

HE REVEREND CHARLES CARADOC was tramping in from Heidelberg : not the old-world German city, but that pleasant Melbourne suburb which was idyllic before it

became a suburb at all. Then the line was only talked about, and you had to walk home if you missed the last 'bus. Caradoc had missed it with his eyes open, and was reveling in the two hours' penalty. Through the wintry starlight his face beamed pink with good-humour and enthusiasm ; on the hard, undulating road his step was the tattoo of health and strength, of infinite confidence and complete youth.

Yet there were younger men, and even curates, as there were thousands more prepossessing in appearance. Caradoc was eight-and-twenty, and he wore a moustache, which is seldom in its place upon a barrister, a jockey, a man-servant, or a clergyman. This moustache was reddish and of the horse-shoe order, but not heavy enough to hide the wearer's good, but rather prominent, front teeth. Caradoc had also very good blue eyes, but these again were a little prominent ; altogether you will picture him no Apollo. He had, however, a deep chin,

a man's mouth, and one of the kindest, most ingenuous, least self-conscious expressions ever worn between a clerical collar and a soft felt hat.

But he was a very new chum, having come out with Archdeacon Huntley, who had been home to England for a few months' holiday after thirty years' ministry in the colony. Greedy for honest work, and impatient of what went by that name in his country curacy, Caradoc had fallen in with the Archdeacon at a garden party, had confessed his discontent, and been promised his heart's desire if he would come to Melbourne. He was getting it among the larrikins of Carlton and of Fitzroy ; in the tide of riff-raff that flowed southward, with thickening scum, to the confines of Little Bourke Street itself.

So his head and his hands were full ; so his heart and his step were light ; and the quick music of his youth and energy had drummed through Ivanhoe and Alphington, and was ringing down the hill to Diamond Creek, when that happened which stopped it for the moment and changed it for the night. Curiously enough, Caradoc was thinking of a story told him that afternoon by the driver of the omnibus, the story of a man shot dead by a notorious bushranger at this same Diamond Creek—when history flattered itself with a weak repetition : a weedy figure flew out from the shadows, and a revolver was presented at the curate's head.

"Bail up !" cried a nasal voice, hoarse with excitement.

Caradoc stepped back, marking the lethal barrel. This was agreeably short, and the starlight scarcely shimmered in its rust; moreover, it was not covering him.

"Bail up? What do you mean?"

"Yer money or yer life!" came in the still older formula and still thicker voice.

"My life," said Caradoc, calmly, "if you can hit me from where you stand."

"I will—*my* word!"

"I don't think your barrel's long enough."

The muzzle was spinning in circles like a midge. The curate laughed as he stepped towards it.

"I'll come nearer. Now try."

And he fixed his good blue eyes on the hungry brown ones of a pitiful stripling, seen

"Oh, Lord! I give yer best—I give yer best!"

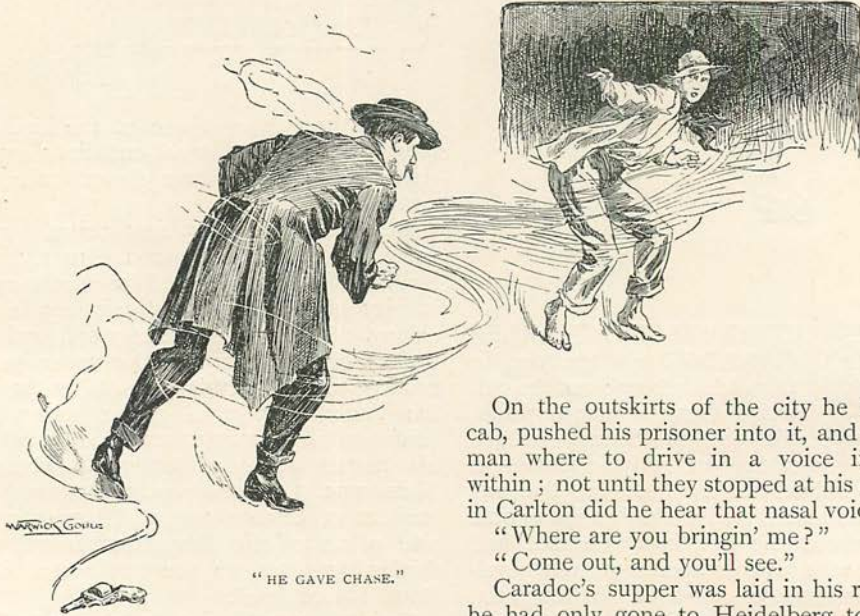
"Then we go back to Melbourne together. I can either twist your arm behind your back and force you along——"

