Monday 6th April.

In the night a violent wind sprang up, and blustered for nearly an hour. I awoke, thought I smelt singeing blankets, slapped my bed at random, and went to sleep again. The morning revealed havoc. A spark from the whipped fire had reached our pile of stores, and had smouldered and spread. We had lost a pound of tea, several tucker-bags, some pease, a handkerchief, and a shoulder-strap.

A workman from a road camp, a mile ahead, came along with a halter in his hand, looking for a runaway horse. I had heard a horse pass in the night, and told him so. He was Australian and poor, and was grateful even for an almost valueless scrap of information.

"D'yer smoke?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Catch," he said, and threw me half a cake of tobacco.

The spirit of comradeship lies full length on our continent, a sleeping giant. When he is wakened, he will be recognised by those who wrong us as a formidable adversary. In him rests our strength. Even the worn-out tradition of hostility between Sydney and Melbourne is treated as a preposterous joke by all but fools and foreigners who bray of border hatred and bid the friends pelt each other from the Murray banks. Australia has only one heart.

From the eastern edges of The Mountain, we overlooked miles upon miles of coast and sea, with the distant headlands fading into sunny haze, and the Shoalhaven district mapped out below us. Nevertheless, we did not stop long to gaze, but descended to the ‘town’ of Berry. Berry is an uninviting flat huddle of houses, with no redeeming points. We hurried through the dreary village with no loss of time, determined to camp in Gerringong, which is the prettiest township on the coast.

A dip in a willow-shaded creek preceded dinner. A prolonged siesta followed. Bill was footsore, and the metalled roads were no improvement, in his eyes, upon earthen tracks. For various reasons we made our way over the hills very slowly, and night overtook us before we reached Gerringong. Luckily I knew good quarters, for I had camped here before.

On the slope above a long pale-brown beach stand two empty houses. One of them is the regular stopping-place for tramps and bummers. We stumbled through a rough paddock, amazing cows and execrating the pitchiness of the night, and reached the house. We unloaded with great relief.

"I'll get water," I said, "while you get wood."

So Bill sank into the darkness, and I groped my way down to the cow-trampled swamp which lay between us and the beach. On my way back, I met The Boy, and asked if he had gathered any wood.

"Two Pieces," he answered wearily.

"Bill Smith," I said, after examination of his find, "you're making a mistake. We don't want toothpicks till after tea."

"Can't find any more."

"Take the water to the house, and I'll look around."

Far away to the left lay a clump of bush, as I knew, and I worked towards it painfully. I tore my clothes on a barbed-wire fence and plunged into the swamp,
but I reached the bush. Somebody had been there before me, for I could hardly find a stick. While I was crawling about and raking with my fingers, I heard a whistle. It was from The Boy. I whistled back, and he sang out:

"How did you get there?"

"Walked."

I heard him talking to himself, and then there was a splash and the sound of suction as he pulled his leg out of a mud-hole.

"This isn't the way," he told me.

I did not think it was.

He made a few more trials, and finally stood beside me. Together we collected a few sticks, and then gave up in disgust. On the return journey, we went a short distance inland to avoid the swamp, and found a deserted picnic-fire with its heart still glowing, and beside it a noble heap of wood. We took as much as we could carry, and a few minutes afterwards the flames were roaring up our chimney.

We intend to sleep to-night on the verandah which fronts the ocean. The music of the waves is in our ears—

The various rush, in front; behind, the roar
Continual, changeless, never less or more,
The great sea's mystic song and magic spell,
Whose meaning man may feel, but none may tell.

Tuesday 7th April.

We saw day break upon the sea. Very slowly the tender regretful Eos drew aside with rosy fingers the diaphanous many - dyed curtains that Apollo the Magnificent might step from the gilded portals of the East. In fact, dawn was followed by sunrise. The sight was worthy of being left undescribed by a master of word painting.

