

The Shearers Colt

The Shearer's Colt



'Banjo' Paterson

an excerpt from: Part I CHAPTER I - An Englishman Abroad When Young Hilton Fitzroy, nephew of one earl and second cousin to another, was due to leave school, the family went into conference as to his career. His widowed mother naturally had no doubt that he would make a good Prime Minister; but the young fellow soon showed that he would be very difficult to place. His extraordinary strength, his violent temper and his stubborn refusal to bear himself lowly and reverently towards anybody, all marked him out as a throw-back to some (possibly royal) ancestor who had helped himself to everything in sight in the dim and distant past. Fitzroy senior had been the younger son of a younger son of a county family, so his widow was left with very little money. In this extremity she was financed by the generosity of the head of the clan, a wealthy peer, who felt it his duty in the patriarchal English fashion to do something for the various scions of the house, even unto the third and fourth generation. Thus it came that young Fitzroy and his mother were allowed to live at one of the shooting-boxes belonging to the family. Here he was entered to hound, horse and gun, and he learnt the unusual accomplishment of catch-as-catch-can wrestling from an old retainer who followed their fortunes to the last. In due time he was sent on to Oxford where he might have laid the foundations of a career as Prime Minister, only that an inherited inability to pass examinations made it apparent that if he lasted even one year at the University he would put up a remarkably good performance. However, there are other ways of distinguishing oneself at Oxford than by obtaining a degree with first class honours. Hardly had this youth settled down in residence, than he inveigled a policeman into his rooms, got the policeman drunk and sallied out into the streets arrayed in the policemen's

uniform. Wearing these borrowed plumes and knowing exactly where to go, he visited some out-of-bounds places and arrested several wealthy Indian undergraduates; but he did not take any of his captives to the police-station. Instead he accepted large bribes to let them go, and later on refused to give the money back, holding with the Tichborne claimant that those who have money and no brains are meant to provide for those who have brains and no money. Then came boat-race night when it is traditional for the undergraduates to visit London music-halls and to play up until thrown into the street by a specially recruited force of chuckers-out. This is an annual affair, a perfunctory business, usually rather boring to the chuckers-out, who have little difficulty in dealing with half-intoxicated undergraduates. But on this occasion the chief chucker-out handled young Fitzroy with unnecessary roughness, with the result that the chief chucker-out was treated to a lesson in wrestling which sent him flying down a flight of stone steps, with concussion of the brain and an action for damages to follow. The next thing was a letter from the much worried head of the clan to the boys mother: DEAR MARIE, I am afraid that your boy is too much of a handful for the effete institutions of this country. He belongs in the wide open spaces, where men are men and do not bring actions for damages. I am therefore arranging to send him out to Australia where he will have more scope for the exercise of his peculiar talents. I will put a thousand pounds to his credit and will let him either mak a spune or spoil a horn. Do not think that I am blaming you for the way in which you have brought up this boy. On the contrary I congratulate you on having produced such a type....

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