

Charles White

*History
of Australian
Bushranging 2*

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CHAPTER X. BEN HALL'S GANG.

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BRIEF SKETCH OF ITS MEMBERS.

For some time after the robbery of the Escort at Eugowra Rocks, Hall, Gilbert, and O'Meally kept away from their usual haunts; but were by no means idle during their temporary seclusion, and not a few cases of "sticking-up" in lonely parts of the bush roads in the Lachlan district were, not without reason, charged against one or other of them by the authorities and the public.

While the fate of their late companions—Mann, Bow, and Fordyce—was hanging in the balance they were arranging fresh plots under the very noses of the police. As in the case of Gardiner, a perfect system of "bush telegraphy" had been established in every locality where their friends resided; and as they invariably moved with a given object from their hiding places, and either returned direct to the place from which they had started or made for some other friendly shelter in another direction, they were always in touch with their "telegraphs", and were thus kept posted in every movement made by the force whose aim it was to capture them.

Upon these "telegraphs" the bushrangers depended as absolutely as did the officers of an army upon their scouts when in the territory of an enemy. Flitting on fast-footed horses from station to station in the disturbed districts, or mixing with the people in the nearest town, generally the headquarters of the police, the "telegraphs" would pick up

every scrap of information likely to be of interest to the hunted men, sometimes times coming into contact with the police, and learning directly all they desired to know. And having satisfied themselves concerning police intentions, they would suddenly disappear and convey or send their news to the camp where the bushrangers were located. Occasionally one of these "telegraphs" would be arrested, but as nothing could be proved against him, a few days' confinement between the time of his arrest and his discharge by the magistrate formed the worst of his sufferings. And should a suspected "telegraph" find himself too closely watched or be arrested, others were always ready to take up the work. They were invariably young men, some of them mere boys, intimately acquainted with the bush, who could cover miles of the roughest country more speedily than the badly-mounted troopers could ride along good roads. Ben Hall, Gilbert, and O'Meally had hosts of such friends in the Lachlan district, where they had lived for years, and amongst whom their bushranging instincts had been developed.

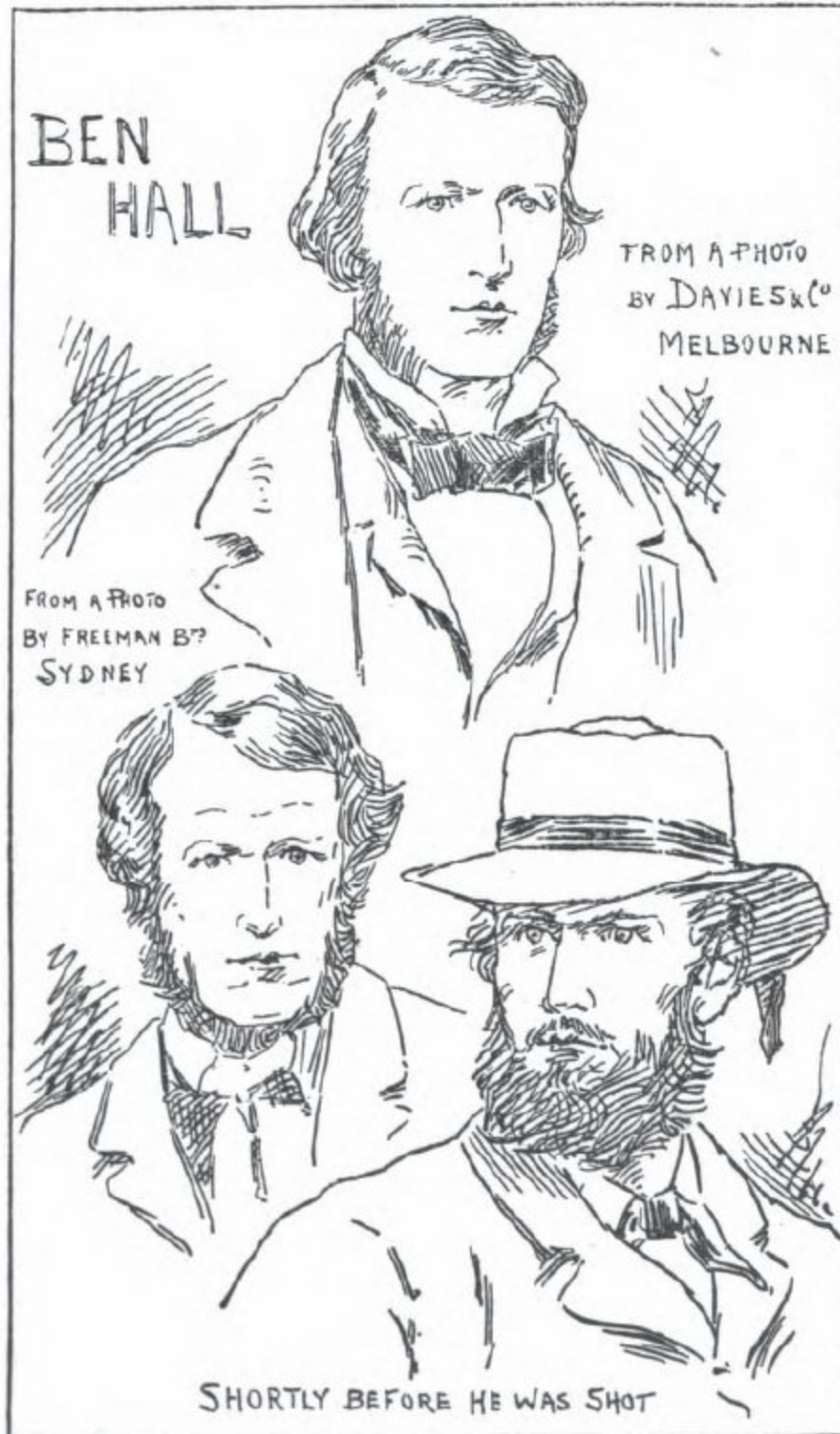
A brief sketch of the three men just mentioned will form a suitable prelude to the account of their outrages.