Instead of going back to the road, we proceeded along the shore for a little distance, dodging sly waves on the beaches, collecting shells, and looking for echidnae and anemones in the crevices of the rocks. When we came to a naturally hollowed tank, we bathed. The water was so clear that, sitting quietly at the bottom, we could see the tiny fish, which swam round us in wonder at the harmless monsters of the air and, at our slightest movement, darted off and were lost in the marvellous blending of colors which represented rocks, weeds and pebbles. But mortal men cannot live long in the fairyworld; it can never become stale; Science herself cannot destroy its mystery.

Between the sea and the railway, we found mushrooms so gigantic that they incurred suspicion. I took one which measured about nine inches from side to side, and suggested that we should have it for dinner.

"Might be poisonous," Bill objected.

"Might," I agreed.

I found a smaller fungus of similar shape and appearance, and ate it as a test. The agreement was that, if I died, the large mushroom was to be thrown away. I have not died, and we have shared the suspected umbrella and found it coarse.

We had dinner near an old mill, not far from Kiama. As we were talking, a cricket, lurking beneath dry leaves, joined in with sudden trills.

"Little beast!" ejaculated The Boy, and stamped at the spot from which he thought the music came.
"Stop," I cried. "Don't kill it."
"Why not."
"Stupidity and strength don't tot up to right."
He stamped again, and when I checked his gymnastics, said: "Do you know what these things do?"
"Don't want to."
"They eat cabbages. Chew all round the stalk."
"Well?"
"They won't eat the whole cabbage," he complained angrily.
"Have you seen a cabbage in this district? When did you last set eyes on cabbages?"
"Dunno. No more do you."
"I do. We passed a cartload at Moss Vale, and haven't seen a trace of one since."
"Don't care. They do lots o' mischief in our garden."
"If you stamp round any more, you can go your own gait home. I'll take another track. Do you think I want my course through the country dotted out in dead things? Don't be a damned fool."

And that is the nearest approach to a serious quarrel that The Boy and I have made. But I have never come so near with any other mate. He is young, and has hardly begun to learn that he is not an alien individual backed by living tapestry. Probably he has much to urge against me, but, you see, I am writing this diary.

Of course we visited the famous Kiama Blowhole, where
"underground there rolls a sound
From where the prisoned waters glide."
But an intense calm drowsed on sea and land, and no fountain of spray shot into the air. Only, in the tunnel, the surly waters, withheld from play, growled discontent and gurgled submission. I had often seen the Blow-hole before, but it was new to The Boy, and he was disappointed.
Towards evening, the thought of camping arose.
"But where?" asked Bill.
"There's a flea-hopping camp, a couple of miles on."
"Oh Lord!"
"We'll have tea first, and think about camp after."
"Tea? — Where? There's no firewood about this place."
"Come on."
I knocked at the door of a cottage, for I am not unknown in Kiama. A gentleman came to the door, and glared enquiringly, suspicious of beggary. I nodded, with confidence of friendship, and said: "I suppose you don't recognise me in this rig, Mr. O'Keefe?" The supposition hit the clout, for he stared with knitted brows. When I laughed, his face lightened.
"Mr. Wilford!" He let out. "No, I should never have known you. But your voice — I never forget voices."
He asked us in, ragamuffins as we were, introduced us to his wife, and invited us to join them at the tea-table. The Boy's sidelong shufflings and his alacrity in accepting a chair were due less to shyness and fatigue than to a painful consciousness of a breach of decency in his attire. O'Keefe, with painful courtesy, failed to notice the rent an envious stalagmite had made. I am his, heart and hand. May his stars be polished by God's most industrious angels!
At about mine o'clock we sallied forth once more. There was an empty passenger train standing near the goods-shed, waiting for the morning. "We must leave early, Bill," I said, as we climbed into a first-class compartment.

Wednesday 8th April.

Northward we passed, skirting the Minna-Murra River, crossing the bridge, and then following the railway until we came to Shell Harbour platform, where we turned seaward to visit the township which gives the station its name. Refreshed with deep draughts of ozone and beer, we turned inland again towards Albion Park. We left the road, followed up a little creek to the right, in search of clean water, and came to a halt for lunch beside a green-mantled pool which was only moderately befouled by cattle. We threw our selves into the long dry grass, and munched the bread we had bought at Shell Harbour.