"Ow! ow!"

"Or we can go arm-in-arm as though we were old friends. You prefer that, eh? Then come on!"

They went on without a word. Gradually their hard breathing subsided, and the parson took out his handkerchief and mopped his face; the captive did much the same with the back of his sleeve, only it was his eyes that required most attention.

"Whimpering at the thought of gaol," mused Caradoc. "Let him whimper!"



"HE GAVE CHASE."

more clearly every instant in the starlight, and every instant a more painful exhibition of insufficient effrontery and oozing courage. The end was in keeping with the rest: instead of being fired, the pistol was flung at Caradoc's head, whizzed over it, and went off like a squib as it clattered in the road behind him. When he rose from ducking, two bare feet flashing under the stars was all he could see of his assailant. He gave chase in his well-soled boots, and for a time the music was very fast; it rattled over the bridge across the creek, and up-hill indomitably on the other side; but towards the top it stopped suddenly, and turned into a duet of gasps.

"Am I to hang on to you," panted the curate, "or do you give in?"

On the outskirts of the city he hailed a cab, pushed his prisoner into it, and told the man where to drive in a voice inaudible within; not until they stopped at his lodgings in Carlton did he hear that nasal voice again.

"Where are you bringin' me?"

"Come out, and you'll see."

Caradoc's supper was laid in his room, for he had only gone to Heidelberg to deliver a letter of introduction, and had said positively that he would be back; but he had reckoned without his kind colonial host, and had fared sumptuously before leaving the farm. Yet he rubbed his hands at sight of the cold sliced mutton, the loaf and butter, the pickles, and the cheese.

"Capital!" he cried. "I've had my supper, Mary, but here's a fellow who I fancy has not. It just fits in."

And Mary withdrew without comment; for this was not the first dilapidated visitor that the curate had introduced during his short tenancy; and he had given fair warning that there would be more.

"Now," continued Caradoc, "sit down and have at it!"

Instead of doing so, the lad stood trembling like a frightened colt; his dark eyes big, and his brown skin blanched, with a deeper and a keener fear than even this coward had displayed on the road.

"What are you givin' us?" he gasped, in yet another formula.

"Mutton and damper, I believe you call it," replied the curate, looking for his pipe.

"Ain't you goin' to gimme to the coppers?"

"That remains to be seen. Not till you've had something to eat, at all events. Matches gone, as usual; got one about you, by any chance?"

"No."

"Ah! I've found 'em. Mind if I smoke while you're eating?"

"I ain't agoin' to eat."

Caradoc took a single glance at the set and sullen face; then he struck a match, and answered as he lit his pipe, with his back turned:—

"Don't be a young fool. (*Puff, puff.*) I know very well why you stuck me up to-night. (*Puff, puff, puff.*) Isn't that the expression? Or is that only when you're a bushranger? If you're a bushranger (*puff*), I'm disappointed in 'em; but I should be sorry to think you were one, for their sake as well as yours. All I believe you are is a half-starved larrikin——"

"That's all, so help me!"

"Then there's your supper. Stow it away! But, look here, if you turn on the water-works, I *will* send for the police—like a shot."

An hour later, the curate and the larrikin were seated at opposite sides of the fire. The curate was in his third pipe; the larrikin would not smoke; and, though the pale, brown face was almost serene in its physical satisfaction, the dark brown eyes reached ever furtively for the door.