Ben Hall was born at Breeza, Liverpool Plains, in February, 1837, and was consequently but a young man—about twenty-five years of age—when he assumed the command which Gardiner had renounced. While the colony was ringing with the account of his exploits his parents were living at Murrurundi, where his father was a freeholder, and well-to-do farmer. It was at Breeza and Murrurundi that young Hall lived until he was ten years old. While at

Murrurundi he attended school for about two years and a half, learned to read and write, and obtained sufficient knowledge of arithmetic to enable him to conduct his own business. Thus early in life, and while assisting his father upon the station, it is related that he evinced a remarkable degree of perception and aptness in regard to stock. If he saw a calf dropped, he could, in a year afterwards, identify the cow and the calf and locate them. When this lad was about ten years old, his father removed to the Lachlan district and took charge of a station belonging to Mr. Hamilton, about fifteen miles from Forbes, on the road to the Pinnacle. The son resided with his father upon this station until he was about eighteen years old, and was almost exclusively engaged in stock-keeping, looking after the stock of Mr. Hamilton as well as that belonging to himself and father. About the year 1852, the elder Hall returned to Murrurundi and commenced farming on his own account, leaving Ben on the Lachlan. Father and son never again saw each other. It was much against the old man's desire that his son remained behind; but the young man had formed an intimacy with Miss Bridget Walsh, the second daughter of Mr. John Walsh, of Wheogo, and nothing could induce him to leave the locality. The father, intent on separating his son from this connection, also removed, not only his own but his son's cattle to the other side of the country. A short time before his father's departure, Ben surreptitiously left home and went into the employment of Mr. Walsh, at Wheogo, as stock-keeper. A year after he married Miss Walsh. Two children were born to him by this marriage, but the youngest was only about twelve months old, and

still in arms, when Mrs. Hall eloped with a man named Taylor, and went to reside with him somewhere on the Fish River. Shortly after his marriage, Ben Hall, in company with John McGuire, obtained the lease of a run adjoining Wheogo, called Sandy Creek, which they stocked with cattle and horses. Up to this period Ben Hall was held in high esteem by the settlers throughout the district, not only for his generous, open-hearted qualities, always showing a disposition to assist his neighbours, but for the enterprise and energy he displayed in conducting his business affairs.

Very shortly after the elopement of his wife with Taylor, which occurred while he was absent attending a muster at the Bland, and after he had taken a most affectionate leave of her, without for one moment entertaining the slightest suspicion of her infidelity, he was arrested by Sir Frederick Pottinger at the Wowingragong racecourse, charged with highway robbery under arms.



BEN HALL.

