

## MUSTERING CATTLE IN THE BUSH.



HE dawn was barely visible when I was awakened by hearing a sound of conversation near by. It was Fitzgerald giving orders to one of the black boys.

"Are all the horses in the yard, Peter?"

"Yohi," answered the black.

"All right. Take down my bridle and the bridle which belongs to that gentleman who came with me last night, and send them up."

"Yohi, Missa Fitzgerald. Me ride 'im, Charcoal?"

"Very well; and tell one of the other boys to catch Forrester for Mr. Thompson."

John now jumped out of bed, and hurrying on his things, made his way outside. The sun had not risen, but everybody was astir. Black boys were bringing up horses from a yard in the paddock, into which they had all been driven. Breakfast was being carried in, and every one was preparing for the day's work. After a hasty meal was disposed of, the horses were saddled. The little court in front of the houses was crowded with horses awaiting their riders. The party consisted of Fitzgerald, Thompson, West, two white stockmen, one of whom was Fitzgerald's lad Tommy. Besides these and their horses, Mr. Williams's saddle and pack-horse swelled the number.

A general mount was now effected, and, bidding good-bye to his entertainer, Williams started on his way down country.

"Now, Tommy," said Fitzgerald, speaking to the youth just mentioned, "we are going to divide. You, with Mr. Thompson and Billy Barlow, can

go up to the Peaks, then start down, bringing all you see worth taking along with you. Send Billy over to Oakey Creek, and let him meet you down at Plumtree Camp. You can clean out the middle branch of the station creek, and then bring all you find down to the main camp, where you will find us."

These directions, which, perhaps, may seem unintelligible to the general reader, referred to the manner in which the young squatter proposed to gather together the cattle among which he expected to collect the bullocks he required.

The two parties now separated—Fitzgerald with his assistants to examine the southern branch of the main creek, together with the country lying between the many tributaries which flowed into it; while the others were to direct their attention to the opposite side and the surrounding country. It was most exhilarating riding along in the cool morning air. How pleasant the fresh smell of the grass! Now they pass through a small patch of Brigalow scrub. Some one has split a piece from the trunk of a small tree. What a scent the dark-grained wood has! What numbers of wallabies! They start out in every direction, and, flying across the path, swiftly disappear. We are in grass once more. Whirr-r-r-r—a covey of quail start from under the horses' feet, fly a short distance, and alight on the thick grass. There are some cattle standing in their camp on a small patch of scrub. We don't want them, however—we can get them any day. Here is one standing by himself. It is a two-year-old steer—a white one. He stands perfectly still; his hanging head and tucked-up body betray his want of health. As we ride past he

shows the whole of his eye, and, gathering up his strength, he gives a deep hollow cough which rakes his whole frame. "Pleura," said Fitzgerald, reading John's inquiring glance; "we always have it more or less on the run."

"Does it not carry off immense numbers of cattle?"

"Well, it has done so; but for some years past we find its ravages have been nothing to speak of. A great deal has been written on the subject. Some have proposed preventing the attacks of the disease by inoculation; others, again, laugh at the idea. For my part, I am convinced that pleura lurks in every herd in the country, and that it only wants favourable conditions to make its appearance."

"What are those conditions?" asked John.

"Much knocking about invariably produces it; for instance, it often breaks out amongst cattle on a long journey, or that have been herded long. It is also much more severe among cattle feeding on rich swampy pastures than on the high hilly stations. Besides which, there is no doubt, I think, that it is both contagious and infectious, and, of course, some constitutions have a hereditary tendency to it."

Now they emerge on a plain bounded by scrub, with openings between the patches, and vistas of plains and more scrub in the distance. On the plain, about half a mile away on the right, a large herd of cattle are scattered, gently feeding towards their camp. What a delightful spot for a gallop! How fresh the horses are! Gaylad feels as if he could devour the space between him and that beautiful blue chain whose distant peaks glitter in the morning sunshine. "Way horse; steady, Gaylad, you'll have your work to do by-and-by." See, there is a plain turkey, quite close; he walks steadily along, keeping his head up and his eye fixed on us. He is quite within shot. There, there,

