

## THRESHOLD OF THE NEVER-NEVER 45

dwindle to an insignificant shrub, or tuft of coarse grass.

Our pace was slow, and what with the dust and the heat, we were all very glad when, well on in the afternoon, a dark belt of trees, which had kept appearing and disappearing tantalisingly for the last hour or two, now showed up substantially and refreshingly green. It marked the Gregory River, and the spectacle of clear water flowing over a pebbly and sandy bed, in a beautifully wooded, palm-fringed dell, was indeed a sight for sore eyes. Strangely enough, the Gulf country, as it is termed in Australia, although one of the hottest places in the world, is remarkably well watered. This beautiful little valley, with its limpid pools shaded by graceful palms, and greenest foliage shot with varicoloured blossoms, hardly less brilliant than the plumage of the birds, seemed to us a vision of fairyland. Its beauty, indeed, was beyond description.

The butterflies, some of them as large as one's hand, were masterpieces of design and colouring. The greatest genius the world ever produced could not have conceived anything so exquisitely beautiful. It was here Madge showed us some of the many wonderful things in Nature that opened to us realms, the like of which neither Grimm nor Hans Andersen had at their command.

She took us down to a shallow pool, told us to look into it, and asked us what we saw. I could see nothing unusual, but Maitland remarked the presence of short pieces of grass resembling chopped hay.

"Watch them," said Madge.