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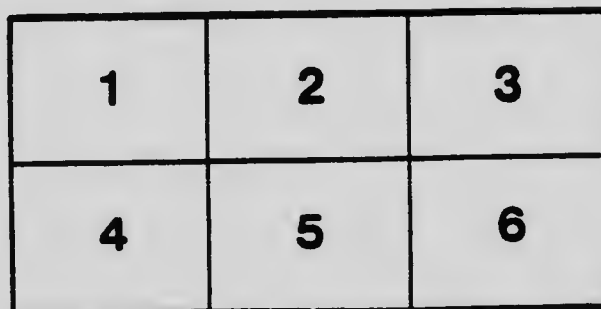
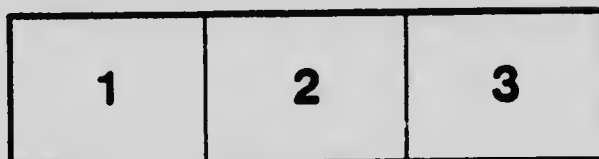
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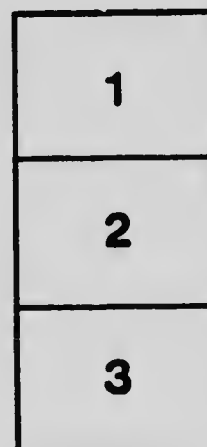
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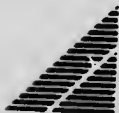
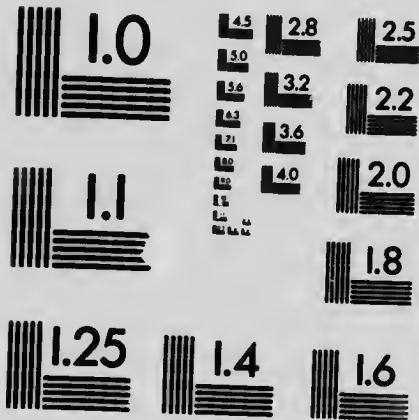
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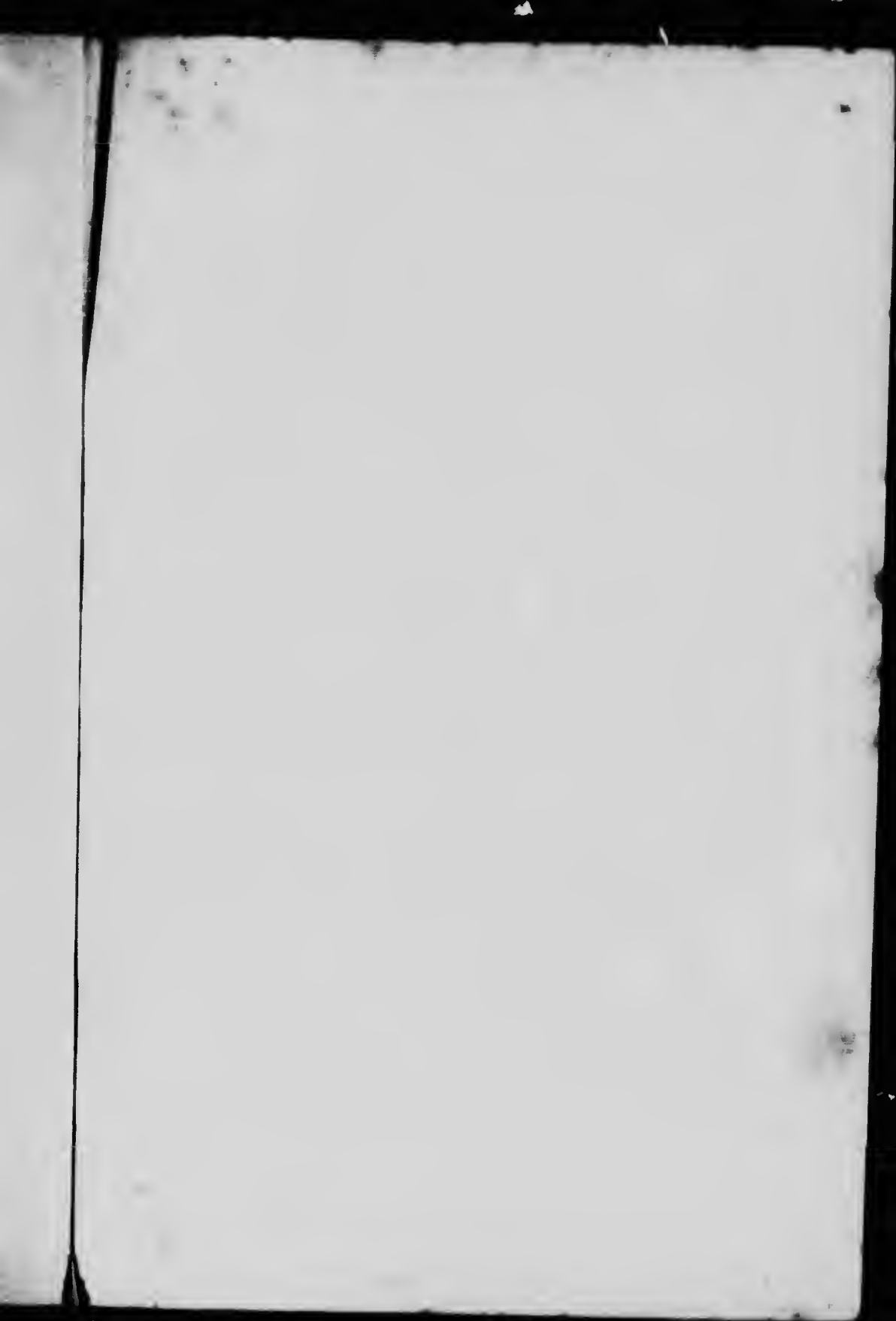
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**THE ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIAN
EXPLORING**





BLUE MOUNTAIN CLIFFS.

THE
ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIAN
EXPLORING

BY
G. FIRTH SCOTT

AUTHOR OF "THE TRACK OF MIDNIGHT," ETC.

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

TORONTO
THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
1910



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PREFACE

IN presenting the "Romance of Australian Exploring," it is not intended, by any means, to claim for the volume a scientific or a "reference-book" value. Rather is it the effort of one who, an Australian by adoption, seeks to hold before men's eyes some of the deeds by which the mysteries of the "silent sombre land" were first solved, and the boundless wealth of the island-continent made available to the all-conquering sons of Britain.

To attempt, in a single volume, even a brief historical *resumé* of the innumerable exploring expeditions which have slowly penetrated into almost every nook and corner of the territory, would be to attempt the impossible—and to produce more than one volume would be to produce too much for the modern reader. Hence the scheme followed, which has been to take the most important, typical, illustrative, and characteristic expeditions, and present their records

with the least amount of dry detail and the largest possible amount of interest and romance.

With the exception of the first few expeditions, which obviously are of preponderating importance, north, south, east, and west have been levied upon to produce some story characteristic of the locality and its aboriginal inhabitants, and yet typical of Australian exploration. Whether the selection has been the best available may be disputed; the intention which guided the selection cannot.

It may also be urged, and with reason, that there have been many romantic journeys since the spanning of the continent by the Overland Telegraph Line. But the transcontinental survey put an end to what may be termed the great trunk lines of exploration. After that the journeys were subsidiary; through districts, if not localities, already touched upon and often traversed; and rarely productive of any information which modified or extended the knowledge of those subjects which it is hoped the present volume may advance in public interest—the history, the romance, and last, though not least, the vanishing but fascinating aboriginal race of Australia.

G. FIRTH SCOTT.

LONDON, 1890.

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THE ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIAN EXPLORING

CHAPTER I.

ACROSS THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

It is difficult, at the present day, to understand the indifference with which the Imperial authorities regarded the Australian territories in the first years of their occupation, and the few efforts put forth to ascertain the capabilities of their development. A few naval enthusiasts made known something of the vast coast-line of the island continent, but the continent itself was only touched in such a vague manner as was necessary to discover suitable sites for penal establishments, while the interior was left severely alone.

For twenty-five years after the settlement on Sydney Cove was founded, the country fifty miles inland was an untouched wilderness whither no

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white man had penetrated, save, perhaps, a few convicts who had the misfortune to escape from the gaols only to fall victims to thirst, starvation, or the spears of the black fellows.

In the first year of the settlement (1788) Governor Phillip, while visiting Broken Bay, some thirty miles to the north of Sydney, discovered a large and important river flowing into it, to which he gave the name of Hawkesbury. The soil on its banks being particularly rich, a settlement was founded there, and a brief effort made to reach the line of mountains which stood out against the horizon almost as blue as the sky. The river, instead of flowing direct to the range, turned parallel with it, and the voyage of discovery terminated. Subsequently one or two officers made attempts to reach the mountains overland from the Hawkesbury; but the country was too rugged and broken for easy travelling, and so their journeys also terminated.

Meanwhile shipload after shipload of enforced residents arrived at "the Cove," and to provide room for them small settlements were created in the immediate vicinity of the main settlement, until gradually the area now occupied by the city of Sydney and its suburbs became known. Spreading still further afield, the settlements reached, at Penrith and Emu Plains, thirty-four miles west from Sydney, the foot of the range which had

attracted Governor Phillip's attention in 1788, and to which the name Blue Mountains had long since been given.

The range stretched from beyond the Hawkesbury, and beyond Emu Plains, away to the south of Sydney, forming what, for many years, was an impassable barrier between the strip of coastal land already occupied and the great unknown interior. The crossing of the Blue Mountains was the first step in the series of exploring expeditions which, during the next fifty years, was gradually to unfold to the British people the vast area, the magnificent resources, and the immeasurable potentialities of the Australian continent.

It was from Emu Plains that most of the explorers set out to win a way across the tangled confusion of chasms, gorges, and precipices which make up the wonders of this extraordinary range; it was to Emu Plains that most of them came back, worn out and weary, with stories of such mighty chasms and cliffs, gorges and ravines, rock-strewn ridges and unclimbable steeps, that the mountains came to be regarded as absolutely impassable.

Nor were all the stories exaggerations. Years after a road had been surveyed over the mountains, Charles Darwin, in his "*Naturalist's Voyage*," wrote of them—

"These valleys, which so long presented an

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insuperable barrier to the attempts of the most enterprising of the colonists to reach the interior, are most remarkable. Great arm-like bays expand at the upper ends of their branches from the main valleys and penetrate the sandstone platform. On the other hand, the sandstone often sends promontories into the valleys, and even leaves them great, almost insulated, masses. To descend into some of these valleys it is necessary to go round twenty miles, and into others the surveyors have only lately penetrated, and the colonists have not yet been able to drive their cattle. But the most remarkable feature in their structure is, that, although several miles wide at their head, they generally contract to such a degree towards their mouths as to become impassable. The Surveyor-General, Sir Thomas Mitchell, endeavoured in vain, first walking, and then crawling, between the great fragments of sandstone, to ascend through the gorge by which the river Grose joins the Nepean; yet the valley of the Grose in its upper part, as I saw, forms a magnificent level basin some miles in width, and is on all sides surrounded by cliffs, the summits of which are believed to be nowhere less than three thousand feet above the level of the sea. When cattle are driven into the valley of the Wolgan (by a path I descended, partly natural and partly made by the owner of the land) they cannot escape, for this



HEAD OF A GORGE.

valley is in every part surrounded by perpendicular cliffs, and eight miles lower down it contracts from an average width of half a mile to a mere chasm, impassable by man or beast."

Sir Thomas Mitchell, to whom Darwin referred, wrote—

"It is a remarkable fact that the mouths of these stupendous ravines are extremely narrow. Some idea may also be formed of their intricate character from the difficulty experienced by the surveyors in endeavouring to obtain access to Mount Hay. Mr. Dixon, in an unsuccessful attempt, penetrated to the valley of the Grose, until then unexplored, and when he at length emerged from the ravines in which he had been bewildered for four days, without even reaching Mount Hay, he thanked God (to use his own expression in an official letter) that he had found his way out of them. . . . Having looked into this valley from the summit of Tomah in 1827, I was tempted soon after to endeavour to explore it by ascending the river, from its junction with the Hawkesbury, near Richmond; but I had not proceeded far in this attempt, accompanied by Major Lockyer and Mr. Dixon, when we were compelled to leave our horses, and soon after to scramble on hands and feet, until at length even our quadrumanous progress was arrested by pebbles in the bed of the river which were as large as houses, and round,

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over, or between which, we found it impossible to proceed." (Mitchell's "Narrative.")

Such are some of the difficulties which faced the early explorers who sought to penetrate into the unknown country lying beyond the great barrier. Bass, whose name occupies so prominent a place amongst the maritime explorers of Australia, devoted a brief leisure on shore to an attempt to climb over the mountains; but he only succeeded in losing himself in the network of gullies and ravines which protected the first range from intrusion. Hacking, another sailor, made a noteworthy attempt, and for seven days battled bravely to find something like a track over the confused and confusing spurs, ridges, ravines, and gorges which faced him in every direction; but only to come back again to the settlement with the conviction that the mountains would never be crossed by man.

An ensign of the New South Wales corps, named Borraillier, undertook several journeys to cross the mountains, and kept most voluminous diaries of experiences; but he wrote in such an illegible fashion that no one could read what he had written, the only fact ascertained being that he had not crossed the range.

A more successful effort was made by Cayley, who, early in the century, penetrated for some distance into the fastnesses, until he persuaded himself that he had at last surmounted the last

ridge, and would soon be able to look out upon the country on the other side of the mountains. But instead, he found himself suddenly confronted by a wall of rock which defied all his efforts to climb over, and in which he was unable to find either break or opening. His efforts, fruitless though they were in enabling him to claim the honour of having been the first man over, were undoubtedly of very considerable assistance to those who ultimately succeeded where others had failed.

At the end of the first decade of the century the little colony had its first experience of a prolonged drought. The rainfall, never very excessive, became lighter and lighter; the streams shrank in volume, and the soil, becoming parched in the absence of rain and the persistent scorching of the sun, gradually lost its natural vegetation. Cultivation was at a standstill, for the seed sown did not germinate, and the cattle, already sufficiently increased in numbers to tax the pasturage available even in good seasons, began to die off for want of food and water. Ruin was staring the settlers in the face; starvation was threatening every one not dependent upon the Government for their daily food. In such a climax many a man looked out towards the blue line which lay along the horizon, chafing at the continued existence of the barrier, which might not only shut them in upon a narrow drought-stricken area, but shut

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them and their cattle out from abundance in the lands beyond. The attempt had so often been fruitlessly made to overcome the barrier in good seasons, that it was almost madness to attempt it now when the creeks were empty and dry, and the grass was withered. No one could attempt to travel without horses, and neither food nor water seemed to be available for them while the drought was on. And to wait till the drought had passed was to throw away the last hope, forlorn though it were, of saving the settlement from ruination.

Three young men determined to make the attempt. They were William Charles Wentworth, Lieutenant W. Lawson, and Gregory Blaxland.

Starting from Emu Plains, they crossed the Nepean river and were at the base of the first slope, up which they toiled, using as much as they could the tracks made by other explorers. The steepness was not the only difficulty they had to encounter, for even on this first slope they found the face scored by deep ravines and gullies where the creeks had flowed in more rainy seasons. By following the summit of one winding ridge they were enabled to get round a deep gorge, though the summit was so narrow that there was barely room for their horses to pass in single file. Once round the gorge, the ridge widened out as they advanced, until they arrived at a small tableland,

now known as Blaxland, where they made their first camp.

Continuing their journey in a westerly direction, there was a temporary absence of the chasm-like gorges, and they were able to make fairly good progress until they came upon the second stage of broken country. Here they were involved in a network of gullies and crevices, precipitous rocks and rugged chasms ten times worse than what they had first encountered. A ridge along which they were climbing would suddenly end in a sheer drop of two hundred feet; a valley into which they had clambered from the broken steeps would cease in a gorge shut in by cliffs hundreds of feet high; an apparently level stretch of wooded country on closer examination became a mass of rocky cracks and crevices, the dangers being hidden by the dense undergrowth. On every side they encountered difficulties and dangers. They were under constant risk of injury, if not death, in clambering up the numberless spurs and ridges which, rock-strewn and rugged, barred their progress; and no sooner was a summit won than the descent had to be made, and to descend was often more dangerous than to climb up. For days they stuck to their task, never seeming to make any advance, and yet always encountering obstacles and difficulties, until they began to despair. What, then, was their surprise when,

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having struggled along a broken ridge, the heavy growth of timber preventing them from seeing more than a small distance ahead, they found themselves at the edge of another precipitous bluff, from whence they obtained an uninterrupted view down a wide open valley, sloping to the west! On the horizon chains of broken summits showed against the skyline, but they were as nothing compared with the rugged steps that had been already encountered.

Fearful of raising false expectations, the gratification each man felt at the view before them was suppressed until they had climbed down to the banks of the stream which was seen flowing through the valley. There was no further doubt when the descent had been made; the trend of the country was distinctly to the west; the highest points were behind, and at last the great barrier had been passed and the road to the interior found. Having followed the stream for some miles, they retraced their steps, reaching the settlement with the news of their discovery after one month's absence.

On their arrival at Sydney, the information they brought with them produced the greatest enthusiasm and excitement. The possibility of the newly found river being the commencement of a westerly flowing waterway was immediately canvassed, and the then Governor, Lachlan Macquarrie, at once



ACROSS THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

ordered the Assistant Surveyor-General, George William Evans, to proceed over the route and further explore the valley beyond the mountains.

Evans and his party in six days were at the end of the pioneers' track, and a brief survey showed that the stream was merely a tributary of the Grose. Pushing on down the valley and over the hills lying beyond it, Evans, in ten days from the time of his start, had actually crossed the ridge that divided the eastern and western watersheds. A stream was found flowing to the west, which he called the Fish River, in consequence of one of the party making a successful catch.

This stream was followed for a week, the soil on both banks being evidently rich and fertile. On December 7, Evans reached a point where the Fish River flowed into another and larger stream coming from the south. This was known to the natives as Wambool, but Evans rejected that name in order to bestow upon it the patronymic of the Governor—a title which subsequently was bestowed on almost every notable landmark discovered during Macquarrie's term of office.

The newly discovered stream flowed in a wide current between high banks through a fertile country in which kangaroos, emus, and other native game abounded, and to which, in honour of the Governor, the name Macquarrie Plains was

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given. For twelve days the explorers journeyed along the course of the river, seeing the smoke from many a native fire, but only actually encountering six natives in person, two women and four children. On January 8, 1814, Evans and his party returned over the mountains, having penetrated one hundred miles west in a direct line from the Nepean river, and having discovered to the settlers round the Sydney settlement a district far more adapted for agriculture and stock-raising even than the rich alluvial flats of the Hawkesbury. Anxiety was at once manifested on the part of the settlers to be off to the new lands, and, in order to facilitate the removal of stock, the Governor issued instructions for the making of a road along the route marked over the mountains.

Prison labour, of which there was always a large amount available in the early days of the settlement, was drafted off in sufficient quantities to enable the road to be cleared of timber and ready for traffic from Emu Plains to Bathurst by January, 1815. Three months later the Governor journeyed over the route, reaching the end of the road on the plains, and making short exploration trips all round about the site of the new township.

A great deal of speculation existed as to the ultimate course of the river Macquarrie after it

left the plains, for it still flowed to the west with a big current and volume past Bathurst. The Governor again despatched Assistant Surveyor-General Evans, with a party provisioned for one month, to explore the country to the south-west of Bathurst, and to ascertain, if possible, where the river went. Evans followed up a small stream which was a tributary to the Macquarrie, and at the top of the valley through which it flowed he found stony ridges, succeeded later by a scrub-covered country from which rose two solitary mountains, with a considerable stream flowing between them to the north-west. This stream was evidently another tributary of the Macquarrie, and proceeding further, the explorers came upon another large tributary which they named Limestone Creek. They had now reached good country once more, and, journeying across it to the west, they found another stream larger than Limestone Creek and the other tributary to the Macquarrie, and of so different a character to either that they were sure it did not join the Macquarrie. As it was evidently a distinct river, and as the Governor's surname had already been bestowed on one stream, Evans named the new one the Lachlan, that being the Governor's first name.

Although smaller than the Macquarrie both in width and volume, and being less rapid, it was

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still of considerable size, and as it flowed more to the south-west than the north, the explorers were convinced that it was not in any way connected with the more northern river. Upon their return to the settlement their discovery set afoot considerable speculation as to whether the rivers were distinct, or whether they both joined further in the west. On only one point were opinions unanimous, and that was the unanswerable nature of the question, Whither did these streams ultimately flow?

CHAPTER II.

OXLEY EXPLORES THE LACHLAN.

At the commencement of the year 1817, Governor Macquarrie issued instructions to the Surveyor-General, Lieutenant John Oxley, R.N., to conduct a more extended exploration of these two streams, paying especial attention to the Lachlan, as the little ascertained of that stream by the Evans party made it, at the time, the more interesting of the two.

Oxley set out with a well-mounted party, which included Assistant Surveyor-General Evans, and Allan Cunningham, the "King's" botanist. Provisions for five months were carried, and two boats were sent on from Bathurst to the nearest point of the Lachlan. It was intended to make an official start from Byrne's Creek, the furthest point reached by the Evans party, and where a depôt had been established. With this view, as soon as the boats arrived at the river they were launched and loaded up with as much of the

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stores as they would hold, and started down the river to the depôt, while the remainder of the stores, the majority of the men, and all the horses followed overland.

The leader of the party, with one or two companions, travelled still more slowly from Bathurst direct to Byrne's Creek, utilizing the opportunity for making observations on the character of the country intervening. This was found to be generally well covered with grass and sparsely timbered, the surface forming long gently rolling ridges which made it admirably adapted for pastoral enterprise. As they approached the river, the land became flatter and the timber more scanty, except along the banks of the stream, where the trees were larger and growing more thickly than elsewhere. On April 25, 1817, Oxley first saw the Lachlan, a more extended acquaintance with which was to produce so much anxiety and trouble to him.

Describing the event in his official "Journals," he says—

"At two o'clock saw the river, which certainly did not disappoint me. It was evidently much higher than usual, running a strong stream, the banks very steep, but not so as to render the water inaccessible. The land on each side was quite flat and thinly clothed with small trees, the soil a rich light loam. Higher points occasionally

projected on the river, and on those the soil was by no means good. The largest trees were growing immediately at the water's edge, and from their position formed an arch over the river, obscuring it from observation, although it was from thirty to forty yards across. . . . Natives were seen in considerable numbers on the other side. I went down opposite to them, and after some little persuasion about twenty of them swam across, having their galengar or stone hatchet in one hand, but which, on their landing, they threw at our feet to show that they were as much divested of arms as ourselves. . . . They were stout and manly, well featured, with long beards; there were a few cloaks among them, made of the opossum skin."

