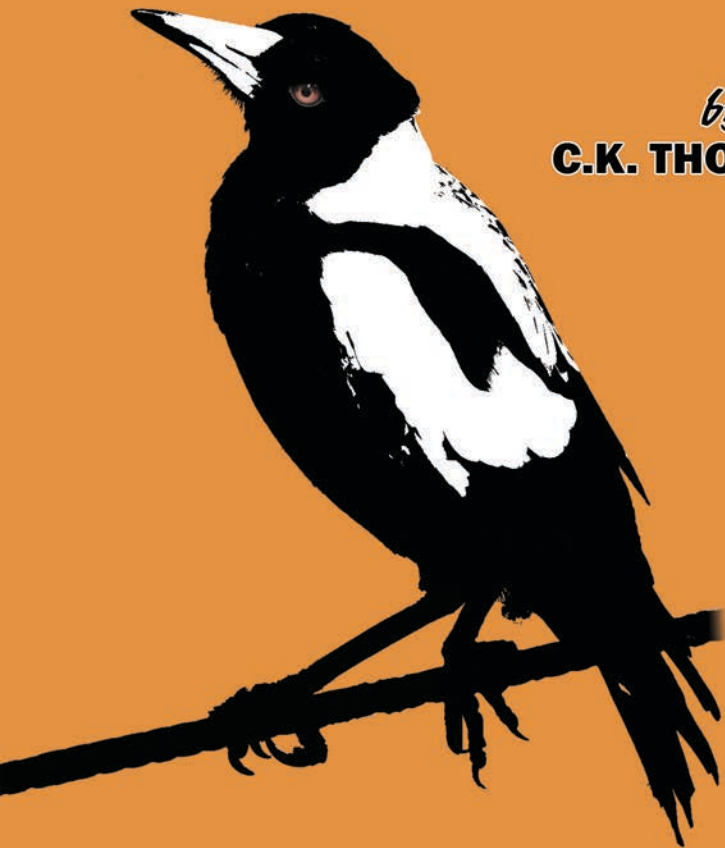




The C.K. Thompson Collection

Maggie the Magnificent

by
C.K. THOMPSON



MAGGIE THE MAGNIFICENT

By C.K. Thompson

(author of "King of the Ranges," "Monarch of the
Western Skies," "Warrigal the Warrior," etc)

With Introduction by A. H. Chisholm, F.R.Z.S., (Former
President of the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union,
Former President of the field Naturalists' Club of Victoria,
Advisor to the Queensland Government on Fauna
Protection, etc.)



DEDICATION

This story of one of Australia's most popular native birds is dedicated, with sympathy and with fellow feeling, to all my readers, young and old, who have been attacked and pecked by magpies.

Many years ago, when my brother Osmond and I were small boys, we set out, as too many youngsters have done and will do, to rob a magpie's nest. We thought that a young bird would make an excellent pet. We saw the nest, but the parent bird saw us first. On the back of my head I still bear a faint scar where the beak of that indignant bird penetrated.

In later years I have been attacked by magpies on the golf links and I have had golf balls stolen by these black and white villains. In many ways I have cause to say nasty things about them, but I don't. I regard the magpie as the finest of our useful Australian feathered songsters.

Those of us who have suffered at the beaks of magpies may feel that we have a perfect right to be indignant. But have we ever troubled to ascertain Maggie's point of view?

I think that every Australian admires bravery and daring and certainly Maggie possesses those qualities. Thief and villain he might be, but we cannot gainsay his numerous good qualities.

Maggie is entitled, as every Australian is, to "a fair go." In this book I have tried to give it to him.

—C. K. THOMPSON.

