

put political prisoners on a different level and treat them in a different fashion from other and more sordid criminals. Society is justified in protecting itself from armed attempts at revolution. But the instance of Mr Davitt, with whom men and women of the highest character are proud to associate, is a valuable warning against the fatal blunder which confounds necessary precautions with degrading penalties.

## AT A CALIFORNIA SHEEP RANCH.

IN THREE PARTS.—PART II.

By M. B. GIBSON.

### Tapping a Bee-Tree.

The day after their exploit in catching the cub bears, it became necessary that Jim and Ham-fat should make a trip home, and have an interview with their mother with regard to the condition of their clothes. What that worthy woman would say to them was somewhat uncertain, and the faces of the boys lengthened as they pondered the subject.

They went, however. Bill guessed that his mother would not let them come up to camp again; but in this he was mistaken, for during the afternoon of the next day we heard a long "coo-whoop" down the trail, and saw both heading for the shack, driving the pack-mule, "Old Nig," loaded with vegetables.

They were now arrayed in some old suits which they had outgrown, and their first exclamation was that they had found a bee-tree on the way up.

It was not more than a hundred yards from the trail, they said, and about two miles back from the camp, and they insisted that we must go with them to "tap it" that very night.

"We'll do all the work!" cried Ham-fat. "We only want you to go for company and see the fun. We've planned how to get it."

A mountain-lion had harassed the sheep the previous night, and Bill had intended to watch for the animal that evening; but the boys were so urgent that we yielded and went with them. We started shortly after dusk.

We took the pack-mule, an axe, and two five-gallon tin cans for the honey. Jim had made a hive out of an old nail-keg; for they proposed to get the bees as well as the honey.

There was no moon, but the stars shone brightly, and as the boys had been careful to mark the spot, we had no trouble in finding the tree, which was a stunted oak, about eighteen inches in diameter, standing upon the very brink of a steep, rocky declivity. To fell the tree was out of the question, for it leaned over the crag, and would have fallen at least a hundred feet before striking. Knocking on it with the back of the axe, the boys found that the tree was hollow.

While Bill and I looked on, the two boys lighted a bright fire at the side of the tree, and chopped a hole near the bottom. Listening at the opening, they found that the bees were only ten or twelve feet above the ground. Jim cut a hole as high up as he could reach, through which, by the light of the fire, we could see masses of clear white honeycomb hanging down almost on a level with the hole. The bees had entered through a large knot-hole about twelve feet from the ground. This hole the boys had carefully stopped up at the outset.

Jim now clambered up and adjusted the nail-keg over this knot-hole, propping it up, as he thought, quite securely, with sticks and poles which Ham-fat passed up to him.

When Jim had arranged the keg and drawn out the leaves with which he had stopped the hole, both boys set about gathering sticks with which to make a platform to stand upon while getting out the honey.

They also placed a few live coals in the hole at the bottom of the tree, and heaped piles of leaves and rotten wood over them to make a smoke and drive the bees out.

Bill and I sat and watched their manoeuvres, not a little amused. Their plans seemed to work very well, for the bees began to make the tree hum with their buzzing. They were manifestly pouring through the knot-hole into the keg.

Jim now mounted the platform, and swinging the axe at a lively rate, soon began to lay bare the finest and largest store of honey that I had ever seen in a tree.

We had been joking the lads somewhat, not expecting that they would find much honey in the tree, and we doubted Jim's ability to manage the bees; but everything progressed so nicely up to this time that the boys began to laugh at us in turn, declaring they should secure pack-load of honey besides a large swarm of bees.

But they were too confident. The tree contained not only a great amount of honey, but more bees than I had ever seen in one swarm, and before Jim had half finished chopping away the two or three inches of bark and wood which surrounded the honey, the keg literally overflowed with bees.

Bill and I noticed, too, as we lay upon the ground at a safe distance, that the blows of Jim's axe made the keg totter, and that it

was likely at any moment to come tumbling down upon the heads of the two boys, who were standing directly beneath it.

"Jim," I called out, "your keg is over full of bees! Hadn't you better stop chopping and take care of them?"