unobserved before, but almost under your horse's feet, is his mate. Startled by the horses, she quickens her pace, breaks into a run, opens her large wings, beats the air two or three times, and rising, wings her way heavily off, followed almost immediately by her companion, uttering a kind of hoarse croak. There they light again, not a quarter of a mile away. Now we come to a water-course. It is a succession of longish holes filled with clear water. Trees, with drooping branches like willows, fringe its sides. The broad leaf of the lotus, amid which rises here and there the beautiful flower, floats on the surface. Look at the wild ducks swimming in twos and threes. Stay for one instant. There, on that broad lotus-leaf, two or three little mites of wild ducklings are sitting. Their mother, with the rest of the family, is floating calmly beside them. Her quick eye notes us; she moves away, her little brood following. Now those on the leaf plunge in and swim bravely after her, shaking their little tails. The other ducks, catching the alarm, at once detect the cause. A sudden splash, a few frightened quacks, and away they fly, the water dripping brightly from their webbed feet as they rise, with the sunlight glinting on their dark-brown bodies and blue-and-bronze wings. There they go, out of sight in a minute. The mother and her brood have vanished in the same instant. You may search, but you will not find them. The little things understand diving as well as their mother, and the banks of the creek are one mass of sedges and long grass. Watch, here come the ducks back again. High in the air they approach, following the course of the creek with the rapidity of lightning. Here they come, right overhead; a confused whizz denotes the speed they are travelling at, and down the water-course they take their way to alight in some undisturbed spot.

As you leave the water, pigeons of all kinds, from the strong beautiful bronze-wing to the gentle squatter and little dove, fly from under your horse's feet, with strong rapid-flapping noise, or sit crouching on the ground, humbly hoping that their insignificance and homely plumage will not attract attention. A white crane, and a few dark-feathered water-hens, at the far end of the water-hole, seeing you moving, conclude to stay. Here is the half-dried carcase of a beast. It died here on the camp near the water. Whew, what a smell! Any one who wants more than one whiff of that is a glutton. Look at that "booming 'guana!" He has been feeding sumptuously on the carrion. He is watching us with his "glittering eye," his head up, his viscous tongue darting out now and then like a serpent's fangs. He knows we are observing him; off he scuttles at an incredibly swift pace, making for that big iron-bark tree. Gallop after; hit him with your whip. Ah, you are too late! he has reached it before you; he is away up lying flat on a high branch. You can just see the end of his tapered tail hanging over, or his head, the tongue still striking venomously.

Now we emerge on still larger downs, dotted prettily with cotton bush. Cattle-tracks converge from all points to the water. They are quite narrow, like little footpaths. The ground bears on its surface the impressions of many feet. You cannot find a foot square without the point of a hoof of some age or another. The grass must be sweet here, the cattle keep it cropped down so closely. That long line of tall white-stemmed gum-trees marks the banks of the main creek; here is the junction of the southern and northern branches. We must cross and follow up this branch next us. Yonder is a mob of cattle; they are not so quiet as those we have already seen. Two or three old cows nearer us than the others lift their heads,

smelling our approach. They turn and run. The old brutes, they know quite well what it is to be rounded up; they have been hundreds of times in the yard; it is all roguery. Now some of the rest notice them running, they run also; had the old cows remained quiet the others would have been stationary too. Now they are making off in a body. Sam, the white stockman with the party, and Peter the black fellow, mounted on Charcoal, spur after them, get in front, and, heading them, bring them to a standstill.

There are a dozen nice bullocks in the mob. After making them stand a little to cool them, Peter is sent to take them over the river to a camp, to be picked up by the party on their return down the other side. The party divide once more. Sam and Peter go one way; John still remains with his friend, and they have two or three exciting gallops after different mobs. Gaylad is sweating now. What a little stunner he is! It will not be his fault if the cattle get away. He watches their every movement with a personal interest. Fitzgerald and John have got a good mob together. They have taken them across the creek, and are bringing them down the other side to pick up the cattle on the camps there. The bullocks and steers and heifers go along without much trouble; but some of those old cows with calves try all sorts of dodges to get away. They fear that we are mustering for branding. It will come soon enough. Let us get through with these fat cattle, then we shall set to work branding.

There, that cunning old wretch of a cow has managed to slip away with her calf, and she is making off for some scrub in the distance. Now, Gaylad; now, boy, fetch her back. Indeed Gaylad wants no bidding, but is flying over the ground at his best. Now he reaches the cow and her calf, a good strong six-months'-old bull. She swerves away as

the horse approaches. Now is your time, John; close on her, turn her, keep her head to the mob; give her a cut or two with your whip, and she will be amongst them once more. Ah! you do not know how to manage your rein; your bridle-hand is fumbling with it; it is too loose; your whip is in your way. Gaylad flies past the cow about twenty yards; she once more makes off in her own direction.