MAGGIE

A TRIBUTE

*Maggie's just a piping crow
Other birds might tell us;
But, if you would like to know
I believe they're jealous.
Maggie's notes so rich and clear,
With his mate's song blending
Ring afar when dawn is here,
To the bushland's ending.
Like two cheery cooper's men
Rolling out the barrels,
Maggie's male joins with him when
Maggie magpie carols.*

*Maggie is a pretty sight—
Bold and dark and splendid
In his dress of black and white
All so neatly blended.
Maggie's mate is good to see,
Though I fear that often
Her young heart's queer coquetry
Is too tough to soften
Till her male aloft ascends,
In the gum-tops fading,
And from there his songs descend
In his serenading.'*

*Loud and liquid, round and true,
flute-like, then a yodel
Its rich music running through.
Maggie's mate's a model—
Knows just what a song should be;
From one heart appealing
To another, which is free
Yet without much feeling
Till the magic in his song
Pierces through her armour
And she yields and sings along
With her black-eyed charmer.*

*Maggie's mate's a thief; like her
Golf balls, how she'll chase them!
Bits of glass or silverware
In their nest they place them
To be ornaments that make
Home a place of beauty—
Somewhere where a bird may take
Friends in love or duty;
Then the thieves and all these friends
Sing loud songs of gloating;
To the bushland's utter ends
Marking songs go floating.*

*Humans who through Maggie's guile
Wish him to perdition,
Pause to listen with I smile
To this bold musician.
He's no foe, but useful friend:
All the farmers praise him;
To his tree their thanks ascend,
Wouldn't that amaze him!
Bold protector of the nest
In his pied regalia;
Maggie typifies the best—
Spirit of Australia.'*

—WILL LAWSON.

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| I. OLD BROKEN BEAK | I |
| II. THE COMING OF MAGGIE | 10 |
| III. MAGGIE FINDS FREEDOM | 24 |
| IV. THE FARMER'S FRIEND | 34 |
| V. TROUBLE AHEAD | 47 |
| VI. DEATH IN THE TREES | 58 |
| VII. MAGGIE IS DEFENDED | 72 |
| VIII. TROUBLE ON THE GOLF COURSE | 84 |
| IX. MAGGIE FINDS A FRIEND | 96 |
| X. THE GRASSHOPPER PLAGUE | 104 |

Chapter I.

OLD BROKEN BEAK

IT WAS one of those delightful mornings of late winter after the Frost King had made his last defiant gesture. True, the early morning air still had the power to chill, but as the grey turned to primrose and the primrose to red, heralding glorious bars of light that sprang up across the eastern sky, so did the wintry air become warmer.

Soon the golden gates flew open and the sun himself came forth majestically with a radiation of a million flashing spears, their golden tips urging a sleeping world into wakefulness.

The first rays of the rising sun, striking through the leaves of a huge ironbark—an ancient forest giant that had graced this grazing paddock for many years—caressed a fluffy feathered ball of black and white, and then passed on to another, and yet another, playing over them in gentle reproof that these sleepy birds should waste one single moment of what promised to be a perfect day.

Then, out from another great old gum tree on the other side of the paddock, came the first tribute to the God of Light—a haunting, liquid, flute-like melody in a glorious rush of choral splendour. It was fitting that the sun's majesty should be accorded first homage by the loveliest voice in the Australian bush, the magpie's.

There were several trees in this paddock and each was

used during the autumn and winter nights as a roosting place by a colony of magpies. The first bird to awaken was the bugler for the regiment and others answered his magic notes with chords of equal beauty before commencing the serious business of the day.

These bold black and white birds were jealous of their territory. A flock of from ten to fifteen worked this particular paddock. All over Australia, similar flocks of magpies would be working similar paddocks, parks, bushlands and farms, and would continue to work them until early spring. In the mating season, which commenced about August, they would pair off and depart to find nesting territory of their own. Some weeks would elapse yet before this occurred and in the meantime the daily routine, observed throughout late summer, the autumn and winter, had to be carried out.

As day succeeded day, so would the rays of the sun get stronger. Already the grass was taking on a greener hue and the wild things realised instinctively that spring was on the way.

The sun was still busily awaking other creatures in the paddock when the first magpies dropped from their overnight roosts energetically to search for their breakfasts. It was every bird for itself, too. Sharp eyes behind sharp beaks caught the slightest movement in the grass that betrayed the presence of an unwary grasshopper, beetle or caterpillar.