Some kangaroo meat the explorers had with them was given to the natives, who immediately swam back with it to their fires on the far side of the stream. The fires were made up and the meat cooked and eaten at once. Before parting with them, a brief vocabulary of words, such as the names of the features, natural and celestial objects, weapons, etc., was compiled, as their language, being totally distinct from that of the blacks round Sydney and on the east of the Blue Mountains, and, indeed, considerably different from that of the blacks around Bathurst, it was considered that the vocabulary might prove useful

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in the event of other blacks being encountered further to the west. As subsequent events proved, however, the words were unintelligible to natives met with only a few days' march away.

On May 1 the formal start of the party was made from the depôt of Byrne's Creek, the boats loaded up with all the salt provisions that could be put into them, the remainder of the stores being placed on pack-horses and led by some of the men, while the others assisted the surveyors in making a flying survey of the country passed over, or collected specimens of new herbs and plants at the suggestion of Allan Cunningham. Progress was consequently very slow, for in spite of the country being flat on both sides of the stream, grass, growing high and rank, alternated with areas covered with a stunted scrubby brushwood which made travelling difficult. The smoke rising in long thin blue columns from the camp or signal fires of black fellows was constantly seen, but for five days after leaving Byrne's Creek there was no meeting with any of the natives.

A small creek, the first tributary noticed since the start, flowed into the Lachlan at a point reached on May 5. There was not much water in it, but the banks were steep and high, and some delay being caused by the unloading of the horses to enable them to cross, some of the men

rode up the creek to its source, which was found to be in a level stretch of wet loamy clay. The visit was memorable as being the occasion when the Australian weeping willow was first met with, the flat being thickly covered with the tree—named by Cunningham *Acacia pendula*—and which, by Oxley, was regarded as an invariable adjunct to flat marshy country.

Immediately after passing the mouth of the creek, the boats, which had hitherto experienced no difficulty in navigating the stream, were delayed somewhat by the amount of stranded timber which blocked the channel, and through which the boatmen had to cut a passage. A visit was also received from some natives, the only ones actually seen since leaving Byrne's Creek. Oxley, in his "Journals," describes them as follows :—

"We fell in with a small tribe of natives, consisting of eight men; their women we did not see. They did not appear in any way alarmed at the sight of us, but came boldly up; they were covered with cloaks made of opossum skins, their faces daubed with a red and yellow pigment, with neatly worked nets bound round their hair; the front tooth in the upper row was wanting in them all; they were unarmed, having nothing with them but their stone hatchets. It appeared from their conduct that they had either seen or heard of white people before, and were anxious for us to depart,

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accompanying the motion of going with a wave of their hand."

As the party proceeded, the channel of the river became narrower, and the current deeper and more rapid. The country on either side continued level, and for some distance there was abundance of game to be had in the form of kangaroo and emus, with fish, which were easily caught and excellent eating, in the river. They passed, now and again, some deserted native huts, around which remains of river mussel shells were thickly strewn; but the natives themselves kept away from the explorers. Three or four days after leaving the tributary creek, it was observed that the quality of the soil was steadily decreasing, while the herbage was becoming more and more scanty and poor, large areas being quite barren of grass, and only supporting a sparse growth of undersized trees. By May 10 they had reached a district where difficulty was experienced in obtaining sufficient food for the horses, and the appearance of a rise some distance ahead was greeted with every satisfaction. They hastened forward to Mount Amyot, as the hill was named, and ascended it, obtaining from it a view of the country ahead, and seeing a still larger hill directly in their line of route, which they named Mount Cunningham. It was reached on May 11 and ascended. From the summit of Mount Amyot a view, the range of which was

estimated at forty miles, was obtained, but it was not inspiring. On the southern side of the stream, the country stretched away as far as the eye could reach, flat, barren, and dreary; on the west, a slight rise here and there broke the otherwise flat monotony of the scantily wooded area, the dull line of the foliage being varied only by the thin columns of smoke which rose from the fires of the black fellows, and which formed the only signs of life upon what the leader termed "a sea of trees," a vast silent desolate solitude of dull-hued scanty foliage. Its effect upon the mind of the Surveyor-General was to aggravate an already well-developed tendency to condemn as useless all land which was not smilingly fertile. The district he characterized as "quite desolate and unfit for occupation by civilized man"—an erroneous opinion, which has since been utterly refuted by the thriving mining and pastoral communities established there.

On the eleventh day after starting, they reached Mount Cunningham, the hill they had seen from Mount Amyot; but the view they were able to obtain from the summit was little different to that obtained from the former hill. The country around was still excessively flat and sterile, with all the monotonous features previously observed. They made their camp for the night under the impression that only a repetition of the monotony of the previous days was in store for them; but in this

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they were disappointed, for on the following day they were more than puzzled to find that the river had risen a foot during the night. The phenomenon was as inexplicable as it was astonishing. Nowhere in the sky, as far as they could see, had there been a cloud for days, and certainly no rain had fallen within their knowledge. Had it done so, there was little doubt but that the dry soil would have absorbed it sufficiently to prevent it soaking into the river, for a few days, at all events. No tributaries had been found flowing into the main stream for miles back, and yet here, in one night, the sign of a coming flood was upon them.

The only solution to the mystery was the theory that rain had fallen in the Blue Mountains, now over a hundred and fifty miles away, and that the rise in the river was due to this distant cause. As they continued their way they noticed that the rise continued also, until the surface of the stream was almost level with the top of the banks and the depth of the channel had increased to eighteen feet. Although an immense body of water had already passed on its way down the stream, a greater volume was still to come, for as they continued their journey in the boats, and on horseback along the banks of the river, the water rose higher and higher until it was level with the banks, and then flowed over the top.

In front of them the stream spread out into one great sea of flood water, the scraggy small trees, half submerged, and the ground, in its flatness, offering no sort of haven to which they could retire in case the flood rose higher.

The boats went ahead in the hopes of being able to find where the channel ran through the broad stretch of water; but the effort was of no avail. At first the current was just enough to move the boat, and a line of flood gums stood out above the water, guiding them for a time. Then the flood gums ceased, and the current no longer appeared to flow, and the boats were compelled to return to where the remainder of the party were waiting on the marshy ground. Altogether the surroundings of the explorers were of a most discouraging description. The day was dull, the sky leaden, and the trees showing above the water were equally depressing in hue. Nowhere was there any sign of colour; nowhere any sign of life. Only a dreary desolate swamp in front of them, and sodden marsh all around. Writing in his journal the leader said—

“Our present situation is by no means enviable. In the first place, there is every chance that the river may be lost in a multitude of branches among these marshy flats, and our further navigation thus rendered impossible. In the second place, a rise of four feet in the river would sweep

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us all away, since we have not the smallest eminence to retire to. Should the river lead through to the westward and be afterwards joined by the branches we have passed, it may become something more interesting and encouraging; a wet, or even a partially rainy season will, in my judgment, preclude us from returning by our present route, more especially if these low countries continue for any distance."

An effort was made to skirt round the swamp in order to test whether it was merely a local spreading out of the stream, or its termination. Travelling was particularly arduous and difficult, and in his journal Oxley wrote, "We were able to reach only a short distance from the spot where we stopped last night, having been obliged to unload the horses no less than four times in the course of the day, added to which the travelling, loaded, through these frightful marshes, had completely exhausted them. My own horse, in searching for a better track, was nearly lost, and it consumed four hours to advance scarcely half a mile."

Some distance back a branch had been noticed flowing from the main stream towards the southwest, and the explorers returned to follow this, in case it should, after all, be the main channel. For four miles they toiled along the banks of it, only to find that it disappeared in a swamp similarly to the branch they had just left. That

night they camped on a slight eminence up which the water was rapidly rising.

After considerable debating of the matter in his own mind, and consultation with his colleagues, Oxley determined upon leaving the locality where nothing was to be encountered but swamps, and set out in a south-westerly direction in order to strike the sea coast about Cape Northumberland. Had this resolve been persisted in, the journey would not only have been the most memorable and daring to be found in the annals of Australian Exploration, but it would also have resulted in discoveries which must have advanced Australian settlement by at least thirty years. The dismal opinion formed as to the Lachlan flowing into, and ending in, a vast impassable morass would never have been published, for the completed journey must have shown the explorers the real nature of the country they were so hastily condemning. As it was they again changed their plans, although it must be admitted that their experiences were not of a description to encourage them in their first resolve.

The first day after leaving the swamps passed without their finding any water at all, in spite of the fact that they were only a few miles away from actually flooded country. The land was level, and producing grass in patches, the intervening parts being barren, or else sparsely covered with

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the weeping acacia and small cypress trees, also growing in patches in the dry parched-looking red sandy soil. As the work entailed on the horses was very severe, the supplies of provisions from the boats being added to their burdens, the want of water was a most serious matter. The second day after leaving the river the horses were entirely knocked up by fatigue and thirst, and the party had to halt while a very careful search was made for water. Fortunately a few small pools were discovered, though the quantity was little more than enough to last for the day; but it enabled the horses to resume the march, though the progress was slow during the next three or four days, the scarcity of water being the chief reason for delay.

On May 25 a variation was given to the dull level of the plain over which they were toiling, by the appearance of a hill. As they approached it they saw beyond it the blue loom of a range on the horizon. The hill, which terminated abruptly to the west in a precipice, three hundred feet high, was named Mount Ayton, and from it they were able to discover several other ranges, all of which shared with it the peculiarity of having the western faces abruptly precipitous. From the elevated position of Mount Ayton a good view was obtained of the surrounding country. The appearance of the long columns of smoke from black fellows'

fires occasioned some surprise, as the explorers had come to the conclusion that no natives could live in such a country. During the time they were taking observations from the hill their horses strayed in search of food and water, and a delay until the last day of the month resulted before they could recover the animals. In this forced detention evidence was forthcoming that not only were there natives in the locality, but that they were actually reconnoitring the explorers, and had been doing so for some days past. On May 27, while the search after the missing horses was still progressing, "a native was seen about half a mile from our fires. The dogs attacked him, and, when they were called off, he ran away shouting lustily. He was a very stout man, at least six feet high, entirely naked, and with a long bushy beard. He had no arms of any kind." (Oxley's "Journals.") That night the flicker from the camp fires of the natives was to be seen all around.

When, on May 31, the last of the straying horses were found, the journey was resumed, and for the first nine miles the travelling was fairly good. At the end of that distance, however, they met for the first time with a dense growth of prickly acacia, which was made still more impassable by reason of the creeping vines which spread from bush to bush, and rendered advance quite out of the question until a roadway was cut for the horses.

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For the rest of the day the men used axe and tomahawk to clear a path through the thickly growing acacia, but had not succeeded in reaching open country when the sun went down, and for the night they had to camp where they were—waterless. The next morning the attack on the scrub was renewed, but two miles had to be cut through before they emerged upon an open plain. The horses were now quite knocked up, and, after unloading them, everybody scattered in search of water, for men and horses had been without any for thirty-six hours. At length some small pools of muddy water, as thick and white as milk, were found, and the horses relieved; but the men found it necessary to boil the liquid again and again, and strain it several times before they could drink it.

Before they resumed the march two of the horses died, but Oxley still persisted in keeping the course he had set, and which was to bring them out on the coast line by Cape Northumberland. Every day saw the country become more barren and desolate, and the search for water more distressing, until, on June 5, they found themselves face to face once more with another scrub of prickly acacia. They looked at the scrub, and they looked at one another. The previous experience they had had was hard enough, and had cost them two horses they could ill afford to lose, and

had only led them to barren plains with scarcely any grass or water to be found. What would be the result of forcing their way through the scrub in front of them? The loss of more horses, a longer period of thirst, and more arduous labour were the probabilities, with another long stretch of desolate sandy plain to meet on the other side. Oxley, never at his best when beset by waterless country and surrounded by desolation, accepted the defeat. In his official account he wrote—

“No other trace of inhabitants has hitherto been seen; no game of any kind, nor grass to support any, have resulted from the various routes and observations of the different persons who were employed for that purpose during the day. I almost despair of finding any, for the country being perfectly level, and the soil a deep loose red sand, the rain which falls must be immediately absorbed. . . . In traversing these flats, the declivity, where it could be observed, was always towards the west and north-west, obliging me to believe that either the country continued a desert of sand, as at present, or that its westerly inclination would cause all that part of it to consist of marshes and swamps.”

Loth, however, to turn back in direct retreat, he ordered his party to turn to the north—and so turned away from the discovery of a greater river than either the Macquarrie or the Lachlan, and

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which, at the moment, was only twenty-three miles ahead in his original south-westerly course.

At first the intention was to regain the Lachlan, but the horses began to show such unmistakable signs of collapse that the route was varied so as to lead them to Peel's Range, one of the ranges observed from Mount Ayton. The scanty supply of water and grass for the horses, and the reduced scale of rations which it became necessary to enforce for the men, did not make the situation any too exhilarating, and it is not difficult to understand how a feeling of real rejoicing was experienced when heavy rain began to fall. The only thought was for their own and their horses' needs; they forgot the country. In two days the flat became boggy. In three it was almost a quagmire, for at every step both men and horses sank ankle-deep in the soil. Two more horses died, and on June 18 Evans set out by himself to seek for a place where grass was to be had for a camping-ground.

With that wonderful luck which, in spite of their difficulties, in reality attended them, the search was successful. A camp was formed, and a day or two was devoted to a much-needed rest, the effect of which was, however, somewhat marred by the discovery that three casks that had presumably contained flour were filled with salt pork. On June 22, at the foot of Mount Bowen, where they were

encamped, one of the men "fell in with a native camp which had not been quitted more than a day or two. Among the relics were three or four pearl mussels, such as we had observed on the river, and it is probable that these may have been the property of natives who live more immediately in the neighbourhood of the river. These shells are used as knives, being ground very sharp against the rocks, and certainly for a scraper they may answer very well." (Oxley's "Journals.")

The presence of the shells, strangely enough, did not in the least prepare them for the surprise which took them aback when, on the following day, they discovered that they were close on the Lachlan. The river, which they had left under the impression that it was lost in impenetrable swamps, had emerged on the other side of the swamps and continued its course to the west. They determined to again follow it, and resumed the march along its banks, noticing that it did not appear to have received any tributary water in the last two hundred miles. The trials of reduced rations for the men and of scanty food for the horses now seemed to have come to an end, for an abundant supply of fish was always to be had for the catching, and on the plains, well grassed and wooded, which extended on either side of the stream, there were plenty of kangaroos and emus. Hope once again came even into the somewhat

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despondent mind of Oxley, and expectation was raised as to the probable early junction of the Lachlan and the Macquarrie, for now that the former river had emerged from the swamps, no other idea appears to have been entertained than that it was bound to flow into the Macquarrie.

It was, therefore, a peculiarly rude shock for them to discover, on June 28, that the river had suddenly developed all the symptoms of an early disappearance into a marshy swamp. At first they were disposed to question the reality of the symptoms, and splashed on round the outskirts of the swamp, finding the river emerging again on the other side, flowing at a quicker rate and between narrower banks, beyond which, however, the plains stretched bare and arid.

Trusting to come upon more fertile country in a few days' march, the party kept on, but only to find, on July 3, that they were once more becoming entangled in marshes. A distinguishing and unpleasant feature of this marsh was the number of crayfish infesting it, and which had literally honey-combed the soil in every direction to such an extent that men and horses were constantly floundering over their knees.

On July 5, the river had widened until it was only four feet deep. To the north-west, a great sheet of water extended as far as the eye could reach. To the west, the horizon was unbroken

save by the trees which fringed the stream. This decided Oxley. "There is a uniformity in the desolation of this country which wearies one more than I am able to express. One tree, one soil, one water, and one description of bird, fish, or animal prevails alike for ten miles or for one hundred," he wrote in his "Journals." Satisfied that the interior was quite uninhabitable by white men, he turned away from it, and a second time missed his opportunity for discovering that greater river into which the Lachlan flowed after it emerged from the swamp which turned Oxley back—as Sturt, twenty years later, demonstrated.

The direction of the journey was once more changed, this time the route being back along the river until an available spot was reached where the stream could be crossed. They found that the river, above the place where they had come upon it near Mount Bowen, maintained all its characteristics, flowing through flat and not very fertile country, sometimes with a strong current, sometimes with scarcely any at all, and at other times suddenly rising as much as two feet.

Failing to find a ford, they constructed a rough and ready bridge, the while it was building Oxley and one of the men riding away some miles to the south, where they came upon two large sheets of water apparently unconnected with the stream. As soon as the bridge was constructed, they crossed

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to the other side of the river and resumed their journey to the north-east. The country improved as they advanced, and they soon encountered evidences of the natives. On July 10 Oxley wrote in his "Journals:" "On our way we passed a raised mound of earth which had somewhat the appearance of a burial-place. We opened it, but found nothing in it but a few ashes; but whether from bones or wood could not be distinguished. A semicircular trench was dug round one side of it, as if for seats for persons in attendance."

The following day they encountered another tomb, of which the leader in his "Journals" wrote: "I caused it to be opened. It was a conical mound of earth, about four feet high in the centre, and nearly eight feet long in the longest part; exactly in the centre, and deep in the ground, we at first thought we perceived the remains of a human body, which had been originally placed on sticks arranged transversely, but now nearly decayed by time; nothing remained of what we took for the body but a quantity of unctuous clayey matter. The whole had the appearance of being not recent, the semicircular seats being now nearly level with the rest of the ground, and the tomb itself overgrown with weeds."

Again, on July 21, "Two of the men, who were about a mile ahead of the main party, fell in with a small native family, consisting of a man, two

women, and three children, the eldest about three years old. The man was very stout and tall; he was armed with a jagged spear, and no friendly motions of the men (who were totally unarmed) could induce him to lay it aside, or suffer them to approach him. During the short time they were with him he kept a most watchful eye upon them, and when the men, calling the dogs together, were about to depart, he threw down, with apparent fierceness, the little bark gunyah which had sheltered him and his family during the night, and made towards the river, calling loudly and repeatedly, as if to bring others to his assistance. He was quite naked, except the netted band round his waist, in which were womerahs (boomerangs?). The women were covered with skins over their shoulders, and the two young children were slung in them on their backs." (Oxley's "Journals.")

A few days later they came upon another native grave, which Oxley described as follows:—

"Near our halting-place we saw a tumulus. The whole outward form and appearance of the place was so totally different from that of any custom or ceremony in use by the natives on the eastern coast, where the body is merely covered with a piece of bark and buried in a grave about four feet deep, that we were induced to think that the manner of interring the body might also be different.

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"The form of the whole place was semicircular. Three rows of seats occupied one-half, the grave and the outer row of seats the other; the seats formed segments of circles of fifty, forty-five, and forty feet each, and were formed by the soil being trenched up from between them. The centre part was about five feet high and about nine feet long, forming an oblong pointed cone. On removing the soil from one end of the tumulus, and about two feet beneath the solid surface of the ground, we came to three or four layers of wood, lying across the grave, serving as an arch to bear the weight of the earthy cone or tomb above. On removing one end of these layers, sheet after sheet of dry bark was taken out, then dry grass and leaves in a perfect state of preservation, the wet or damp having apparently never penetrated even to the first covering of wood. The body was deposited about four feet deep in an oval grave, four feet long by eighteen inches to two feet wide. The feet were bent quite up to the head, the arms having been placed between the thighs. The face was downwards, the body being placed east and west, the head to the east. It had been carefully wrapped in a great number of opossum skins, the head bound round with the net usually worn by the natives, and also the girdle. It appeared, after being enclosed in those skins, to have been placed in a larger net and then deposited in the

manner before mentioned. The hair of the head was perfect, being long and black. To the west and north of the grave were two cypress trees, distant between fifty and sixty feet; the sides towards the tomb were barked, and curious characters deeply cut upon them in a manner which, considering the tools they possess, must have been a work of great labour and time to the natives."

The country through which they were passing was better than the sterile sandy flats they had struggled over to the south. There was a greater variety also, and although water was not always plentiful, they had sufficient for their own needs and their horses. The acacia—the "wattle" of the colonists—was coming into flower, and the gleam of the brilliant yellow buds threw such an amount of life into the scene that the sombre character of the foliage had less effect upon the minds of the explorers. The evidence constantly met with that the locality was fairly populated with natives added a further interest. The marks made by their stone axes, where notches had been cut in the bark of the trees to enable them to climb in search of opossums, were to be seen on all sides.

Through this country, which, if it were occasionally bare, was also occasionally luxuriant and generally fertile, good progress was made. The

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expedition entered a well-grassed valley on August 8, which was named the Emmeline, and the next day the horses were walking through grass up to their girths. On the 10th they arrived at Coysgain's Ponds, beyond which they entered upon a plain whence a magnificent view was obtained of Harvey's Range on the north-east, "rising blue, high, and rugged." Two days later, in wooded country, they had an interesting encounter with natives, of which Oxley gave the following account:—

"We had just pitched our tent, when, hearing the noise of the stone hatchet made by a native in climbing a tree, we stole silently upon him, and surprised him just as he was about to descend. He did not perceive us until we were immediately under the tree; his terror and astonishment were extreme. We used every friendly motion in our power to induce him to descend, but in vain. He kept calling loudly, as we supposed for some of his companions to come to his assistance. In the meantime he threw down to us the game he had procured (a ring-tailed opossum), making signs for us to take it up. In a short time another native came towards us, when the other descended from the tree. They trembled excessively, and, if the expression may be used, were absolutely *intoxicated* with fear, displayed in a thousand antic motions, convulsive laughter, and singular

motions of the head. They were both youths not exceeding twenty years of age, of good countenance and figure, but most horribly marked by the skin and flesh being raised in long stripes all over the back and the body. Some of these stripes were fully three-quarters of an inch deep, and were so close together that scarcely any of the original skin was to be seen between them. The man who had joined us had three or four small opossums and a snake, which he also laid upon the ground before us. We led them to our tent, where their surprise at everything they saw clearly showed that we were the first white men they had met with; they had, however, either heard of or seen tomahawks, for upon giving one to one of them, he clasped it to his breast and demonstrated the greatest pleasure. After admiring it for some time, they discovered the broad arrow with which it was marked on both sides, the impression of which exactly resembles that made by the foot of the emu. It amused them extremely, and they frequently pointed to it and the emu skins which we had with us. All this time they were paying great attention to the roasting of their opossums, and when they were scarcely warm through they opened them, and, taking out the fat of the entrails, presented it to us as the choicest morsel; on our declining it they ate it themselves, and again covered up the opossums in the hot ashes. When

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these were apparently well done, they laid them, the snake, and the things we had presented them with, on the ground, making signs that they wished to go, which of course we allowed them to do, together with their little store of provisions and such things as we were able to spare them. The collection of words we had made at the depôt on the Lachlan we found of no use, as they did not understand a single one. They had neither of them lost the upper front tooth, though apparently grown men."

A distance of one hundred miles had now been traversed since the expedition left the banks of the Lachlan, and as they estimated that only some seventy miles had to be covered before they arrived at Bathurst, there was considerable speculation as to what had become of the Macquarrie. They were almost directly west of the town, and presuming that the course of the river had been correctly surmised by the Evans party, it would be met with perhaps on the following day. The view from the position they occupied was extensive. Behind them, for seventy miles, the country stretched away in one interminable flat; to the east, about six miles away, a range of mountains rose, rugged and precipitous; and to the north and north-east the horizon was limited, at eleven miles, by a range of moderate height.

