

"The Mythical Sundowner."

DEAR BULLETIN,—I notice in your issue of September 11 a contributor entitled "The Mythical Sundowner," which, I must say, is calculated to convey an impression erroneous as to what it is designed to correct.

In what part of the civilised world and in what grade of society, under circumstances and conditions favourable to its development, is the professional lazier and potential sundowner not found? This a lazier: sometimes it appears like a lord, sometimes like a lawyer, sometimes like a philosopher; he is very often like a knight, and generally walks in all the shapes that man goes up and down in from fourscore to thirteen.

You will become giddy in attempting to trace the origin of the lazier—the blue-gown, gaberlunzie, beggar man, sundowner, snuicer, &c., being, of course, sub-species, each developed by special conditions favourable to their own growth.

Neither is it fair to the squatter to assume that his hospitality to travellers—which, by the way, is preposterously over-rated by every writer I have met with—is intended by him as a menace to his employees or is ever interpreted by them as such.

But a drove of 200 sundowners is just the sort of mis-statement we should expect to find in an English magazine. The writer referred to by your contributor has ignorantly confounded with this base and helpless class the honest workers who, as the shearing season approaches, come from Victoria and eastern New South Wales like lions from the swelling of Jordan.

far below the average revenue of royal or aristocratic lazier, but it is ample compensation for riding a quiet horse seven or eight hours per diem, while you carry across your saddle-bow the lightest best known to the hardware trade.

On the approach of intense civilisation the true gentleman-sundowner folds up his tent like the mallee-men, and as silently steals away.

We have already seen that the representative or typical sundowner never dies. It is questionable whether even the individual would die—seeing that he is never sick, never was any younger and

The Philosopher of Riverina.

(FOR THE BULLETIN.)

When a man can work on the foibles of others and fail to smile when he segregates their shakels (put a ? there; I'm dubious, but it sounds well), and when he arrives with a swag but departs on a charger (Note I), he is entitled to the name of a philosopher.

On the contents of Oountember a little fellow arrived at Bluegum. His assets were a leather bag (last time I saw him he had it slung round his shoulder and was talking about the Barwon, which is a Caledonia).

When you have dismissed (noted) all this, bear in mind the fact that the boss and his trustees wished to let the drummer down mildly and relegated him to the jackeroos. (Note IV.) The latter saw fun and entertained the angel unaware; i.e., unaware of the fact that they were being laid. (Note V.)

Next evening he gave the same entertainment to the (ex)eme man, (you Greek type ain't handy) Roy Pollock in the woods, and his trustees where fly-flats breed, and he read their heads for some time, making each flattered flash sign his name and being called second (Cassiar or fourth) Napoleon.



Melbourne, Thursday.—The Dowds and Marian Ponto, were to-day charged with stealing the furniture and property of the latter's husband, who is employed in Cameron's tobacco factory. Deeds, it is alleged, were with Mrs. Ponto and her children, selling all furniture. — Daily Paper.

It was a giddy Melbourne man Who, tired of single life And seized with a romantic fit, Intended to choose a wife!

He chose another party's wife; And started in pursuit; He also chose his furniture (The latter he could sell).

And then occurred what play-wrights call A Thrilling Situation; A guilty pair—a husband wronged; They meet! (see illustration).

"O, give me back my family," The outraged party cried; "O, give me back my children three, Give back our mutual bride!"

"Yes, give me back my furniture And all that I love best; Or, stay; give back the furniture And you may keep the rest."

WOLFE'S SCHNAPPS, A GREAT RELIEF IN RHEUMATISM.

HIGH ART PHOTOGRAPHY.—For artistic posing and effective lighting, combining softness with brilliancy, the Photographs of CHARLEMONT and CO., Royal Arcade, Sydney, stand pre-eminently high, photographers to his Excellency Lord Carington. By Appointment.

"Oh! yes, just as a souvenir." But he billed them for seven-and-sixpence apiece. What he charged the Government House I don't know, but he, like the man in St. John (not Baptist) climbed in another way and nobbled the servant-girl a half-hill. He told her she'd marry 15 squatters and die a widow and be buried in a golden coffin under wattle. Here is a sample of his "Phrenological Analysis of the head of B. L. Thudner, Esq., sheep-farmer."