I was lifting the billy from the fire when a jew-lizard came rushing down the hill towards me, and stopped close to my foot. He came from a little thicket, some twenty or thirty feet away, and ran — as jew-lizards always do when they are in a great hurry — on his hind legs. His eyes were round, and his flanks throbbed.

"Hokey!" I exclaimed. "Just look what a fright his lizard's in. Must be a snake in that clump."

The Boy rose hastily from his nest in the grass, while I went to the thicket and saw the end of a shiny monster gliding away among the leaves. We bombarded the thicket with boulders, hurled with Cyclops force. The snake stole away on the other side of the shelter, and I found him with his head hidden under a tiny bush. A stone, badly aimed, struck but did not disable him, and he shot, with head erect, into a brake, where he was safe. He was fully six feet long, glossy black, with large convex scales.

"How about dotting your course?" The Boy queried.

I ignored him.

Between Albion Park and Dapto we were overtaken by a lady and gentleman in a sort of waggonette — a shallow vehicle adorned with the name of somebody's sewing machine. They pulled up close to us, and the gentleman hailed us. We waited.

"I hope you won't mind my suggesting it," He said politely, "but we have a few sandwiches, and we thought you might not mind taking them."

"Mush obliged, I'm sure," I said; "we'd be very glad o' them."

He groped under the seat and brought out a brown paper parcel, which he surveyed with some dismay. His apologies were ample: "I'm very sorry," he said, "but I find there are fewer sandwiches than I thought; in fact, there are only two. But if you don't mind — "

"Don't mention it. One apiece is good enough. G'day!"

He handed me a couple of ham sandwiches, which I bestowed upon Bill with my blessing as soon as the donor was out of sight.

At nightfall we reached the crossing at Mullet Creek and found five workers — who were making for Albion Park — camped under the willows. We made use of their fire to boil our soup. These minor pre-ordained conveniences you will recognise as characteristic of our tour. They are the direct result of friendship with the pagan gods, Hellenic and Teutonic. Moreover, I have a special protector,
for, like a well-known freeman, I was littered under Mercury — witness my empty purse and my love of wandering.

A wild wind sprang up in the south and hurled itself upon us, scattering the embers of the fire, and lashing the willows. Clouds rushed up and flung showers of rain as they passed, murmuring, fearful of being late at some elemental celebration, anxious to exhibit their ghastly power. The five navvies rolled their swags and fled towards the nearest hotel. The Boy and I took refuge under the bridge. The atmospheric disturbance grew more pronounced. Out at sea, a tempest was executing its frenzied dance. We could see the flashes of lightning; could hear the rumbling of thunder. From more than one quarter, as it seemed to us. huge bodies of cloud fled towards the centre of turmoil, like regiments of artillery hurrying into action. And we sat on our swags and waited till the stinging showers had ceased. Then we returned to the willows and made up the fire with wood which the navvies had painfully collected. The wind is busily removing all traces of rain.

Your keen desire shakes through the sky,
And sweeps the forest as a lyre;
It thrills the world to melody —
Your keen desire.

The flood of passion waxes higher,
And, quivering, pours its deluge by
In sheets of elemental fire.
To what veiled Beauty would you fly,
To what delight would you aspire,
Glad Powers, and what may satisfy
Your keen desire?

Thursday 9th April.

Beside the road, half a mile to the south of Wollongong, rested three miners in various stages of intoxication. One lay on his face in the grass. Of the other two, who sat with their feet in the gutter, one imagined himself almost sober, and the other was admittedly drunk and frankly self-depreciatory.

"Come on," shouted the Self-depreciator to us. "Chuck off yer swags, mates, 'n' 'ave a drink."

"Yesh," corroborated the Sober One, "cumanaverdrink — uhrp — lotsheure."
"There ain't," growled the man in the grass.

But the Sober One held out a soda-water bottle full of rum, and smiled invitation; whereat I swigged gravely, and returned the bottle that he might pledge me.