Caradoc took his pipe from his teeth, catching the glance.

"Must you go back to Diamond Creek to-night?"

"*My word!*"

"You could have that sofa if you'd stop."

The larrikin fidgeted, looked down in discomfort, looked up in blunt inquiry.

"But you was goin' to get me run in?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't."

He must have known it; he only sighed relief.

"Then you'll let me clear? The old man'd give me hell if I didn't go home!"

Caradoc took no notice of the word.

"So there's an old man, and a home, too, eh?"

Vol. xvi.—89.

"Not much of one," laughed the larrikin. "Plucky home!"

"Do you know that you haven't told me the old man's name, or yours?"

"Wot's the good, when he has so many?"

"But he must call you something," remarked the curate, smiling behind his red moustache.

"He calls me things wot'd make your hair curl!" replied the larrikin, and Caradoc showed those prominent white teeth of his as he laughed outright in his own despite. Next moment he was particularly grave; as shyness wore off on the other side, it was his habit to drop a certain familiarity which he had found indispensable for putting the Melbourne larrikin at his ease; so now he suddenly ceased smoking at two pipes and a half, and stood up stiffly on his hearthrug, with his long coat-tails to the fire.

"If you like it better," said he, rather loftily, "what am I to call you?"

"I don't see as you'll have much chance of callin' me anythink," replied the other, with a snigger.

"Very good. Then you certainly sha'n't clear out. Now, what's your name?"

The reply was slow, sullen, and uncertain.

"Willyum!"

"William, eh? Well, William, you shall clear out, as you call it, on certain hard-and-fast conditions which you'll break at your peril. Refuse them, and I give you in charge."

He felt it a mean threat, an ignoble coercion; but if any end could justify any means, surely it was the end which he had in view. Nevertheless, when William had accepted the inevitable, with a sudden desperation following upon a frank reluctance, and equally suggestive of sincerity, the master of the situation felt a genuine relief, and made haste to adopt a less terrible tone.

"Know Lygon Street, William?"

"*My word!*"

"Know St. Cuthbert's—half-way down?"

"Outside," said William, with a fine ungodliness.

"You shall know the inside too before I've done with you," the curate promised him. "But one thing at a time. There's a mission-room a little lower down on the same side—a red-brick affair. You've got to know the inside of that first; you're to let me see you there every Wednesday and Saturday evening, at eight o'clock, till further orders!"

William sighed.

"To-day's Tuesday," continued Caradoc. "You begin to-morrow night—and I don't

think you'll hate it half as much as you think. The other fellows don't. Lots come—lots of greater villains than you. I shouldn't care to be stuck up by some of them, William—they wouldn't mean it for a joke!" he added,



WARWICK GOULD

"HE CALLS ME THINGS WOT'D MAKE YOUR HAIR CURL,"
REPLIED THE LARRIKIN."

as the boy turned a warmer brown. "But they aren't such bad fellows either; they come and play bagatelle and draughts and dominos; we let them smoke, but kick them out if they swear!"

Caradoc was disappointed. He had hoped that the programme—the Wednesday and Saturday evening programme—the kindergarten class in elementary decency—would appeal to this larrikin in the mere prospect as it had done to others. He was mistaken. William did not brighten; he had been brighter before. All he did was to sit and stare into the fire, crass and unattracted.

"I forgot," said Caradoc. "You don't smoke, and you won't swear. Perhaps you can read?"

"My word!"

"Then you can read there to your heart's content. One end of the room's for nothing

else; magazines, books, papers, and no talking allowed."

The effect was magical: it brought William to his feet.

"I'll be there to-morrow night."

"You promise?"

"My oath."

"Then that's a bargain; your hand on it, William. . . . And now there's just one more thing I want to know, and you shall go. I want a plain answer to a plain question; you mustn't be hurt. Supposing I'd given you my money on the road—it's the last time I'll speak of it—would the old man have got it or would he not?"