Moving towards the north-east, they entered fine

rolling country, into which they had not penetrated many days before they came upon the unusual sight of cattle tracks. As they were still too far away from Bathurst to have met any of the settlers' stock, the only conclusion they could come to was that the tracks had been made by some cattle which had escaped from the Government herds and had found their way into the rich pasture lands ahead of their owners.

Again they encountered friendly natives as they approached the hilly country. Camp was pitched on August 6, when some of the baggage horses came up to the tent with nine natives who had joined them on the road.

"They were entirely unarmed, and there was but one mogo or stone hatchet among them; we had reason to suppose their women and children were at no great distance, as they were observed to hide themselves when the men were first seen. They were neither alarmed nor astonished at what they saw, and while some of the men had lost the front upper tooth, others still retained it, thus suggesting that the loss of it was not common to every tribe; the wearing of a bone or stick through the cartilage of the nose appeared common to all of them. We distributed the iron hoops off a keg in small pieces among them, and they received the pieces with as much delight as a European would have manifested over a like quantity of gold. Wishing, if possible,

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to learn if they knew anything of the river, a fish-hook was given to one of them, but he did not understand the use of it. When, however, Mr. Evans drew the figure of a fish they immediately understood, and pointed to the east, making signs that fish were to be found there. They appeared a harmless, inoffensive race of people, extremely cautious of giving offence, and never touching anything until they had first, by signs, obtained permission. Many of the words collected at the depôt were known to them, but others were not." (Oxley's "Journals.")

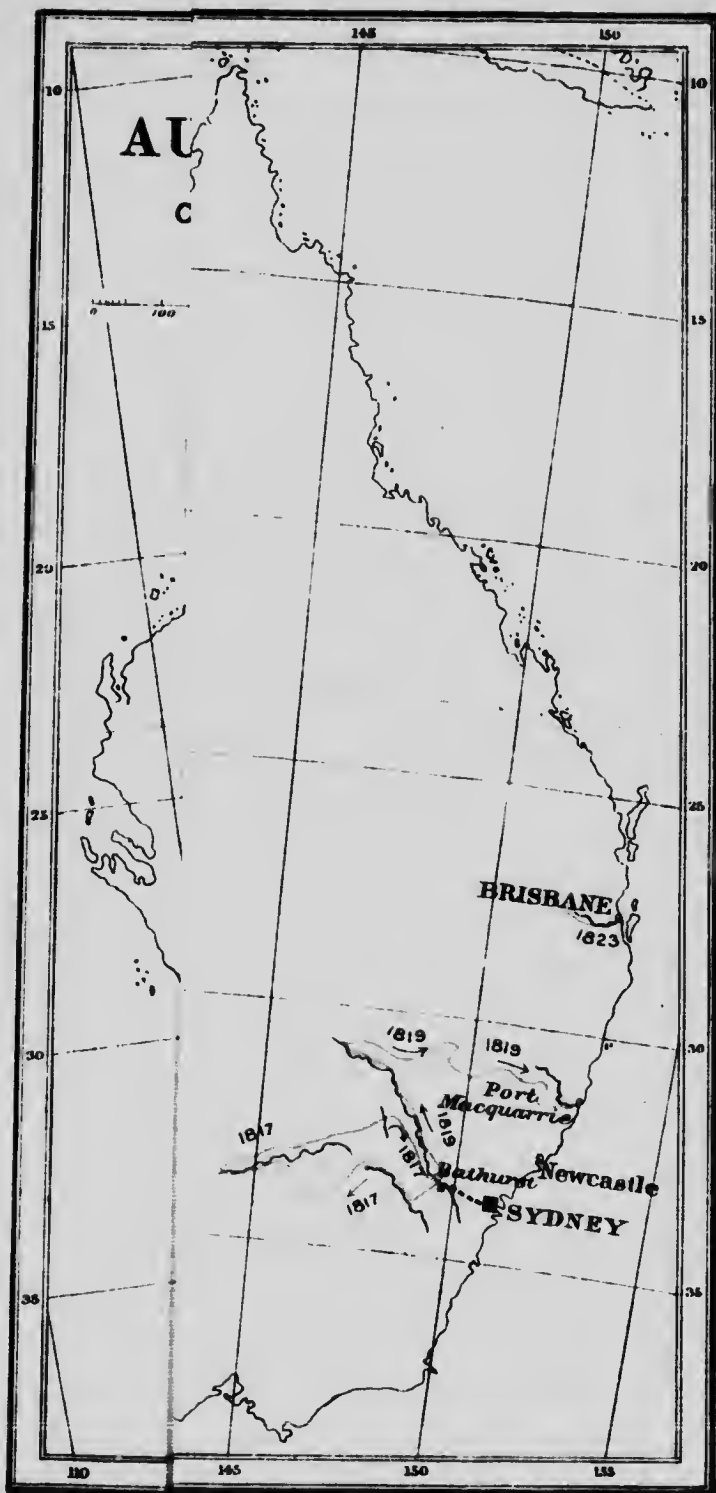
Profiting by the suggestion that fish were to be caught to the east, the range in that direction was approached, and the explorers soon found themselves passing through a valley which was not only rich and fertile, but extremely picturesque. The grass was growing with a luxuriance not previously seen on the journey, while the foliage was also particularly varied and beautiful. Coming upon a rocky, clear-watered stream, Oxley at first regarded it as the Macquarrie; but a short ride up the gully disproved him, and the way was continued through the Wellington Valley.

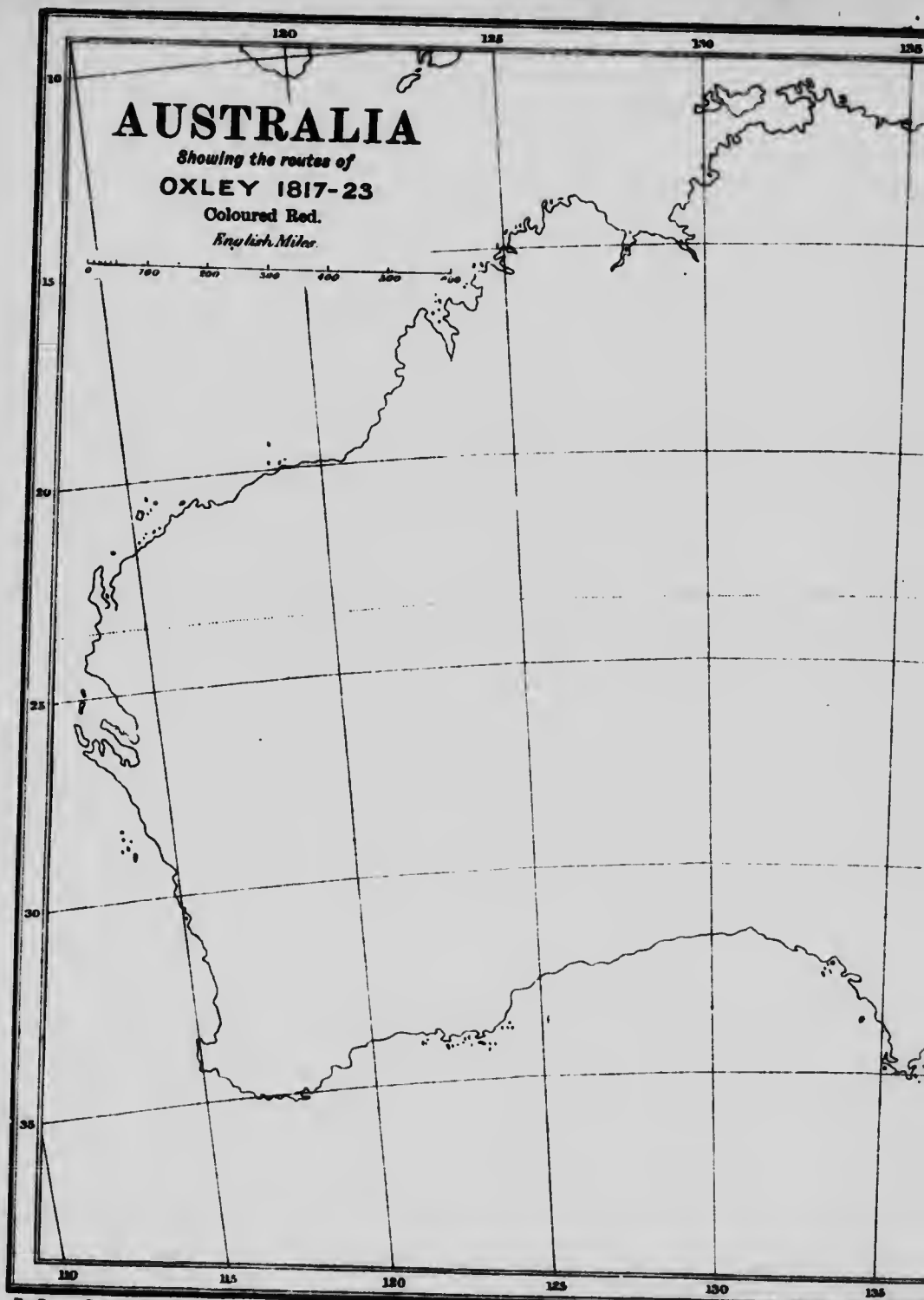
Again a stream of clear water flowing over a rocky bed crossed their route, and Oxley turned down its course, finding that it shortly flowed into a stream which was unmistakably the Macquarrie.

They had almost reached the end of their journey now. Indeed, they fancied another day would bring them to Bathurst, and on August 28, the day they came upon the Macquarrie, the last allowance of provisions was served out. Their route lay along the steep and uneven banks, and as travelling became more and more difficult, Oxley determined to strike across the hills, expecting that as soon as the first rise was surmounted, level table-land would be met with along which they could journey easily to Bathurst. This estimate of the country was, however, far from accurate, for on ascending the first hill it was found that it immediately descended into a valley, on the other side of which an equally steep hill rose in front of them. There was no table-land, only a succession of hills and valleys; the fact that they were covered with rich grass enabling the horses to improve their condition every hour. Had it been otherwise, the last few days of the journey would have been in all probability tinged with disaster, for the men began to experience the strain as day followed day and no sign of Bathurst appeared. As a week or so previously every day they expected to see the Macquarrie, so now they anticipated viewing Bathurst from the summit of every ridge they surmounted. But it was not until the 28th that the settlement was sighted, and on the following day the explorers entered

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the township and told the story of the desolation into which the Lachlan flowed, and the abundance of riches, both in fertile soil and glorious scenery, which were to be found along the banks of the Macquarrie.





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CHAPTER III.

THE COURSE OF THE MACQUARRIE.

THE glowing account given by Oxley of the country along the Macquarrie, as far as he had explored it, roused a great enthusiasm among the settlers, the luxuriant richness of the district appearing the more pronounced in contrast with the dreary desolation which Oxley and his men firmly believed surrounded the lower parts of the Lachlan. That the one river had ended in swamps which were set in the midst of dry sandy wastes, while the other flowed on through richly grassed and fertile land, ever increasing in volume, confirmed in Oxley's mind the theory that the interior of Australia was occupied by a great fresh-water sea, into which all rivers of the western watershed flowed; unless, as in the case of the Lachlan, the intervening stretches of sterile desert proved too great an obstacle in the path.

The theory seems ridiculous enough to-day, as indeed it was as soon as the great system of riverways which goes to make up the Murray was

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correctly understood. But at the beginning of the century, when coastal surveys had failed to reveal a single big river entering the sea on the southern, northern, or western coasts of the continent, there appeared to be no other explanation than an interior desert, or an interior sea, as the ultimate absorber of the westerly flowing rivers.

To settle the question, whether it was desert or inland sea, surrounded by expanses of rich pastoral lands, Governor Macquarrie commissioned Oxley to again set out, as soon as the summer had passed, and explore the Macquarrie until he was satisfied that it ran into the inland sea; or was compelled to return back from the impassable wastes of the interior desert.

In May, 1818, Oxley, with Evans, Dr. Harris, and Fraser as his immediate companions, and a strong body of assistants, well horsed and provisioned, set out from Bathurst. The scheme of the Lachlan survey was to be followed to a certain extent, inasmuch as boats were sent ahead of the main party to the river, where they were loaded up with provisions, and started drifting down with the current, the remainder of the party following along the banks and making a flying survey as they went. By June 6 they had passed the point where the river had been met on the former occasion at the junction of Bell's River. As they

advanced, the aspects of the stream became more and more pleasing. Wide placid reaches succeeded one another, the banks fringed with sedges and shaded by lofty trees, and the surface of the water covered with a myriad of wild fowl, ducks and black swan being so numerous that they did not rise on the wing as the boats drifted past.

On June 11 a stream was discovered flowing into the Macquarrie from the east, thus proving that the river and its tributaries drained both the north-east and the south-east. The stream was named the Erskine, and, as far as could be seen, it flowed through country of equal fertility to that the explorers had been travelling over. The pleasant nature of his surroundings had its influence on Oxley's opinions, and his remarks upon the prospects of the expedition at this period were tinged with the rosiest expectation.

Two days later they came in contact with the first natives seen since the start. "We came suddenly upon a couple of native families. They, however, with the exception of an old man and a boy, who was up a tree, made their escape. No entreaties could bring the boy down; he seemed, in fact, as well as the old man, petrified with terror. The man possessed the remains of an iron tomahawk fitted as a mogo or native axe (that is to say, with the handle bound round the head and fastened

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with gum and thongs, instead of being put through the haft-hole). But it was clear he had never seen white people before. He made repeated attempts to induce us to depart, which, to his great joy, we shortly did. The left side of this man's body was one continued ulcer, occasioned most likely by a burn." (Oxley's "Journals.") Again, two days later, Oxley wrote: "We fell in with another small camp of natives; the women and children withdrew before we came up with them. Among the men (seven in number) we recognized four whom we had seen on the last expedition at Mary's Rivulet. The recognition was mutual, and they seemed highly pleased with it. They accompanied us about eight miles further to our evening's encampment, where, being gratified with some kangaroo, and undergoing the operation of shaving (at their earnest request, after seeing one of their number disencumbered of an immense beard), they left us at sunset to join their families, which were probably at no great distance."

The country they were passing through was evidently well populated by natives, although the explorers did not come into actual contact with them every day, due, probably, to the fact that they were not looking particularly for them, and were not sufficiently acquainted with their habits to know where and how to find them. From the general habits of the aborigines it is more than

probable the progress of the new and strange creatures was watched with all the stealthy care of which the black fellows are capable, and only when tribes or families to whom warning had not been transmitted were come upon suddenly, were the explorers able to come into actual touch with the natives. As Oxley's journeys were the earliest occasions when white men came in contact with the blacks of the interior, ignorance on both sides contributed to the infrequency of meeting, and suspicion, at least on one side, when chance encounters did occur. To the same cause must also be attributed the hostility which marked the experiences of subsequent explorers and even of Oxley. The object and aim of the white men, let alone their appearance, their movements (especially on horseback), and their weapons, were totally incomprehensible to the blacks; while on the other hand the search for new country and the survey of that already discovered engrossed the attention of explorers far too much to allow of more than a very cursory interest being taken in the rude and simple inhabitants who happened to be encountered from time to time. Occasionally men, having learned something of the customs of the natives, respected and observed them, and came through difficult and dangerous expeditions without a shot being fired in anger or a single act of hostility on the

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part of the blacks—as in the case of Sturt. But more frequently the white man moved on towards his own goal, caring nothing, knowing nothing, of the enmity he was rousing among the people he encountered until they resented the continual violation of their laws (obscure as they might appear to the white man), and took such measures as their resources permitted to drive back the intruders—as in the case of Mitchell. To the latter class the majority of cases belong, and so it came about that the power of the dominant race, as it advanced over the unutilized wastes of the interior (to the white man's way of thinking), swept from the path of the advancing flocks and herds the animals which diminished the grass of the plains, and swept away, also, the men whose sustenance such animals were. Now and again the blacks, learning something of the needs of union and co-operation, combined in their resistance, and the white invaders fell back. But it was only a momentary check. There was nothing behind the isolated bodies of natives; there was a great multitude of vigorous, forceful people, fearless, resourceful, indomitable, behind the first white explorers; and so the black race melted away as rain-mists before the sun, and over the land where they only lived there spread the race that both lived and made live.

A couple of days from the meeting with the

friendly natives, a native tomb, not more than a month old, was met with on the banks of the river. "The characters carved on the trees were quite fresh. The tomb had no semicircular seats, but in other respects was similar to those seen on our last journey." (Oxley's "Journals.") Later in the day one of the men, who was some distance ahead, saw a large party of natives, who fled at his approach and swam the river. There were upwards of twenty men, besides women and children. The moment they were safely across the river they brandished their waddies and spears in token of defiance. This was the first time Oxley, or any of his party, met armed and hostile natives.

The following day one of the boats got stove in against a submerged rock, and a delay was necessitated to repair it. Just as the men were starting, a large party of natives appeared on the opposite bank and set up a hideous and discordant noise, making signs, as well as they could be understood, for the men to depart and go down the river. After beating their spears and waddies together for about a quarter of an hour, accompanied by no friendly gestures, they went away in one direction while the boat started in the other. Subsequently a man who was riding in advance of the main party, surprised an old native man and woman, the former digging apparently for

edible roots, and the latter engaged in lighting a fire. The white man approached them unperceived to within a few yards, when the old man, seeing him, flung his wooden spade at him, striking the horse. Then he seized the old woman by the hand, and they set off running as hard as they could, especially when they saw the dogs the white man had with him. In the evening natives were heard on the opposite side of the river, but none came into view.

So far the aspects of the country drained by the Macquarrie were particularly pleasing, and on June 23 Oxley sent back a couple of men with an interim report for the Governor on the fertile state of the land during the hundred odd miles already surveyed. But his flattering opinion of the locality soon underwent a change when the high sloping grass-clad banks gave way to low embankments, and the wide clear reaches contracted into a narrow slowly flowing channel which forcibly recalled the Lachlan when it was about to pass into the region of swamps. As the banks became lower so did the country become flatter, and Oxley developed misgivings as to these signs. For days the country travelled over was level and not too fertile, and when, on June 27, a rise was noticed ahead, no time was lost in ascending it. From the summit another hill of very similar size and shape was seen beyond it,

and the two were named Mount Harris and Mount Forster. They were found to be composed entirely of granite, from one and a half to two miles long, by half a mile to one mile wide. Describing them, Oxley said, "Their formation must be considered a most singular geological phenomenon, detached as they are at an immense space from all mountain ranges, and rising from amidst soft alluvial soil. Small pieces of granite were in several places thrown into heaps as if by human means, and their whole surfaces were covered with small pieces detached from the solid mass to which they had once belonged."

The view obtained of the country ahead showed it to be still level and unbroken by any eminence, the only interruption being where a swamp stretched away to the horizon; but to the east a huge mountain range with precipitous faces and high jagged peaks limited the view. The name Arbuthnot Range was given to the mountains.

Advancing past the hills, an interesting encounter with blacks occurred.

"The natives appear numerous in these regions of apparent desolation," Oxley wrote in his "Journals." "We fell in with several parties in the course of the day, in the whole probably not less than forty, and many fires were seen to the north. Being a mile or so ahead of the party, I came suddenly on three men. Two ran off with

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the greatest speed. The third, who was older and a little lame, threw his fire stick at me, and next (seeing me still advancing) a waddie, but with such agitation that though not more than a dozen paces distant, he missed both me and my horse. I returned to my party, and in company with them surprised a native camp. We found there eight women and twelve children, just on the point of departing, the women with infants in cloaks on their backs. On seeing us, they seized each other by the hand, formed a circle, and threw themselves on the ground with their heads and faces covered. Unwilling to add to their evident terror, we only remained a few minutes, during which time the children frequently peeped at us from beneath their clothes; indeed, they seemed more surprised than alarmed. The mothers kept uttering a low and mournful cry, as if entreating mercy. In the camp were several spears, or lances, as they were much too ponderous to be thrown by the arm. They were jagged. There were also some elamonges (shields), clubs, chisels, and several work-bags filled with everything necessary for the toilet of a native belle—paint and feathers, necklaces of teeth and nets for the head, with thread formed of the sinews of the opossum's tail for making their cloaks. The men belonging to the camp were heard shouting at no great distance; their affection for their families was not, however, strong enough

to induce them to attempt their rescue from the fabulous creatures we must have appeared to be."

A few days after sighting the swamp from the top of Mount Harris, the banks of the river became so low, and the stream so high, that the water began to flow over the plains. Ordering his men back to Mount Harris, Oxley, in one of the boats, continued on to explore the swamp which lay ahead. For twenty-eight miles they rowed mostly through a reed-grown stretch of water, and, reaching a small island about sunset, they camped there for the night. The following morning they found that the water had risen considerably during the night, and, on attempting to resume their journey, they lost all signs of a channel in the dense growth of tall reeds which waved six feet above the surface of the water.

Satisfied that he had penetrated to the shallows which skirted the shores of the great inland sea, Oxley turned the boat back and hastened to rejoin his party at Mount Harris. Arriving there on July 7, he found that Evans had started off with one or two men towards the Arbutnot Range, and Oxley was compelled to wait until July 18 for his return. Meanwhile the water from the swamp rose until it flooded all round the base of Mount Harris, the Macquarrie running at high flood. On the return of Evans he reported that he had been unable to reach the range owing to the bad state of the

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country, but that he had found two streams, one which he named the Castlereagh, being of good size. On July 20 the entire party started for the Castlereagh, but, in consequence of the heavy nature of the travelling, they did not arrive at its banks until five days later, and then only to find it in strong flood and impossible to ford. They made their camp on a high part of the bank, and by the next morning their camping-ground was the only land visible for miles, all the rest being under water. For seven days they were confined to the one spot, and it was not until August 2 that they succeeded in crossing the stream and proceeding towards Mount Exmouth, as they termed the end hill of the Arbuthnot Range. As they advanced, they found the natives both numerous and daring. One was seen who stood his ground, at some distance, armed with a formidable jagged spear and club which he kept beating against each other, making the most singular gestures and noise. He followed them for more than a mile before turning aside to join several of his companions who were to the right.

After eight days' heavy travelling over the soft flat ground lying between the Castlereagh and the range, they arrived at Mount Exmouth and ascended it. From the top they obtained a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

"Directing our view to the west, Mount Harris

and Mount Forster, whose elevations do not exceed from two to three hundred feet, were distinctly seen at a distance of eighty-nine miles. These two spots excepted, from the south to the north it was a vast level, resembling the ocean in extent and appearance. From east-north-east to south, the country was broken and irregular; lofty hills arising from the midst of lesser elevations, their summits crowned with perpendicular rocks, in every variety of shape and form that the wildest imagination could paint. To this grand and picturesque scenery, Mount Exmouth presented a perpendicular front of at least one thousand feet high, when its descent became more gradual to its base in the valley beneath, its total elevation being little less than three thousand feet. To the north-east, a lofty and magnificent range of hills was seen lifting their blue heads above the horizon, distant from one hundred to one hundred and twenty miles. The country between was broken into rugged hills and apparently deep valleys, and several minor ranges of hills also appeared." (Oxley's "Journals.")