"There's no sush crimson fools in th' worl' as miners," explained the Self-depreciator. "Look 'ere!" He thrust his hat back, and slapped his retreating forehead for confirmation.

"They're mostly real good fellows," I said.

"Thasho," the Sober One said with sapient nod, "but he's awri', though he is drunk."

"No, he ain't," from the man in the grass.

"Will yer come 'th us fer th' night?" invited the Self-depreciator. "Our comp'ny ain't mush, but we've gollotser tucker."
"Goin' stinkin'," the man in the grass commented.
"Not too shtinkin'," the Sober One assured us.
The man in the grass raised a fresh point. "Too far."
"Yesh; too far, mi' be," said the Sober One. "We live up on slopesher Moun' Kemler." An explanatory wave of the hand almost upset him.
We regretted that the slopes of Mount Kembla were too distant from our track, but expressed gratitude for the hospitable offer.
The Sober One then gave us some parting advice. "If yer look'n' fur work at th' mines —" "We ain't," I interrupted.
"No — well, no!" he said thoughtfully. After a moment's pause a bright idea struck him, and he continued cheerfully: "But I shay if y'are — if y'are — be careful even if yer know all — uhrp — 'bout it. If yer don't —"
"We ain't looking for work."
"No. I'm tell'n' yer, cosh I'm sobresh o' th' three."
"Shut up," snarled the man in the grass.
The Sober One smiled benignantly at the prostrate figure, winked heavily at us, and kept on: "If yer don't know 'nything, don't — uhrp — don't take it."
The advice was sound, no doubt. He was adding to it when we passed out of hearing.
I am writing this at Woonona, in a patch of bush where I, perhaps, am a trespasser. At any rate, nailed to the tree against which I am leaning is a notice-board bearing the words: Miners' Pathway on Sufferance. But a trav'ler must camp somewhere.
The stars remind me of Marjorie's eyes, and I almost feel as though she were looking at me — not reproachfully, but with a generous love which knows nothing of such nice particulars as resentment or forgiveness. And the breath of the evening is like her presence, surrounding me with subtle deliciousness which none of the five senses can perceive. Since I left her, my love has been glowing by reflection from everything I see, or feel, or hear, and the whole world is a glass to my delight. Nature offers me compensation for the absence of my dear one. My passion is recorded in a thousand beautiful forms. I see it in the green crops which bow to the glad breeze; the wind scribbles it across the water; it flares in the sunset, and glitters on the sea-track of molten gold at sunrise; the wagtails chatter it, and the leaves tell it in whispers; I feel it in the soft, strong grasp of the ocean, in the warmth of sunshine, and in the swing and resistance of branches pushed aside. I believe the birds are happier when I pass through the groves where they flute to their chosen companions.

Friday 10th April.
The beauty of the coastal scenery has been bedimmed all day with a thick haze, caused probably by smoke from bush fires. But the subdued colouring and uncertainty of outline in the landskip harmonised with our almost sleepy satisfaction as we drifted onward. We halted occasionally for a meal, a bath, or a smoke, but we seldom spoke. The silence was luxurious.
Below the crumbling cliffs at Clifton I picked up a pin and stuck it in my waistband — I was not wearing a coat — with prevision of future uses. The Boy said:
"Picking up a pin means you'll have good luck."

"Then you ought to be pleased," I said. "We share our luck pretty equally, I think."

But, while looking out a good camping-ground at Stanwell Park, I found a bed — a couple of sacks on a framework of saplings. The Boy said, with gloomy triumph: "I told you so," and saw the hand of Providence. I rigged the bunk on a couple of logs, and find it very comfortable.

Abysmal ease received us both,

The Boy and me beneath the trees—

An unimaginable sloth,

Abysmal ease.

The rush of water, hum of bees,

And air to slumber nothing loth,

Made silence quick with mysteries.

To Nature we had sworn our troth,

And whose to her bosom flees

Is given, till he break his oath,

Abysmal ease.

(to be continued)