Once more John charges her with the same result, only that this time, as he holds the rein tighter, Gaylad, obeying the check, props round at the same instant the old cow does. John finds himself sitting on his horse's neck; it is a miracle how he holds on. He manages to get back to his seat, and confining operations to a trot, succeeds in heading the chase back towards the mob. He will punish her at any rate for the trouble she has given him. Two or three desperate cuts at the cow fall harmlessly, another only gets the lash under Gaylad's tail, who resents the indignity by kicking once or twice, and humping his back, and nearly upsetting his rider.

Now a camp with a good many cattle on it has been reached. Sam and Peter have evidently been here, and are away after more. The cattle stop of their own accord, mingling with the rest, uttering many bellows of greeting. Fitzgerald proposes to wait for a little. What a thorough master of his work he looks, as with careless ease he sits side-saddle fashion on Bugler, his long whip hanging festooned round him! Hark! there goes a whip! The cattle on the camp recommence bellowing. Here they come down this gully—the bullocks and young cattle ahead, running towards those on the camp, roaring as they run. A mixed lot, with many cows and calves, bring up the rear, after which come Sam and Peter, riding side by side. There are so many cows and calves, it is not advisable to drive them as far as the main creek. We don't intend taking them

home for branding to-day. We cannot draft the bullocks out properly here though; we require all hands for that. Let us keep as many as we can of the others back on the camp, therefore, when they start. It is not quite easily done either; for with stronger perversity those even who wanted to stay behind previously now desire to go along with the mob, and insist on following up, until effectually driven back to their camp.

We have yet a large number, and still pick up more as we go along. Gaylad makes himself very busy in assisting to drive. Should any beast in his vicinity lag behind to crop a sweet morsel he marks him; then, laying his ears back, with outstretched neck and open mouth, he rushes at the offender, inflicting sometimes a rather sharp bite. The loud pistol-like report of a stock-whip is heard again, this time ahead. The leading cattle quicken their pace. Bellows in the distance are answered by bellows from the mob. We come in sight of a large number of cattle standing close together on an open yet shady camp, and some distance apart, under a shady tree, are three horses. Their riders are lying on the ground. The two mobs mingle now, amid terrific roaring, as we ride up to the little party under the tree.

"Well, Thompson, had much luck?"

"Got about sixty or seventy head, I think."

"There are forty or fifty in our lot," said Fitzgerald; "we had better set to work at once. It will take all our time to get them drafted and yarded before it gets late."

Now they prepare for work. John, with the lad Tommy and Billy Barlow, is told off to ride round the cattle, and prevent them straggling off the camp. Peter is to look after the bullocks when separated from the main crowd, and Fitzgerald, Thompson, and Sam are to draft. A few very quiet animals are driven out, and placed at about one

hundred and fifty yards from the rest, to form a kind of nucleus mob for the bullocks to run into. Peter is in attendance to receive them when they come, and prevent their making back or running away.

Now, threading his way through the masses of cattle, Fitzgerald selects one which his practiced eye tells him is of the kind wanted, and, riding behind it, urges it quietly to the edge of the mob. Bugler knows his work, and loves it with all his heart. His undivided attention is given to the animal in front of him. He is aware that it is his duty to separate him from the herd, and he is determined to do it. Any dodging movement on the part of the bullock, as, looking from side to side, he approaches the outside ring, is met with an involuntary motion to balk it on the horse's part, revealing the intense interest he takes in his work. A slight raising of the bridle-hand, and Bugler makes a desperate rush. Startled, the beast singles out from the rest, but immediately tries to double back, and mix up with his fellows. In vain—Bugler's quick eye watches him too narrowly; he has turned in the same instant, and is racing alongside, between him and his bellowing mates. Now, so suddenly as to be almost instantaneous, the determined brute has stopped, wheeled round, and is going at a headlong pace the opposite way. But it is all of no use. The practiced stock-horse props at the same moment, and still at speed bars the way. A few sharp cuts from Fitzgerald's whip decide the question, and the conquered creature joins a couple of his mates who have been taken out respectively by Thompson and Sam, and who are now running to mingle with Peter's charge.