An Ex-Digger's Growl.

This life is gay enough at times, But still it has its heavy spells, The weary course of slinging thames, When wages, not the will, impels— The "horrid grind" at "pointed taps," The articles with headlocks cramm'd, The column stick & hot of the bars, That "must be funny" or be damnd.

My flesh muscled seems to twerk To feel the windless pull and strain, To shake the cradle by the jerk, And paddle at the "ton" again. Ah! 'pen for tick in an' poor swag When'er o'er the slides the waters flow, A pile of half-ounce stuff on top, And fifty feet on wash below.

'Twas lightly left, 'tis lately mourn'd, That life in Tassie's eight-by-ten, When coats with yellow glare adorned, Were good enough for gentlemen, And Sunday's best was Monday's wear, When Bonnet gave us verse and look— Poor Phil! a crude philosopher,

But, bless his heart, a clever covek, A high old time he had, we thras— Our dappled clouds with sunshine load— The pipe-stalk soft and dry at knee, A foot of washit, easy "faced," And none to say us aye or nay.

'Twas good, when "spell-oh" had been said, To watch the white smoke curl and ring Against the gravel roof overhead, The candle dimly flickering, And circling with a pallid glow— To sprawl upon the broken reef, And persistently to pull and blow. The fragrant incense from the leaf.

And where the torpid Wondie's tide, Untainted by the Stafford's sloughs, Fell into its pristine pride, Stole sleeplessly beneath the boughs, It was delightful toil to lay, The dish within the food, I wren, And paddle off the pug and clay, And pan the gold prospect clean.

In hours of indolence and dream I writ the old tin Olla again, About Wondie's lambent waters seen To lave my brow and lap my brain: And, from the ravished hillside, come Faint clamours on the fifted breeze, And mingle with the crooning hum Of insects in the drowsy trees.

The barrels rattle on their stand, In the shakels the nail-grogs swing The short, sharp strokes of practised hands, Are making pick and anvil ring. The slothful echoes daily so, They blend with spidder's measure ch a, The chery cry, "Look up, below!" The muffled call of "Heave on top!"

No piles were made on Pinafords, Here Nature's hoards were hard to find, And though we skinned the golden store, We left the richest stuff behind— Contentments, freedom, careless ease, And friendship which—a long felt want— We never meet in towns like these, 'Twas not the kind that cities haunt.

The day is done, regrets are vain, I cannot eat my cake once more, The crumbs of comfort that remain I won't despise for feastings o'er; The life I loved of olden days, Was digging-days by flood and field, The gladstone graft with pick and pan, The pay a problem till the field.

A Rockhampton correspondent points out, in support of cremation, that two local grave-diggers recently discovered a skeleton face down in its coffin. We have noticed that the Rockhampton man when dead-drunk generally does he face-down.

A Melbourne Herald reporter complains that at the latest local hanging he had to endure a weary 15 minutes' wait before the drop-scene came. This serious complaint should be investigated with a view to improvement next time: punctuality is the soul of business and early first editions. A German resident in England thus writes to a London paper—

A few weeks ago I resolved, for the first time, to write a humble letter to the police authorities in a large city of Prussia, asking permission to visit it to see my aged father and mother, who are feeble in health, and who would like to look once more upon their own faces before they die. I left home at the age of 30—15 years ago—and before I had served in the army. Soon after I came, my father received an order to appear before one of the Imperial regents, when they call in this kind of freedom on Prussia. My dear old father, 75 years of age, reported that his son—the only one—in London, and was told that if I agreed to pay a fine of 2000, undergo six weeks' drilling and six months in fortress, I might return and see my parents. I was not averse to such terms in his case and a trembling hand, at the same time committing me to the care of the Almighty. It would have been a great joy for me and my parents to have met, but under these circumstances we shall meet no more.

The leading Packet Tea in New South Wales is the Famous BILLY TEA. Its consumption is at least double that of any other brand in the market. PACKED ONLY BY James Inglis & Co., 4 & 6 DEAN'S PLACE, SYDNEY.

