

The Albany Register.

VOLUME VI.

ALBANY, OREGON, NOVEMBER 19, 1873.

NO. 21.

LOVE UP A GUM TREE.

New South Wales is a colony peculiarly liable to floods. Its rivers generally take their rise in the lofty mountain ranges, and in the early part of their course are joined by numberless tributary streams. When the rainy season has set in—which generally commences about the middle of May—the down-pour sometimes continues for six weeks at a time, and then these rivers overflow their banks and flood the surrounding country far and near, forming, in many places, miniature seas. Upon these occasions hundreds of farmers are ruined, thousands of sheep and cattle generally destroyed, and not unfrequently many valuable human lives sacrificed.

Perhaps the district most liable to disastrous floods in the colony is the broad vale of the Hunter, where, every few years, thousands of acres are submerged with a suddenness that is truly appalling. Houses are frequently buried to the chimney-tops beneath the waters, which rapidly form an inland sea of at least a hundred miles in length by a score in width.

In the year 1866 I was quartered at Windsor, a little township about twenty-five miles distant from Sydney, the metropolis of the colony, and for some months I had been chiefly engaged in the arduous and by no means romantic duty of hunting for illicit stills of which it was supposed there were several in the neighborhood.

I certainly did my best to discover their whereabouts, but was completely unsuccessful, and after traversing the country day after day, in every kind of disguise, until I must have traveled, on foot and on horseback, many hundreds of miles, I at last gave the matter up as a bad job.

If I had not found a still, however, I had in the course of my wanderings discovered what gave me far greater delight, for I had fallen across one of the prettiest and most loveable little girls that an Australian or any other sun ever had the honor of shining upon, and what was better, I had so ingratiated myself in her good graces as to win her promise that she would never marry any one but me.

Our acquaintance had commenced in a romantic manner enough. I had rescued her from a wild cow and who would certainly have gored her had I not interposed and shot the brute.

She was too frightened to walk home alone, and so I accompanied her, was introduced to the parents, as a matter of course, and they were profuse in their thanks, and begged me henceforth to look upon their house as my home and so forth.

I promptly took them at their word, and every other evening, and sometimes even oftener, my charger would be comfortably stalled for hours in farmer Martin's stable; and, meanwhile the pretty Gertrude and myself would be either wandering by the river's bank, studying poetry together in the old Summer-house, or, as the cold weather drew on, playing chess in the snug little back parlor.

These things continued until the rainy season set in, but instead of being deterred by the steady down-pours, my visits became, if possible, more frequent, and through the slushy lowlands, where the water was often above my horse's knees, I nightly jogged, like a marine centaur, to visit my innamorata.

By and by the father's suspicions were aroused.

Could it be possible that a mounted trooper, wearing Her Majesty's uniform, would ride nightly through mud and rain,

thunder and lightning, and hail and wind, to drink a glass of grog and smoke a pipe with an old man of sixty? Common sense answered No, and, having a fair stock of that commodity, so also said Farmer Martin.

"The girl he's after, and it's time to put a stop to this nonsense," was the conclusion he arrived at.

And so the very next evening that I rode over, before Gertrude and I could finish our third game of chess, Mr. Martin put his head into the room, and said, in a dry, dignified kind of way—

"Hem! Could I speak with you a few minutes in the front parlor, Mr. Rush?"

I think I knew what was coming, and so did Gertrude, for she grew very pale and upset the chessboard in her agitation, so that kings, queens, bishops, knights and all the smaller fry went rolling over the room.

Meanwhile I followed the old gentleman into the front parlor—that horrid room wherein everything was buried in chintzes or yellow muslin, and where a fire was never lighted more than once a year and here he opened the trenches, not angrily, but collectedly calmly, determinedly, informing me that his daughter never could be mine, for that he was a tolerably wealthy man, and he had resolved never to wed his child to one who was not possessed of a portion equal to her own.

In vain I told him how much I loved his daughter, that she loved me in return, and that we could never exist apart from each other. The old man merely smiled sarcastically and, pointing to my uniform, said:

"The man whose very coat is not his own and whose pay is only seven shillings and sixpence a day cannot marry my heiress."

He laid a strong stress on the last word, and I don't know what possessed me, but I replied:

"And what may be the extent of your present wealth, Mr. Martin?"

The question was certainly a very rude one but the old gentleman did not seem to regard it as such, for he answered, simply:

"Well, three months ago I had four thousand pounds in the Bank of Australasia, but I took it all out and expended it in the purchase of additional stock and in improvements on my farm; I daresay I am worth altogether twelve thousand pounds, and Gertrude will be the sole possessor when I die."