The residents of the district were greatly surprised that a charge of this nature should be brought against a man who

was held in such good repute. After lying in the lock-up for four or five weeks he was taken to Orange and tried, but the jury acquitted him without leaving their seats. This was towards the end of May, 1862, and immediately upon his release he returned to Sandy Creek station and commenced mustering his horses. He had been engaged several weeks in this work, and the business was still progressing, when Sir Frederick Pottinger and Sub-Inspector Sanderson appeared upon the scene. They had good grounds for suspecting that Hall had been doing something besides mustering horses. The Eugowra escort had been robbed; and instinct and information had led the officers to Sandy Creek station. Hall was arrested on a charge of being in some way implicated in that robbery, and was straightway removed to Forbes. He remained in the Forbes lock-up some six or seven weeks, being brought before the Bench of Magistrates from time to time and remanded, at the instance of the police, for the production of further evidence. He was ultimately admitted to bail, himself in £500, and two sureties of £250 each, to appear when called upon. He was not committed. When he returned to Wheogo and Sandy Creek he found that all the labour of mustering his horses had been in vain, some of them having perished in the yards, and the greater portion having dispersed. After looking about to see if he could recover them he found they were hopelessly scattered, and gave up the idea of collecting them that season.

About this time the Police Station at the Pinnacle was stuck up and robbed of firearms and other things by Patsy Daley. The same night this was done, Ben Hall (unfortunately for himself, and by mere chance, he

declared), happened to be stopping at the house of a Mr. Allport, on the Lambing Flat road. To this house Patsy Daley went after robbing the Police Station. The police tracked one horseman to Allport's, and from that point they tracked two horsemen, Daley and Hall. Hall knew at this time that Daley was compromised with Gardiner, but subsequently declared that he did not know Daley had just robbed the Police Station. When he discovered that he and Daley were being pursued by the police, knowing that he was in company with one of Gardiner's gang, he fled. The police pursued and fired upon them, but they escaped, and from that time both openly took to the roads, and Hall joined Gilbert and O'Meally. Some two or three months afterwards Patsy Daley was captured when secreted in a digger's shaft at the Pinnacle. Upon being tried he was convicted at Bathurst and sentenced to fifteen years on the roads.

Johnny Gilbert, who was the right-hand man of Gardiner, before Hall's troubles commenced, was a Canadian by birth, and came out as a boy to Australia with his family in the "Revenue", from New York, landing in Melbourne in October, 1852. Soon after his arrival young Gilbert commenced a fast career, and bolted from the paternal roof. Shortly after the first rush to the Ovens diggings he was located in Kilmore, where he associated with gamesters; and as he was generally "flush" of money, derived from no one knew where, he became an object of suspicion to the authorities. Subsequently he crossed over to New South Wales, and next came into notice as a stockman in the neighbourhood of Marengo. Here he made himself a general favourite by a display of good temper and fairly correct living; but towards

the end of 1861 he suddenly left the district, and about three months afterwards reappeared in company with Johnny O'Meally, flashily dressed and flush of money. It then transpired that he had fallen in with Gardiner, and joined his gang.

John O'Meally was little more than a boy when Gardiner commenced operations on the road. His father kept a shanty at the Weddin Mountains. Here he fell in with Gardiner. From being a sympathiser he soon became an active ally, and having joined in the bold exploit at Eugowra, he threw off all restraint, and plunged into the robber business with an energy and daring that would have been meritorious in a better cause.

There was another member of the gang who should be referred to here, for he became a member very shortly after Hall had assumed the command. His name was John Dunn, and he also was a young man. Born in December, 1846, at Yass, he was but 17 years of age when he broke away from the home circle, and chose the life of a bushranger, Gilbert and another member of the gang, yet to be mentioned, having persuaded him to that course. His father was a respectable settler in the district, and, it is said, rode many miles in the effort to find and reclaim his erring son when he was made aware of the ruinous course upon which he had entered. His fall was certainly not the result of bad upbringing. He outlived all the rest of the gang, but after narrowly escaping death from a policeman's bullet he was captured and ended his life on the gallows, having been convicted of shooting down a policeman in cold blood.

In June, 1863, exactly twelve months from the date of Eugowra Escort Robbery, six highway robberies were committed in one day near Lambing Flat, and every succeeding day brought forth its "report" of travellers being "stuck up", by either two or three bushrangers. Now it would be of a solitary traveller "bailed" up and stripped of his possessions; now it would be of her Majesty's mail stopped on the road and the letters sorted by hands not legally appointed to the work; now it would be of a store invaded and ransacked, provisions and clothing being carried off in cornsacks and by the hundredweight. It was a serious time, a time of tremulous anxiety to every traveller, every householder, every storekeeper in the Lachlan district; and a time of ceaseless worry, hard riding and fruitless chasing for the police.