The Mythical Sundowner

JOSEPH FURPHY

First published in the *Bulletin* 5 October 1889 p.8

Dear BULLETIN,—I notice in your issue of September 14 a contribution entitled “The Mythical Sundowner,” which, I must say, is calculated to convey an impression erroneous as that which it is designed to correct.

In what part of the civilised world and in what grade of society, under circumstances and conditions favourable to his development, is the professional loafer and potential sundowner not found? ’Tis a spirit: sometimes it appears like a lord, sometimes like a lawyer, sometimes like a philosopher; he is very often like a knight, and generally walks in all the shapes that man goes up and down from fourscore to thirteen. Given the opportunity to loaf, and you can trust our poor, frail human nature to supply the loafer. Great is laziness and she will prevail. Millions breathe but to inherit her forever-lounging spirit. This spirit may equally be tabernacled in the bedizened body of the heiress-hunting assassin-officer or in the rag-clad anatomy of the fragrant hanger-on at a country pub. Nothing short of the mutual police system of ideal Socialism will ever shift the beggar—I use the title not inadvertently, but advisedly and critically. Never believe but that the Riverina shanty of the present day witnesses many a modified repetition of the scene at Pousie Nansie’s a century ago, when those tuneful sundowners held the splore, to drink their orra duddies. Ask any elderly and observant Irishman whether he ever saw a beggarman, and mark his answer—mark his answer, I say, for you can thereby determine his religious persuasion: if he be a member of the dominant class, he will, whilst admitting the existence of the Irish sundowner, carefully impress on you that the individual in question is invariably “more Popery than fiscal.”

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You will become giddy in attempting to trace the origin of the loafer—the blue-gown, gaberlunzie, beggar man, sundowner, sinecurist, &c., being, of course, sub-species, each developed by special conditions favourable to its particular growth. Members of this ancient order often stretched their legs (saving reverence of the word) under Ulysses’ mahogany whilst the absent hero made history in a manner which reminds us of Baron Munchausen. Back, back in dim epochs which have left but scanty relics, the pre-historic sundowner

performed his diurnal journey from one lacustrine dwelling to another in his bark canoe, while the Swiss mountains—fit type of his own interminable continuance—catapulted avalanche after avalanche at his invulnerable head. Back, back in the very earliest of the perished civilisations—in fact since the invention of laziness—the sundowner has been an institution; in this secondary sense, and in no other, he may be termed “mythical.” And wherever food is to be obtained without the vulgar equivalent of work, there the sundowner of the present day sits, like Patience on a monument, smiling at his unearned increment—namely his pannikin of flour.

* * *

The social and economic conditions of Riverina being perhaps even more favourable to the perpetuation and advancement of this ancient and time-defying cult than are the traditional usages of the upper and upper-middle classes of Great Britain, it would be rather surprising if, as your contributor says, “The sundowner or Murrumbidgee whaler has no existence and never had.” I grieve to say I have seen the sundowner in force—not merely *seen* him, for, being a nobleman at large rather than a Knight Companion of the Bath, he generally appeals to another sense—wasting his sweetness on the desert air anywhere and everywhere between the Murray and the Darling. He does not by any means “carry his swag from station to station, travelling a score of miles under a burning sun where water is often unobtainable.” Not at all: that is more like what an independent, self-respecting man would do. Your gentleman-sundowner does not disdain the simple hospitalities of the contractor’s or rabbiter’s or bullock-driver’s or drover’s camp; and true men will not insult the submissive, be he ever so worthless. Do not imagine that he necessarily bakes his pannikin of station-flour at once; his constant care is to increase his slender store so that he may retire to some secluded bend where he can mend his diet with a few cod-fish (hence the name “Whaler”), and fleet the time carelessly as they did i’ the golden age. His wants are few and simple; he wears cast-off clothes; and eating is, in a great measure, an acquired habit. The man who, in lieu of honest “calluses” on the palm of his hand, is distinguished by knuckles of aboriginal blackness, perennially lustrous with the gloss which blankets alone can give, is not easily starved. Starve? quotha!—starve a blackfellow.