"No," said Jim, who evidently distrusted my advice. "The bees are all right, and I'm going to bag the whole nest. Don't fret!" he added, with a sarcastic chuckle. "Maybe you think we don't know how to tap a bee-tree. We'll show you."

Whack went his axe again, but he had not dealt many more blows before down came the keg!

Luckily for the boys, it was thrown a little to one by its side props, and went over the brink of the crag. About a pint of the bees fell down upon them, however, and lauded for the most part on Jim's head.

They were in a stinging mood, and stung fiercely wherever they touched. Jim dropped his axe and jumped to the ground, screaming, slapping, and brushing frantically at the back of his shirt.

Ham-fat fared but little better. They made the hills echo with their outcries. The hills also echoed with Bill's shouts, but his were shouts of laughter.

It was several seconds after the keg went over the crag before I heard it strike. Then it bounded on downward, thumping and bounding, scattering the bees right and left. We found what there was left of the keg a week later nearly a quarter of a mile from the bee-tree.

The boys soon shook off the bees, but were not rid of the smart of their stings so readily. Jim was half inclined to give it up, but Ham-fat's temper was of a more gritty sort. Our laughter had hurt him more than the bee-stings, and he was determined now to have the honey at any cost.

"Laugh away, if it amuses you!" he shouted to us. "Maybe you think we're going to give up, but that's where you are mistaken. We'll have that honey. Come on, Jim, let's finish up the business!"

He and Jim then set to work gathering up damp brush and rotten wood, so as to create plenty of smoke, piling the wet fuel on the coals of the fire about the roots of the oak, a dense smoke was raised, which soon drove away the bees which were buzzing about.

Under cover of the smoke Jim again mounted the platform, and succeeded in cutting away enough of the tree to enable him to get at the honey. They then cleared out large blocks of comb, and soon filled both the cans. There was enough of it, indeed, to have filled several more.

Jim, whose stings no longer troubled him much, was inclined to jeer at us.

"Ha! ha! You smart fellows!" he shouted to Bill and me. "What do you think now? You'd like to help eat this honey, wouldn't you? But you won't get the chance! We'll pack the whole of it down to the ranch, won't we, Ham-fat?"

"Yes, and sell half of it at the store for some clothes. Mother won't want so much honey."

They brought up the mule, and set the large cans, which were about a foot square and eighteen inches deep, into a rawhide pockets which hung from each side of the pack saddle, lashing them firmly in place.

While they were tugging at the ropes Bill and I noticed that now and then a bee was beginning to buzz by again.

They flew blindly, in the darkness, alighting everywhere, crawling rapidly about, and stinging too.

The old mule began to get uneasy. He stamped his feet, flapped his long ears, and shook himself several times. The boys made slow progress.

"Whoa, old mule; what's the matter with you?" cried Jim.

"It's the bees coming back from the keg," Bill whispered to me.

"Why don't you hold the mule?" cried Jim; for the animal was now plunging about, and immediately began to kick violently.

"I can't hold him, Jim," panted Ham-fat. "Something's got into him! Ouch!" he cried, slapping at the back of his neck. "The bees are at me again!"

The bees were no doubt mercilessly at work on the mule. Jerking away from Ham-fat, he kicked, reared, and bucked, as only a mule can, till all the fine comb honey was well churned and thrown over the sides of the cans. Then, finding that he could not rid himself of his tormentors, the brute suddenly wheeled about, struck into the trail, and started for camp at a terrific gallop.

Jim and Ham-fat gave chase, fighting off bees as they ran.

As soon as we recovered from our laughter, Bill and I followed. The mule had left such a trail of honey and bees behind him that we found it prudent to keep to one side. About half a mile further on we overtook the boys, who had sat down to nurse their wounds; for the bees had stung them pretty badly during this last encounter. Neither felt like talking; in spite of Ham-fat's youthful fortitude the big tears would gather in his eyes—tears he disdained to wipe away, but occasionally dislodged with an impatient shake of his head.

When we reached the shack the old mule was standing by the door, his ears lopped over in front, and his head bowed almost to the ground; while, from the tips of his ears to the end of his tail—pack-saddle, ropes, straps and all—he was a mass of dripping honey!