Resuming their eastward journey, they passed through sparsely wooded country, the natives continuing in their vicinity, unheeding and unheeded. "Even the noise of their mogos upon the trees is a relief from the otherwise utter loneliness of feeling we cannot help experiencing

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in these desolate wilds," Oxley wrote, the difficulty of their surroundings having again sent his opinion of the country down to the level inspired by the deserts round the Lachlan. But it must be admitted that there was ample reason for despondency in the experience they were to have during the next few days. They had encountered plains and mountain range, desert sands and flooded swamps, and now they were to learn yet another form of almost impassable country to be found in parts of Australia after a very wet season. This consists of two or three inches of light mould sparsely covered with vegetation, and resting on about eighteen inches of loose sand and muddy liquid, the whole resting on a rocky or stony bottom. Immediately it was trodden upon, the liquid squirted up several inches, and, if the weight was sufficient, the top soil opened and the foot sank into the loose sand and mire, which held it like a peat-bog. It was difficult for the men to pass over this, and for the horses almost impossible. One day only six miles was advanced after hours of toiling, during which the horses had to be unladen and their loads carried half a mile by the men before they could be got over, or through, one patch of the morass. On another day they toiled and struggled all day, the quicksands, as they termed the morass, keeping them revolving round and round in their

efforts to find a substantial path until, as sunset was nearing, they came upon the spot whence they had started in the morning. By that time the horses were so terribly exhausted that as soon as the loads were taken off their backs they lay down like dogs around the men.

Until August 25 they struggled through this country, which was the most difficult to travel over that had been experienced either on this journey or the previous one. It was with a feeling of almost indescribable relief that they at last saw a change, and, pushing on as fast as they could, they at length emerged from the quagmires upon a district of well-wooded hills and extensive plains. The hills gradually disappeared until only an expanse of magnificent plains, well grassed and of good soil, stretched away to the horizon. For three days they were able to enjoy the easy travelling over these well-grassed flats, to which the name of Liverpool Plains was given. At the end of the plains they found a river crossing their path, and they formed a camp on its banks in order to allow the horses to thoroughly recuperate their strength before proceeding into the hilly country which could be seen beyond the river. One of the men who had taken the dogs out after kangaroo fell in with a party of natives, among whom were some women and children. Two of the men accompanied him to the tent. It was

evident from their behaviour that they had previously heard of white people (most probably from the settlement at Newcastle). "Their appearance was most miserable, their features approached deformity, and their persons were disgustingly filthy; their small attenuated limbs seemed scarcely able to support their bodies, and their entire appearance formed a marked contrast to the fine and manly figures of their brethren in the interior. We gave them a small turtle we had just caught in the river, and they sat down to dress it instantly. In fact, their cooking was very simple; the fire soon separated the shell from the meat, which, with the entrails, was devoured in a few minutes. Some of the people went to visit their camp, where they found eight or ten men, but the women and children were sent away. The same jealousy of women exists throughout the interior."

Upon resuming their forward march, the expedition entered upon a fine undulating country, which, however, became more hilly and broken as they advanced. Between each of the hills small clear streams flowed down the valleys, and as the expedition advanced, the hills became higher and the sides steeper, until it did not need a very great stretch of imagination to fancy themselves once more in the Wellington Valley. Their route was now constantly ascending or descending the sides

of the hills, until they came upon a wide stream along whose course they kept for some time, when suddenly they saw it disappear over a wall of rock into a deep gorge along which it rushed and roared. A further investigation revealed a cataract of wild and impressive grandeur, of which the following description was given by its discoverer :—

“We had seen many fine and magnificent falls, but the present one so far surpassed anything which we had previously conceived even to be possible, that we were lost in astonishment. The river, after passing through an apparently gentle rising and fine country, is here divided into two streams, the whole width of which is about seventy yards. At this spot, the country seems cleft in twain and divided to its very foundation. A ledge of rocks, two or three feet higher than the level on either side, divides the waters in two, which, falling over a perpendicular rock two hundred and thirty-five feet in height, forms this grand cascade. At a distance and height of three hundred yards we were wetted by the spray, which arose like small rain from the bottom ; the noise was deafening. After winding through the cleft rocks about four hundred yards, it again falls in one single sheet for over a hundred feet, and continues in a succession of smaller falls about a quarter of a mile lower where the cliffs are of a perpendicular height on each side, exceeding one thousand two hundred

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feet, the width at the edges about two hundred yards. From thence it descends, until all sight of it is lost from the vast elevation of the rocky hills which it divides and runs through. The whole is indeed a grand natural spectacle."

Having passed the falls, they became involved in very broken country, and for some days had a continuance of alternate ascending and descending. The day after leaving Bathurst Falls, as they named the great cataract, they met a solitary native. He was one of a number, but the others fled on the approach of the strangers, and left him alone by the fire. He was a terrible cripple, having several of his ribs broken in, his spine fearfully twisted, and his lower limbs paralyzed. Oxley wrote, "He seemed more astonished than alarmed at the sight of our cavalcade, and expressed his wonder in a singular succession of sounds resembling snatches of song; his countenance was mild and pleasing, and was entirely divested of the ferocity we had seen expressed in the visages of some of his countrymen."

To add to the difficulties of travel, the hills now became clad with a dense growth of trees, and describing this part of the journey, the leader in his account stated—

"We had no choice in the route we pursued this day, taking that which appeared most practicable for man and horses; it was a continued ascending

and descending of the most frightful precipices, so covered with trees and shrubs and creeping vines that we were frequently obliged to cut our way through. To add to our perplexities, it rained incessantly, and was so thick and dark that towards evening it was with difficulty we could see sufficient of our way to avoid being dashed to pieces. About two hours before sunset, after a descent of upwards of five thousand feet, we found ourselves at the bottom of the glen, through which ran a small stream, but a passage down it was impossible, as it fell over rocky precipices to a still greater depth. The opposite side was a mountain equally steep with the one we had just descended."

Struggling and clambering up and down such steep declivities as these, they found that they were gradually ascending to higher altitudes, until it seemed as though the summit of the range lay in front. The ascent was little short of a precipice, and, to test whether it was possible to climb it, Oxley and one or two others set off ahead. They found their surmise was correct, for as soon as they had succeeded in reaching the top they saw before them, across fifty miles of intervening land, the Pacific Ocean.

The country between them and the coast was broken into considerable forest hills and pleasant valleys, down a number of which they saw small streams flowing to the sea. They could distinctly

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make out the coast-line beyond the timbered country, and they estimated they were then at a height of about seven thousand feet. The country to the north and the south appeared to be equally lofty.

The task of getting the horses and baggage up the steep which led to the summit of the range was a terrible one, the strain on the animals being so great that one had to be shot through injuries sustained. When they reached the summit, the descent to the coast-lands was almost as difficult, and when they did reach the coast, several of the horses were so exhausted that they were unable to proceed.

Having heard that the natives along this part of the coast were particularly treacherous, the expedition, for the first time on the journey, overhauled its armoury, in case an attack was made. As soon as they had reached the lower lands, they made for a large stream that had been seen from the heights, and which was named the Hastings. When they came upon it, they saw a large number of natives fishing out of canoes, but were unable to get into communication with any of them. The river was reached on October 8, twelve weeks from the time the start had been made from the Macquarrie, during which time a distance of three hundred and fifty miles had been travelled in almost a direct line to the coast. Descending the river, it was

found to flow into a large shallow lagoon teeming with fish, to which the name Macquarrie Harbour was given, and from whence a start was made down the coast towards Port Jackson. Arriving at the Manning River, they succeeded in crossing it, after which they had a practical experience of the warlike nature of the blacks in the vicinity. The natives around Port Macquarrie were numerous, but they kept on the other side of the harbour to where the expedition camped, and were by no means inclined to have closer communication. Four young men were prevailed upon to come over on one occasion, and by making them presents of fish-hooks, lines, etc., they were rendered less shy; but they were terribly afraid of the muskets, and if any of the white men touched one, the blacks immediately ran off, showing by every means in their power their dread of the firearms.

The natives more to the south, however, were of a very different character.

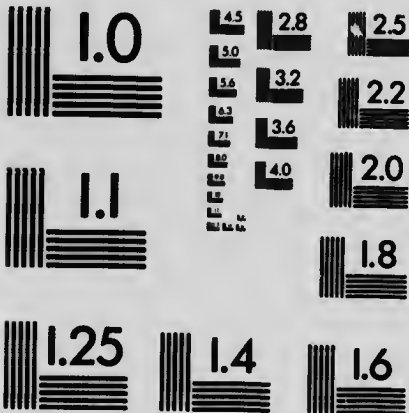
The first intimation of this was given after crossing the Manning, when—

“One of the men, William Blake, had entered the brushes about one hundred yards from the rest of the people on the north side, with the design of cutting a cabbage-palm. He had cut one about half-way through when he received a spear through his back, the point of which struck against



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his breast-bone. On turning his head round to see from whence he was attacked, he received another, which passed several inches through the lower part of his body. He let fall the axe with which he was cutting, and it was instantly seized by a native, the only one he saw, and it was probably the temptation of the axe that was the principal incitement to the attack." (Oxley's "Journals.")

A few days later a still more serious instance of the native treachery was given.

"We had just got the tents pitched, when a number of unarmed natives appeared upon the hill near us, and among them a woman and a child. As they came in peace, so in peace were they received. They approached the tents without any hesitation, and in the course of an hour their numbers amounted to upwards of thirty—men, women, and children. Most of these people seemed to have been at Newcastle, and appeared a friendly and peaceable set. Kindling their fires close to our tents, they seemed to have taken up their quarters for the night. The weather had appeared to threaten rain, and as they all decamped about ten o'clock, it was attributed to the circumstance of their being without shelter, and we expected a friendly visit from them in the morning."

In the morning two members of the party, Mr. Evans and Dr. Harris, had gone into the sea to

bathe, and were dressing when four natives appeared on the cliffs above. They were recognized as being some of those who had paid the visit to the camp on the previous day; but they had spears with them, which they prepared to throw. Dr. Harris escaped under shelter of the rocks, but before Evans could move a spear whizzed past him. An alarm was raised, but the blacks had disappeared into the bush.

A few hours later a shower of spears fell from the heights above upon the tent in which Oxley was sitting writing his journal, one of them passing directly over his shoulder and entering the ground at his feet. Spears also fell among the other members of the expedition who were collecting the baggage; but no one, fortunately, was hurt. The appearance of the natives and the flight of their spears was so rapid, that men posted on the look-out, after the attack on the doctor and his companion, had no time to give a warning of the attack.

"To enable us, therefore, to proceed in safety, it was necessary to clear the hill, which was done, for on our ascending that hill they took their station on another more distant. We travelled unmolested along the beach for upwards of twelve miles, when we halted for the evening on a small point of clear land, which at high water was an island. Here we found ourselves secure; we had,

however, but just unladen, when three natives were seen coming along the beach from the side of Port Stephens. We knew that the party which had behaved so treacherously had gone that way, and we suspected these men were sent to see whether we were disposed to resent their conduct. They appeared unarmed, each holding up a fish as a peace offering to us; but when they were within three hundred yards of us, they stopped, and not receiving any encouragement from us to advance, after halting a few moments, they returned with all speed along the beach to their companions." (Oxley's "Journals.")

From that time until they arrived at the settlement of Newcastle (November 5), they encountered no more natives, nor indeed any serious difficulty compared with what they had experienced since their departure from Bathurst so many months before.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE BRISBANE.

THE third important journey which Oxley undertook was to explore what was then the northern part of New South Wales, in order to find a suitable locality for a subsidiary penal settlement. Three places on the coast were suggested as being worthy of inspection—Port Bowen, Port Curtis, and Moreton Bay. Oxley, with one or two companions, set out from Sydney in the *Mermaid* (cutter) on October 23, 1823, to examine the sites; but the journey would have been of little interest at the present day, save for the fact that, while it was in progress, the Brisbane river, on which the metropolis of Queensland is now built, was discovered, though the discovery was more by accident than design.

The cutter, sailing to the north from Sydney, put in for water at the mouth of the Tweed river, a locality thickly populated at the time by blacks. On the right bank of the stream, as the *Mermaid* came to anchor, a man, with several women and

children, were seen standing. All were perfectly naked, but they evinced neither surprise nor fear, and remained quietly by while the man landed and searched for water. The man was curiously scarified all over the body, the flesh being raised in weals as thick as one's finger all over his breasts. He talked loudly for some time, using much gesticulation, and frequently pointing to the other side of the river where the voyagers had observed a number of native huts. On being given some biscuit he tasted it, and immediately spat it out of his mouth. The only weapon the blacks appeared to have was one rudely fashioned stone axe which a woman carried. On the day following, as the boat was standing away from the anchorage, about two hundred natives were seen on the shore, all carrying spears. They watched the boat with apparent interest until the big square sail was hoisted. As it slowly ascended the mast and the hoists creaked through the blocks, the blacks set up a fierce yelling shout and danced about the beach, waving their spears and shouting as long as they could be observed from the boat.

The voyage was continued to Port Curtis, the weather not being favourable for a visit to Port Bowen. The harbour at Port Curtis was found to be large, and of considerable picturesqueness at high water; but with the low tide vast mud banks appeared, with only narrow and shallow

channels running between them. A small river, the Boyne, was discovered and named; but the locality was not regarded as satisfactory for a penal settlement, and a return was made to Moreton Bay, which was reached on November 29, almost the hottest part of the year.

Scarcely was the anchor let go at the entrance to Pumice Stone Channel, when a number of natives were perceived advancing rapidly towards the vessel. One appeared to be very much larger than the others, and of a light copper colour instead of black, and as soon as they came opposite the vessel he hailed the ship in English. A boat was put off, and as it approached, the natives danced, shouting, round their light-coloured companion. He turned out to be one of a party of men who had left Port Jackson to seek for cedar in the previous March, and had been wrecked on Moreton Island, which lies at the ocean side of Moreton Bay. When found he was quite naked, and daubed all over with red and white paint, and was so excited at meeting some of his own race again that for several hours he could only express himself in disjointed sentences.

When he became calmer, he explained that he and two other companions had been saved from the wreck of their boat, and that all three had been well and kindly treated by the natives. The

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other two had set out with him shortly before to walk to Port Jackson, which they considered was only a few miles down the coast, as they had lost their bearings in the storm which wrecked their boat. After a few days the man, Pamphlet, had been compelled to return to his friends the natives, where Oxley's party found him, owing to his feet being too tender for the overland journey. A few days after his return, Finnegan, another of the three, also came back and reported that the third man, Parsons, had gone on. Finnegan, at the time of the *Mermaid's* arrival, was away on a hunting expedition with some of the natives, but on the following morning the boat's crew saw a white man, similar in colour and decoration to Pamphlet, wading out on the opposite side of the channel, shouting to them and waving a long stick with an animal's skin at the end of it. He was also brought off, and promptly told Oxley of the existence of a large deep river further round on the western or mainland shores of the bay.

The news was especially pleasing to Oxley, who still clung to his theory that a vast inland sea existed from whence the water must flow into the ocean somewhere. Consequently he was in a great hurry to start and test the truth of the story told. A boat's party, with only a few days' provisions, set out with Finnegan on board to act as guide up the new river.

They had not proceeded far from the cutter when they found themselves in a current setting steadily in towards the shore, while on the surface of the water there were many evidences that a fresh-water river emptied itself not far away. Almost before they realized it, the boat swept round a low sandy point on which the mangroves grew thickly, and before them the lower reaches of a magnificent river were revealed.

The tide was on the flow, and it carried them up stream, the attention of every one in the boat being held by the beauty of the scenery along the banks of the wide deep reaches. The features were entirely different to anything that had hitherto been discovered in Australia. Now and again thick masses of mangroves grew out in the water on shallow flats along the banks ; at other places the banks rose high and bold, well covered with trees of more imposing foliage than those existing around Sydney, and with bluff rocks showing among the greenery. Again the river turned and long low rounded tongues of land, on which grass grew from where the line of trees stopped, some distance back, to the water's edge, and terminated in beds of waving reeds. Yet again the forest grew without interruption down to the rocks against which the tide wavelets rippled, a forest that was also new, and in which two trees were conspicuous and novel—trees which

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have since been named the Moreton Bay fig and the Moreton Bay pine. The latter rose to a height of from fifty to eighty feet before a branch marred the straightness of the stem, and the former flung out its branches of silvery white bark and deep green leaves, until acres were covered with the deep shadow cast.

For twenty miles the voyage was continued up the stream, and then the boat was made fast for the night, the journey being resumed on the following morning, and another thirty miles traversed without getting above the tidal influence. Throughout this fifty miles the stream had continued its noble appearance, and the scenery along its banks continued to excite the admiration of the explorers. The voyage would have been continued further, but as only a limited amount of provisions had been put into the boat at starting, a return had to be commenced forthwith. Taking advantage of an eminence in the neighbourhood, Oxley landed and climbed to the summit, whence he was able to command an extensive view over country which impressed him as favourably as the river.

In his report on the expedition he wrote—

“The nature of the country, and a consideration of all the circumstances connected with the appearance of the river, justify me in entertaining a strong belief that the sources of the river will not

be found in a mountainous country, but rather that it flows from some lake which will prove it to be the receptacle of those inferior streams crossed by me during an expedition of discovery in 1818. But whatever may be its origin, it is by far the largest fresh-water river in New South Wales, and promises to be of the utmost importance to the colony, as it affords communication with the sea to a vast extent of country, a great portion of which appeared to me to be capable of raising the richest productions of the tropics."

With the exception that the river was not the largest—although the largest discovered up to that period—in New South Wales, nor that it had its origin in the mythical inland sea of which Oxley was so certain, his estimate was correct. The stream was named the Brisbane, after the then Governor; and later, when a township was laid out on its banks, that also took the same name, becoming, in subsequent years, the capital of Queensland and one of the richest and most beautiful cities of the continent.

In addition to the important discovery of the river Brisbane, some interesting particulars were obtained from the rescued castaways as to the habits of the coast natives with whom they had been living. The blacks lived in huts built of long slender wattles, both ends of which were stuck into the ground so as to form an arch of

about four feet high. The wattles were strongly interwoven with a rude wickerwork, and the whole frame covered with sheets of bark taken off the ti-tree, making the interior rain-proof. Such a hut was large enough to accommodate as many as ten persons comfortably, and the coastal natives, who subsisted mostly on fish, had their huts built every three or four miles in order to enable them to move from place to place as the fish shifted their feeding-grounds, without the necessity of building each time. In the event of hunting excursions into the back country, women accompanied the hunters and built the huts (umpie or mia-mia) while the men were engaged in the chase.

The method employed in taking the fish was for the men, each one with a hoop-net in his hand, to wander along the shore until they saw where the fish were feeding. A young boy always accompanied the men, and as soon as the fish were sighted he crept on hands and knees to the water's edge while the men spread out on either side of him. At a given signal he would throw a handful of dry sand out on to the water so as to attract the attention of the fish, and at that moment the men sprang into the water, forming a half-circle with their nets extended each side of them. The result of such a manœuvre was usually to furnish them with sufficient fish for the day.

In travelling ordinarily, the men carried only

their weapons and a fire-stick, a piece of smouldering wood which served them to light a fire whenever they needed it without the trouble of producing fire by means of twirling one long pithy stick on another. The women carried in their "dilly" bags (made from a fibre-twine twisted out of the hibiscus bark) such food as they had; on their backs the children, and all family property. Pamphlet, one of the rescued men, stated that the blacks apparently had no idea of boiling water, for when one day he heated some in an old tin can which was saved from the wreck, the blacks gathered round and watched until the water began to bubble, whereupon they fled with cries of terror, and would not return until he had poured the water out on the sand and rubbed the inside of the can. When they came back they carefully covered with fresh sand the place where he had thrown the hot water.

The habit of wearing a bone or stick through the nose was general, and the nose was pierced as soon as a child was six years, the piercing being done by a member of the tribe, who also performed the operation of raising the flesh in weals, and whose office seemed to be hereditary. Clothing was practically unknown, a cloak of skins, with the fur attached, being the extent to which their ideas ran in this direction. The tribes were distinguished round the shores of Moreton Bay by

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the colour of the pigment used to decorate their bodies, one tribe using charcoal, another red clay, and another white. Authority was exercised over each tribe by a chief, and the treatment of the native women was in marked contrast to that obtaining with the Sydney blacks, by whom the women of the tribes were brutally ill treated. The loss of the two top joints from the left-hand little finger in all women was observed here as at Sydney.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST OVERLANDERS.

THE exploration of the interior of the continent, after the return of the second Oxley expedition, was practically discontinued, so far as Government enterprise was concerned. The settlers, especially those who had penetrated to the plains beyond the Blue Mountains, undertook local journeys in search of fresh country for the benefit of their growing flocks and herds, and now and again stumbled across some geographical feature which was sufficiently novel to be spoken of and so become known to the general public. But, as a rule, the fact that such exploring journeys were taken only for private ends, prevented the discoveries being made known to the great majority of settlers, and very often the knowledge was so carefully guarded that it was only known locally to the discoverers.

The gloomy tone of Oxley's reports on the interior, as far as he had penetrated, did not enhance

the prospect of further long journeys into such inhospitable regions, where, according to his opinion, neither pleasure nor profit were to be obtained. Country, which was either under water, or waterless sandy wastes, did not appeal to the pastoralist, and no other class of settler was at all anxious on the subject; and so, except for a very small number, the problem of the interior was allowed to slumber. Out of the small number who paid any heed to the matter at all, nearly half were satisfied that the interior was covered with a great inland sea, and a similar number were equally satisfied that it was all a low-lying sandy desert. A very small proportion kept an open mind on the problem, but strove, by every means in their power, to find out actually what was the answer to the riddle.

An enthusiastic member of the very small minority was Alexander Hamilton Hume, who, being one of the first white "natives" of the country (he was born at Parramatta on June 18, 1797), seemed to have imbibed the spirit of the bush from his birth, and may justly be termed the first bushman in point of history as he was in point of fact. At the age of seventeen he had travelled far enough into the unexplored to discover and open up to the settlers the country round Berrima, to the south of Sydney, and before he was twenty he had discovered Lake Bathurst and Lake George, the latter ten miles away from the

former in the range that was afterwards learned to be the dividing range between the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee Rivers. For this a reward grant of three hundred acres of land was given to the young explorer, and the discovery, being followed up, resulted in the finding of the Murrumbidgee River.

Had an expedition been sent to explore this river, as had been done in the case of the Lachlan and the Macquarrie, important results must have been obtained which would at once have disposed of the theory of the inland sea. But instead of adopting such a course, the then Governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, conceived the idea of landing a certain number of convicts at a point midway between Port Jackson and Port Philip, and promising rewards to any who succeeded in reaching Sydney. In order to facilitate the experiment, a certain amount of provisions was to be landed with the men, and Hume, who was known as perhaps the most experienced bushman in the colony, was invited to act as the leader of the party. Hume not only refused the invitation, but pointed out the impracticable nature of the scheme, and subsequently it was abandoned.