The look was enough; it was a look of swift, open-eyed amazement at Caradoc's insight. He smiled and nodded, rather proud of it himself.

"I thought as much. So he sends you out to make money?"

"Day an' night."

"That way?"

"That's my look-out."

"He wouldn't know, eh?"

"No, nor care!"

"I see," said Caradoc, looking into the bright brown eyes, and disliking their moisture in a lad who was almost a man. "I quite understand; and there's nothing to take to heart so much as all that, my good boy. It wasn't your fault—I don't blame you a bit. But, I say, you'd better take some money back, hadn't you? Look here, you shall see what you'd have got . . . Three-and-seven exactly—a noble haul! Take it, my dear fellow, it'll be better than nothing; and one of these days you shall earn it honestly and pay me back. We must put you in the way of earning something, of course; but you shall come in to-morrow night and have another square meal to walk back on; and we'll talk it over then—if you won't be such a baby!"

And Caradoc stood impatiently on the landing while the bare feet stumbled downstairs and over the linoleum; when the front-door slammed, he returned to his room and re-filled his pipe.

"If he wasn't such an infernal baby!" he muttered, as he struck the match. Yet the baby grew on him as he sat and smoked and put up his feet on the empty chair opposite.

The site had been bought, the room built, the mission started, by Archdeacon Huntley's

sons—fine, hearty fellows, who did almost as much good in Melbourne as that dear divine himself. It was the young men who had gathered in the larrikins, and the young men who had taught them to appreciate their privileges by kicking them out again as often as necessary. At first the necessity had been almost nightly; the character of the place very nearly non-religious, as it still was on Wednesdays and Saturdays; but gradually it had become possible to establish a specific ideal, to accentuate this as time went on, until the mission-room could afford to avow its allegiance to the church hard by. So the enterprise flourished, until it grew beyond the surplus energies of mere laymen, and Caradoc on landing found his work cut out for him; what was better, he might himself have been cut out for the work. Good-humoured and yet firm—but his qualities need no bush. Of the highest order they were not; but for dealing with the Melbourne larrikin they proved a well-nigh perfect combination.

And yet a certain innate bluntness, which stood Caradoc in stead with the ruck, did not always serve him with the individual; certainly it did not answer with the half-hearted desperado, the incomplete adventurer, who had attempted to stick him up on the Heidelberg road. The lad came regularly to the room, but Caradoc never knew how long he would continue coming. He did not grow more manly on further acquaintance; yet the curate did not like him less. He was not popular with the other boys: he was shrinking and self-conscious in their midst; yet Caradoc liked him well enough to ask him sometimes to his rooms, to resent his invariable refusals, to lend him his own books instead, to see him on the way to Diamond Creek, to feed his mind as they walked. And he seldom laid himself out to feed the mere minds of the rest; all his time was taken up in purifying their hearts.

So the short winter ended, and the long summer began; but before the great heat a feast-day was fixed, and the date announced by Caradoc to his larrikins, amid astonishing enthusiasm; for some of them knew, though he did not, the kind of day that it would be.

Quite in the bush, down the Gippsland line, Archdeacon Huntley had a twenty-acre selection, and a wattle-and-dab hut to which he and his sons would repair, now for hard, solitary work, now for complete rest and change. It was only thirty miles by rail; then there was a drive; and in a couple of hours all told you were in the heart of the

wilderness, amid huge boulders and forest ferns, and trees taller than any steeple in the Southern Hemisphere. Hither, once a summer, Archdeacon Huntley brought his choir-boys for the day; and here the larrikins had their separate outing, with the Archdeacon and all his available sons to keep them in order.

There was a sound repast on the grass behind the hut; there were games, competitions, tree-climbing, stick-whittling, an organized exploration of the wilds; and before tea, a general and compulsory bathe in the big waterhole. The young fellows acted as whips, but their office was a sinecure: the difficulty was not to persuade the boys to go in, but to induce them to come out again. Caradoc suggested a strict time-limit, and stood watch in hand on an adjacent boulder, christened the Tarpeian Rock by the classical Archdeacon, who stood beside him smiling benignly upon the brown hands and faces and the white bodies of the boys, wet and flashing in the sun. But the curate did not smile; he frowned; and his frown was blackest when he closed his half-hunter with a vicious snap.

