching frantically, at all the available lifebuoys and hurling them over the side.

The stewards forcibly restrained him from denuding the ship of its stock of life-saving appliances.

Strange how quickly a man disappears when a moderate sea is running! The eye is continually baffled by the swift-changing surface currents. It was at first surmised that our man had been swept astern and caught by the propeller.

The Orotava slewed round; a boat was lowered in fairly good time, and was soon pulling back through the long white wake astern.

No sign of the gum-digger anywhere. The boat cut here and there travelling far until it was lost to view.

A mail boat is an impatient of delay as a woman with an appointment. She fretted and heaved, while several officers searched the wave hollows from the bridge for a glimpse of the unfortunate man. Five hundred people crowded the sides peering across the long insliding seas that swept under our stern.

A flock of sea hawks and albatrosses circled in groups at a certain point in our wake. A dozen glasses covered them to ascertain whether the struggles of the Austrian had caused the unusual commotion among the birds.

Broad-winged mollyhawks and black shags joined the scurriage, thrashing and screaming in mid air as though anxious to share the spoil.

"Those big birds will drown a man," said one of the sailors to me. "I've seen 'em settle on the head of a swimming boy and drive him under."

"They're a derved sight worse than sharks," added a New York man excitedly. "I got adrift from a whaleboat up in the Barrier, some years ago, and a big, skulking cow-bird came at me claw and wing as if it wanted my two eyes for breakfast."

"A man can't fight birds when he's swimming for his life. He's got to chew up all his bad language and duck his head," continued the American. "I ducked every time it clawed my head until I was blinded, near silly and half drowned. Every time my bald head showed above water the derved wings hit me on the face and jaw."

"Then I felt my mate grip me by the shoulder and haul me into the boat. Guess he wasn't a second too soon either. About a dozen other cowbirds had swarmed round, and started sharpening their claws against my scalp."

A sudden shout from the Orotava's stern told us that another boat had been lowered. A minute later we beheld the missing Austrian being lifted into the