Now that he had been approached by the Government to lead an exploring party, Hume made a counter proposal to them, which was, that if they would fit out a party, he would lead it over-

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land from Sydney to Port Philip. At first the idea was well received, but when it came to a definite issue, so many obstacles were raised and delays caused, that Hume was on the point of withdrawing from it altogether. He was, however, approached by a brother squatter, who suggested the name of a retired sea captain, Hovell, as a man ready to join in the proposed journey and share the expenses. The arrangement was ultimately completed, the cost of the expedition, with the exception of a few saddles and similar articles contributed by the Government, being defrayed by the two leaders.

On October 3, 1824, the party, consisting of eight persons in all, assembled at Hume's homestead at Appin, and on the 17th they started from Lake George for the Murrumbidgee. They reached the river near Yass two days later, but found it was in such high flood that it was impossible to ford it. They waited patiently for two days, anticipating that the stream would fall; but as it did not, and they were anxious not to lose more time than they could help, Hume resolved to try an expedient he had seen used on a similar occasion. One of the two carts they had with them was unloaded, the body taken off the wheels, covered on the outside with a tarpaulin, and put in the water. It formed an excellent substitute for a boat, floating with a good load of provisions. Hume and one of the

men, taking the end of a thin line in their teeth, now swam to the other side of the river, drawing after them, by means of the line, a rope which had been made fast to the floating cart, and by means of which the cart and its load was pulled over the stream. In the course of a few trips all the stores of the party were thus conveyed across the river, and the journey was resumed.

The obstacle of the flooded river, serious as it seemed at the moment, was only the commencement, and far from the worst, of a series of difficulties they were to encounter during the next few weeks. As soon as they were over the river they found that they were rapidly becoming involved in broken mountainous country, very trying for the horses. Arriving at a fertile flat which they named Narrengullen Meadows, they camped for two nights in order to rest the horses, and then proceeding, crossed the Tumut river, and again became involved in hilly country. At first the range was composed of high but not very steep hills, but as they penetrated further into the range they found that the hills became steeper and more rugged until it was hopeless to attempt to climb them, and all efforts were concentrated upon the discovery of a pass through which they could escape from the fastness. One valley after another was followed, only to prove more impracticable than the preceding. Until

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October 24 every effort, short of retracing their steps, had failed to discover a way out of the narrow valleys, hemmed in by mountains which were hopelessly inaccessible to the explorers and their horses. The days were full of wearying disappointment as one effort after another failed, and as, again and again, what seemed to be a pass was ascended only to result in further difficulties and obstacles.

It was at this juncture that the disadvantage of there being two leaders to the party became acutely manifest. From the commencement of the journey friction had existed, Hume, by reason of his incomparable knowledge and experience of bush-craft, justly feeling that the greatest share of responsibility rested upon his shoulders; while Hovell, as the man who worked out the bearings of the party from day to day, fancied his claim to the position of authority was the more important. In the tangled confusion of valleys and mountain steeps with which they had become involved, the use of the sextant and compass was of little consequence compared with the practical bushmanship which alone could extricate them from their difficulty. Hovell, however, held a different view, and disputed the judgment of his colleague to such an extent that a separation was the only chance of peace.

The majority of the six men forming the working

section of the party had greater faith in Hume, and five of them adhered to his plan, only one, and he half-heartedly, throwing in his lot with Hovell. As soon as the two were apart and Hume was able to use his own judgment, he discovered a way out of the tangle they were in. Breasting a slope, he and his men were able to escape from the gorge and reach a table-land along which, for a time, travelling was easy, and by nightfall they had made better progress than for days past. As they gathered round their camp fire after sunset, wondering how the others had fared, they were disturbed by a shout, and presently the two of whom they had been speaking came up to the fire. Hovell had had his experiment, and, as Hume had told him, travelled straight into absolutely impassable country. A yawning chasm which barred his further progress showed him the impossibility of finding his way unaided, and he and his companion turned back and hunted for the track of the others, following it, as soon as they found it, until they reached the camp.

On the next day Hume discovered a stream which he traced until it ran into a narrow gorge. Passing along the gorge, he found that the first stream ran into a second, the banks of which afforded sufficient space for the horses to travel, but not enough for the carts. The latter had already been a source of great trouble in the

mountainous district, and it was decided to leave them where they were, loading the stores on the horses instead. The horses being laden, the route was resumed along the banks of the stream; but the further they went, the more the steep sides of the valley closed in, until there was only space for the men and animals to move along one after the other. Even this form of travelling was interrupted when they reached a part where the sides of the valley sloped directly into the stream, leaving no foothold for the horses. This was a possibility that had not been foreseen, but it was too serious to admit of any question. There was no more advancing along the side of the stream; they could turn round and go back into the jumble of blind gullies they had left, or they could face the slope and struggle to the top; no other course was open to them.

Loth to turn tail, Hume decided to try the climb. It proved less severe than it looked from below, but it was not until three days after they had abandoned the carts that they reached the summit. Expecting to find a long descent on the other side, they were surprised to emerge on to a table-land broken by creeks, which flowed rapidly and noisily in deep-cut channels. For three days they journeyed across this high plateau, and on November 2, on climbing an eminence in the line of march, Hume discovered that they were just

about to reach a point where a precipitous descent commenced to lower levels. The valley below gave no idea of the country that lay beyond. A level tract seemed to extend for some ten miles, after which a range of lofty mountains rose against the skyline and limited observation.

The descent from the table-land to the valley was almost as tedious and trying as the climb up had been, and when at last they reached the lower lands, both horses and men were so fatigued that they remained in camp all the next day. A stream flowed along the valley, narrow, swift, and deep; but as there was good foothold along its banks, they decided to follow it until they succeeded in finding a native ford or some other means of crossing over. As they proceeded, an opening appeared in the range, and they left the stream to test its capabilities as a pass. It was impracticable, and they returned to the river, preferring to follow that rather than again be caught in the network of mountain gorges. A spur from the mountains tempted them to essay once more the feat of climbing, and the summit was won, but only to find that the spur was connected with the range by a narrow neck having such precipitous sides that it was considered too dangerous to attempt to cross by it. Clambering down to the valley once more, they recommenced the ascent in another direction, and this time

succeeded in arriving at a table-land which was heavily timbered. Scarcely had they congratulated themselves on having a day or so of travel on fairly level ground, when they emerged from the wood and found that they were on the verge of another steep descent, beyond which was another valley, two miles wide, and with a good-sized stream flowing through it. Beyond the stream the country rose, mountainous and broken. They toiled down the steep and across the valley and up on the rise beyond. When they reached the ridge and looked ahead, a panorama of such unexpected magnificence confronted them that for some minutes they could only gaze upon it, silent in their admiration, and so impressed, that the toil of the past few hours was forgotten.

Across the blue distance of the intervening broken rolling ridges, a great parapet of rugged mountain heights flung up snow-clad peaks towards the cloudless blue of the sky overhead. The sun, sinking down towards the horizon, threw rays of reddening light upon the snow on the western sides of the mountains, while the eastern sides stood out against the skyline in dazzling whiteness. The valley, from whence they had climbed, stretched away in a pleasing vista of green fertility, the stream adding to the natural charm of the well-grassed sides, the more noticeable by reason of the dark sombre gloom of the gum-

tree forests which crowned the summit of table-land on the other side. But it was the chain of snow-clad mountains in front of them which held the attention of the explorers. The title of Australian Alps was at once given to them—the native name was Warragong—and then the admiration they had caused became tempered with discrimination. The bold rocky fastnesses lay directly in the route of march, and to go forward meant to go up and over the snow-clad peaks. Hume hesitated, and discussed the matter with his associates, ultimately deciding to turn away to the west, and proceed sufficiently far to enable them to get round the end of the chain. By chance they had selected the only point where it was possible to escape from the difficulties which had seemed to dog their footsteps for so long.

As they advanced towards the west they found that the hills gradually diminished in size until they became mere rises, and within a few days of taking the westerly detour Hume was satisfied that the course might be altered to a more southerly direction. After the experience of the past few weeks, the country they were passing over—well wooded and grassed—enabled them to make good records every day, and at the same time keep their horses in fair condition. Their surroundings, and the fact that it had been entirely due to Hume's bush-craft that they had

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emerged at all from the network of valleys of the Warragong, should have induced peace between the two leaders, but unhappily friction still continued. On November 10 a wide chasm with precipitous sides a thousand feet deep was unexpectedly encountered. The ravine ran north and south, and as it was inevitable that they had to cross, Hume rode on by himself until he found a place where the sides were less steep and sufficiently broken to permit the horses to go down in safety. The descent was made, and the expedition climbed up on the other side, but only to find when they reached the top that it was a ridge so narrow that there was barely room for a horse to walk along it. On the north and west rugged mountains reared their rocky peaks to the sky, and over them the white snow-clad heights of the Warragong glistened in the sunlight. Passing along the ridge, the country again became pleasant for travelling until, on November 15, they came upon a large creek. This Hume rode down ahead of the others, seeking for a place to cross, when it led him to a magnificent stream some eighty yards wide, and flowing clear, deep, and rapid.

The discovery was so entirely unexpected, and so contrary to all preconceived notions of the locality they were exploring, that when Hume returned to camp and spoke of what he had found, his statement was almost too incredible



A GLIMPSE OF THE WARRAGONG.

for acceptance. The remainder of the party pushed on, and were soon standing where Hume had stood, gazing in admiration on the splendid river, which, flowing to the west, still further complicated the question of the ultimate outlet of all the westerly flowing streams. But for the moment the little band did not trouble over the inland sea problem; it was sufficient for them that, after all, their struggles in the mountains were not in vain, for they had added to the geographical knowledge of Australia the locality of the highest mountain chain and the largest river on the continent. In honour of the white man who had first stood upon its banks, the river was named the Hume, subsequent anxiety on the part of another explorer to pay an official compliment smothering the justly earned tribute under the name of Murray.

Pleasing, however, as the discovery was, it had its drawbacks, inasmuch as the stream flowed directly across the line of march. Riding along the bank, the explorers found that the further they went the deeper and wider the stream became, and the less likelihood there was of finding a place where they could ford it. This was the occasion on which the smouldering sense of antagonism between Hume and Hovell again became acute. Hume was persistent in his determination to cross the river and complete the journey he had

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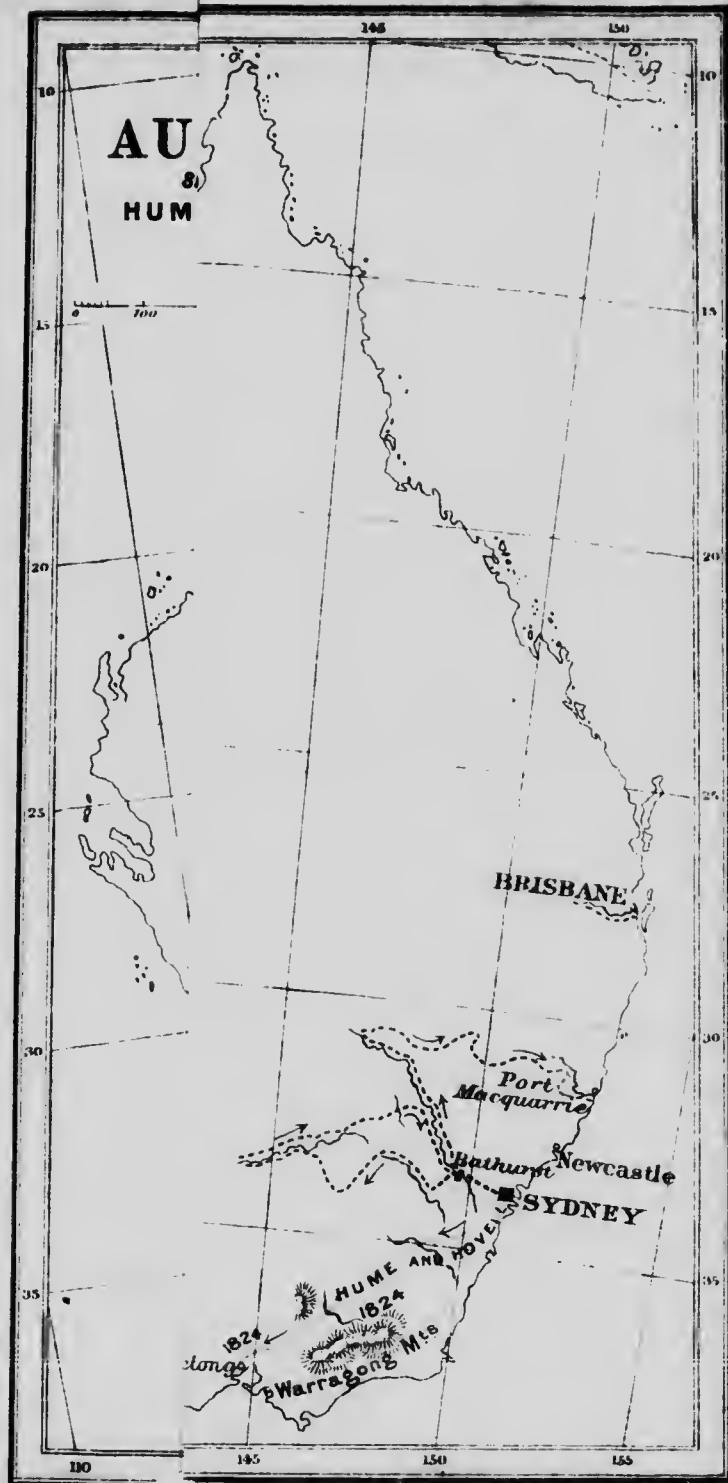
undertaken ; Hovell argued for a return to Sydney with the news of the discoveries already made. He backed up his contention by pointing out the impossibility of crossing the stream ; their carts had been abandoned many miles behind, so that the substitute for a boat which Hume had, on a former occasion, made by means of a cart and a tarpaulin, was now out of the question. But Hume, always resourceful and intrepid, was equal to the emergency. The carts had been left behind, but not the tarpaulin, and with the aid of a tomahawk Hume soon had a bundle of wattles to take the place of the cart. Binding the sticks together, they were covered with the tarpaulin, and Hume, to show his less inventive companion how to defeat obstacles, put off from the shore and paddled his new-made canoe across the stream and back again. Still hankering after a return to Sydney, Hovell appealed to the men to support him. One expressed his readiness to return and his intention of not crossing the river, but Hume dealt with him as he had dealt with other obstacles. With the choice of going over, or into, the river, the man chose the former, and made the voyage in safety. The rest of the party followed, and the journey was resumed from the southern side of the river.

They were now travelling over good rolling country and found little difficulty, feed for the horses being plentiful and good, and water also

abundant. Another stream, met with on November 24, was crossed similarly to the Hume (or Murray). Beyond this they came upon another range of hills, which, although making travelling more difficult than it had been since crossing the big river, were not to be compared with the labyrinths of the Warragong. The barrier was soon surmounted, and when they began the descent of the southern slopes they noticed that they had crossed the watershed between the valley of the Hume (or Murray) and the south. A fair-sized stream flowing to the south convinced them of this, and to emphasize the fact they named the stream the Ovens, after an army officer who was presumed to have merited such a distinction. The first day of December saw them passing over granite hills, which gave place, on the second, to a wide plain covered with luxuriant grass, unfortunately dry enough for the natives, who were probably startled by the appearance of undreamed-of creatures, to set on fire. The flames and smoke swept across the level space, and the explorers had to turn back to the hills to avoid being smothered. Making a detour to avoid the fire-swept flat, they came upon another fine stream which Hume named, after his colleague, the Hovell, and which an appreciative posterity now calls the Goulburn.

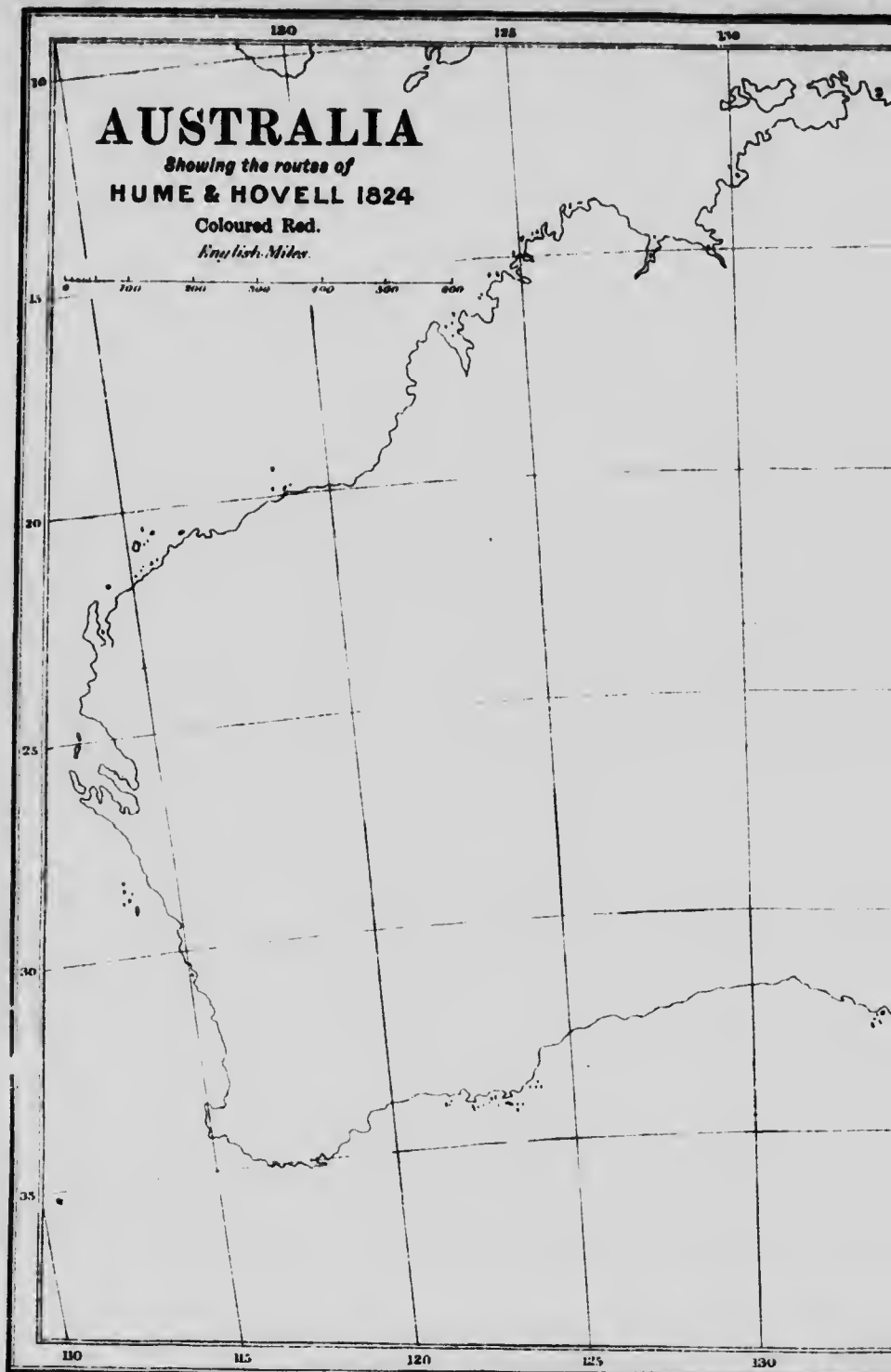
A little further on they encountered another stream, which, on account of the state of the water,

was named Muddy Creek, a name which it shares with more than a score of other creeks in almost every colony. The bush, which had been fairly open, now became congested with a thickly growing scrub closely interlaced with trailing creepers, and which made progress slow and travelling difficult. The natives also became troublesome, not by appearing personally, but by persistently repeating the experiment which had proved so successful on the grassy plain. The bush was constantly being set on fire all round, and the circumstance did not tend to ameliorate the condition of the explorers, which was fast becoming more and more prone to irritation. The sight of a range ahead stimulated their energies. From the top they would probably be able to look down upon the sea, and they pressed on till they reached the top—only, however, to find appropriateness to their feelings in branding the hill as Mount Disappointment. Bearing more to the northwards, they escaped further hills which lay in the southern track, and succeeded in reaching more level country, over which they travelled with fair ease, the chief source of anxiety now being water, which was very scarce on the level lands. Arriving at a creek named by the blacks Werribee, and by Hume the Arndell, they refreshed both themselves and their horses before following it down until it emerged on the sea-shores of Port Philip at a locality to which they wisely gave the native name, Geelong.



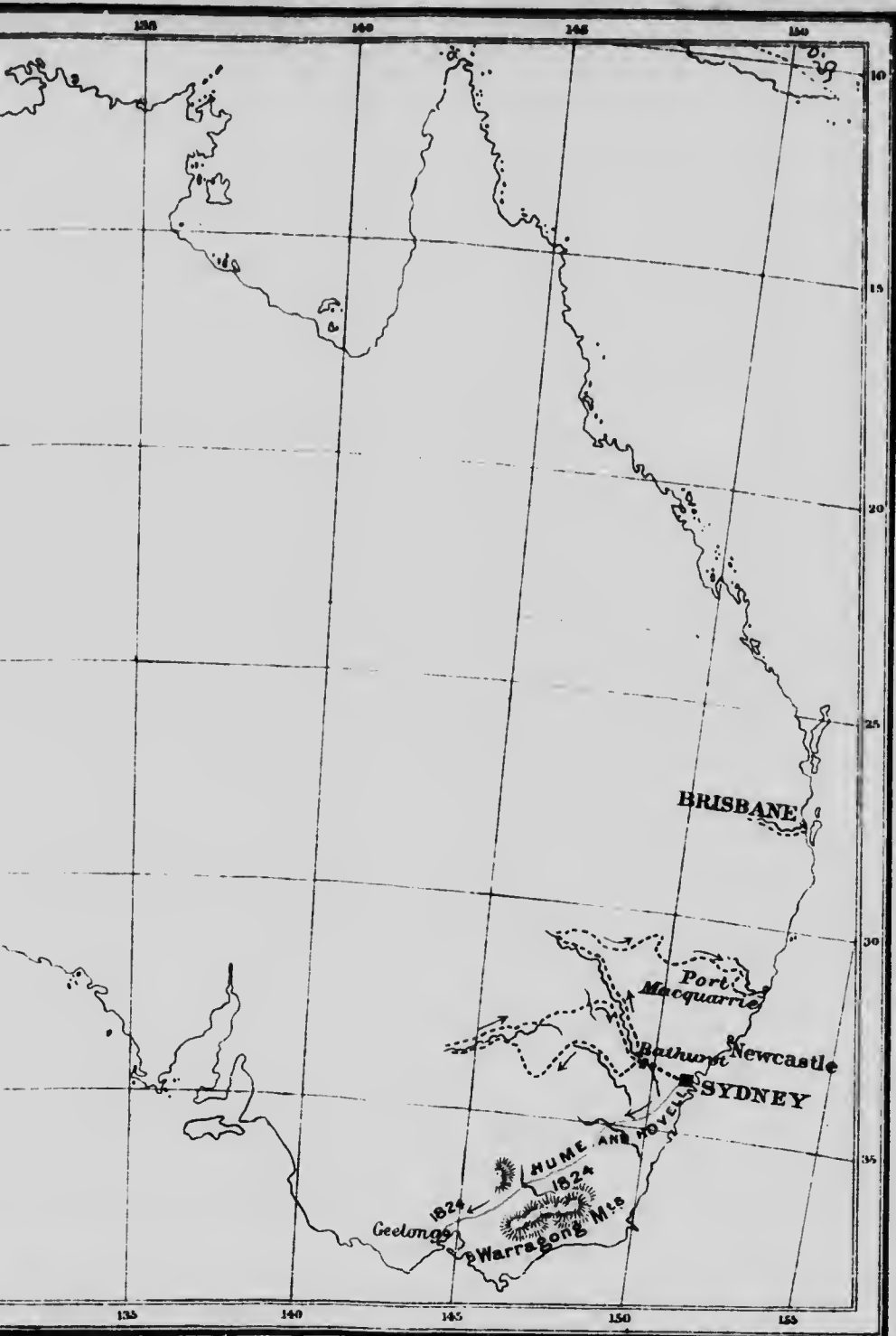
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CHAPTER VI.

