

He paused with a deep sigh. Then seizing his whip, he continued, "But it all comes to the same thing in the end, we've got to grin and bear it, both you and I. Even you youngsters with the bleeding necks are not so deeply galled as I am; so wire in, ye devils, and do your darudest for another half-mile, and then, as a magnificent reward for your labours, you can go and fill your bellies with the least uneatable rubbish in the old raupo swamp, while I do ditto in camp!"

"Well done, Bullocky! You're half drowned I guess, I never expected you on such a day, and Christmas Eve to boot! Glad you're come, I was right out of stores," roared out the sleek-looking storekeeper as, with an artistic flourish and regular volley of double cracks from his whip, the clumsy team was neatly swung round at the store door.

"You're an artist in your particular line, Bullocky. Come right in and have a nip, you want it badly after a trip in such weather. The boys will unload for you."

"Well, I guess it won't hurt me—there are other things it's good for besides a wet jacket, and I've got 'em bad to night!" answered Bullocky shortly as he accompanied the storekeeper into the store.

I had followed the dray up and entered the store with several other men to get out of the rain and see more of this man who, I felt convinced directly I heard his soliloquy on the road, was Fred. I asked a man standing by what the fellow's name was? "Not a soul in the camp knows," he replied, "they always call him Bullocky, but it irritates him, and I noticed it did more than ever to-night. Why he doesn't give us his real name and ask to be called by it, I don't know. It would be a simple way to save annoyance."

This, then, was the man of whom I had heard Milman speak. He had only been at the camp once before since my arrival, and I was out fishing for eels at the time, and did not meet him.

The storekeeper hastened to pour out a tumbler half full of a fiery compound known by the name of rum by the diggers, bushmen, and Maoris who frequented the camp,

but unrecognizable by the uninitiated. This he presented to the mudstained and exhausted man. It was seized with avidity and quickly gulped, undiluted, down his throat, parched as it was with shouting to his stubborn team. He had sampled it on a previous occasion, and preferred not to prolong the agony of tasting it. It was evidently not to please his palate that he took it; the craving came from below, therefore the quicker it reached its destination the better. A shudder, and a contortion of the face as of one who has swallowed vilely tasting physic followed the operation. And yet, strange to say, Bullocky would repeat the performance as often as he was asked to do so—at least that was the character the man standing by gave me of him.

"God's truth! Jackson, you've overdone the bacey and bluestone this time. No wonder so many poor devils of diggers go off their chumps!" he exclaimed with a sardonic grin as he handed back the glass.

"When I want your opinion about the liquor I'll ask for it, Bullocky. And none of your hints about doctoring liquor and sly grog selling, anyhow! That's a bottle of real old Jamaica I keep for my friends at Christmas time. It's a howling shame wasting it on a man like you who doesn't know the taste of good liquor when he gets it!" retorted the storekeeper sharply.

For a moment a flash came into Bullocky's eyes and his fists clenched ominously, but it passed off, and he replied quietly—"Keep your hair on, old man, I never *said* anything about sly grog selling. All the same, if that's good liquor, you're right—I don't know it, and what's more, don't want to."

"Well, you needn't drink it if you don't like it, there are plenty here who do. Come on, boys, and have drinks round!"

"Yes I need, much as I deplore the necessity," chimed in Bullocky again. "Be a Christian for once and pour me out another nip. I'm feeling very low to-night and must have something—gently, please, I don't want the dregs; they ain't nice!" With a more pronounced shudder than before, the liquor disappeared, and he left the store abruptly to unyoke his bullocks.