Unlike some other birds, the magpies did not wander far and wide in search of food. They had their recognised hunting ground and they stayed in it, ready to defend it against interlopers. They did not invade the chosen haunts

of other birds and, therefore, they expected strangers to keep away from theirs.

Grasshoppers were their favorite morsels and these, fortunately for the birds if not for the farmers, were always plentiful. All kinds of crawly things were acceptable and they used their very efficient beaks as spades to dig if required, or as crowbars to turn over stones and manure to get at the creatures beneath. Unwary mice coming out of their burrows to observe the upper world, or lizards caught off guard, were readily seized upon by the sharp-eyed magpies and, after being beaten on a stone, made a most acceptable addition to the breakfast table.

Sometimes the birds temporarily would leave their exclusive paddock for brief visits to nearby cultivated fields in the wheat-growing season and lunch off newly-germinated grain, much to the annoyance of the farmer who had planted it; some of them had been known, too, to emulate their cousins, the butcher birds, and swoop upon some unfortunate lark, sparrow or robin, as an addition to the larder.

Though the flock of magpies lived together sociably, there was no recognised leader. Each individual bird insisted on his or her own rights and did not look to any other for help or guidance.

But there was one old magpie more pugnacious than the rest. He was a battle-scarred veteran with part of the top beak broken and his neck almost bare of feathers which made him look like a miniature vulture. The broken beak, which did not inconvenience him at all, had been caused many years before by a bullet fired from a rifle by a man who had become tired of being attacked as he crossed a field

in which the old magpie's nest stood in a big ironbark tree.

Year in and year out, old Broken Beak and a mate had nested in that tree and nothing short of death or dire disaster would prevent him continuing to nest there for the rest of his life. That was his magpie way. Tradition and habit were deeply ingrained.

Old Broken Beak, in his time, had seen many magpies come and go, including several of his own mates. Though most of the present members of the flock had worked that same hunting ground for years, Broken Beak was the oldest, the patriarch of them all. When he first saw the light of day, he had had a brother and two sisters in the nest and they had all taken up residence in this paddock with their parents as soon as they were old enough to look after themselves. His two sisters, in due course, had found mates of their own and had departed for fresh pastures. His brother had found a mate also, and though, in nesting time, they departed to a secluded place in the distant bush, they always returned to the paddock in between keeping house.

This had been the routine for several seasons and then one year his brother's mate had returned alone. What had happened to his brother, Broken Beak did not know. Neither did he care, for Broken Beak had regarded him as just one more magpie. There were no family bonds between them as would be the case among humans.

Though magpies came and went as the years rolled by, there were always about a dozen of them working this huge paddock, Broken Beak among them. He had lost several mates, victims to rifles, the catapults of small boys,

accidents and natural deaths. Others had deserted him for more handsome and more amiable husbands.

But this did not cause him the least concern. He was a self-centred bird, independent and more than a little conceited. Up to the present he had never had much trouble finding a mate when the pairing season came round.

He had been the part-architect of many nests. In his time he had built them in trees, among telephone wires and even attempted, on one occasion, to erect one in a house chimney. He had lost nests through human agency; he had been burned out by bushfires and washed out by torrential rain; and he had fought off marauders of all kinds, from small boys to goannas and tiger cats.

Broken Beak was not a popular bird with members of the flock. He just could not mind his own business. He was continually interfering in the affairs of other magpies, specially those who unearthed particularly attractive morsels during their foraging. He had been known to spring upon a bird and try to wrest from him a big centipede that the finder had picked up from under a stone he had overturned with his most-efficient beak, and to chase another and fight him for a mouse he had caught.

Naturally, he did not get his own way on any occasion. Fiercely jealous of their own rights, acknowledging no superior, and afraid of nothing, each magpie was prepared to fight any other bird in defence of those rights. In all his contests with the others, Broken Beak had never once encountered a bird that had turned tail and refused to fight him. Indeed, it would have astonished him if he had ever

met a cowardly magpie.

