

Ballarat Sam

By M. QUAD

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The day I arrived in Adelaide, Australia, I was twenty years old and my pocket contained a dollar for every year I had lived. I had exactly £4 to begin life on in this colony, but was a healthy youngster, with no fear of the future. Luck was with me from the start. On the second day after landing from the steamer I hired out to a sheep raiser, who had a ranch on the Murray river, near its junction with the Darling, and on the third we started off up the country.

One evening I was building a fire to cook supper by, while McCall, the overseer, went to secure a lever with which to raise a wagon off its wheels. I was thus alone for a few moments. Suddenly a man burst out of the thicket and came running up to me.

"For God's sake, young feller, give me a bite to eat!" he said as he stood before me. "Don't be afraid of me. I'm a sheep herder who has been lost in the bush for three days and a half."

I stepped to the wagon and handed him a piece of bacon, some hard crackers and a handful of tea, and after he had placed them in his pockets he continued:

"Young feller, do me a greater favor still. Lend me your pistol and knife until tomorrow, when you will pass my station, and, furthermore, do not mention to any one that I was here. Do this and you will never regret it." Then he hurried away.

Just as McCall came back with the lever there was a clatter of hoofs, and I looked up to see five mounted men ride into camp. They were in the uniform of the patrol, and the appearance of the men and horses showed that they had had a long ride of it.

"Well, Captain White, what is it?" asked McCall, who seemed to know every one of the five.

"Been after Ballarat Sam again," was the reply as the captain dismounted.

"And lost him, eh?"

"Yes, curse the luck! We struck his trail near Dobney's yesterday morning, and he led us a chase of fifty miles during the day. We killed his horse about dusk last night and had him surrounded in the scrub. He got out, however, and we did not get his track until about noon today. We followed to the creek two miles above and there lost it."

We continued on up the country and finally arrived at the ranch, and for the next six months I was hard at work as a sheep herder and neither saw nor heard much of the outside world. Then one day I was called to report at headquarters and upon my arrival found a couple of visitors there—two gentlemen who had lately arrived from England. They had come out to Australia to go into the sheep business, but would leave it in care of an agent. They hired me and a number of others, and we began work with them.

One evening we had finished supper and were grouped about the campfire when one of the dogs barked and we looked up to find ourselves covered by five rifles.

"Hands up or you are dead men!" shouted a voice, and every one of us quickly obeyed the command.

The five advanced, each keeping his rifle leveled, and when I could see the man who had spoken I at once identified him as Ballarat Sam,

the man whom I had befriended months before. He recognized me almost as quickly and, taking a step forward, he said:

"Well, boy, you did me a good turn that day and I'll not forget it. Move over to the left. Now, then, gents, who are you?"

All our arms were in the wagon, and we were helpless to offer any resistance. The first thing they did was to despoil their captives. After they had robbed the two gentlemen of everything they had of value and helped themselves liberally to our stores in the wagons Ballarat Sam shook hands with me and said:

"So you didn't inform the police you had seen me that day?"

"No, sir."

"Well, you were mighty kind to me, and I am going to return the favor. Take this hundred pound note and save it for a rainy day, and here's the finest pistol and knife in Australia. Probably some day you will see me hanged, but whatever is said of me you can vouch for the fact that Ballarat Sam never forgot a favor or failed to get even with an enemy."

Columns of matter were printed in the Australian newspapers concerning Ballarat Sam and his crew of outlaws during the next year, and his picture was posted everywhere and a large reward offered for his capture dead or alive. The authorities were bound to get him, but he seemed to bear a charmed life for a while, and, although arrested several times, he always managed to escape by some ruse or other. Finally he was surrounded by a patrol numbering forty policemen and taken prisoner, and when brought handcuffed to Adelaide the entire population of the town turned out to view the famous bushranger. I happened to be in the city at the time and witnessed the hanging, and probably I was the only one in the vast crowd that felt a pang of regret. He went to his doom with a smile, and after it was over the timid ones in Australia breathed a sigh of relief.

Ballarat Sam was a bad man, but he had played fair with me.

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