Riding back slowly to breathe their nags, the drafters single out more of the particular class wanted, and the scene is repeated. The ground resounds with the rapid battering of the horses' feet, as, stretched at their utmost speed,

the intelligent creatures assist their riders with all their might. It is a stirring scene, full of healthy enjoyment and wild excitement.

"How these Australian fellows do ride!" thought John, as he notices the sudden dead-stop and sharp wheel, the rider sitting unmoved in his saddle. Look, there is a bullock which has proved too much for Thompson single-handed. He is a large roan bullock, with a red neck, and long, sharp, cocked horns. He is six or perhaps seven years old. He is one that has been missing from the run for the last year or two, and has been seen to-day for the first time during that period. Most probably he has been away on the scrub with a wild mob, and in an evil hour has taken it into his head to revisit his old haunts. His temper has not been improved by his association with the scrubbers. See, he turns on Thompson. What a narrow escape! Forrester manages to get out of his way, but receives an ugly scar on his thigh, which he will carry while he lives.

Sam now bears down to Thompson's assistance. Roaney is once again cut out of the mob. Watch—now—here! here! here they come! The wild-looking roan bullock endeavours to break back, while Sam races alongside, his body bent forward, uttering short, fierce, quick shouts, as, waving his hat in his hand, he seeks to intimidate the savage scrubber into sheering off from the main mob. What a pace they are going at! There they pass side by side between two trees, that barely allow them room. The leg of Sam's white moleskins brushes the fire-blackened trunk, and adopts its colour. A sudden fierce prop, and Roaney has shot behind Sam's horse, and succeeds in burying himself among the many-coloured bellowing herd. Sam rides slowly back, and, dismounting, slackens the girths of his steaming horse, who, with hanging head and quickly-heaving flanks, betrays the exertions he has made.

"Well," muttered Sam, rather sulkily, "blessed if he didn't near skiver my hoss!"

"Now, Sam, as soon as your horse gets his wind, you and I will tackle him," says Fitzgerald. "Our horses are the handiest. I wouldn't lose that fellow for a trifle. Ten to one, if we don't get him, after this knocking about, he'll make back for the scrubs again."

In about ten minutes' time Sam and his master ride side by side through the crowded camp. At last they notice their savage friend pushing his way through a thick mob of cattle some distance from them.

"Now, Sam," says Fitzgerald, "as soon as we get him fairly out, I'll ride alongside and shoulder him, and you must keep close up and play on him with your whip." "All right," growls Sam.

One or two essays are ineffectually

made to rush out into the open the huge beast, whose hot blood is now boiling within him. At last he is out, and is again racing, with Fitzgerald alongside this time, to get back into the mob.

"Now then, Sam!" shouts the squatter, as the clever bold horse, in obedience to his accomplished rider, closes on his horned antagonist, and, leaning over, presses all his weight against the scrubber's shoulder, edging him towards Peter's mob as they fly along. Sam, galloping at the creature's heels, has been waiting the word, and now commences a flagellation with his long twelve-footer, which compels the red-necked savage to keep his pace up, and gladly seek refuge among those already out.

It is now time to be making homewards, and the selected cattle are driven steadily in, and yarded for the night.

## THE FRIGATE-BIRD.



HERE is a pirate of the air. He is found, far out at sea, in tropical regions, and alas for any respectable sea-bird that he may spycarrying home a small cargo of freshly-caught fish to its expectant family.

Down sweeps this swift robber, and before the poor gull or tern can make up its mind about terms of surrender, the frigate-bird has forced it to drop its fish, which is swooped after and caught up by the pirate before it so much as touches the water.

It would be a difficult thing for any bird, respectable or otherwise, to fly faster than the frigate-bird, which has longer and more powerful wings, in proportion to its size, than any other bird. If its wings were stretched out, you would see this for yourselves.

The whole bird does not weigh more than three pounds and a-half, and yet its wings often measure more than seven feet from tip to tip. These birds are so strong and swift upon the wing, that they are often seen out at sea a thousand miles from land, and they will fly straight into the eye of the wind, and, when they choose, can rise high above the hurricane and the storm.

They live principally on fish, and, when they cannot overhaul a weaker and slower bird and steal his hard-earned prize, they will take the trouble to fish for themselves. But they seldom dive for their prey. They can see a fish from an immense height; and when an unfortunate fellow happens to be swimming near the top of the water, a frigate-bird, floating in the air so high up as to be almost invisible, will suddenly drop down, and with a skim over the surface of the