

By S.J. Treasure

OCTOBER 27

It was raining fine mist when we arrived on the Plains with the first mob of cattle this spring. Every-where water oozed, and the fog, thick upon the range, blocked distant views. The cattle were tired and hungry. Short, lush green growth was inviting to travelled, weary stock. Next day I drove some of the drycows across the Plains to Bluerag. As we left the basalt plateau and travelled the road towards St. Bernard, the sun shone through. Yet southward, where rises the great bulk of the Dargo High Plains, trimmed with basalt cliffs along most of the north and west sides, the heavy clouds of fog hung persistently, as if reluctant to let go and reveal "God's country" in common with the surrounding mountains.

In this land where I was born and lived all my life, there is something fascinating and inspiring to be here again in spring. The process of winter has completely wiped away the autumn. Everything has a new start. Grass and clover, clean and new, covers the autumn's greyness as if it were forever gone. Each little glade at the end of the road cuttings is covered by a mat of wild white clover. Cattle fight the dogs to "stall" time for a few more mouthfuls. Then on, beyond Bluerag, where the sharp range is suddenly cut off by cloud which seems built of smaller puffs drifting from the valleys far below. That means fine weather. I leave the cattle now and ride on to shut the gate across the road to St. Bernard. Half an hour to boil the billy at Evening Star Hut. The smell of burning snow gum leaves brings memories; and while the billy boils, I dwell in my enjoyment alone and unshared. Through the hut doorway, white-barked snow gums, mingling with red mountain ash, tint the picture of the vast expanse beyond, of eagle-baffling ranges fading in unmeasured distance to the vague snow-capped outline of Kosciusko far away.

OCTOBER 29

The cattle have been ushered to their places for the summer, but any excuse to avoid ^{riding} to Dargo in the company of others! One day alone on the Plains in the spring is worth living for. Yes, I will be down, Isay, tomorrow; today I must shift thoes bullocks on the Long Spur. That job is easily attended to and the hole in the fence fixed up. What a day! What about a few pan-fuls of trout? Away to the creek that never fails, a mountain stream clear and bounding over basalt ledges and teeming with trout. I almost tread on a copperhead as I jog down; he is quickly dealt with. But where are the fish this year? Hole after hole is tried, but not even a bite. The last big hole under the waterfall reveals the reason. For the first time in history that creek has been raided by a cormorant and, there he is, too full of fish to fly! Over the boulders through the scrub, with stones whizzing, but missing their mark. At last he rises and carries southwards (Towards the lakes from whence he came) my fish, from my own creek. What an age is this, when my pan-fuls of trout become air-borne and fly away.

The sun is sinking beyond Mt. Howitt, and I fall to thinking of my mountain wanderings and of one place - that vastness surrounding the old settlements of Dandongdale - which

streams pouring ice cold from the Dividing Range, standing in a semi-circle from Mt. Selwin in the east to beyond Mt. Cobbler in the west. Here is grandeur: sheer rock faces and plunging waterfalls, silent forests thick with undergrowth, struggling in harmonious conflict to share the life-giving sun. Here, perhaps, our bush poet, Billy Wye, caught the mood for the verse:

How well I remember that scented September
Aglow with the wattle-boughs' blossoming gold,
With ripples a-quiver, the silver river,
Reflecting the sun-flames as onward it rolled.
Times' passing but hallows the song of the shallows
In echoes resounding through uplands afar,
That still from the distance, with soft sweet ~~in~~
insistence,
Transport me again where the lyrebirds are.

Only the keen eyes of the bushmen see the old pads worn deep along the rivers by thousands of cattle that once grazed here. There are, too, the remnants here and there of a draughting yard, a few remaining posts, fast rotting away, and destined soon to follow in the path of their builders. Those men and women of early pioneering days, whose hospitality is a dying code, who suffered privation to build for those that follow on - what a pity they are being forgotten. Fire and plagues of rabbits have upset Nature's balance and the bushland has drawn into recess to recuperate, though a few cattle still graze. Surely here lie secrets concealed in their own language. Far from the confusion of the cities, where my kind are being moulded, am I not entitled, as they are, to voice an opinion, even though only one against the multitude? Perhaps here, also, the stone age man paused to reflect deeply; but his tribal legend helped little to solve the mysteries of the universe. Yet at least he was better adapted to Nature's conditions. He needed no more, until advancing intelligence from a world apart flung him, destitute and unwanted, on to the cruel rocks of extinction.

As the shadows deepen in a troubled world, I view again the crag bathed in the last golden rays. I read the message and seek to translate it while I make camp in the silence of the forest.

Truth is eternities away,
And we but climb
Through the dark of time
To the dawn of day.