As the days ran on, there were growing signs of restlessness among the flock, and presently pairs of birds began to leave. The mating season was upon them and they had to obey Mother Nature's strongest and most insistent call. And when the flock had dwindled away almost to nothing, old Broken Beak alone had not found a new mate. It did not worry him. He was profoundly confident of his own powers of attraction, though he might have changed his opinion if he could have seen himself in a mirror.

At last there came the day when he was left entirely on his own. His favorite nesting place, the paddock with the ironbark tree, was several miles away, and though he did not yet have a mate to share it, he deemed it wise to go there and enter into possession, just in case some feathered squatter decided to take over in his absence.

It was a first class nesting place, that paddock and ironbark tree. It fulfilled all the requirements of parent birds. Broken Beak had not worked it out in his head, but his instinct had made him select it years before.

He and his mate at that period had known what all birds know. After the eggs hatched, the young ones would be naked and helpless, needing abundant food for their growth and liable to die of exposure if left too long uncovered. It was necessary, therefore, for both the parent birds to feed the youngsters and also necessary that there should be around the nest an area big enough to supply the needs of fledglings and parents, and not trespassed upon by other food-hunting birds. It was this that caused magpies when nesting to resent the intrusion of all other birds into the selected area.

Broken Beak arrived at his ironbark tree and was vaguely disappointed to find no other magpies around. He half-expected to find a mate already installed in the tree awaiting the coming of her master, and half-hoped that some interloping male had taken over because a fight would be a fitting prelude to serious nesting business.

There still remained a few sticks of the previous season's nest, and Broken Beak told himself that these would be all the less to carry.

Perched on the highest limb of the tree, the old bird preened his feathers and then had a good look around the countryside. There was nothing of interest and not another magpie in sight, either in the air or on the ground.

This would not do.

In addition to being a fearless bird, Broken Beak was an intelligent one, and very proud of himself, notwithstanding his rather unprepossessing appearance. He had everything to offer a lady magpie desirous of setting up housekeeping—a well-stocked food paddock, an exclusive tree with the foundations of a nest already built and, of course, his valuable self. Had he been listing these attractions, he, doubtless, would have placed himself first.

Be that as it may, he considered that he had much to offer. But to whom was he to offer it? He must advertise.

And advertise he did. He had no newspapers but he did have his own glorious radio, and the four winds of heaven carried his message, poured out in those magic carolling liquid notes of which only the Australian magpie is capable. In his song he told everything—the home he wanted to build in a most desirable territory, what a magnificent fellow he was personally and what an honor it

would be to any lady magpie whom he deigned to accept as a mate. The song, too, carried a warning to all other male magpies to keep away from this paddock and tree. They were Broken Beak's.

Broken Beak proved to be a first-class salesman, because within five minutes of his first broadcast, not one, but two, black and white ladies arrived, coming from opposite directions. They alighted on different branches and, after having taken stock of Broken Beak, looked each other over. The looks must have engendered mutual dislike because, without wasting time over common courtesies, they flew at each other.

Fighting clear of the ironbark tree, the two birds met in mid-air, swooping, circling and squawking, pecking, clawing and buffeting, fighting for the possession of this most eligible territory, plus Broken Beak. That dilapidated gentleman did not interfere. Not he! It was only right and proper, he thought, that these two females should battle for the right to win his favors. He left his branch and hovered over the combatants, an interesting but aloof spectator.

As far as outward appearances went, he could not tell them apart. They were both handsome black and white birds, one younger than the other; and it was the younger bird that eventually withdrew from the contest. Inexperienced in fighting, she gave way, and when almost pushed to earth by her quick-snapping antagonist, deemed discretion the better part of valor, and flapped rapidly away, leaving a few small feathers drifting on the breeze.

The contest over, Broken Beak flew back to his perch on the branch near the fork in which rested the remains of last year's nest. The victorious female did not join him

immediately. Having seen her defeated rival vanish into the distance, she flew down to the ground under a stringybark tree and picked up a large twig. With this in her beak, she returned to the ironbark and, landing on the limb near Broken Beak, presented it to him. The old warrior deigned to accept it and, sidling with dignity along the limb, placed it in the old nest.

