

to roughing it as a miner, but such was his charm of manner that he won my sympathies and as we were attracted by our mutual ignorance of our new life and unfitness to cope with the difficulties which hedged us in we soon became inseparable companions and finally decided to strike out for the interior and try our fortunes. Our last money was expended in the purchase of a mule and provisions enough for a three months trip. The mule was to carry the provisions while we were to trudge alongside on foot. With swags strapped on our backs we turned our faces towards the east and bid good bye to Coolgardie. Fifty miles inland found us in the most bleak and desert-like country which you can imagine. We had turned to the north of the beaten track in the hope of coming upon a new field not taken up by the old-time and experienced prospectors, who over-ran like the locusts of Egypt. We camped upon the confines of a small creek, the only one in that part of the country. Day after day was spent in vain attempts to find a trace of gold, but so profound was our ignorance of mining that our ill success was no proof of the absence of the precious metal. A few miles to the north of the camp the sand plains terminated in a series of hills, almost mountains. This region we carefully avoided lest we should be lost in the hills. As a last resort we decided to explore the foot-hills, taking care to keep our camp continually in sight. To avoid fatigue we placed part of our supplies on the mule and with the tent advanced to the range which proved to be well watered, much to our surprise none of the water coming down to the plain, it being sucked up by the sand in a short distance. Our search was fruitless and we had determined to abandon our quest and return to Coolgardie when the following remarkable circumstances transpired. In consequence of Vail's youth and lack of strength we had made a division of the work, he took charge of the culinary department while the hard labor fell to my lot. But for his skill in this particular I should have abandoned the search in two weeks. Given the most common materials he could be relied upon to prepare an excellent meal. One day while I was absent in the hills he found in the neighborhood of the camp a small piece of opal which evidently had recently been broken from its bed in the rock as the fracture was new and bright. Our conclusion was that we must have a neighbor but why he had not made his appearance known we could not conjecture. There was but one interpretation to be placed upon his desire to remain concealed and that was that he had hit upon a new field and was working it. We had never heard it stated that opals