Let me give a few illustrations culled from letters and papers of the period:—

I was stuck-up about eighteen miles from here (on my way from Tumut) by two armed bushrangers (writes a resident storekeeper of 'Young, Lambing Flat, under date 30th June, 1863). They took my watch and chain, a gold pin, and £2 in money, and a railway wrapper. They did not attempt to molest me, and appeared very jolly and well up to their business. I had a little conversation with them and asked them their names. One told me his name was Gilbert, but from the description I gave of him I very much doubt whether it was him. The other would not give his name. They ransacked my buggy, not being exactly satisfied with the amount of money they got, and came across a little box containing some cakes and candy, to which they helped themselves, and then rode

off, politely telling me they did not want to delay any any longer. One of them asked me my name, which T told him. "O," says he, I know you; I had some of your lobsters." So I told him he forgot to mention that he also had some gin and tobacco. He was one of the men that stuck up my drays some time back, and took those articles from the dray. There were no less than six persons stuck up that day, some within a mile of the township, and others on different parts of the diggings. This place is really in a frightful state, and it is dangerous to ride out of the town. They don't care about the police, and only laugh at them; they always have good horses, and can ride away from the police with the greatest ease.

There was no small amount of excitement here yesterday (says a letter of the same date, and from the same place). Yesterday Coupland was stuck up by two bushrangers, about two miles down the creek. The same two stuck up Howard, Murphy's bookkeeper, and robbed him of five or six pounds, in the afternoon. Emanuel was stuck-up the other side of Wombat, and robbed of his watch and two pounds, and so on. About the same time the local paper contained the following paragraph:—

On Sunday last a travelling German saddler called on our reporter to state that on the previous Wednesday he was stuck-up on the Bathurst-road, near the Gap, by three armed bushrangers, and robbed of a packhorse and property to the amount of £60; likewise 15s, which was all the money he had about him. He describes one of the bushrangers as a young man, apparently not more than 18 years of age, light hair and fair complexion, riding a dark bay horse; another a tall man, with bushy black whiskers; and the third as a full faced man with foxy whiskers. When about to leave, the

youngest of the three robbers turned to the German and handed him 5s of his own money to help him on the road, observing that he was not so badly off, as he had the horse he rode to sell, if he liked. About four miles from where the robbery took place, the German called at a settler's hut, and on making the people there acquainted with the loss, he was told that Gilbert and O'Meally had been there two days before. In answer to a question from our reporter, he said he gave no information to the police, nor did he intend to do so, as he, in common with everybody else, considered it useless. How long is society to continue thus disorganised, and its present state of insecurity to life and property to exist, and how long will the country bear with the reign of terror before it hurls the present imbecile police before the winds?

The fact is that popular conversation was divided between the daring of the bushrangers and the inefficiency of the force empowered to catch them. And it was about this time that "Bell's Life in Sydney", in a jocular sketch of the state of the bushranging news market, published the following *soi disant* telegram:—

Narrow Escape of the Police!!! Last evening three bushrangers espied a large body of troopers, and immediately gave chase. The darkness of the evening favoured the escape of the troopers, and baffled the bushrangers. The appetites of Captain McLerie and Sir F. Pottinger continue in undiminished vigour.

The following letter, written by a traveller about this time, will enable the reader to understand the delights of travelling in the disturbed district while the bushrangers

held the road, and also the indifference to the presence of the police displayed by Hall and his gang:—

I relate the following incident (wrote this gentleman) to show how very little Hall, Gilbert, and O'Meally cared for the police, and how they kept on good terms with the residents of the parts they frequented. I left Lambing Flat diggings by Greig's coach, which started at four in the morning, to go to the Lachlan goldfield, about 90 miles distant. The coach being full, the agent allowed me to ride on the rack with the mailbags, with strict injunctions to hold well on to the ropes. It was well he did, for some portions of the road were laid down with logs from 12 to 18 inches thick, and when the coach came on to these the effect was anything but exhilarating. First a terrible shock, and then a continued bump, bump, bump for perhaps hundreds of yards. These parts were called "corduroys", and were a rough-and-ready way of making a road passable over bogs and swamps, until other improvements could be effected. The stages were from 12 to 15 miles apart, and in the afternoon we reached the last but one before we came to the township, and it being a public house, most of the passengers got down, and so did I, to stretch my legs. And when I did I noticed something unusual going on in the yard adjoining the inn. There were four men on horseback, two standing, seemingly stable men or rouseabouts, and a woman, who I heard was the landlady. I did not know them, but heard after we started that the four men were Ben Hall and his mates, and the reason of their visitation at the time was the following:— The landlady, who was a widow, had a week or so before gone to Forbes to settle some business affairs, and was away for two or three days, during which period it appears that the man she left in charge