"There's one fellow cut it, after all!"

"Indeed?" said the Archdeacon. "Which boy is that?"

"His name is William."

"William what?"

"Nobody knows; he refused me his surname when I first got hold of him, and I have never pressed him for it."

"So he is one of your boys?" said the Archdeacon, kindly. "I hear there are so many of them already! You are doing a very noble work, Caradoc; it was a good day for us all when I fell in with you."

Neither the Archdeacon nor his sons knew under what circumstances Caradoc had fallen in with the missing larrikin.

"I fancy his father is a great villain," continued the curate, blushing at the praise. "The lad himself is all right—if only he were more of a sportsman. This is so characteristic of him! Goodness knows where he is! I am sorry," he added, with less emphasis, and more to himself: "I have a soft corner for the fellow, in spite of it."

Yes—in spite of the very faults he could least endure—it was a softer corner than the curate could understand. His own tolerance puzzled him. Another skulker he had lashed with his contempt; another muff he had tormented into manliness, long weeks before this. It was as though the very badness of this lad's beginning, the abortive

highway robbery, had imbued the object of that outrage with a special lenience towards him, less paradoxical than it might appear, since anything short of crime must in him henceforth assume a merit.

Not that Caradoc argued thus: he was one of the least introspective of mortals. His subtlest feeling was a slight impatience with himself, a naïve wonder that his day should be so easily spoilt. Yet he never hesitated as to what he should do: when the boys were finally in the brake, and the cheering at its height, it was the curate who ran up last and hottest.

"May I have one word, Mr. Archdeacon? I can't find that boy anywhere!"

"God bless my soul!"

"I fear something has happened to him; or he's run away to avoid going back to town. But we can't allow that; he must be found."

"He must, indeed," said the Archdeacon, looking at his watch; "but we must also catch our train. There is no other to-night. I think the best thing will be for one of my sons——"

"If you will permit me, sir, I would much rather stay myself. I know this lad; he has a peculiar disposition; but I believe I can manage him. I should deem it such a kindness if you could spare me to find him and to bring him back."

So the brake waddled down the rough track, and Caradoc was left behind, waving back to the waving lads, and returning their cheers until the great trees swallowed them; then he ran back into the selection, and mounted the Tarpeian Rock, which was its highest point.

The sun had long been among the trees, but then the trees were so tall. It might be light for the better part of another hour. Caradoc stood on the rock, the golden glare showing the day's dust upon his black clothes, the day's own coat of red upon his heated face; the prominent white teeth were parted, the prominent blue eyes filled with anxiety and distress. And as he stood, the sounds of the bush, drowned all day long by those of a city, broke upon him for the first time: the whisper of leaves and grasses, the chit-chat of parakeets, the guffaw of a laughing jackass, the chirrup of locusts invisible, innumerable. But of the sounds for which he

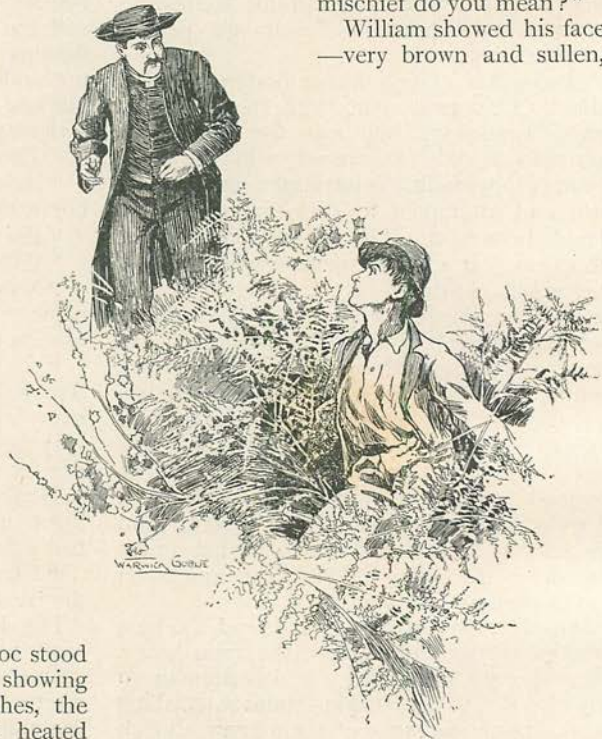
listened—a timid hail—a swishing of the ferns—the breaking of a branch—not one fell upon his straining ear.