THE PROBLEM OF THE INTERIOR.

THE discovery of the great westerly flowing river by Hume revived, to a certain degree, the official interest in exploration, and accentuated the belief in the existence of the inland sea. The presence of the snow-clad mountains of the Warragong between the river and the southern coast, and the absence of any big river mouth in the coast-line, as far as it had been explored, lent a good deal of colour to the arguments advanced by those who believed in the inland sea theory. A very severe drought was also existing at the time (1828) over the colony, and it was further argued that, while it lasted, an expedition might be able to penetrate further into the area of the reed-grown swamps discovered ten years earlier by Oxley at the end of the Macquarrie.

Captain Charles H. Sturt, of the 39th Foot, who had arrived in the colony on service, had from the first been considerably attracted by the fascination of inland exploration. Espousing the land-locked

sea theory as being the most feasible explanation of the fact that great rivers flowed to the west, but failed to reach the ocean, he advanced the suggestion to the Governor that an expedition undertaken during the drought might be able to settle the vexed question once for all. The fillip given to public interest by the Hume discoveries acted beneficially for Sturt's proposal, and the result was the commissioning, by Governor Darling, of an expedition to explore, for a period of six months, the country beyond the Macquarrie swamps. Sturt was given command, and he at once secured the co-operation of Hume, the remainder of the party consisting of two soldiers and six convict servants.

Starting at the beginning of November, 1828, the expedition pushed on to Wellington Valley, which was reached by the end of the month, and from there it proceeded to Mount Harris, following down the Macquarrie, which was found to be very much smaller in size than when Oxley came upon it in 1818. The heat experienced was terribly trying at this period of the journey, in illustration of which it was recorded that even the sugar in the canisters melted. Black fellows were soon met with, and, having had some intercourse with white men, they manifested no surprise at the appearance of the explorers. One tribe fallen in with a little above the cataracts which had so excited

Oxley's admiration, gave Sturt an interesting insight into the method employed by them to secure fish.

"In the evening they assembled at a pool below the falls to take fish. They went very systematically to work, with short spears in their hands that tapered gradually to a point. They sank at once under the water, without splash or noise, at a given signal from an elderly man. In a short time one or two rose with the fish they had transfixed, the others remaining about a minute under water, and then made their appearance near the same rock, into the crevices of which they had driven their prey. Seven fine bream were taken, all of which the natives gave to our men, although they had not broken their fast all the day. They found mussels for themselves." (Sturt's "Two Expeditions.")

During these expeditions there were many interesting meetings with the blacks, mostly tribes who had never seen or heard of a white man before, and as, fortunately, both Sturt and Hume took an intelligent view of them and carefully observed their habits, the result was a collection of instructive anecdotes on the subject. A few days' journey from the cataracts another tribe was met, of which Sturt wrote—

"On the 16th we fell in with a numerous tribe of natives, who joined our train after the very

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necessary ceremonies of an introduction had passed. They were very different in appearance from those whom we had surprised at the river, and from the manner in which I was received, I was led to infer that they had been informed of our arrival and had purposely assembled to meet us. I was saluted by an old man who had stationed himself in front of his tribe, and who was their chief. Behind him the young men stood in a line, and behind them the warriors were seated on the ground. I had a young native with me, and he explained who and what we were, and I was glad to observe that the old chief seemed perfectly reconciled. The warriors, I remarked, never lifted their eyes from the ground. They were hideously painted with red and yellow ochre, and had their weapons at their sides, while their countenances were fixed, sullen, and determined. In order to overcome this mood, I rode up to them, and, taking a spear from the nearest, gave him my gun to examine—a mark of confidence which was not lost upon them, for they immediately relaxed from their gravity, and, as soon as my party arrived, rose up and followed us. That which appeared most to excite their surprise was the motion of the wheels of the boat carriage.”

As the expedition emerged on to the plain country, through which the river flowed to Mount Harris, the effect of the prolonged drought became

more and more manifest. The grass was dry and yellow, the leaves hung limp on the trees, and the river shrank into little more than a small creek, the water in which, opposite Mount Harris, was practically stagnant. A depôt was formed at the mount, and instructions left for the guidance of the men who were to come out to them in the course of a couple of months with a fresh store of provisions, after which the journey was resumed into the great reed-covered area, which Oxley fancied was the commencement of the inland sea. As far as the eye could reach nothing was to be seen but reeds, and for days the expedition wandered through them, occasionally coming upon isolated pools of water, and now and again striking the dried-up channel of a stream. The ground was often moist but never wet, and, save for the isolated pools, there was little to suggest that the whole surface had been under water, as Oxley found it ten years earlier.

Towards the end of the month, water grew scarce enough to cause the leaders some uneasiness, and Sturt and Hume ranged to and fro in search of a pool before leaving that found for the previous night's camp. While on one such journey, they unexpectedly came upon a creek, along which water was slowly flowing. They had arrived at a part of the plain where the decreasing quantity of reeds led them to believe that they would soon

arrive at the end of the swamp. Following down the creek—New Year Creek—they found their expectations realized as they emerged once more upon the ordinary bush country.

“Continuing our journey on the following morning, we at first kept on the banks of the creek, and at about a quarter of a mile from where we had slept, came upon a numerous tribe of natives. A young girl sitting by the fire was the first to observe us as we were slowly approaching her. She was so excessively alarmed that she had not the power to run away, but threw herself on the ground and screamed violently. We now observed a number of huts, out of which the natives issued, little dreaming of the spectacle they were to behold. But the moment they saw us they started back ; their huts were in a moment in flames, and each with a firebrand ran to and fro with hideous yells, thrusting them into every sh they passed. I walked my horse quietly towards an old man, who stood more forward than the rest, as if he intended to devote himself for the preservation of his tribe. I had intended speaking to him, but on a nearer approach he trembled so violently that it was impossible to expect any information from him, and I left him to form his own conjectures as to what we were.”

A few days later a hunting-party, probably belonging to the same tribe, was met with.

"As we were travelling through a forest, we surprised a hunting-party of natives. Mr. Hume and I were considerably in front of our party at the time, and he only had his gun with him. We had been moving along so quietly that we were not for some time observed by them. Three were seated on the ground, under a tree, and two others were busily employed on one of the lower branches cutting out honey. As soon as they saw us, four of them ran away, but the fifth, who wore a cap of emu feathers, stood for a moment looking at us, and then deliberately dropped out of the tree to the ground. I then advanced towards him, but before I got round a bush that intervened, he had darted away. I was fearful that he had gone to collect his tribe, and, under this impression, rode quickly back for my gun to support Mr. Hume. On my arrival, I found the native was before me. He stood about twenty paces from Mr. Hume, who was endeavouring to explain what he was; but, seeing me approach, he immediately poised his spear at him, as being the nearest. Mr. Hume unslung his carbine and presented it, but as it was evident my re-appearance had startled the savage, I pulled up, and he immediately lowered his weapon. His coolness and courage surprised me, and increased my desire to communicate with him. He had evidently taken both man and horse for one animal, and as long as Mr. Hume kept his seat,

the native remained on his guard; but when he saw him dismount, after the first astonishment had subsided, he stuck his spear in the ground and walked fearlessly up to him. We easily made him comprehend that we were in search of water, when he pointed to the west, as indicating that we should supply our wants there. He gave his information in a frank and manly way, without the least embarrassment, and when the party passed, he stepped back to avoid the animals without the slightest confusion. I am sure he was a very brave man, and I left him with the most favourable impressions." (Sturt's "Two Expeditions.")

As they advanced, the dry state of the country again caused anxiety, water being very scarce. Occasionally patches of good grass were passed, and this enabled the stock to keep in fairly good condition, but the want of water was beginning to tell. Once they came upon some pools, of which Sturt wrote—

"About midday we crossed a light, sandy plain, on which there were some dirty puddles of water. They were so shallow as to leave the backs of the frogs in them exposed, and they had, in consequence, been destroyed by solar heat, and were in a state of putrefaction. Our horses refused to drink, but it was evident that some natives must have partaken of this sickening beverage only a few hours before our arrival."

The prospect for the next day was far from pleasing when they camped that night, and yet, so uncertain was the state of the country, that within a few hours after starting in the morning, they were riding over a plain so well covered with vegetation that the grass reached almost to the horses' girths. They discovered, and briefly surveyed, a stretch of table-land, which was named after Oxley (who had died only a few days before Sturt left Sydney). Returning to the track of the creek they had been following from the reedy marshes, they found that it turned away to the westward. The country to the north appearing open and promising, they struck away from the creek, and followed along the flat to the north. But they had not proceeded more than a mile upon it "when we suddenly found ourselves on the banks of a noble river." The channel was from seventy to eighty yards broad, and enclosed an unbroken sheet of water, evidently very deep, and literally covered with pelicans and other wild fowl. Its banks were too precipitous to allow the cattle to be watered, but the men eagerly descended to quench their thirst. But they were met with a cruel disappointment. The water was so salt that they could not touch it. Along the banks of the stream there was excellent feed for the cattle, and the party proceeded five miles along it, until, reaching a spot where the cattle could get to the

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water, they waded into it until it covered their backs, and stood so with only their noses above the surface. While the camp was being arranged, Hume rode off by himself in search of water, and fortunately found a pool of fresh water on the summit of a ridge of pure sand by the river side. Sturt, half inclined to believe that the river was an arm of the great mythical sea, called it the Darling, after the Governor.

The next morning they set out to follow the stream, along the bank, in the direction whence it flowed. They came on a group of seventy huts, capable of holding from twelve to fifteen men each, which appeared to be permanent habitations and all fronting the same point of the compass. In searchin, among them, two beautifully made nets, about ninety yards in length, were found; one with large meshes, evidently for taking kangaroos, and the other with small meshes, evidently for fish. In one hut, the floor of which was swept with particular care, a number of white balls, as of pulverized shells or lime, had been deposited. A trench was formed round the hut to prevent the rain from running under it, and the whole was arranged with more than ordinary attention.

Approaching the river shortly afterwards, four natives were observed seated on the banks, and as the ground favoured the approach of the party without discovering them to the natives, it was not

until they were only a few yards off, that the noise of the drayman's whip betrayed them. The natives for a moment gazed at them, and then started up in horror and fled yelling into the bush.

Their cry brought about a dozen more natives from the river, who also took up the shout and dashed into the bush. The explorers, wishing to learn the number and disposition of the tribe, remained quite still on the slight eminence they had ascended, and which terminated in an abrupt drop to the water. They had not waited very long when the sharp crackling sound from the distance warned them that the natives had fired the bush. The fire approached very near them, and heavy smoke rolled over and around them; but as they were safe where they were, they did not move. Then one of the natives came out of the bush on to the bank, and, advancing towards them, bent his body so that his hands rested on his knees, and fixed his gaze on the white men. No notice being taken, he began to throw himself into the most extravagant attitudes, shaking his foot from time to time, and at last turning his back upon them. The white men still remaining unmoved, he stood still, perplexed, until Hume succeeded in inducing a conversation with him, and ultimately managed to get him to approach nearer. Sturt then went up to him with a tomahawk, the use of which the native at once guessed.

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In his account of this interesting encounter, Sturt wrote—

“We now observed that the natives who had fled from the river had been employed in setting a net. They had placed it in a semicircle, with either end to the shore, and rude pieces of wood were attached to it to keep the upper part perpendicular. It was, in fact, a sein, only that the materials, with the exception of the network, were simpler and rougher than cork or lead—for which last stones were substituted.

“We had on this occasion a remarkable instance of the docility of the natives of the interior, or of the power they have of subduing their apprehensions; manifesting the opposite extremes of fear and confidence. These men, who had apparently never seen nor heard of a white man before, and must have taken us for something supernatural, in a brief space so completely subdued their fears as to approach us without reserve.”

The tribe was found to be suffering from an eruptive skin disease which was proving of a very fatal character. The chief, desiring to solicit the help of the white men in curing the malady, called several of the young men affected up to Sturt and Hume.

“Nothing could exceed the anxiety of his explanations, or the mild and soothing tone in which he addressed his people, and it really pained me

that I could not assist him in his distress," Sturt wrote.

Parting with the natives on the best of terms, the explorers continued their way along the river, watching the current carefully the while, in case it should prove to be a tide, and not the ordinary flow of a river. But they were disappointed in their desire to discover this evidence of the inland sea, the stream flowing on steadily all the time they were near it. Their close watch, however, enabled them to observe that there was a number of brine springs along the course of the river, from whence it obtained its saline character. They also had another inexplicable experience in this district, of which Sturt gave the following account:—

"About 3 p.m. on the 7th, Mr. Hume and I were occupied tracing the chart upon the ground. The day had been remarkably fine; not a cloud was there in the heavens, nor a breath of air to be felt. On a sudden we heard what seemed to be the report of a gun fired at the distance of between five and six miles. It was not the hollow sound of an earthly explosion, or the sharp crackling noise of falling timber, but in every way resembled the discharge of a heavy piece of ordnance. On this all were agreed, but no one was certain whence the sound proceeded. Mr. Hume and myself had been too attentive to our occupations to form a

satisfactory opinion, but we both thought it came from the north-west. I sent one of the men immediately up a tree, but he could observe nothing unusual. The country around him appeared to be equally flat on all sides, and to be thickly wooded; whatever occasioned the report, it made a strong impression on all of us, and to this day the singularity of such a sound in such a situation is a matter of mystery to me." (Sturt's "Two Expeditions.")

They journeyed along the banks of the Darling until they had traced its course for a distance of sixty-five miles from the point where they had first come upon it. All that distance it had maintained its character, the water too salt to drink, but clear and sparkling, and literally teeming with fish, which attracted large flocks of pelicans, ducks, etc. The country along the banks carried plenty of feed for the horses, and the splendid bushmanship of Hume was of invaluable assistance in discovering fresh water whenever a camp was formed. At the end of the sixty-five miles, as the provisions were becoming scanty and the time was at hand when the fresh supplies would be due at Mount Harris, it was decided to strike back across the intervening country to the depôt. Many tribes of natives had been met with along the river, and they impressed Sturt so favourably that he thus described them—

"The natives of the Darling are a clean-limbed, well-conditioned race, generally speaking. They

seemingly occupy permanent huts, but the tribe did not bear any proportion to the size or number of their habitations. It was evident their population had been thinned. The customs of these distant tribes, as far as we could judge, were similar to those of the mountain blacks, and they are essentially the same people, although their language differs. They lacerate their bodies, but do not extract the front tooth. We saw but few cloaks among them, since the opossum does not inhabit the interior. Those that were noticed were made of the red kangaroo skin. In appearance these men are stouter in the bust than at the lower extremities; they have broad noses, sunken eyes, overhanging eyebrows, and thick lips. The men are much better-looking than the women. Both go perfectly naked, if I except the former, who wear nets over the loins and across the forehead, and bones through the cartilage of the nose. Their chief food is fish, of which they have great supplies in the river; still they have their seasons for hunting their emus and kangaroos. The nets they use for this purpose, as well as for fishing, are of great length, and are made upon large frames. These people do not appear to have warlike habits, nor do they take any pride in their arms, which differ little from those used by the inland tribes, and are assimilated to them as far as the materials will allow."

On their journey from the river towards the direction of Mount Harris they obtained a very fine view of the Oxley Table-land, after which, by bearing more to the south, they came upon the reed-covered plains into which Oxley found the Macquarrie flowed. Even in the few months that had elapsed since they were last in the neighbourhood the effects of the drought were more manifest. The appearance of the country was melancholy; there was not a flower in bloom, nor a green object to be seen. The natives in the vicinity, alarmed perhaps at the return of the white men, kept on firing the reeds on the great marshes, and as the flames raged across them, great masses of smoke rose over the horizon, and, like storm-clouds, rolled across the sky, adding yet more dreariness to the already dreary scene.

Nearing Mount Harris, they saw in the distance a tribe of blacks, one of whom was wearing a jacket, a circumstance which roused the suspicions and alarm of the explorers, who feared that the men in charge of the consignment of stores might have been massacred. They pushed forward as rapidly as they could, and were greatly satisfied when they arrived at the mount and were greeted by the two men who had come out from Wellington Valley with the stores. The blacks, they said, had been about a great deal, and once or twice an attack was feared, but nothing of the kind had

occurred. Subsequently some of the natives came to the camp to beg for food, as they were nearly starving, the drought having destroyed almost all their food-supplies. Sturt gave them some provisions, and in course of time ascertained the source from whence the jacket he had noticed had been obtained. Two men, probably convict servants, had made their escape from a Wellington Valley station, and had fallen in with the tribe, with whom they camped for a few days. They had with them a couple of dogs which the blacks wanted to keep, and on the men refusing to part with them the blacks handed them spears and clubs, and challenged them to fight. The duel was of short duration. One of the men fell before the first flight of spears, and his companion, seeing that escape was impossible, cut the dogs' throats—and fell speared while doing it. They were both subsequently eaten, and the jacket was the remaining relic of the incident, to which the black fellows were very loth to refer.

Remaining in camp for a week to rest and recuperate, Sturt and his companions set out again on March 7 with the object of intersecting the Darling more to the east of the point where they left it. Three days later they came upon the Castlereagh river, but although the channel was a hundred and thirty yards in width, there was not a drop of water to be found

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in it. Like the generality of rivers in the interior of the continent, it had, at the point where the explorers came upon it, outer as well as inner banks; the one to confine the water in ordinary seasons, the other to prevent the flood waters from spreading over the surrounding country. The space between the two banks was covered with rich soil, and the trees were stronger and larger than those on the country beyond. As they proceeded down the course of the stream, however, they found that the outer banks gradually disappeared until they ceased to exist, so that in times of flood the whole of the adjacent country would be under water.

The effects of the drought were more and more pronounced the further they descended the Castlereagh, the daily search for water becoming an anxious and difficult undertaking. The ground was parched and, save for the trees, entirely barren, the stock consequently suffering considerably for want of feed. On March 20 the signs of another watercourse were noticed across the flat, and on going over to it a large pool of water was discovered. As they approached it they surprised a party of natives—old men, women, and children—who were engaged in cooking a large number of fish, but who fled, leaving the fish behind, immediately they saw the white men.

The explorers camped by the water, and in the afternoon a party of native warriors approached to within a hundred and fifty yards of the tent. Sturt and Hume set out to meet them, whereupon the blacks formed a double line and, crouching over their spears, marched to and fro, chanting a war song. Hume advanced closer to them, whereupon they stopped, and he went up to a tree, broke off a branch and held it towards them. As soon as they saw the branch they laid down their spears, and two of their number walked about twenty paces in front of the others, who sat down. Hume again went forward and sat down, when the two went up to him and sat down beside him, after which intercourse between them and the explorers was unrestrained. "It is not to avoid alarming their natural timidity that a gradual approach is so necessary; they preserve the same ceremony among themselves," Sturt wrote in describing the scene.

Although the blacks had a plentiful supply of fish preparing for a meal when the explorers came upon them, it was evident that the experience was by no means frequent. They had come upon the pool shortly before the white men, and had captured all the fish they could secure to devour at once, with their usual improvidence. But for many days before they had been short of food. For forty-five miles the explorers had ridden down

the bed of the Castlereagh without finding a drop of water all the way. The country on either side was parched and barren, with not one living thing to be seen, and the blacks, who understood only the needs of the day and never thought of the morrow, were faced with starvation. "The natives are dying fast, not from any disease, but from the scarcity of food, and should the drought continue it seems probable they may become extinct," Sturt wrote in his diary.

On March 29 they had arrived at a part of the river bed where all around were signs of a great tumult of water having occurred, as though in a bygone time of flood the stream had been forced back over the banks. The peculiarity caused them considerable wonder until, on crossing a sandy bight, they saw before them, with the same characteristics, the same steep banks and lofty timber, the same swift clear stream, the river Darling.

So well had it maintained its features, that not for a moment were they in doubt as to its being the same stream they had left ninety miles lower down, and in this particular the Darling is only the same as nearly every river of the interior of Australia in having its own characteristic features, which are so well maintained that the stream can be recognized at any part of its course when once it has been seen.

A party of natives were soon encountered, who manifested the usual friendly feeling towards the white men, and pointed out where fresh water was to be obtained, the river still being too salt for the water to be used. As there was good feed for the horses and cattle, a camp was formed early in the day, and the men took advantage of the opportunity to wash their blankets. At night, after it was dark, a cry was heard on a rise near the camp, and upon going to see the cause of it, one of the men was met by a native holding a poised spear in one hand and one of the blankets in the other. Seeing that no harm was intended him, the black lowered his spear and gave the blanket to the white man, disappearing at once into the bush.

About eight in the morning the blacks made their appearance, and Sturt went out to meet them, as they appeared to be doubtful whether to approach or not. He beckoned with a downward motion of his hand, whereupon they all laid down their spears, and only when the motion was reversed did they come towards him. Desiring to reward the native who had returned the blanket, he called the man who went for it to pick the black out of the crowd. All stood absolutely firm and motionless while the man walked three times round them, but when he recognized and touched the native they testified the correctness. A tomahawk

and clasp-knife were then presented to him, which caused satisfaction not only to him but to all the tribe. As, however, the tribe was very numerous, Sturt thought it advisable to show them the effect of gunpowder as a warning. He therefore fired a bullet into a tree. "The effect of the report on the natives was truly ridiculous. Some stood and stared at me; others fell down and others ran away; and it was with some little difficulty we collected them again. At last, however, we did so, and left them to pick out the ball."

A brief attempt was made to pass further up the Darling, but the country was found to be so terribly barren and dry that the project was abandoned, and a route marked out from where they were back to Mount Harris. Travelling on from water to water, the search for which was half the day's work very often, they followed the route mapped out sufficiently well to cross the dry bed of the Castlereagh and other creeks—"during the short interval I have been out I have seen rivers cease to flow before me, and sheets of water disappear," Sturt wrote—until they arrived at what had been the reed-covered swamps of the Macquarrie, but were now parched and bare clay pans. On April 7 they arrived at Mount Harris, having demonstrated the fact that the Macquarrie flowed into and out of the swamps Oxley had regarded as part of the inland sea, and ultimately joined the

Darling when the numerous creeks it split into in coming out of the marshes had reformed into one stream. Whence the Darling came and whither it went were questions the explorers could only state, for further travelling, excepting homeward, was out of all possibility in view of the protracted drought.

