

contemptuously. "But, if you won't admit, or are careless of the scientific gains of the expedition, at least you cannot be insensible to its peculiar interest for ourselves. It is a most mysterious and solemn discovery that Masonry should have made its way through the wild tribes of this trackless continent, and that black men, who never saw a white one before, should be ready to spare him in their wrath, upon the prompt recognition that he too was a brother."

Here I fairly laughed outright at the ex-deacon. "It is a most mysterious and solemn discovery," I answered, "to find an undergraduate of Christ Church abandoning himself to any such rubbishing fancies. The black man who never saw a white one is not nearly so sentimental; and when you chance to meet him I would strongly recommend your signalling him from your rifle, in preference to awaiting any fraternal advances from his boomerang."

"But you heard what Stuart distinctly told us! You don't mean to disbelieve him?"

"I heard him distinctly tell us that he would have reached the Indian Ocean but for an armed native opposition too formidable to break through; and that among the ferocious savages his whole company would have been killed and cooked had he not been able to announce himself as a Craftsman, and so secure fraternal protection and hospitality. That was the tale I heard, as well as I remember it."

"And you mean to tell me you don't credit it?"

"I mean to ask,—do you? The narratives of explorers are always to be taken *cum grano*. In the first place they are enthusiasts—not unfrequently visionaries. The solitudes they traverse are in the highest degree stimulative of the imagination, and the blank monotony of the succeeding days creates a longing for episode, in which a fanciful day-dream grows to tangible consistency. After a man, whose business is to find something, has been for weeks toiling through the Sahara, I believe that his objective and subjective perceptions become inextricably entangled, and that, with the honestest intentions in the world, half of what he writes down in his note-book has been evolved from his own inner consciousness."

"A polite mode of saying that such adventurers are commonly crazy. Was Sturt, was Kennedy, was Leichardt?"

"Kennedy and Leichardt are dead in their tracks, and their names, like Franklin's, are sacred. But that they should have bartered lives so valuable for information so little interesting may, perhaps, without irreverence, be said to offer instance of sublime impracticability, rather than of keen worldly wisdom. And as to Sturt: there's his map on the shelf behind you. What do you say to his Great Stony Desert, and his Inland Sea, and his huge Horse-shoe Lake, and all the rest of his