It was his very first day in the bush; but he had met old bushmen in Melbourne, had visited them in the parish, and got on terms by a genuine eagerness to hear of the wilderness and all its ways. Now something that he had heard came back to him; he was off the rock in an instant, and following the posts and rails that inclosed the Archdeacon's twenty acres. If the fugitive had crossed the fence, he should find the place, the trail; but he never did; nor was there need.

From a brake of ferns two glittering eyes drew his; the green fronds rustled as in a sudden wind; the hapless William was run to earth.

"Thank God!" gasped Caradoc, but with that cry his tone changed. "Come out of it, you young idiot! What the mischief do you mean?"

William showed his face—very brown and sullen,



"COME OUT OF IT, YOU YOUNG IDIOT!"

and his shoulders—round with shame. But the brake was breast-high, and he evinced no disposition to come out.

"Why did you do it?" cried the curate. "Are you so frightened of cold water?"

The dark head hung lower, and in the red-gold glare there was a sudden glitter of

tears, that fell like great diamonds upon the greater emeralds of the sunlit ferns.

"Is there no manhood in you?" pursued Caradoc; but even as he spoke the scorn fell out of his voice; and the question, that had broken from him as a harsh taunt, died away a whispered question and nothing more.

The answer was a wild covering of the hot, brown face by the tremulous, brown hands, a pitiful heaving of the high shoulders, and such a storm of sobbing as might have wrung a heart of stone. Caradoc stared and listened as though he had been stone all over. And the crimson killed the gold in the failing light; and it warmed the withering fingers, and what of the wet face they failed to hide, to the hue of burnished copper.

"So you have deceived me all these months!"

He was kept so long waiting that he was forced to repeat the question. He repeated it in a sterner tone, of which he felt instantly ashamed; but even this only elicited a whisper, inaudible, incoherent.

"I can't hear," said Caradoc, gently; "I'm sorry. I'll come nearer."

"It was all the old man," the girl's voice whispered. "He didn't care so long's I brought something home . . . there were worse ways . . . *he* didn't care!"

"You shall never go back to him," said Caradoc, a tremor in his own firm voice.

"That was what I meant. That's why I bolted—that and——"

"I know. Know, by George? I understand—everything!"

"What do you think you understand?"

And at last the brown eyes met his, drowned in their shame, but so keenly inquisitive, that, to the male mind, their look was a confirmation in itself.

"I understand," he said, "why I've liked you so much in spite of your unmanliness. It was *because* of it—all the time!"

"But you won't like me any more!"

"Won't I?" And the bracken broke before his stride—broke louder than his hurried whispered words.

"What are you givin' us?" There spoke the larrikin of old days. "It ain't true!"

"But it is; it must have been true all along, without my knowing it. I swear it is now."

"It'll dish you up!"

"I don't think it. The Archdeacon will forgive me; he's a man himself, the most sympathetic of men. Besides, I needn't go back to him; there are other fields. But—you? Is it—isn't it—true of you?"

The answer came with the last red beams of the dying day, in the first hush of the twilight forest—

"*My* word!"

And now all that remains of that romance is a genial rector in the Old Country, with a wife who is not the less popular for being considered just a little colonial by the county.