"Then you don't object to me in myself, Mr. Martin, but only because I'm poor?" I said, bitterly.

"Just so my boy. I object on principle; but, to show you that I bear you no personal animosity, come into the kitchen, and we will honor your last evening among us by a glass of my best grog, and some tobacco such as you have not tasted for many a long day."

"Stay a moment," I cried. "Were I as rich as you, Mr. Martin, would you give me your child?"

"Aye, that I would, right willingly," was the reply.

"And directly I am as rich as you, if Gertrude is then single, will you consent to our marriage?" I persisted.

"Aye, verily, I will, on my word of honor, Mr. Rush. But why talk of impossibilities?" he added; "where are you going to realize a sudden fortune?"

Ah! where was I? My heart sank as I asked myself the question, and I followed the old man into the kitchen in almost heartbroken silence. A bright fire was burning on the hearth, for grates are still very rare in Australia, in fact, they would be ill adapted for the logs of red-gum wood that form the invariable fuel.

Presently glasses and pipes were laid on the table, and I did my best to rekindle hope within my breast by the aid of Hollands and Barret's twist, but it was no good.

On the other side of the fire sat Mrs. Martin, a comely dame of fifty years, fully as broad as she was long, and with a mind wholly given to the concerns of the dairy, and the making of orange marmalade. Gertrude, knowing that something was wrong, but scarcely guessing what, nestled up to my side, and, to my great joy, her father did not rebuke her.

And thus we sat for a long time, neither of us speaking a word, but listening to the falling rain and howling wind without, and to the groaning of the great forest trees, as their branches were swayed and tossed by the blast. Anon came another sound—a loud but yet a soothing murmur, like the sighing of a Summer breeze amid a cork wood.

No one seemed to notice it but me, and I only did so as wondering how so gentle and so musical a murmur could make itself audible above the uproar of the wind and tempest. Suddenly however, there broke upon our ears the dashing open of a gate and a man's voice shouting:

"Master Martin, if you value your life, look sharp! The river has overflowed its banks and the waters are out."

Then we heard the splash, splash, of horses' feet, as the warning visitor rode away.

"Water out, impossible!" muttered the old farmer. "Why, bless my heart, the river was not on a level with its banks by a good six inches this morning and we've had no rain to speak of since."

"You don't know what weather it has been amongst the mountains, though, Mr. Martin," I said. "And hark! put your ear to the floor. By heaven! the warning was a timely one. We have not a moment to lose."

We all bent our heads down and listened; and now we could hear a hollow, gurgling sound under our feet, and little jets of spray leaped up between the crevices of the flooring.

The house according to the common custom in the colonies, was built on piles, and thus the downstairs rooms were about four feet above the ground, between which and the flooring the angry waters were now fretting and fuming and dashing against the stout wood-work with momentarily increasing power.

The women began to cry, the farmer was too stupefied to move.

"This will never do," I said; "there is not a moment to be lost. I can take one of you up behind me on my horse, and I know that Carlo and I will get through it somehow. The rest had better get up stairs—or, if possible on to the roof—and with the first peep of dawn I'll send a boat to bring you off. Now, who am I to take charge of?"

I was very much afraid he would bid me take the old lady, but to my great relief both the parents cried out—"Save Gertrude!"

I lost no time in acting. I flew down the four steps that led to the garden, and, with the water above my Napoleon boots, made my way to the stable. Mine was the only steed there—for Australian settlers seldom stable their own horses—and he, poor fellow, was very miserable and frightened.

I did not stop to reassure him, but had him round at the house door in a minute, and then Gertrude, after bidding a weeping adieu to her parents, sprang up behind me, and away we dashed into the storm and tempest.

It was indeed, a wild, fearful night. The moon shone brightly, but every minute or two its light was obscured by black, pall-like clouds, that were tearing with fearful velocity across the sky, and then it was so dark that I could not see my horse's head before me.

In the brief intervals of ghastly white light I could perceive that we were surrounded by a sea of waters, and that scarcely a speck of dry land was to be seen. True, they were as yet very shallow, scarcely above Carlo's knees; but I knew how rapidly they would deepen, and I urged the good horse in the direction of the town as quickly as possible.

Gertrude's arm encircled my waist, and she clung tightly to me with fear. Often I turned my head to speak to her a few words of encouragement and hope, but I was too anxious to secure her safety and my own to say much.

She was warmly wrapped up in shawls wraps, and, as she was an excellent horse-woman, I had no fear of her falling off, though the wind was blowing hard enough to whirl her from her seat.

