

so that a dim light stole in between the branches. There was no marked track to be followed, but Carew had been a good bushman all his life, and could make a fairly straight course to where he judged the house to be. At times in his haste he stumbled over the creeping supplejacks that strewed the way, or the fallen trunks of trees.

The bush was not more than a square half mile in extent, and he had traversed perhaps half the distance when the first puff of smoke stole in through the trees. Carew caught his breath hard and started to run. The pungent smell of the burning trees grew stronger every moment. Crashing through a thicket of fern he came face to face with the flames. He recoiled and tried another point, only to be again driven back. The whole undergrowth was blazing. Had he been in any condition to reason he might have known that the very presence of the flames showed him to have reached the outskirts of the bush, where the vegetation was dry as tinder from the long drought. It would probably have taken days for the flames to have reached the fresh, green heart of the bush. A bold rush would have taken him through the flames in safety. But, exhausted as he was, and confused by the darkness and the smoke he did not realise this. After trying at some half dozen points, always driven back, blinded and choked, the poor fellow lost his head entirely. He rushed wildly up and down through the labyrinth of trees, stumbling blindly and shouting for help.

PART II.

At eight o'clock the old Weston couple put out the lamp and prepared to retire for the night.

"Where's the maid?" asked the old man as he took his candle.

"Peggy! Peggy!" cried her grandmother, in a cracked voice.

Peggy had been sitting in the porch, watching the men at the fire. Now, she came in, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Grandfather," she exclaimed, "come and see the burn. The whole side of the mountain seems alight, and the men are working in the clearing like mad."

Old Weston laughed contemptuously. He was of the aggravating "oldest inhabitant" type. Whatever had been seen, heard, or done he had seen, heard, or done something greater.

Now he jerked a contemptuous thumb towards the mountain and said:

"Burn! Call that a burn? Why, I mind the time when the whole range was afire, like the 'burnin', fiery furnace' we read of in Scripture. Why, this'd be nothing but a bonfire beside it—a bonfire!"

He shuffled off, chuckling to himself. The old woman prepared to follow, and Peggy said, timidly, "Mayn't I stay up a bit longer, granny? I'm not sleepy."

"No, no!" was the reply. "Young maids should be abed early for their beauty sleep. I always went to bed early in my young days."

She was old and thoughtful and withered now, but at the thought of her youthful charms she bridled and smiled.

Peggy said no more but went to her room. Arrived there, however, she blew out her light and sat at the open window dreaming her maiden dreams, with many a blush and smile in the darkness.

By and bye she began to nod. So she threw herself dressed as she was upon the bed and was soon sound asleep. She had slept for what seemed to her a few minutes when she suddenly started up broad awake. Her room was full of smoke and as light as day, lit by a dancing red glare from without. A sound of roaring and crackling drew her to the window, and a cry of dismay broke from her. Outside was a tossing sea of fire, gorse and titree and the waist-high fern burning furiously. Running from window to window Peggy saw that the house was surrounded.

There was every reason for alarm. The fern fire, though they burn fiercely while they last, soon burn themselves out, but the house timbers were old and rotten and dry as tinder. Any moment a spark might light and set the roof in a blaze. Peggy roused the old people with difficulty. They slept heavily, seeming dazed with the smoke that filled the room. The old

man whimpered and shook like a frightened child, and refused for some time to leave his bed. At last they induced him to get up, and Peggy ran to the back porch to see what could be done.

As she stood there she saw a man break from the trees at the back of the house and stagger rather than walk across the yard. The next moment he stood beside her.

"Jack!" she shrieked, in mingled horror and relief.

Jack it was. Hatless, shoeless, blackened and burnt, his clothes hanging in tatters upon him.

"Water," he gasped, hoarsely, and sank down upon the step.

Peggy dashed inside and returned with a tin pannikin of water, which he drank greedily. When Carew had found his way cut off, he had almost lost his reason for the time being, exhausted and dazed as he was. He had rushed about wildly, seeking a place where he might break through. At last, quite by accident, he had hit upon a cattle track, which had led him in sight of the house.

"Jack, what is to be done?" cried Peggy, and he looked up in a stupid way, muttering vaguely, "must get out of this," "not safe."

Just then a call from the house made Peggy turn and run in again. When she returned she found Carew fast asleep, with his head upon his arm, utterly done up and exhausted. She shook him by the arm, and he stirred drowsily. Evidently no help could be expected from Jack.

The poor girl felt helpless indeed. A spark lit upon an outhouse, and the roof was soon in a blaze. It caught the fence and ran along rapidly towards the house. Peggy looked longingly over the burning gorse to the right of them, where the vivid, rank, green of a raupo swamp offered a haven of refuge. But how to traverse that sea of fire unscathed? Suddenly an inspiration flashed across her mind. Somewhere in that paddock was a track that she used to drive the cattle to water every day. If they could reach that they might be saved. Confused by the darkness and smoke she could not tell exactly where it was, but she felt confident she could find it, partly because she did not dare think of failure, and partly because of an inner conviction that God always meets our greatest extremities with His surest aids.

Almost dragging Carew to his feet, and taking the trembling old woman on her arm, they set off. It was a slow, painful journey. The old people moved with tottering steps, and Carew stumbled blindly, almost walking in his sleep. Twice he threw himself down, forgetting everything in his craving for sleep.

For weeks past he had been out night after night, working against the fires and to-night he had reached the limit of his endurance. Peggy implored and prayed and commanded. "For the love of heaven," he pleaded once, "let me sleep! Go on, and leave me." But she refused, and he stumbled on again.

The old man, too, was in a panic, and it was all she could do to restrain him from making back for the house. He whimpered and whined and besought her to "be a good maid and let him go," but she refused harshly, and he seemed cowed.