of the bar had started drinking, with the result that the yardman and groom and neighbours, and in fact all hands who came along, had joined in the spree, and the quantity of liquor consumed as well as provisions was something enormous, especially as there was very little money to show that any had been paid for. So, at their wits' end for an excuse, the two principals agreed to swear to the landlady on her return that it was the bushrangers who had come and helped themselves. She, who was always friendly to them, happened to tell this to one who informed Ben Hall, who came over and made the real culprits confess their guilt. At that time they stuck up no one on the coach nor any one in the house. But it was a well-known fact that they never did stick up many of the places on this line of road, and it was the general opinion that they were afforded valuable information as to the movements of the police by a very large proportion of the residents in these localities in consequence. As I looked at them over the gate I noticed that the spokesman was a rather tall, robust-looking man, with a fine frank-looking face, and wore a high felt hat and cord breeches and top boots—that was Ben Hall. A slight, fair man, looking like a horse trainer, had a slight, fair moustache and cabbage tree hat, breeches and boots, and had one leg crossed over the pommel of the saddle, listening to what was said—that was Gilbert. A flash, rowdy-looking young fellow, with keen flashing eyes, who was looking at the two men standing with no pleasant countenance, was O'Meally. At this time there were between 30 and 40 mounted police at Forbes, only a few miles distant, under Sir Frederick Pottinger.

But it was time for the gang to change quarters, and as a few days passed without report of fresh outrages in the

Young district people began to look for reports from some other direction. And what everybody anticipated shortly came to pass. The gang had taken across country and quietly entered Carcoar, where instead of blackmailing travellers on the road or calling upon the driver of the mail to "chuck out the bags", they proceeded to "stick-up" the bank. This was no midnight descent, after the manner of the ordinary burglar, but a bold and open onslaught in the broad light of day, and it was quite by an accident that the designs of the robbers were frustrated. Under ordinary circumstances the mere fact of two horsemen riding up to the Commercial Bank (which was situated in the main thoroughfare of the town), alighting, and entering the bank, would not have excited suspicion; but there was something extraordinary in the appearance of both men and horses on this occasion. The former were dressed, not like ordinary customers of the bank, but as "flash" bushmen, and the latter were animals of a superior class, with suspicious-looking pouches attached to their saddles. The door of the bank was invitingly open. There were no customers on the public side of the counter, and only one of the bank officials was in his place on the business side. That official was Mr. J. Parker, who, in his capacity as chief clerk, had full control of the institution for the time being. The manager, Mr. McDonald, was not far away, however. He had crossed the street to "see a friend", and happened to look towards the bank just as the two men entered the door. A suspicion at once crossed his mind that his presence at the bank might be required.

Having entered the bank Hall and Gilbert strode up to the counter and one of them handed to Mr. Parker a rather dirty-looking piece of paper, in form like a cheque, at the same time asking him to cash it. Mr. Parker took the document, but had no sooner begun to inspect it than he was startled by having a revolver presented at each side of his head, the action being accompanied by an assurance from the bushrangers that if he made the least noise or resistance he would find his brains on the floor. It was at this moment that McDonald, the manager, made his appearance at the door, and the noise of his approach caused both the bushrangers to turn their heads, although they kept their revolvers presented at Parker's head. One of the men, no doubt thinking that the visitor was one of the customers of the bank, at once called out "Come in, mate;" but McDonald had taken in the situation at a glance, turned on his heels, and sped down the street to give the alarm at the police station.

The momentary distraction of the would-be robbers was not lost upon Parker, who, although much alarmed at the situation, had not lost his presence of mind. In anticipation of a visit of this kind the bank authorities had sought to make provision for defending their treasures, and loaded revolvers became part of the bank furniture in every country branch. There was a revolver beneath the counter within reach of the startled clerk on this occasion, and as the bushrangers turned their heads to the door Parker dropped behind the counter, seized the revolver, and fired—not at the intruders, for the counter intervened, but into the air, for the purpose of at once creating an alarm and scaring the robbers. Both ends were accomplished. A Mr. Harrison and

his daughter, living on the opposite side of the street, at once ran over, the latter calling loudly for assistance and attracting the attention of a number of the townspeople, who also began running towards the bank. At the same time Miss Harrison attempted to let the horses loose from the post to which they were hitched, but the bushrangers rushed from the bank, having realised the danger of remaining longer on the spot, and warning those who displayed an inclination to intercept them that if they did not keep back they would be shot, hurriedly remounted and galloped away.

