

DROVER'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

GIANT POLE'S ATTACK

The Australian bush is instinct with mystery; in its dark recesses is hidden crime, but it is doubtful whether in the long revolutions of the suns the silent forest has ever witnessed a more ferrible struggle than that which was thrust upon Charles Barker, a district drover, on Friday evening, May 26 (says The Charleville Times, Q). Sore and stricken, he can now move about with the aid of a crutch, but had he waxed less faint in the life-and-death bouts with his would-be slayer there had been one more enigma of the bush, to become, perhaps, a nine days' wonder, and then to pass into the limbo of forgotten things. Mr. Barker says that on Friday, May 26, he was on his way from Morven to Woongarmere with a mob of bulls. With him was his young son, Norman, eight years old. On the evening in question he camped on the Morven side of the Old Boatman homestead. As is customary with bush folk, he had tea early, and turned into bed, the boy lying alongside him. Fortunately, Mr. Barker's sense of hearing is very acute; he is a light sleeper, and the distant call of a shepherd's companion, or the rustle of a snake in the grass, suffices to awake him. It was, he thinks, about half-past 9, when the soft fall of approaching footsteps roused him. He turned in the direction the sounds came from and waited. The

the sounds came from and waited. The night was of Egyptian blackness, but the flames of the camp fire, as they rose and fell, lent a spectral appearance to the surroundings. Presently, in the flickering firelight, the drover saw approaching a man of Brobdingnagian proportions. In his hand he carried a rounded bar of iron, something resembling the handle of a huge saucepan. The intruder came on with "silent lips and striking hand," and as Mr. Barker endeavoured to rise he was struck a terrible blow across the right shoulder and arm. Every faculty now alert, he rolled out on the opposite side of the bed, and getting to his feet, faced his opponent across the fire, prepared to battle for his life.

—Fell into a Gully.—

The stranger, still silent, ferociously renewed the attack, Mr. Barker on his part endeavouring to close with his gigantic adversary. The bar of iron proved, however, a formidable weapon, and its holder a master of fence. Thrusting, cutting, and parrying he defeated every attempt to get within his guard, wounding the plucky drover at the same time on head and arms. Bleeding freely and somewhat dazed, Barker realized to the full that he was fighting not only for his own life but also for the life of his boy. Handicapped by loss of blood and by his having no boots on, he was pushed back into the bush, and, in trying to escape what looked like a finishing stroke, fell into a gully. The giant, luckily, was too slow to avail himself of his advantage, and Barker, regaining his feet, got out to the road, along which he retreated painfully, his feet having been terribly torn and lacerated in the bush and in the fall. Blood marked his every step along the road, and, weak as he was, his pace could not have been great, but it was sufficient to keep him in front of his pursuer, who hung on grimly until the Old Boatman house loomed up in the darkness, when he slunk off. There was a musterers' camp at the house, and Mr. Barker was made comfortable while some of the men went to the scene of the struggle and brought along young Norman

struggle and brought along young Norman Barker, who, strangely enough, knew nothing of the bloodthirsty combat that had been waged so close to him.

—Assailant Arrested.—

On Saturday morning Wilson Reardon, Joe Childs, Bert Langsford, Fred Collins, and others examined the road over which Barker had been pursued the previous night, and, picking up tracks, followed them to where they found a man of herculean build sitting on a swag. There was no grass in the vicinity, but the man when asked why he had not lit a fire said, in Broken English, that he was afraid of starting the grass. Questioned further, he denied any knowledge of the assault on Barker. He was, however, told that he would be tied up pending the arrival of the police, and that operation was duly carried out. Barker when confronted with the man fully identified him as his assailant. Acting Sgt. Creedy, of Morven, arrived on Saturday night, and took charge of the prisoner, who is described as a Pole, and who gave the name of George Connand. He, however, wears an A.I.F. badge, and claimed to have a gratuity bond worth £80. When Connand was arrested he was wearing a new pair of boots that did not correspond with those that had made the tracks. In searching for the iron bar a pair of old boots was found hidden, and these when examined were found to be identical with the boots responsible for the tracks. The prisoner was asked to fit on these boots, but told that he might decline, a permission of which he promptly availed himself. He is quite unknown in the district. Mr. Barker was sent into Charleville, and under the treatment of Dr. A. W. Fox is making a satisfactory return to health.

—The Motive for the Attack.—

What was the motive for the attack on Barker? He and the arrested man were complete strangers. The chance of securing plunder, in the circumstances, could hardly have been regarded as promising. Traveling drovers do not, as a rule, carry much money with them. Later information suggests that Barker was the victim of

tion suggests that Barker was the victim of a mistake; he was taken for another man. It appears that a foreigner met a bush worker named John Francis Smith near Bendena. Both were carrying their swags and journeying on the road to Morven. Smith was not impressed with the man's appearance, and, contrary to the general custom, the men did not journey along together. Alternately, they passed one another on the road, exchanging a few words occasionally. Smith had worked for some time at Fernlea, and might reasonably be supposed to have a good amount of money on his person. Smith passed the man at Old Boatman on Friday, and in reply to a question of the latter's said he intended to camp at the three mile that night. Mr. Barker, as has already been said, camped within two and a half miles of the station. In the darkness any one might easily mistake the camp at the two and a half mile for the one at the three mile. An examination of the tracks at Mar Barker's camp shows that his antagonist first inspected the nearby creek, which is carrying bore water, before engaging in the attack. Of course these speculations are more or less hypothetical, and until the police have a chance of testing them out cannot be held as reflecting on the Pole. Connand was brought up at Morven on a charge of inflicting grievous bodily harm, and remanded for eight days.