Then, without further ado, both birds flew off together in search of suitable sticks, fully to construct their future home.

Old Broken Beak's confidence in himself had been justified. He had found another mate.

Chapter II.

THE COMING OF MAGGIE.

THOUGH old Broken Beak regarded himself as an aristocrat among magpies, he was not too haughty to work. In their nest-building, his new mate found him a ready laborer and a first-class architect. Day by day the home of their future brood grew and took shape—a deep, bowl-like stick structure at the top of the ironbark tree.

At last all was ready and Broken Beak handed over complete occupancy to his mate. This did not mean, however, that he could loaf around the countryside with friends and cronies idling the time away; on the contrary, his real responsibilities had only just commenced.

In due course, four large eggs appeared in the nest. They were green-blue, with reddish-brown streaks, smears and scratches; and though it was no novelty either to Broken Beak or his mate to be the producers of such precious atoms of potential life, familiarity certainly did not breed contempt or carelessness. Broken Beak had always been a fearless and pugnacious bird, but the sight of those eggs caused such a surge of pride in his old breast that he was ready to lay down his very life if necessary in their protection.

His mate felt exactly the same about it. In between nestings she was rather a mild-mannered bird as magpies go, content to live and let live. Fearless like all her kind, she

would brook no liberties or indignities, but was willing to live in peace if permitted to do so.

Gone now was that mildness of manner. With the laying of her eggs she had shed her placidity as a snake casts off its old skin. Of course, a great deal of her time now would be occupied in hatching the eggs and she would have to depend upon Broken Beak to do the major part of the guard duty; but she was more than ready to assist him if the occasion should warrant it.

In placing her reliance in her old mate, she was depending upon no broken reed. The old fellow was prepared to take on anything from a wedge-tailed eagle to a human being, large or small. He did, too, playing no favorites. Anything that came within easy radius of the ironbark tree was given tangible evidence of his battered presence.

Actually Broken Beak, like many of his species, was a more conscientious sentry than he needed to be. The paddock that contained the ironbark was not often visited by human beings, big or little, but when it was, Broken Beak swooped. He did not pause to weigh the possible consequences. It never entered his head, intelligent though he was, that these people would be ignorant of the existence of the nest if he refrained from advertising it.

He was a bird who believed in taking no chances. Every human being was a potential nest-wrecker and egg-stealer, and he took the war into the enemy's territory. He worked on the theory that though thrice is one armed who has his quarrel just, four times is that one armed who gets his blow in first. Broken Beak was a strong advocate of the military maxim that attack was the best method of defence.

Guard duty, of course, had to be interrupted in feeding his mate and keeping himself going with necessary nourishment. She used to join him occasionally, mainly for exercise, but it was not until after the eggs hatched that she left the nest for any great length of time.

With the appearance of four hungry nestlings, Broken Beak had to work overtime. It was a busy period for both parents. The youngsters had voracious appetites and the old birds were almost run off their legs and wings keeping up an adequate supply of food.

Broken Beak had been pugnacious while the eggs were in the nest, but with the advent of the youngsters he became definitely vicious. He even evolved a new plan of warfare with the assistance of his mate. Human beings entering the paddock would catch sight of Mrs. Broken Beak flying conspicuously in view having every appearance of a bird about to attack. But she never did. Her task was to keep the unwelcome visitor's attention occupied while old Broken Beak swooped unknown from behind. A swish of wings and a sharp peck was the first intimation the luckless human had of his cunning presence.

Broken Beak's plan of campaign—to attack everyone venturing near the nest and to punish the innocent with the potentially guilty—was based on the slogan that it was better to be certain than to be sorry. It was, therefore, just sheer ill-fortune that a most unusual set of circumstances brought unhappiness to him and his mate.

In an adjoining paddock there lived, in a post and rail enclosure behind a barn, a big black bull, the property of a dairy farmer named McFarlane. This bull was never permitted the wider freedom of the home paddock because

it was a savage animal liable to attack man or beast if free. There had been occasions in the past that the bull had broken free and it had caused consternation in the district.