Before we had got more than a mile from the farm the rain commenced with redoubled fury, and in a few moments we were both of us wet through. The wind, too, grew from a gale to a hurricane, and amid the continuous roar of the thunder and flash of the pale lightning, we could see huge boughs of trees hurling through the air, and now and then heard a mighty crash, as some aged monarch of the plain fell prone to the earth.

Suddenly a flash of lightning darted right in front of Carlo's eyes, and, with a snort of fear, he reared nearly upright.

"Hold fast, Gertrude!" I cried, endeavoring to throw my right arm around her to keep her from slipping off.

I was too late—she had fallen. I heard a splash in the water, a cry, and the darkness hid her from my sight. Just, however, as I was about to give way to despair, another flash revealed her to me standing amid the flood, at not a dozen yards distance.

I spurred towards her, and presently she was again on Carlo's broad back.

The excitement of this event, and the turning of my horse round and round, had made me forget the proper direction to the town, so that we now rode on not knowing whither we were heading.

Meanwhile, the flood grew deeper each moment, and presently I discovered that Carlo was swimming. I had not felt fear until now; but I must say that a great dread crept over me when I found that, whichever way I guided my charger he could not touch the ground. I knew that, weighted as he was, he could not keep afloat long, and each moment he seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the water.

At this critical juncture of affairs, the moon shone out again, and lighted up the scene as though it had been broad daylight. Far as the eye could reach, not a speck of dry land was visible; but, to my great joy, I perceived, close by, a blue gum tree, whose boughs were so disposed as to be easily scaled.

"Do you think you can climb that tree, Gertrude?" I asked. "It is our only chance of preserving our lives now."

She answered feebly in the affirmative, and with some little difficulty I swam Carlo alongside. Under the tree he regained his footing, and I was glad of this, as he was enabled to stand steady for my poor little companion to climb into the lower branches from his back.

When she had accomplished this feat, I took off his bridle, so that

he could not catch his feet in it if he had to swim for his life, and then Gertrude and I got some twenty feet higher up in the blue-gum, and paused to rest. Shawls and wraps had long ago fallen off her and been lost, and now poor Gertrude was exposed to all the inclemency of the weather, in the low-necked, short-sleeved dress she had worn during the evening.

How her plump, white and beautifully-molden arms were scratched by the rough tree-bark in climbing, and as the rain poured down through the unprotected vertical foliage, the drops glittered on her polished shoulders and trickled down her plump, snowy bosom.

"Why, Gertrude, you look a veritable Undine," I said, and, having no cape for overcoat to protect her, I doffed my uniform, and made her put it on.

We then sat side by side, and, putting my arm around her neck, I told her all about my interview with her father that evening.

"And did papa really say that as soon as you were as rich as himself he would let me marry you, Willie?" she asked.

"Yes, Gertrude; he gave me his word of honor to that effect," I responded.

"Then he won't break it," she replied. "Poor papa! this night has made him a beggar. All his money was invested in improvements on his land and in increase of stock. It is all lost now, so you may claim me sooner than you thought for, Willie."

This view of the case had never struck me before, and I nearly jumped off the gum tree in, I fear, a most selfish ecstasy of delight. I was bound to control myself, however, and exert all my attention in comforting Gertrude, who, now that the excitement attending our escape was over, began to entertain a thousand fears concerning the fate of her parents.

At last I succeeded in convincing her that it was a matter of impossibility for the flood to cover the house before rescue came in the morning, and thereupon she became composed, and our thoughts reverted to our own hopes and fears, and amid the rain and howling wind, and the still rapidly-rising waters below, she nestled in my arms, and we talked of love, until the gold, gray dawn aroused us from our seventh heaven of bliss. Well, then, to make a long story short, after another three hours perch, we perceived some boats coming from the direction of Windsor, and by the aid of a brilliant scarlet handkerchief that I fortunately possessed, we signaled them, attracted their attention, and were in due time taken on board.

At my instigation, we then rowed to Mr. Martin's farm, and saved the old man and his wife from a chimney-top, whereon they were both sitting, with their feet held up out of the water. We were only just in time.

Two months later, Gertrude Martin became Mrs. William Rush. The old man stuck to his word, and our position was not so bad, after all, for, a month previously to our marriage, I came into an annuity of a hundred and fifty pounds per annum on the death of a distant relative in England, so that, with my pay of seven-and-sixpence per day, we are able to begin house-keeping pretty comfortably.

Mr. Martin has retrieved his loss, and is now the owner of a capital farm at Hyde, New South Wales. He has abjured, and very wisely, the rich alluvial lands on the banks of rivers, so freely offered to the emigrant in a certain column in our leading daily newspapers.

Sunlight is the best light.