* * *

Neither is it fair to the squatter to assume that his hospitality to travellers—which by the way, is preposterously over-rated by every writer I have met with—is intended by him as a menace to his employees or is even interpreted by them as such. It is simply a pastoral tradition which cannot be abruptly swept away. The type squatter, in spite of his unkind and insolent attitude

towards drovers, carriers, &c., and his unrelenting animosity to selectors, is by far the most considerate and indulgent employer in Australia; and, as might be expected, his employees are devoted, body and soul, to his interests. This is very beautiful in the present, but may be most disastrous in the future. It means unquestioned lordship and contented peonage—it means *caste*. By-and-by a king arises who knows not Joseph; the population begins to press upon him the means of support, and the canaille are counselled to eat grass. Ask history what follows.

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But a drove of 300 sundowners is just the sort of mis-statement we should expect to find in an English magazine. The writer referred to by your contributor has ignorantly confounded with this base and helpless class the honest workers who, as the shearing season approaches, come from Victoria and eastern New South Wales like lions from the swelling of Jordan. These are the very antithesis of the sundowner—active, emulous, and independent and capable men; they appear by hundreds in the early spring and disappear as summer approaches. Your true sundowner will scarcely accept the easiest work of a rouseabout in the shearing season: at any other time he will *not* work. At Willandra, a few years ago, I saw 12 out of 13 sundowners refuse 15s. per week—with board of course—for burr cutting; the offer being made to them by the station storekeeper as he served out the traditional pannikin of flour and a bit of raw mutton. To be sure, 15s per week is far below the average revenue of royal or aristocratic loafers, but it is ample compensation for riding a quiet horse for seven or eight hours per diem, while you carry across your saddle-bow the lightest hoe known to the hardware trade. I felt interested in those 12 princes. I sought their society that evening in the rouse-about's hut by the woolshed, and I can safely say that I have seldom spent three hours more pleasantly or profitably. The conversation, so far as I can remember, ran entirely on the subject of station hospitality to “travelers.” In the darkness of the hut, gruff voices and squeaky voices and drawling voices and snuffling voices rose here and there from the bunks in championship or condemnation of names familiar to the pastoral ear as wicked words—Tyson and Landell and Locky, of course—Sammy Wilson, Ole Ric, Hungry This, Gentlemen That, Charley Officer on the Port Phillip side, &c. As an evidence of Conservatism, I noticed that though these hidalgos necessarily associated daily, more or less, with the few inhabitants of those lonely plains, they always spoke of the Cabbage Garden as “Port Phillip,” of the Holy Land as “tother side,” and of *Australia* as the “Sydney side.” It was the honest impression of every one of their Serene Highnesses that a squatter's pastoral licence contained a provision binding the feoffee to supply to each and every professional knight-errant, on demand, the traditional

pannikin of flour. So that, you see, the sundowner claims his tribute by imagined authority of law as well as by indefeasible divine right.

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On the approach of intenser civilisation the true gentleman-sundowner folds up his tent like the mallee-hen, and as silently steals away. I was on the Murumbidgee when the north bank of the river became suddenly busy by reason of the construction of the Junee and Hay railway line, and I noticed a marked change in the old order of things, that the sundowner, for a time, ceased to peregrinate up and down the river eating Jacky Dow's mutton.

* * *

We have already seen that the representative or typical sundowner never dies. It is questionable whether even the individual would die—seeing that he is never sick, never was any younger and never grows any older—but that he is subject to accident. During the protracted floods of '70, many of these unfortunate waifs—no one knows how many—perished miserably, marooned on insulated-patches of higher ground along the rivers or drowned as their refuges became submerged. Casualties of many kinds thin their ranks, and recruits are not so plentiful now as 20 or 30 years ago. The old economic systems which produce and tolerate social extremes are dying out—dying hard, certainly, after the manner of abuses, but dying, nevertheless.

* * *

Still, while human nature sports into so many varieties and degrees of laziness, the sundowner will never fail; men may come and men may go, but he goes on forever. Pastoral interests may wax and wane: stations may be incorporated, divided, sold, or foreclosed; managers may die, resign, be sacked, or received into partnership; the Mantchoorian boundary-man may supersede the Indo-Germanic, but while there exists a circuit of stations as a basis of operations, the phoenix-like sundowner shall flourish in immortal youth.

Warrigal Jack.