One morning the bull managed to make its escape. Continual butting and bumping against a particular rail had weakened the support until eventually it had given way. The bull soon burst out into the paddock and, after giving a triumphant bellow to announce the fact, commenced to graze around the vicinity. It was not in a particularly bad mood and as long as it was unmolested might continue to keep its temper under control.

On the other side of the paddock and behind the farmhouse, the bull's owner, blissfully ignorant of the animal's freedom, was ploughing an area of ground. Old Broken Beak observed this activity from the top of his tree, and it made him restless. He was torn between desire to do his duty in guarding the nest and desire to fly rapidly across to that ploughed ground and feed royally on the fat grubs and worms turned up by the ploughshares. He had followed ploughs before and knew of the sumptuous repasts to be had in the furrows.

From the top of his tree he could see around him for miles. All seemed peaceful and of human enemies there were none. No matter where his eyes wandered, however, they always came back to that farmer and his plough. Mrs. Broken Beak was away temporarily scouting round for food for the hungry quadruplets in the nest. When she returned, he told himself, he would take time off to venture across to the ploughed ground.

Merely thinking of the fat grubs and crickets made his old beak water and when his mate arrived with a large

caterpillar and thrust it deftly into the gaping beak of a nestling, he was ready to depart.

But here he struck a snag. His mate, who had also observed the ploughing, wanted to accompany him. They argued and squabbled about this in their own fashion, and then Broken Beak took off and flapped rapidly across the paddock, his mate closely following. They alighted together some yards behind the moving plough, dived into the furrow and, within a few seconds had completely forgotten their nest and nestlings as they hopped along, guzzling the fat white cockchafer grubs lying plentifully in the freshly-turned earth.

Back in the dairy paddock, the bull had grazed his way to the fence separating the paddock from Broken Beak's domain. Finding the top rail of one panel of fencing had fallen away, the bull stepped over the bottom and entered the magpie's territory.

In his grazing, the animal proceeded slowly in the direction of a thick clump of tea-tree and as he disappeared behind it, fate brought more actors into the drama, the climax of which would greatly annoy Broken Beak.

Scarcely had the bull disappeared behind the tea-tree scrub than three boys crawled under the fence at the far end of the paddock. One of them carried a bird trap which contained a diamond sparrow as a decoy, and their intention was to scour the bush until they found a suitable place wherein to set the trap in the hope of catching some more of those pretty little bush birds.

They had not the slightest knowledge of the magpie's nest in the ironbark tree and possibly would never have known of its existence had the black bull stayed in its

enclosure that day. Certainly, it would appear that the Fates were working against old Broken Beak. In the final analysis, it would be difficult to decide who was really to blame—the bull, or Broken Beak and his longing for a grub-feast.

The three boys, Reggie Jones, Ben Worth and Bill Thomas, had no intention of trying to trap birds in that particular paddock. Their destination was the thick bush and scrub on the other side of McFarlane's dairy farm. The paddock provided a short cut. Except for a few trees, including Broken Beak's, and the patch of tea-tree scrub behind which McFarlane's bull was now peacefully grazing, the paddock was unrelieved grassland.

Walking three abreast and talking among themselves, the boys reached the tea-tree scrub and rounded it. When they caught sight of the bull, they stopped dead and regarded it in wild surmise. The bull raised its head and looked at them. The boys returned the compliment. The bull gave a loud roar, lowered its head and began to paw the ground, sending small clods of dirt up on to its back.

That was enough for the boys. They knew the ways of bulls. Ben Worth and Bill Thomas immediately streaked for the fence, but young Jones paused long enough to pick up a huge stone, which he threw at the bull, hitting it on the head. Then, as he turned to run, he tripped over another big stone and crashed to earth. He had his wits about him, however, and when he sprang to his feet, saw he had no chance to reach the fence. Urgency lent extra strength to his already first class climbing prowess, and he had scaled the nearest tree before the bull had rushed ten yards.

