

screamed. The bullock-driver, Long Steve, was a good-tempered fellow, and did his best to calm her. "Why, law bless ye, Miss," he said, "I've got an old 'ooman an' half a dozen kids. What call have I got to do any harm to a pretty gal like you!" But flattery was thrown away on Phoebe. She entreated her mistress not to leave her to the tender mercies of that wicked-looking man, and made such a fuss that at last her master was obliged to say, "Well, look here, Phoebe. If you don't go in the dray, you must either stay in Sydney, or walk, or ride one of the horses. Take your choice—which shall it be?" Phoebe mounted the dray then, and though it was night when she reached her journey's end, she was on quite good terms with Long Steve when he helped her off the dray. She had been talking to him for hours, half condescendingly, half propitiatingly, thinking all the time what a capital adventure it would be to relate in her first letter home. In that letter Phoebe made out that Long Steve had committed half a dozen murders, whereas the honest fellow had never committed one. A great many terrible scamps were sent out to Australia in the old convict times, but, mixed up with them, there were men who were far better fellows than many of the people left at home.

Late in the afternoon the Captain and his party reached his farm. "Oh, what a first-rate broad!" Walter, fresh from Norfolk, exclaimed, when the riders had mounted the top of the shore-hills, and were looking down on the lagoon which the farm fringed—a lagoon with thickly-wooded banks, cleared here and there, a little stream running into it at one end, and at the other a sandy bar over which the sea was breaking.

Mrs. Daventry was delighted at first with her new home. A pretty flower-garden sloped down to the lagoon, and the verandah of the snug one-story house of brick and weatherboard was smothered in passion-flower. The Captain had furnished the house as comfortably as he could for his wife, and altogether it seemed a much smarter, livelier place than the dark old house in the dull, grass-grown side-street of the little Norfolk town where she had been economizing whilst her husband was first doing military duty, and afterwards building this snug nest in New South Wales. There was no need, apparently, to economize now. Beef and mutton were the commonest of things at Daventry Hall. Cream, butter, eggs, honey, pigs, poultry, fish and game were all to be got, to almost any extent, upon the premises. Besides English vegetables, there were pumpkins and sweet

potatoes in the kitchen garden. There was a nice vineyard, which Walter mistook at first for a field of currant-bushes; and in the orchard there were raspberries and strawberries and mulberries, pears and pomegranates, figs and plums and loquats, oranges and lemons, peaches, apricots and nectarines, and gigantic rock and water melons. Walter thought of the scanty pennyworths of sour apples that he used to get in Norfolk, and for a week or two devastated the orchard and the vineyard like a 'possum or a flying-fox. As soon as it was known that Mrs. Daventry had arrived, the Captain's friends and their wives rode over to Daventry Hall, and then there was a round of dinners at the friends' houses, and then the Captain gave dinners in return, and both Mrs. Daventry and Phoebe were delighted with the gaiety. But when things settled into everyday course, and, as often happened, Captain Daventry was away from home for hours together, they both began to fall back into their old dread of Australia. Mrs. Daventry had been proud at first of having so many servants inside and outside the house, but it was not pleasant to remember that all except Phoebe were convicts. Captain Daventry was a strict but not a severe master, and so he got on pretty well with his assigned servants, but in all their faces—except Long Steve's and his wife's—there was a shallow, time-serving look, however cringingly civil they might be, that was not reassuring.

Walter did not trouble himself about such things. He made friends after a fashion with the men, and rode about with his father to look after the horses, cattle, and sheep; the maize-paddock and the potato-fields; the clearers, the fencers, and the sawyers. His father soon let him go about by himself, and then he *was* a proud and happy boy. He could scarcely believe that only a year ago he was stumbling through the irregular and defective verbs in that gloomy old Norfolk schoolroom. Walter could leap logs now far better than he could conjugate *Fio* or *Inquam* then. Of course, his father or his mother gave him lessons every now and then, but that was not like regular school, you know. Long Steve had taught him to crack a stock-whip, and Long Steve's wife had plaited him a cabbage-tree hat (in those days the country all round the lagoon was studded with cabbage-tree palms), and Walter used to gallop through the Bush like a Wild Huntsman on his own three-parts blood chestnut Dragon-fly. Sometimes he went out on foot with his little gun, and after a bit he managed to shoot wallabies and kangaroo-rats, and quail and snipe, and bronze-wings, and parrots and cockatoos to