

MISCELLANEOUS

EARLY DAYS ON THE RICHMOND.

THE RIVAL RACE BALLS OF '54.

(By Mr. Jas. Ainsworth in the "R.R. Herald.")

In 1854, when still a boy—and a lightweight rider of local repute—I found myself one of a Ballina party bound for a typical Casino race meeting. The grandstand on the course was a square, rough-hewn structure with a flat slab roof, from which eminence those who cared to pay 2/6 for the extra privilege could view the different events. The space below served as a weighing room and office for the stewards and committee. In common with the majority in attendance thus early in the carnival, Joe Eyles had imbibed not wisely but too well, and, to ease the exuberance of his spirits, sought the seclusion and sanctuary of the grandstand. There he solemnly sat and stared, and blinked, and smoked and—in turn—spat.

Immediately beneath, Squatter MacKellar, who was busily attending to the scales, became all at once visibly disconcerted. He was apparently interested in the meanderings of a copious trickle of insistent wetness which he felt slimly stealing down his back beneath his shirt collar. He was readily aware that it had not been raining, and for the moment was at a loss to account for the phenomenon. Then, looking up, he saw that it connected with a crack in the roof. Rushing out, his excitement registered breaking-point when he caught Joe in the deliberate, if unwitting act of expectorating another full volley at the crack. MacKellar became instantly furious and peremptorily called for all the satisfaction to his outraged dignity that the law and particular circumstances would

to his outraged dignity that the law and particular circumstances would allow. In this attitude he was supported by the committee to a man, and the police were ordered to clear the stand.

Joe, meanwhile, from the elevated perch, viewed the tumult below him with a complacency that was admirably as it was seemingly disinterested, until it was slowly borne in upon him that he was the centre figure of the disturbance. Then, assuming, a hurried but comprehensive aggressive, he unsteadily unended himself into action. Between hiccoughs he accepted the situation and addressed the crowd. He defied the police, and by and large challenged the whole fraternity of squatters to do their luridest, uttermost, and absolute worst. Fired by the heat of his own eloquence, and the potency of the rum, he concluded with a declaration of hostility against the entire population.

Following the Eyles grandstand incident, the Ballina men were known in Casino as the "Bully Blues," because of the blue turbans they affected round their hats in contrast with the white turbans worn by the squatters, turbans having come into popular fashion at the time. Though invitations had been issued generally by the station proprietors for the Race Ball, it was regarded as significant that the "Bully Blues" were omitted. Taking hasty counsel together to consider reprisals, they learned that Burley, the only fiddler in the district—whose services as musician were retained for the ball—was as fond of a drop of Jamaica rum as the next man. They lost no time in making friends with Burley, who was only too willing to accept the lavish hospitality offered him. They kept him under close guard while they arranged an opposition ball, so that by the time the "White Turbanites" had assembled for the aristocratic hop, and only awaited the fiddler, the latter well

awaited the fiddler, the latter well primed, was busy scraping out music for the "Bully Blues" dance in another quarter of the town. Next day the squatters openly acknowledged defeat and the combined ball the following night was enthusiastically attended by every one, squatter and timber-getter without exception.