Suddenly there came a report from another quarter. The gang had gone east, along the old Lachlan Road*, and had made a raid upon Caloola, quietly robbing the local store, kept by Mr. S. Hosie. Here also two members of the gang only presented themselves, Gilbert and O'Meally doing the business. They made their appearance in the afternoon, and going to the counter presented revolvers at the heads of Mr. Hosie and his assistant, ordering them to stand in one corner of the shop while they proceeded to ransack the place. It wasn't money they wanted so much as provisions, and of these they found abundance. Nevertheless they were not prepared to overlook money in their search. One of the intruders found £20 in notes and £5 in silver in the till, and this he appropriated with the remark that it might "come in useful." The other bushranger chiefly acted as sentry, keeping one watchful eye upon the "bailed up" proprietor, and the other upon the road; and while thus engaged he passed the most jocular remarks, and issued directions to his mate concerning the best things to take. Each of the

robbers wore a belt in which four revolvers found a resting place. Having gathered together all they required, the booty was placed upon two of Mr. Hosie's horses, brought from the stable for that purpose, and then the unwelcome customers said "Good day!" to the proprietor of the store and rode off. Shortly after their departure a messenger was dispatched to Bathurst with information for the police, and before midnight four mounted troopers were clattering along the highway in the direction of Caloola; but before they reached the scene of the robbery the bushrangers had disappeared, and no person in the locality could give information concerning the direction they had taken. Subsequent events proved that they had made back for the Carcoar district.

[* The road passed Carcoar, a little south of the town, towards Cowra, and crossed the old Bathurst-Trunkley road near Caloola.]

Hosie's store had been "stuck up" on the Thursday. On the Sunday the bushrangers paid a visit to Mr. Icely's homestead at Coombing; but in the interval between those dates the gang had been strengthened in numbers, a young man named Johnny Vane having cast in his lot with them. This young man had been living with his parents, most respectable people and reputed to be very well-to-do, in the eastern portion of the Carcoar district. He was a typical Australian youth—well-built, active and fearless, a splendid horseman, and fairly intelligent, having an intimate knowledge of the bush. That he had previously come into contact with one or other of the gang there can be no doubt, and Hall was no doubt pleased enough to receive him into the ranks. Little wonder, therefore, that he should appear as

a prominent figure in the gang within a short time after joining.

The attack upon Coombing was made at night, and all the members of the gang appear to have taken part in it. Mr. Icely was a magistrate and one of the wealthiest men in the district. It was one of the most natural things in the world that he should keep a good stable and that in that stable there should be exceptionally good horses. Now, good horses were in their way more valuable to the bushrangers of the sixties than firearms; hence they were always on the lookout for fresh mounts and those of the swiftest foot and soundest wind. It was not a strange thing, therefore, that they should set longing eyes upon Mr. Icely's possessions, neither was it a strange thing that having the longing they should seize the first favourable opportunity of gratifying it.

Shortly after dark on Sunday the venturesome quartette stole quietly to the stables, and while two entered two kept guard outside.

On the night of the attack Mr. Icely had a distinguished visitor, in the person of Inspector Morrissett, who had turned in at Coombing for the night, after a day's weary ride through the bush after the bushrangers. It appears that the inspector and his men had come across the tracks of Hall and his mates heading towards Caloola, and they had followed these until they came across fresher tracks of the same horses making back towards Carcoar. These they followed until within three miles of the town, when darkness set in, and the inspector sent his men back to the barracks at Carcoar, himself deciding to accept shelter under the

hospitable roof of Squire Icely. Sub-Inspector Davidson had previously called in at Coombing and left his horse for a rest at the homestead, the animal having been well-ridden about the bush in the previous search for the bushrangers. The stables were about a hundred and fifty yards from the house and were in charge of a man named Charley the German, one of Mr. Icely's employees. This man happened to observe some movement at the stables while the host was entertaining the inspector and other visitors in the house, and suspecting that something was wrong he went towards the stables, carrying a gun with him. As he neared the building he saw two of the horses being led out and at once discharged his piece, but without doing any damage. The fire was returned by one of the bushrangers, and with truer aim, for Charley was struck in the mouth. The alarm having been raised Mr. Icely and his visitors rushed out, but only in time to see the robbers making off. A glance at the stalls showed that a favourite grey horse of Mr. Icely's had been taken and also Sub-Inspector Davidson's animal, which happened to be one of the few good horses bearing the Crown brand. Morrissett then proceeded with others to Carcoar, and set the town in a ferment of excitement by the news of the robbery and shooting. The townsfolk did not know what next to expect, and they determined to make provision for the worst that might happen. It was clearly the duty of the police to follow the bushrangers, and if the town were left unprotected the gang might at any moment suddenly swoop down upon it and make a clean sweep of all its portable treasure. To guard against a surprise, therefore, twenty-two of the residents presented themselves before a

Justice of the Peace and were sworn in to serve as special constables to protect the town, taking two hours' watch about in small companies. This arrangement having been perfected, the police were free to take saddle and scour the bush, which they did without delay—and, as usual, without success.