They reached the slip rails at length, and to the girl's relief she found them only charred. She let them down with trembling fingers. Old Weston declared with a piercing shriek he would go no further, and his wife hid her face in her hands and moaned. Even the girl's brave spirit shrank appalled. The passage looked so desperately narrow, and twisting tongues of flame lunged and darted across in the gusts of wind.

Carew, suddenly, made a mighty effort, and threw off the sleep that was overpowering him. Putting Peggy aside he strode forward and took the lead. The horrors of the awful journey, down that lane of fire! The distance was really very short, and the track considerably broader than appeared in the uncertain glare. The hot breath of the flames fanned their faces; and the smoke blinded and choked them. Shrieking, stumbling, they hurried on, and at length reached the swampy ground. The flames were almost down to the swamp-edge, and the heat was overpowering.

They flung themselves down on the damp ground, exhausted, and Carew immediately fell asleep again. The others lay there in wakeful silence, save for the old man's whimpering and moaning. Peggy fixed her eyes on the red glare in the sky. With a start she saw the old roof-tree that had sheltered her, all her life, was now a mass of flame. Hour after hour they lay there, chilled to the bone, fitfully dozing and waking.

When morning came a scene of desolation met the eye. The flames had died down, but a dismal cloud of smoke hung over the grey waste of ashes, and blackened stumps of gorse and titree. Here and there little fires still burned. Carew slept till the sun was high in the heavens. Then Peggy waked him. He sat up with haggard looks and blood-shot eyes. The old people were still asleep.

Then they told of how they had spent their night to each other, and so wrought upon was the sober and cautious Jack that there, in that strange time and place, he told his love. And Peggy? Did she hesitate because he, her lover, was dirty and grimed with blood-shot eyes and haggard face? No! A thousand times no.

They waited till noon before they dared trust themselves on the hot ashes, with their well-nigh shoeless feet. Then, faint and hungry, by slow degrees, they traversed the wastelands. In the second paddock they met David Carew, Ashley and several of the neighbours, going in search of them. How wild was the joy of the meeting! How incoherent the mutual explanations. They were borne off to the nearest house and provided with food and clothes.

Pretty Peggy blushed with shyness as her lover told in glowing terms of how her pluck had saved them all, when he was useless. Then she broke down and cried and laughed hysterically with the reaction of it all. They made quite a heroine of her, and though old Weston, quite revived by the food and warmth, declared that it was nothing to what an aunt of his had done, actually sleeping three nights and days in the river, no one paid the least attention to him.

Soon after that memorable night the welcome rains came, and early in the following spring Jack and Peggy were married. They found that gallant mare reached her, but her mad terror of the fire, the wild gallop and the pain had done their work. There she lay dead, and all their lives Jack and Peggy mourned her, who had lost her life in their service.

Fortunes Spent on Holidays.

HEALTH RECRUITING AT £6,000 A WEEK.

Fifty thousand pounds for a single week's holiday is rather a large sum, but this is the amount which the cotton workers of Blackburn have just laid out on their annual vacation.

In all the Lancashire and Yorkshire towns clubs are formed by those who work in the large factories for the purpose of saving money in anticipation of seven days' holiday in the summer, each person putting aside so much a week throughout the year. The money thus saved is, of course, banked by the club, and distributed when the time comes to each family in proportion to the amount saved by its various members. Last year a single family drew out from an Oldham club £74, and though at other times the recipients scarcely knew what luxury meant, they succeeded in spending the entire amount in one short week by the briny. This year the Oldham clubs are distributing £80,000 among their members, all of which will be swallowed up in seven days' diversion.

But these figures pale when compared to the fabulous prices expended by individual members of the aristocracy for a short holiday every year. A certain peer who annually hires one of the finest Scotch grouse moors openly stated the other day that the month of August necessitated his relieving his purse of £100,000 every time it came round. This enormous sum is, of course, made up of several items, the most important being the cost of entertaining, the hire of the shooting, etc., while the cartridges

fired during this short period run up a bill of nearly £1500.

Paradoxical as it may seem, it costs prominent members of society far less to spend a holiday in travelling abroad than in entertaining at their country seats at home. A month's vacation for a party of six, spent in exploring the Continent in the best style, will cost anything from £1000 to £5000, while a houseful of friends could not be entertained at home during the same period for less than the last-named sum, provided, of course, that sport was freely indulged in. To prove this, it is only necessary to state that considerably over two millions goes every year in the hire of shootings, and half that sum in obtaining the fishing rights of salmon and trout streams. Should the host possess pheasant coverts of his own, the cost will probably be even greater than it otherwise would, for rearing the birds necessitates his putting his hand in his pocket all the year round.

When Royalty takes a holiday vast sums of money are spent. The Queen's few weeks on the Continent every spring cost £30,000, but her recent visit to Ireland was even more expensive, and left little change out of £50,000.

The Kaiser assesses his usual visit to Cowes at £20,000, but then he spends a great deal of his time on the water, which considerably reduces the cost. In the olden days a Royal holiday in Britain was unreasonably expensive, for the visiting monarch was expected to leave never less than £5,000 in gratuities behind him. The late Prince Consort was responsible for many reforms in this respect, and a Royal visitor's gratuity bill will now never exceed £2,000.

Eastern potentates when holiday-making in Europe do so regardless of cost. The late Shah of Persia when he visited this country for the last time prior to his assassination was politely informed that it was not the Queen's wish that he should make his sojourn an expensive one, but despite this he managed to part with £80,000 during his short stay. Another prolific spender is Li Hing Chang, and his visit in 1896 cost him nearly £150,000, though the greater portion of this went in the substantial presents he gave to practically everybody he met.

The most expensive holiday of this year is undoubtedly the Shah's. During his recent visit to Europe he was recruiting his health at the cost of £6,000 a week!

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