From their safe position behind the fence, Ben Worth and Bill Thomas began to hurl at young Jones maledictions

and advice that he did not appreciate. They pointed out to him, with what he thought was unnecessary emphasis, that he would not be in his present predicament if he had not lingered behind to throw a stone at the bull. They told him that the bull probably would not have troubled to chase them had he refrained from angering it.

"You are a first-rate idiot, Jonesy," wound up Ben Worth.

Young Jones was in no mood for censure. He was wedged in a fork of the tree while down below the bull was doing sentry-go around the trunk.

"Come and hunt this wretched hound of a thing away," he roared.

"Wretched bull of a thing, you mean," pointed out young Thomas.

"That's right, be funny!" howled Jones from the tree fork. "Don't stand there like a pair of stuffed mullets. Do something, can't you?"

"Do what?" yelled Ben.

"Come and hunt this thing away so that I can come down out of this tree!" roared Reggie. "Do you think I want to stay up here all night?"

"It's all your fault, Jonesy," called out Bill. "Who threw the stone at the bull?"

"Are you going to go through all that again?" howled young Jones. "I know I threw the stone. I know I am to blame. I know I shouldn't have done it. I know that you two have all the brains and that I'm the village idiot. I agree with everything you say. Now, will you please hunt this bull away and let me get down out of this tree?"

"How?" shouted Bill.

"I'm too big a fool to work that out. You've got all the brains, you know," replied Reggie, with a hint of sarcasm.

"Perhaps you would like me to go into the paddock and let the bull chase me, and while he is goring me to death, you can get away safely, eh?" asked Ben, who could be sarcastic too when he chose.

"Now that's what I call a great idea!" roared Reggie, eagerly. "Thanks a lot. I'll be ready. In you come!"

"Hey?" exclaimed Ben heatedly. "I'll do nothing of the kind! Who do you think you are, anyway?"

"Let me see if I can shift it," said Bill, picking up a stone and throwing it unerringly at the bull, which had stopped its sentry-go to paw up some more earth. The stone hit it on the back. It let out a bellow and rubbed its neck vigorously against the trunk of the tree.

"Stop that, for heaven's sake!" bellowed Reggie, clinging madly to a limb. "I'll get shook out of the tree, you fool!"

"Shaken out," said Bill reprovingly.

"It will save you having to climb down if you do," called out Ben, who always looked for the silver lining in the dark cloud.

Reggie's reply to both these comments was inaudible. He spluttered something most uncomplimentary, but neither Ben nor Bill could catch it.

"Listen," Reggie called out when he had got his breath back, "Get hold of some long sticks or saplings and then come in and charge the bull as if you had rifles and bayonets. The bull won't like being charged with long sticks."

"And it won't like us for doing it, either," Ben pointed out.

Young Jones then changed his tune. He ceased reviling his two friends and began to appeal to their better natures. He mentioned that they had all been intimate pals for many years and had always helped each other. Through thick and thin they had stuck to each other, come what might, rain, hail or sunshine. Mateship was a wonderful and a precious thing.

He was speaking really well and might have gone on indefinitely in the same sentimental strain had not the bull suddenly rubbed itself vigorously against the tree trunk. Reggie ceased his exhortations and, pulling a branch off the tree, threw it down at the bull. The branch fell on the animal's horns and its efforts to dislodge the encumbrance annoyed the animal exceedingly. It roared loudly and charged the tree trunk, its head meeting it with a dull thud. The force of the impact almost threw Reggie out of the fork. He gave a startled grunt and began to climb higher.

"We have got to do something about this," said Ben to Bill. "Let us walk down the fence a bit and then enter the paddock. If we attract the bull's attention, it might chase us. We can easily get back through the fence again and Jonesy might have a chance to get clear."

"I'm willing," said Bill, and yelled out to Reggie exactly what they proposed to do. Reggie climbed down to the lower fork again and held himself in readiness to move swiftly.

Ben and Bill walked a good distance down the fence and crawled through it, advancing a few yards into the paddock. Then they started to shout loudly.

The bull, which had been watching them moving along the fence, resented the noise and, putting down its head,