The wounded man was taken into Carcoar and placed under the care of the local surgeon, Dr. Rowland. It was found that the revolver bullet had lodged in Charley's neck, and some days elapsed before it was considered safe to operate for its extraction. The wounded man slowly recovered, and thus for the present the bushrangers were free from any charge of actual murder.

As a spur to the police and a temptation to any of the friends of the bushrangers who might not have any scruples concerning the taking of what was called "blood money", Mr. Icely caused the following notice to be published in the district newspapers and posted in conspicuous positions:—

£100 REWARD.

Whereas the stables at Coombing Park, Carcoar, were robbed on the night of the 2nd August, instant, by two or more men, unknown, and the man in charge was fired at, and dangerously wounded; I hereby offer a REWARD OF £100 to any person who will give such information as will lead to the conviction of the guilty parties.

T. R. ICELY, August 6th, 1863. Coombing Park.

Finding that they could not catch the bushrangers while the telegraphs were allowed to watch them and report, the

police decided that the next best thing open for them to do was to catch the telegraphs; but in carrying this decision into effect they brought themselves into very serious trouble, which very nearly cost at least one of them his life. After spending a week in the bush, riding hard by day and not infrequently camping out under a tree, almost perished with hunger and cold—for it was winter, and large quantities of snow had fallen on the ranges among which the chase had been pursued—they succeeded one morning before daylight in arresting three men who, they had good reason to believe, had been aiding and abetting the bushrangers. These three men were taken at once into Carcoar, and about noon were despatched in the mail coach en route to Bathurst. Fearing an attempt might be made to rescue the prisoners, Superintendent Morrissett, Sergeant Grainger and Senior-Constable Merrin accompanied them in the coach, while Trooper Sutton rode the Superintendent's horse behind the coach.



CONSTABLE SUTTON.

CONSTABLE SUTTON.

That the Superintendent's fears were not groundless was proved before the escort had proceeded far on the road. When about four miles on the Bathurst side of Carcoar, three mounted men galloped up to the coach calling upon the driver to "pull up." This he immediately did, and the police who were inside the vehicle at once jumped out on to the road prepared to fight, for they knew that fight was intended, and that they would for the time being have to act upon the defensive. No sooner had Morrissett and his companions alighted than the bushrangers fired upon them, although in their haste they did not take good aim, and no damage was done. The police at once returned the fire, and the bushrangers fired again, this time also without doing

damage—it is probable they hesitated in their aim from fear of wounding their friends who were still in the coach—and then drew back. At this moment Constable Sutton, who was the only member of the force on horseback, came up and charged at the attacking party, firing two shots from his revolver as he did so; but as he raised his hand to fire a third, one of the men shot him through the arm, which fell to his side powerless, and being unable to do anything further he turned his horse and rode back to the coach, the bushrangers firing at him as he went, evidently with deadly intent, for one of the bullets passed through his hat and knocked it off. Emboldened by this success the bushrangers rode forward and commenced to fire again, the fire being returned by the police, but without other effect than that of causing the bushrangers to again retreat. The firing was kept up on both sides with considerable spirit, the bushrangers being well equipped and armed with double barrelled guns and revolvers, and having discharged the former they, continued to fire with the latter, until they found they had no chance of success, and as the police advanced upon them they gradually backed their horses out of reach and then galloped off.

The three men were very stylishly dressed and looked like gentlemen; but they were soon discovered to be no other than Gilbert, O'Meally, and Johnny Vane. O'Meally was riding Mr. Icely's horse, and Vane was mounted on Mr. Davidson's—the two horses which were on the previous Sunday night stolen from Mr. Icely's stables at Coombing, when the German was shot in the mouth.

The wounded trooper Sutton, who certainly deserved praise for his plucky attempt, proceeded with the coach to King's Plains; but as he was weak from loss of blood, the Superintendent arranged for him to stay at McNamara's inn, while the coach with the prisoners and their escort proceeded on the journey to Bathurst, which town they reached without further molestation or mishap, and the prisoners were safely lodged in gaol.

On the following morning Dr. Machattie proceeded to King's Plains by the mail coach for the purpose of attending to Sutton's wounds, which he found to be of a serious nature, the ball having entered his arm between the elbow and the shoulder and passing upwards crossed into the body and came out about the centre of the right breast. It will thus be seen that his escape from death at the hands of the bushrangers had been a remarkably narrow one. The same day he was driven into Bathurst by Mr. Major West, jun., and thereafter suffered a tedious recovery. It may interest the reader to know that Sutton was until lately an active member of the police force in the western districts, being stationed in Orange, and during the thirty years that have elapsed since this memorable brush with Ben Hall's gang his name has been constantly before the public as a steady, painstaking, zealous, and efficient officer.