As soon as was possible, the return to Wellington Valley was commenced, the journey being trying, for the Macquarrie, for stretches of half a mile, was destitute of water, food for the horses and bullock team was very sparse, and the few natives met with were literally dying of starvation, the men bringing up their children to the white men and begging for something to be given them to eat. The experience was typical of an Australian drought, and in painting its dreariness Sturt said—

“I am giving no false picture of the reality. So long had the drought continued that the vegetable kingdom was almost annihilated, and minor vegetation had disappeared. In the creeks weeds had grown and withered and grown again, and young saplings were now rising in their beds, nourished by the moisture that still remained; but the largest forest trees were drooping, and many were dead. The emus, with outstretched necks, gasping for breath, searched the channels of the rivers for water in vain; and the native

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dog, so thin that it could hardly walk, seemed to implore some merciful hand to despatch it. How the natives subsisted it was difficult to say, but there was no doubt of the scarcity of food among them." (Sturt's "Two Expeditions.")

CHAPTER VII.

DOWN THE MURRAY RIVER.

THE news of the discovery of the Darling, or Karaula, as the blacks named it, following so soon after Hume's discovery of the big river flowing westerly across the route he had followed from the Murrumbidgee to Port Philip, aroused the interest of the colonists in exploration to a degree that had not hitherto been attained. In both instances there was something more tangible as a basis for speculation than the pessimistic tales told by Oxley of the wasting away of all westerly streams into impenetrable deserts and impassable swamps. Both his deserts and his swamps had been encountered and beaten, and beyond them, in what he had branded as dismal, desolate deserts, noble streams had been found, even in periods of extreme drought, and areas of land, both level and mountainous, which only needed the energy of the Anglo-Saxon to make them the sources of wealth they became within twenty-five years of Oxley's sweeping condemnation.

The solution of the problem as to whether the interior contained desert or sea was certainly as far off as ever, but it was not so keenly considered in the face of the fact that two large and apparently permanent streams, coming no one knew whence, and flowing no one knew whither, were awaiting exploration. The ground of controversy shifted so as to divide opinion on the matter of the first stream to be made the object of an expedition. Sturt threw his weight on the side of the Murrumbidgee, the memory of the drought-stricken district lying between Wellington Valley and the Darling being sufficient to influence his choice of the more southern stream. The Governor shared his views, and when the expedition was officially decided on, Sturt was offered and accepted the command of it. He desired to secure the services of Hume also, but that intrepid bushman found, in common with most of the other successful early explorers—the brilliant Sturt among them—that developing one's own resources was a more profitable undertaking than opening up the colony for the benefit of the Government. Therefore he declined the position offered, and missed the chance of the further exploration of the great river he had been the first to discover, and from which an appreciative posterity has carefully obliterated his name.

Failing the companionship of Hume, Sturt

obtained that of a son of the Colonial Secretary, George McLeay, who proved himself an excellent substitute for the first bushman of the period. The official instructions having been given at the end of September, 1829, the leader and party set out from Sydney on November 3, 1829, on what was to prove the most brilliant, courageous, and adventurous journeys in the whole range of Australian exploration.

The first part of the route, from Sydney to the Murrumbidgee, was made with practically no incident. The party, though small, was well found, and carried amongst its stores a whale-boat for use on the river, and firearms for each man. Upon arrival at the river, Sturt was at once struck by the extraordinary difference which existed between it and the other streams he had explored. He found it to be a clear, rapidly-flowing mountain river, of considerable width and equable depth. By November 27 they had arrived as far as the junction of the Tumut, where one of the most outlying stations was situated; and as it was necessary to cross to the other side, Sturt utilized the idea he had learned from Hume of making a punt from wattles covered with tarpaulin. Despite the strong current running, everything was got over in safety.

As they proceeded the country continued good, feed for the stock being plentiful, and the scenery

along the upper reaches of the river so picturesque that the members of the party all felt its effect, and were more than sanguine as to the final results of the expedition. In the open forests that skirted the route they were following, they saw and killed several red kangaroo, and game of other kinds appeared plentiful, but very few signs of natives were seen. Until December 2 none were actually encountered, but on that day, when the expedition remained in camp owing to heavy rain, a few came up. At first they were shy and timid, but, gaining confidence, they accompanied Sturt and McLeay on a short journey round the vicinity of the camp, and incidentally gave the explorers an exhibition of opossum hunting.

One of the blacks being anxious to get an opocssum out of a dead tree, every branch of which was hollow, he asked for a tomahawk, with which he cut a hole in the trunk above where he thought the animal lay concealed. He found, however, that he had cut too low, and that it had run up higher. This made it necessary to smoke it out; he accordingly got some dry grass, and, having kindled a fire, stuffed it into the hole he had cut. A raging fire soon kindled in the tree where the draught was great, and dense columns of smoke issued from the end of each branch, as thick as that from the chimney of a steam engine. The shell of the tree was so thin

that Sturt thought it would soon be burned through, and that the tree would fall, but the black had no such fears. Ascending to the highest branch, he watched anxiously for the opossum, and no sooner did it appear, half-singed and roasted, than he seized it, and threw it down to them with an air of triumph. The effect of the scene in so lonely a forest was very fine. The roaring of the fire in the tree, the fearless attitude of the savage, and the associations which his colour and appearance, enveloped as he was in smoke, called up, were singular. He had not long left the tree when it fell with a tremendous crash.

The river continued to increase in size as they descended its course, a fact which seemed as much due to springs as to tributaries. But the country did not maintain its standard of excellence, and became very varied in character, as well as declining in quality, until at one time fears were almost entertained that it was going to develop into a repetition of that around the terminal swamps of the Macquarrie. The anticipations were, however, illusory, for on December 8 they emerged on to a rich level area, well grassed and covered sparsely with timber, and having the further peculiarity of small hills of pure sand rising above it here and there, the sides being covered with wiry rushes, *Banksia*, and cypress bushes. The following day they came upon a

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small tribe of natives of a very friendly disposition, and one of whom, an old man, offered to accompany them for some distance as guide. On the way he told Sturt that there was another large river flowing on the south-west, compared to which the Murrumbidgee was merely as a small creek. He could not give any clear idea as to the distance this large river was away, but said the water in it was good and the banks without people.

Falling in with another small tribe, the appearance of both men and women so struck Sturt that he wrote of them: "They were, without exception, the worst-featured of any I had ever seen. It is scarcely possible to conceive that human faces could be so hideous and loathsome. The old black, who was rather good-looking, told me that they were the last we should see for some time, and I felt that if these were samples of the natives of the lowlands, I cared very little how few of them we should meet."

The country again became of excellent grazing quality, and, in spite of the old black fellow's words, another tribe was met with, the people of which were an improvement on the last. "Their manners were those of a quiet and inoffensive people, and their appearance in some measure prepossessing. The old men had lofty foreheads and stood exceedingly erect. The young men were cleaner and better-featured than any we had seen,

some of them having smooth hair and an almost Asiatic cast of countenance. On the other hand, the women and children were disgusting objects, the latter being subject to diseases, and dreadfully emaciated. But although the men were more prepossessing than any others that had been seen, either on the coast or in the interior, they were decidedly the same race, and had the same leading features and customs. The sunken eye and overhanging eyebrow, the high cheekbone and thick lip, distended nostrils, the nose either short or aquiline, together with a stout bust and slender extremities, and both smooth and curled hair, they had in common with the other natives, and were evidently sprung from one common stock, the savage and scattered inhabitants of a rude and inhospitable land. In customs they differed in no material point from the coast natives. They extracted the front tooth, lacerated their bodies to raise the flesh, cicatrices being their chief ornament; they procured food by the same means, painted in the same manner, and used the same weapons, as far as the productions of the country allowed. They made a light spear from a reed for use in distant combat, and which was thrown, with the boomerang, not only to a great distance, but with unerring precision. They used a heavier spear for close combat. The old men only had the privilege of eating emu; and so submissive

were the young men in this regulation that if necessity compelled them to break it, the offender, on returning to camp, sat apart until an opportunity was given, by a question from the chief, to confess the fault, when punishment was given. Married people only were allowed to eat ducks. Their corroborrees, or ceremonies, were held at midnight, the same weird, melancholy ditties being chanted with telling imitations of the various birds and beasts with which they were acquainted. Their women they regarded merely as secondary objects, chiefly useful as beasts of burden." (Sturt's "Two Journeys.")

A few days later (December 15) they came upon a large tributary to the Murrumbidgee, which the natives named Colare, and which Sturt imagined was the Lachlan re-formed on the western side of the swamps which had turned Oxley back. This opinion was emphasized by the fact that they had now reached the degree of longitude in which the Lachlan and the more northerly Macquarrie had disappeared in marshes. Half fearfully the explorers kept a close look-out for the appearance of the reedy flats along the banks of the Murrumbidgee, which had on the other rivers been the forerunners to the absorbing swamps and marshes. The sudden appearance, not of reedy flats, but of a wide area overgrown with reeds on both sides of the stream, brought the expedition to a halt.

A hurried ride round the edge of the reedy waste revealed the fact that the river spread out into a shallow swamp, beyond which the country was dry and barren—a repetition of the northern rivers, save that the channel of the Murrumbidgee could be seen continuing through the centre of the reeds. It was out of the question to attempt to force a passage through the swamp in the drays, and to go round it might be only a means of fruitlessly wasting time. The whale-boat they had with them was large enough to carry the men, but not the stores and animals as well. The situation was one which to a less resolute or resourceful explorer would have meant either a branching off to the north or south, or a return to Sydney with a sad-hued story of the dismal interior. But Sturt was not so easily repulsed.

Selecting a tree, he set one man to cut it down and two more to dig a saw-pit, while the others were engaged in putting the whale-boat together. As soon as it was finished, another and lighter boat was built out of the boards sawn from the tree; and when, on January 6, 1830, that also was completed and in the water, Sturt divided his party. He and McLeay and six men, with as many of the stores as could be placed in the skiff and the whale-boat, were to proceed down the stream, wherever it might lead; the remaining two men were ordered to return to the Goulburn

Plains with the drays, horses, and bullocks. The next day, January 7, the two parties separated, the explorers starting down stream in the whale-boat and towing the skiff behind. One of the men, Fraser, who was an inveterate sportsman, was posted in the bow of the boat with a gun to shoot any game which came within range, and also to keep a sharp look-out ahead. The voyage was uneventful until they landed for the night, when, at the place selected for camping, they found a tomb, which appeared to have been recently constructed. No mound had been raised over the body, but an oval hollow shed occupied the centre of the burial-place, which was lined with reeds and bound together with strong network. Round this the usual walks were cut, and the recent marks of women's feet were visible upon them, although no natives had been seen.

In the morning a few blacks visited the camp, and were kindly received, but could give no information as to the state of the stream further down. Resuming the voyage, twelve miles had scarcely been covered when the skiff struck heavily on a submerged rock, and sank in more than ten feet of water. The men hastily landed and strove to pull the skiff to the bank by means of the long painter with which she had been attached to the whale-boat, before the provisions in her were spoiled by the fresh water. They succeeded in

bringing her to the bank, but the fresh water had got into the provisions, and, moreover, several articles had been washed out of her by the current. By the time these had been recovered it was too late to proceed further. A camp was made for the night, and as the men were all greatly fatigued by their exertions to recover the submerged articles, a night guard was dispensed with. The result of this was shown in the morning, when it was discovered that although not a native had been seen or heard from the time the small tribe was left twelve miles up the stream, the camp had been visited, and several metal articles, especially cutlasses and tomahawks, carried off. It was impossible for the explorers to chase the thieves, so the journey was resumed.

For the next two days they were drifting past great stretches of reed-covered flats. Occasionally a few natives were seen, but they disappeared at once when noticed. A sunken rock caused a slight diversion by checking the whale-boat so suddenly as to throw the bow-man overboard, but beyond a wetting he escaped unhurt.

Leaving the reed-beds, the river rapidly contracted into a narrow waterway, the channel of which was almost choked by large trees, which had apparently been drifted down by the current roots first, so that their long scraggy branches lay pointing up stream, and presented a serious

obstacle in the course of the boats. Only by the utmost care were the two boats guided through the difficult passage, for had the whale-boat come into contact with one of the long snags, nothing could have saved her from destruction, while the position of the explorers would then have been dangerous in the extreme.

Having successfully threaded their way through the snags, they found the river becoming still more narrow, with high steep banks on each side, from the tops of which branches of trees extended in a perfect arch, and obscured the light to such an extent that by five o'clock in the afternoon it was found necessary to stop for the night. By the morning light it was seen that the best course had been adopted; for soon after resuming their journey, the explorers again found themselves amongst snags, which were so thickly collected that the river was black with them. To get the boats through, it was frequently necessary for the men to get on to some of the snags and carefully guide the boats clear of the threatening impalement. When at length a clear channel was reached, the stream narrowed and deepened, the current running swifter, and the course turning so frequently and suddenly that it was often impossible to say which was to be encountered twenty yards ahead.

A sudden exclamation from the man in the bows

startled the rest of the party into expecting to find the boat suddenly crashing into a mass of snags. The men glanced round hurriedly, ready to spring over the sides if necessary to save the craft; but before any one could express his thoughts, they were rapidly swept between two precipitous headlands, and floated out upon the surface of a magnificent sheet of water.

"It is impossible for me to describe the effect of so instantaneous a change of circumstances upon us," Sturt wrote. "The boats were allowed to drift along at pleasure, and such was the force with which we had been shot out of the Murrumbidgee, that we were carried nearly to the bank opposite its embouchure, whilst we continued to gaze in silent astonishment on the capacious channel we had entered; and when we looked for that by which we had been led into it, we could hardly believe that the insignificant gap that presented itself to us was indeed the termination of the beautiful and noble stream whose course we had thus successfully followed."

This new stream, which was in reality the Hume, was so wide and deep that Sturt came to the conclusion it must be a river to which the Hume was merely a tributary, and so he named it the Murray. At the point where it received the waters of the Murrumbidgee, it was three hundred and fifty feet across and from twelve to twenty

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feet deep, its current being steady, and every indication pointing to the probability that it maintained its course for many hundreds of miles. There was not a moment's hesitation in the mind of Sturt as to what should be done. He had discovered the greatest river existing in the continent; he would follow it to the mouth, wherever that might be. This opinion was held by every man, and for two days they drifted down the splendid reaches, constantly occupied in admiring the varied scene presented at every turn of the course.

On the second day natives were seen for the first time since the boats emerged from the Murrumbidgee. Being anxious to come into contact with them, in order to learn if they knew anything of the river lower down, Sturt put the whale-boat round towards the shore. As it approached the bank, the natives disappeared into the bush, evidently terrified at the appearance of the white men, and nothing would induce them to leave their hiding-places. The boats were taken to the other side of the stream, and a camp was arranged for the night. As soon as the camp had been formed, the shouts of the natives on the other side of the stream drew attention just as they came in sight from out the shelter of the trees. They advanced from cover in a line, each man daubed over with white or red pigment, and with

a small shield in one hand and spear ready for throwing in the other. They came forward at a peculiar dancing gait, singing a melancholy war-song as they danced, until they were well in the open. There they stood in a line, still singing and beating their spears against their shields, until, astonished evidently at no notice being taken of them, they ceased their song, and stared silently across at the white men.

Sturt then walked to the water's edge with a green branch in his hands, which he waved to them, at the same time beckoning them to come over. Two or three at length waded into the water, and swam over, and the others followed almost at once. As soon as the first one emerged from the stream, Sturt handed him a tomahawk, which not only delighted the man but seemed to make the others lose all fear. Subsequently, in order to impress them and prevent an attack at night, Sturt formed them into a line, and, standing in front of them, fired his gun. The noise so astonished them that for a moment they stood staring at him, and then, realizing the mystery of it, they gave a great shout, and dashed into the bush, from whence they were with difficulty persuaded to again come. Food was given to them, and by signs they asked for a place to be given them to camp. Upon a place being indicated, they lit a fire, and made a camp, in which sixteen of

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their number stayed for the night. The following day the balance of the tribe came to the explorers with the men who had left the night before. They numbered eighty-three in all, and were particularly friendly, trying to induce the white men to stay among them. So anxious were they for this that when the men embarked in the boats, the natives swam round and round them, trying to prevent their going away.

For the next three days the boats sailed along without interruption, the river continually improving in size and appearance, the banks being varied now and again by long stretches of high perpendicular white cliffs. On the third day after leaving the friendly natives another large body was seen on the right bank just as a camping-ground was being selected. The blacks were in war array, and showed every desire for hostilities, running along the banks with spears ready for throwing, and shouting in an angry manner their war-cries. The river being wide, Sturt headed the boats for the left bank, so as to be out of reach of the spears, when another band, painted and armed and also shouting war-cries, dashed out of the bush on the left bank, and menaced the occupants of the boats.

The situation was decidedly serious, for in the middle of the stream the boats were within spear-throw of both bands; and Sturt was about to take

strong measures for the safety of his party, when the blacks on the left bank plunged into the stream, and swam over to their companions on the other side. The explorers, as soon as they saw a suitable place, ran for the left bank, and quickly prepared a camp, the natives, who showed no fear, massing on the opposite bank, shouting, dancing, and beating their spears and shields together incessantly.

As soon as the camp was formed, Sturt and McLeay went to the water's edge and made signs to the natives, who, however, only replied by increased shouts and excitement, beating their weapons against each other furiously, and manifesting every token of acute hostility. Describing the subsequent events, Sturt, in his account of the expedition, wrote—

“I held a long pantomimical dialogue with them across the water, and held out the olive branch in token of amity. They at length laid aside their spears, and a long consultation took place among them, which ended in two or three wading into the river, contrary, as it appeared, to the earnest remonstrances of the majority, who, finding that their entreaties had no effect, wept aloud, and followed them with a determination, I am sure, of sharing their fate, whatever it might be. As soon as they landed, McLeay and I retired to a little distance from the bank and sat down, that

being the usual way among the natives of the interior, to invite an interview. When they saw we acted thus, they approached and sat down by us, but without looking up, from a kind of diffidence peculiar to them, and which exists even among the nearest relatives. As they gained confidence, however, they showed an excessive curiosity, and stared at us in the most earnest manner. We led them to the camp, and I gave the first who had approached a tomahawk and to the others pieces of hoop-iron. At sunset the majority left us, but three old men remained by the fire all night. Several suffered from disease, but they are undoubtedly a brave and confiding people, and are by no means wanting in natural affection. . . . McLeay's extreme good humour made a most favourable impression upon them. Whether it was from his entering so readily into their mirth, or from anything peculiar that struck them, they apparently took him to have been originally a black, in consequence of which they gave him the name of Rundi. Certain it is they pressed him to show his side, and asked if he had not received a wound there—evidently as if the original Rundi had met with a violent death from a spear wound in that place. The whole tribe, amounting to upwards of a hundred and fifty, assembled to see us take our departure. Four of them accompanied us, among whom there was one remarkable

for personal strength and stature. The 21st passed without our falling in with any new tribe, and the night of the 22nd saw us still wandering in that lonely desert together. There was something unusual in our going through such an extent of country without meeting another tribe, but our companions appeared to be perfectly aware of the absence of inhabitants, as they never left our side."

That night, however, as the four blacks sat round the fire with the man on guard, they suddenly arose and went into the bush. All the evening they had been endeavouring to make something clear to the white men, but the latter could not grasp their meaning, a fact which evidently affected the blacks considerably. Finally, they placed a lot of small sticks in the form of an irregularly barred gridiron, as the white men considered, and when that failed to convince, they retired to the fire, where they sat until they went off in the night. In the morning Sturt was somewhat perplexed at the action, and the explorers hastened to resume their voyage. There was no appearance of the natives up to the time they set sail, and began what was to be the most eventful day's journey of the whole expedition. Describing it, Sturt wrote—

"We were surprised by the appearance in view, at the termination of a reach, of a long line of magnificent trees of green and dense foliage. As

we sailed down the reach, we observed a vast concourse of natives under them, and, on a nearer approach, we not only heard their war-song, if it might so be called, but remarked that they were painted and armed, as they generally are prior to engaging in deadly conflict. Notwithstanding these outward signs of hostility, fancying that our four friends were with them, I continued to steer in for the bank on which they were collected. I found, however, when it was almost too late to turn into the succeeding reach on our left, that an attempt to land would only be attended with loss of life. The natives seemed determined to resist it. We approached so near that they held their spears quivering in their grasp ready to hurl. They were painted in various ways. Some, who had marked their ribs, thighs, and faces with white pigment, looked like skeletons; others were daubed over with red and yellow ochre, and their bodies shone with the grease with which they had besmeared themselves. A dead silence prevailed among the front ranks, but those in the background, as well as the women, who carried supplies of darts, and who appeared to have had a bucket of whitewash capsized over their heads, were extremely clamorous.

“As I did not wish a conflict with these people, I lowered my sail, and, putting the helm to starboard, we passed quietly down the stream in

mid-channel. Disappointed in their anticipations, the natives ran along the bank of the river, endeavouring to secure an aim at us; but, unable to throw with certainty, in consequence of the onward motion of the boat, they flung themselves into the most extravagant attitudes, and worked themselves into a state of frenzy by loud and vehement shouting.

"It was with considerable apprehension that I observed the river to be shoaling fast, more especially as a huge sandbank, a little below us, and on the same side on which the natives had gathered, projected nearly a third way across the channel. To this sandbank they ran with tumultuous uproar, and covered it over in a dense mass. Some of the chiefs advanced to the water to be nearer their victims, and turned from time to time to direct their followers. With a very pacific disposition and an extreme reluctance to take away life, I foresaw that it would be impossible any longer to avoid an engagement, yet with such fearful numbers against us I was doubtful of the result. The spectacle we had witnessed had been one of the most appalling kind, and sufficient to shake the firmness of most men; but at that trying moment my little band preserved their temper and coolness, and if anything could be gleaned from their countenances, it was that they had determined on an obstinate resistance.

"I now explained to them that their only chance of escape depended, or would depend, on their firmness. I desired that after the first volley had been fired, McLeay and three of the men would attend to the defence of the boat with bayonets, while I and two others would keep up the fire. I then delivered their arms to the men, which had, up to that moment, been kept in the place assigned for them, and also gave some rounds of cartridge. Thus prepared, and having lowered the sail, we drifted onwards with the current.

"As we neared the sandbank, I stood up and made signs to the natives to desist, but without success. I took up my gun, therefore, and, cocking it, had already brought it down to a level. A few seconds more would have closed the life of the nearest savage. The distance was too trifling for me to doubt the fatal effects of the discharge, for I was determined to take deadly aim in hopes that the fall of one man might save the lives of many. But at the very moment when my hand was on the trigger and my eye was along the barrel, my purpose was checked by McLeay, who called to me that another party of blacks had made their appearance upon the left bank of the river. Turning round, I observed four men at the top of their speed. The foremost of them, as soon as he got ahead of the boat, threw himself from a considerable height into the

water. He struggled across the channel to the sandbank, and in an incredibly short space of time stood in front of the savage against whom my aim was directed. Seizing him by the throat, he pushed him backwards, and forcing all who were in the water up on the bank, he trod its margin with a vehemence and an agitation that were exceedingly striking. At one moment pointing to the boat, at another shaking his clenched hand in the faces of the most forward, and stamping with passion on the sand until his voice, that was at first clear and distinct, was lost in hoarse murmurs.