The following letter written by a gentleman in Carcoar to a friend in Bathurst shortly after the occurrence here related will indicate how completely the bushrangers were masters of the situation:—

Carcoar, 9th August, 1863

...We are all here upon our mettle, and in a considerable state of excitement. The attempt to rescue the prisoners from Edric (Morrissett) and the three troopers shows that there are men not many miles from us prepared to do almost anything. You will know full particulars of the affray long before you get this Sutton was the only man wounded, and he was shot by O'Meally. O'Meally rode Comus, John Vane Davidson's grey, and Gilbert a racehorse called Matheroo, stolen some ten days since from Grant—three first-rate horses, and Edric says all in splendid condition. Comus seemed to have been taken great care of and he said looked as well as he ever saw him, but became unmanageable, and almost brought his rider to grief. The attack doubtless was daring, but I don't think the bushrangers showed much pluck. They each had a double-barrelled gun and a brace of revolvers, but they seem only to have used their guns—the only shot fired from a pistol was the one that wounded Sutton. Pottinger and Morrissett are here with six troopers and a black tracker and are just starting out again. This part of the country really is in a fearful state and will, I am sure, get worse and worse. I am satisfied from what I have seen during the past week when in company with the police that it will be impossible to put bushranging down unless the harbourers are punished with the greatest severity. I believe there is scarcely a house between Mount Macquarie and the Abercrombie River that will not afford any criminal shelter when required, and I am satisfied that there are hundreds of lads in that neighbourhood under twenty that would give one of their eyes to have the same notoriety as Gilbert and Gardiner. They never work, never have worked, and are without exception the flashest lot I ever did see. Something must be done by the Government or things will become worse and worse, and what will be the end of it no one can tell. At present the police can

get no reliable information. Morrissett, as you may fancy, is most anxious and would give anything to take these fellows, but he works as it were with a blindfold, and you may depend on it if the Government do not take the most stringent measures to punish most severely all harbourers, bushranging and its accompanying evils not only never will be suppressed but will get worse and worse, until consequences will follow which, I believe, it would be difficult to overrate.

Some time after the mail and its occupants had left the scene of the encounter, Gilbert and his companions—Hall appears to have been otherwise engaged when this attempted rescue was made—returned and found the revolver that had dropped from Sutton's hand when he received his wounds. About seven o'clock the same evening Chesher's Inn at Teasdale Park was "stuck up" and about £40 in money and property taken away. Amongst the property that was taken there was a good deal of spirits, on which, it was supposed the bushrangers intended to regale themselves for a few days. Before leaving Chesher's they insisted upon having some hot punch made, and compelled the landlord to partake of it before they touched it themselves.

The three prisoners were remanded from time to time by the Bathurst Bench, but no definite charge could be brought home to them, and they were eventually discharged. Shortly afterwards one of the three became one of Ben Hall's most active allies.

The bushrangers were next heard of at Trunkey Creek, where in one day they stuck up three stores, kept respectively by Messrs. Jamieson, Dominique and "Alick the

Greek", and one hotel, kept by Mr. Stapleton. They plundered each of these places, removed a large quantity of provisions, ammunition and clothing, and then disappeared as suddenly as they came. The police appeared on the scene shortly after they had gone, and when out in the bush searching for them Sub-Inspector Davidson managed to shoot himself through the foot.

And it was just here that the *canard* of "Bell's Life" resolved itself into utterance truly prophetic. The bushrangers did actually chase the police. Among other detachments sent out into the bush near Carcoar was one of three, consisting of Sergeant T—— and two ordinary troopers. Fatigued with riding through the bush and not getting sight or information of those for whom they were supposed to be searching, T—— and his companions turned into a hut occupied by a man named Marsh, who had told them that there was a horse with saddle and bridle on running near his place. After dinner one of the policemen went out with Marsh for the purpose of catching the horse. The bushrangers, who had followed them to the hut, suddenly swooped down upon the two, and before any resistance could be offered they found their hands fastened behind them, their arms round a sapling, and their horses tied up at some distance from them. The bushrangers next went to the hut, and before the other troopers had realised the position they too were prisoners. Marsh and his companion were then released and brought down to the hut, and the bushrangers proceeded to appropriate the carbines, revolvers, ammunition, and even the handcuffs which had been intended for use against themselves; and having