"Two of the four natives remained on the left bank of the river, but the third followed his leader (who proved to be the remarkably tall savage I have previously mentioned) to the scene of action.

"We were so wholly lost in interest at the scene that was passing that the boat was allowed to drift at pleasure. For my own part I was overwhelmed with astonishment, and in truth stunned and confused, so singular, so unexpected, and so strikingly providential had been our escape.

"We were again roused to action by the boat suddenly striking upon a shoal which reached from one side of the river to the other. To jump out and push her into deeper water was the work of a moment with the men, and it was just as she floated again that our attention was drawn to a

new and beautiful stream coming apparently from the north. A great body of the natives having posted themselves on the narrow tongue of land formed by the two rivers, the bold savage who had so unhesitatingly interfered on our account was still in hot dispute with them, and I really feared his generous warmth would have brought down upon him the vengeance of the tribes. I hesitated, therefore, whether or not to go to his assistance. It appeared, however, both to McLeay and myself, that the tone of the natives had moderated, and the old and the young men having listened to the remonstrances of our friend, the middle-aged warriors were alone holding out against him. A party of about seventy blacks were upon the right bank of the newly discovered river, and I thought that by landing among them we should make a diversion in favour of our late guides, and in this I succeeded. If even they had still meditated violence they would have to swim the great broad junction, and that would probably cool them, and we at least should have the position of advantage. I therefore ran the boat ashore, and landed with McLeay amidst the smaller party of natives, wholly unarmed, and having directed the men to keep a little distance from the bank. Fortunately, what I anticipated was brought about by the stratagem to which I had had recourse.

"The blacks no sooner observed that we had landed than curiosity took the place of anger. All wrangling ceased, and they came swimming over to us like a parcel of seals. Thus in less than a quarter of an hour from the moment when it appeared that all human intervention was at an end, and we were on the point of commencing a bloody fray which, independently of its own disastrous consequences, would have blasted the success of the expedition, we were peacefully surrounded by the natives who had so lately threatened us with destruction. Nor was it until after we had returned to the boat and had surveyed the multitude upon the sloping bank above us, that we fully became aware of the extent of our danger and of the almost miraculous intervention of Providence in our favour. There could not have been less than six hundred natives upon that blackened sward."

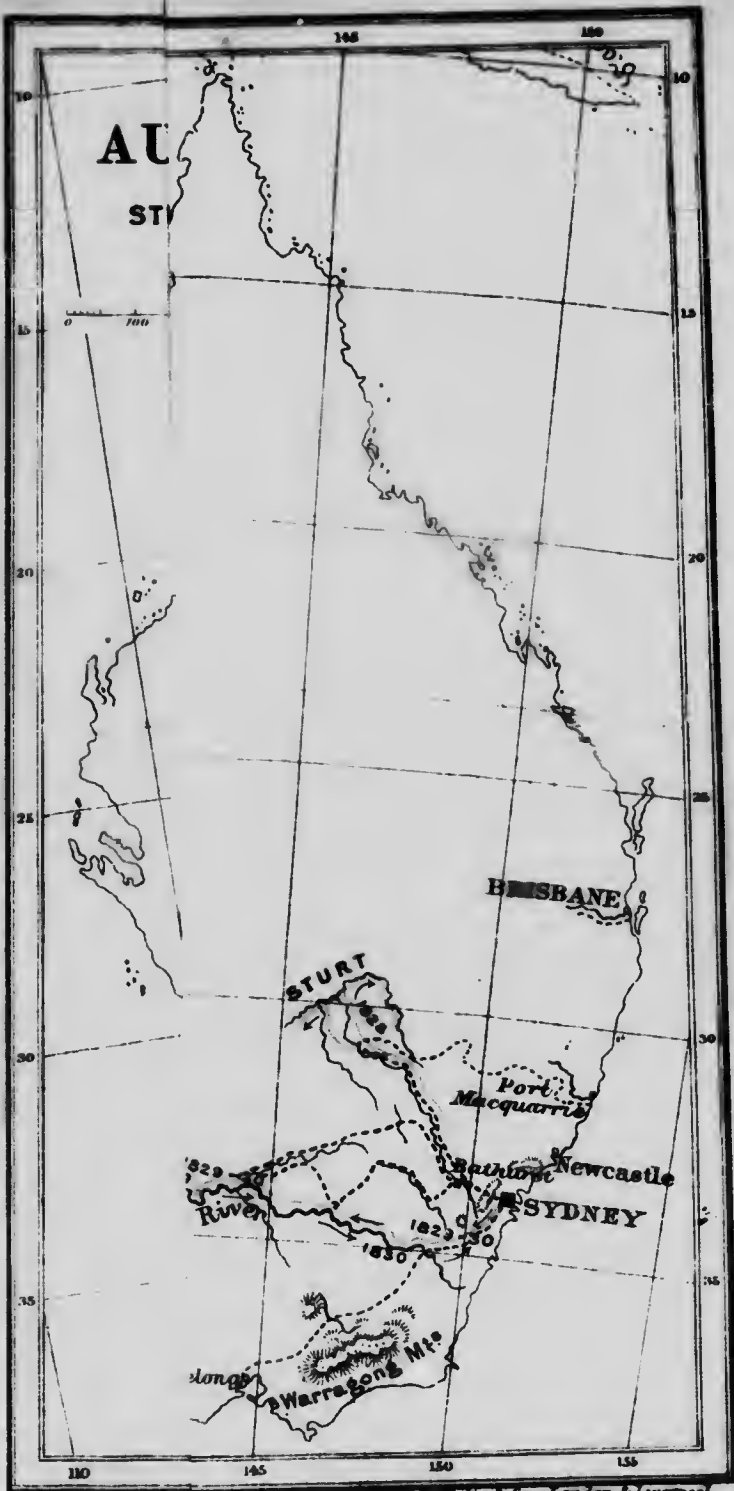
The explorers gave numerous presents to the man who had so boldly come to their assistance, and the sight of the iron tomahawks and other articles given to him aroused the envy of the other chiefs, all of whom clamoured for presents also. But Sturt resolutely declined to give them any, signifying by signs that his refusal was in consequence of their former hostility.

Pushing off from the bank, Sturt ordered the men to row up the newly discovered stream. At

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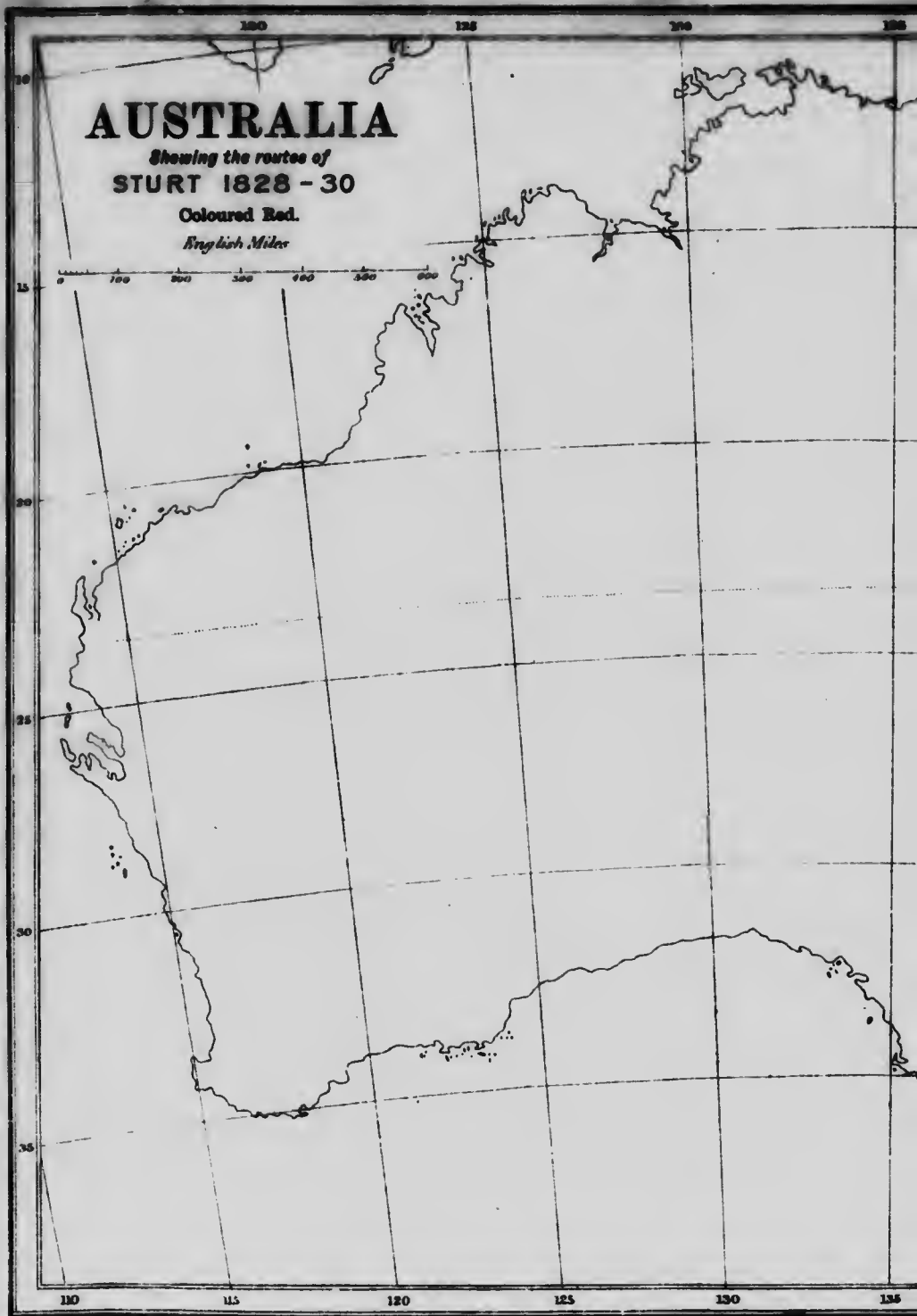
first only one pair of oars was used, but the current being very strong, a second pair had to be employed. The blacks crowded along the banks watching the boat, and when they saw the extra oars put out they gave a great shout, gesticulating to one another, and pointing to the oars in astonishment. The river continued over a hundred yards wide for some miles, and was some twelve feet deep. Further progress was stopped because Sturt saw in front a fishing-net fixed right across the stream, and, with the consideration he always evinced for the natives, he would not allow it to be disturbed. The banks sloped to the water's edge, and were covered by trees of magnificent size and foliage, the appearance of the stream recalling the rivers of England more forcibly than any the explorers had yet seen. Sturt was convinced in his own mind, and rightly, that the stream was none other than the Darling, which he had discovered on his previous journey to the interior, and to honour it, he had the Union Jack hoisted to the mast-head, while the boat's company stood up and gave three cheers.

The appearance of the flag and the sound of the cheering had an extraordinary effect upon the natives. All their hubbub instantly ceased, and they stood staring in open-mouthed wonder as the boat swung round in the tide, and, the wind filling the sail, passed rapidly down to the main stream



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and out of sight. The speed surprised even the white men; to the blacks it must have been inexplicable.

But although they passed so rapidly away from the assembled blacks, they did not escape from them. When at sundown they landed on the bank to make their camp for the night, they saw seven blacks within a short distance of them. The natives did not attempt to approach the white men's camp until they were called, when they came up diffidently. They were at once recognized as having been with the big crowd met at the mouth of the Darling, and made no attempt to deny the fact when asked by signs. They further explained, by signs, that they were to accompany the white men down the river until the boundary of the next tribe was reached, when they would hand them over to the chiefs for free passage to the next tribe, who would do the same, and so on, until the end of their journey.

At first Sturt and his companions were inclined to believe they had misunderstood the signs, but subsequent events confirmed their reading. The white men, on their journey down the river, were passed from tribe to tribe. They did not stay anywhere long enough for the natives to develop any unfriendly sentiments, although often enough it was difficult to get away from them. On the return journey, however, with one exception, they

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would have been better pleased to have had the safeguard of the native embassies.

The country on either side of the Murray, after passing the Darling, continued very much as it had been before. Several sandbanks were sailed past, which were as large and long as though they had been thrown up on a seashore, and occasional timber-snags were noticed in the stream, though not in such numbers as had been the case in the Murrumbidgee. As the stock of provisions was now considerably smaller than when they started from the depôt, the skiff was of little use to them, and as it was rather a drag upon the whale-boat, Sturt decided to break it up. The boards were burned in order to obtain all the nails and copper, both of which were particularly useful articles for trading to the natives for fish. The white men with their lines could only catch one sort of fish (the Murray cod), but the natives were able to secure several others. The facility with which they procured them was surprising. "They would slip feet foremost into the water as they walked along the bank of the river, as if they had accidentally done so, but in reality to avoid the splash they would necessarily have made if they had plunged in head first. As surely as they disappeared under the surface of the water so surely would they reappear with a fish writhing upon the point of their short spears." (Sturt's "Two Expeditions.")

The explorers were astounded at the number of tribes (rarely less than a hundred members, and often nearly three hundred) met with along the banks. The men, as a rule, were finely made fellows, though many were suffering from horrible diseases, but in the case of the women disease was shockingly rampant, and in most of the children it was manifest. Possibly because they had been warned in advance, the tribes showed little or no fear at the report of firearms, and once when Sturt shot a bird on the wing away above them, so that it fell dead in their midst, they scarcely glanced at it. He was able to obtain some shadowy information as to the country lying back from the river, but the party had passed the latitude of St. Vincent's Gulf on the south coast before they obtained any suggestion that they were approaching the sea.

February found them still sailing and drifting with the current, which soon, however, turned away from the west to the south, and they at last heard definitely that the ocean was ahead of them. Some days were yet to elapse before they found the water beneath them grow salt, and then they had the booming sound of surges ringing in their ears. The river widened out into what appeared to be a magnificent lake-like harbour—but it was shallow. Sturt knew by his bearings that he was in the neighbourhood of Encounter Bay, on the coast of what is now South Australia, and he

marvelled that no one who had explored that part of the coast had seen the mouth of the Murray. His own experience explained his wonder. Even from the inside he could only find one opening from the lake, which he named Lake Alexandrina, to the ocean, and that was too shallow and wave-swept for his boat to sail through.

As they tacked from side to side of the lake, groups of natives were gathered at each point of the shore they approached, and it was evident that there was no communication between these coastal tribes and those along the course of the Murray. Signs of active hostility greeted their appearance, and no efforts the white men were able to make had any effect in pacifying the anger of the blacks. The land lying at the back of the shores, moreover, appeared barren and sandy from the boat, and on February 18 Sturt turned the course towards the head of the lake and once more entered the Murray.

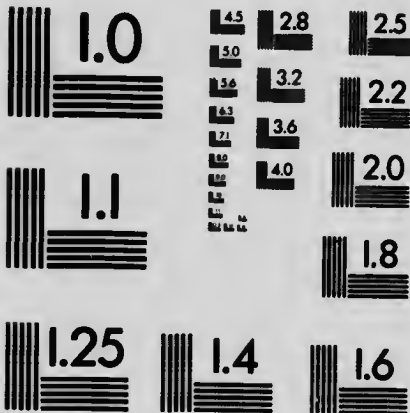
With the steady current against them, there was only one way of progressing; the boat would have to be rowed the whole distance back to the depôt on the Murrumbidgee. In ordinary circumstances the undertaking would have been severe, for the heat of the climate was very trying, and the distance to be covered was over two thousand miles; but situated as the explorers were, the task was one which might well have disheartened

them. The loss sustained to their stores by the sinking of the skiff on the Murrumbidgee was sternly brought home to them now, for the last of the salt meat was consumed, and only flour remained on which to subsist until they reached the depôt, and a purely farinaceous diet is not the most sustaining on which to row for eight or ten hours a day against a heavy current and under a broiling sun. So freely did the men perspire that their clothes were as wet as if they had fallen overboard, and the consequent strain still further reduced their strength. Added to these difficulties, they found that the blacks along the banks were not so peacefully inclined as they had been when the native messengers preceded the advance of the white men. The desire to retain possession of the men, the boat, and its contents, was frequently manifested, and only by constant watchfulness were the traps and ambushes laid for them avoided by Sturt and his companions. Occasionally matters assumed so threatening an aspect that a fight seemed imminent; but the tact and courage Sturt and McLeay always displayed enabled the use of force to be dispensed with. As they approached the junction of the Darling, there were some misgivings on the part of the white men in case there should be a repetition of the previous brush with the natives. Heavy rain was falling at the time, and instead of the army of warriors, only a few families



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were gathered on the grassy banks, and they sat shivering under their gunyahs.

There were rapids two days' journey higher up the river. On the downward journey the boat had swept over them at a great pace, but to pull it up, weakened and overworked as they were, was almost beyond the powers of the men. As they toiled and struggled, blacks appeared on the bank above them, one of whom displayed the magnificent proportions of the chief who had already done them such good service. Sturt signalled to him, and he, with several of his warriors, at once came to the boat in light flimsy bark canoes, which they propelled with their long thin spears, used either as a pole or a paddle, and which bent double under the efforts of the natives to give the white men every ounce of their assistance. By their help, generously given, the boat was brought up over the rapids, and such presents as Sturt could give were lavished on the natives, whose conduct had always been so good, and whose services so valuable, and who, moreover, formed the exception to the general rule of treachery and greed displayed by the other tribes along the course of the river.

By the time the party reached the Murrumbidgee they were almost exhausted, and only the hope of finding food and succour at the depôt kept them up, and enabled them to mechanically swing

their oars in the rowlocks. One fidgeted as he sat, and talked incoherently of events that had never transpired; but the rest only watched that he did no harm to himself and them, and stuck doggedly to their task.

At last they saw the depôt, and put forward their remaining strength to reach it—and found it empty.

It was impossible to row further. Only two had strength enough to go forward on foot and try to reach the nearest station, over eighty miles away. They set out with a few days' rations of flour, and the remainder made a camp at the depôt to wait. The depôt was reached on April 8; on April 10 the two men set out to try and reach the station. On April 18 the last ration of flour was eaten; the specimens collected and the notes of the trip were buried by a marked tree, and the worn and wearied explorers crossed the stream to make one final struggle to get as near help as they could. Scarcely had they landed on the other side when shouts attracted their attention, and, looking back, they saw white men at the depôt. The two men had intercepted a party coming out with stores, and had reached the river just in time.

Thus terminated what is, perhaps, the most brilliant trip ever undertaken by an Australian explorer. Whatever discoveries were subsequently made in that part of the continent where the

Murray flows, were directly the outcome of Sturt's magnificent qualities of courage, resource, and leadership manifested on this occasion. Those who followed his footsteps, for many years sought to draw upon themselves the honour and glory which were indisputably his—a fact which later years only tend to confirm, and in so doing, strip the pilfered laurels from names which never earned them, to lay them, with added homage, on the memory of heroic Sturt.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROMANCE OF A BUSHRANGER.

THE success attendant on Sturt's efforts, and his verification of Hume's discovery of a magnificent waterway flowing to the west and south, roused the fervour of the colonists for exploration to a higher pitch than it had yet reached. The inland sea theory was rapidly waning, and in its place came stories, more or less fantastic, of stately streams flowing in all directions. An escaped convict named George Clarke, but better known by his nickname of "the Barber," had, in taking to the bush, fraternized with the natives until, in course of years, he was more a black fellow than a white man. Unfortunately, the little that remained of his civilized nature prompted him to use his savage allies as a means of retaliation upon the white settlers, until cattle-stealing and more serious offences became so numerous in the district he infested that the somewhat dilatory central authority was compelled to move in the

matter, and "the Barber" was brought back to civilization as a captive.

His return occurred about the time when the colony was bubbling over with enthusiasm for exploration, and "the Barber," with typical cunning, put forward a specious story of a tremendous river he had followed for hundreds of miles from the interior to an obscure inlet on the northern coast. He was very clear in giving the exact position where he had first come upon the river, "Kindur," as he said the blacks termed it, and even gave the native names of various hills and ranges that had to be crossed to reach it. No one had been in the part of the country to which he referred, but after the extraordinary discovery of the Murray, the people, as well as those in authority, were prepared to believe anything, and they believed the story of the "Kindur."

Although the Murray was only known from the junction of the Murrumbidgee to the sea; although the Darling was unknown save where it joined the Murray and for a short distance hundreds of miles to the north; while the Lachlan was still assumed to end in a bed of reeds; the men in authority turned away from the legitimate work of exploring these great and known waterways, and fitted out an expedition—to survey the "Kindur." The then Surveyor-General, Major, subsequently Sir, Thomas Mitchell, was placed in charge of the

party, which numbered in all some eighteen men, and was splendidly fitted out with stores, carts, boats, and other articles, necessary and otherwise.

On November 24, 1831, the expedition started from Sydney, round which settlement now extended to a radius of three hundred miles. On reaching the outskirts of settlement, a shortage was discovered in certain stores, and one of the assistants, with a dray and two men, were sent back to make up the deficiency, and follow on the track of the advance.

The immediate locality into which they were penetrating had already been roughly explored by Allan Cunningham, who was one of Oxley's party on the Lachlan and Macquarrie, and who, since that period, had roamed over enormous tracts of country, and made many valuable discoveries in collecting and studying Australian botany. On December 16, when Mitchell came on a fairly large river, he had no difficulty in identifying it as the Namoi (named by Cunningham), and in the vicinity he found a rough stockyard, which had been built by "the Barber" for the storing of stolen cattle, the bones of which, scattered on all sides round the remains of native huts, showing plainly enough to what use the settlers' bullocks had been put. Three days later the party was among spurs and ridges of the Nundowar range, one of "the

Barber's" landmarks, and the name of which was verified by a black fellow.

The country was very bad for travelling, and while Mitchell was looking out for a good track for the drays, he chanced upon an old aboriginal woman, who was "a most miserable specimen of our race—a figure shortened and shrunk with age and entirely without clothing—one eye alone peering from the dim decay of nature, and several large fleshy excrescences projecting from the side of her head like so many ears, and her jaw-bone visible from a gash or scar on one side of her chin. Her withered arms and hands, covered with earth from digging and scraping for the snakes and worms on which she fed, more resembled the limbs and claws of a quadruped." (Mitchell's "Journals.")

Failing to get any information out of the creature (who was the first wild native they had come in contact with), the explorers left the ranges and returned to the river, where they determined to use the canvas boats carried in the drays. On December 23 the country all around was set on fire by the natives, of whom, however, none were seen, and on December 26 two of the boats started to explore the river. Naturally the stream was full of snags, and naturally the canvas boats could offer no resistance to the sharp jagged points of submerged trees. When they had both

been swamped time and again, Mitchell decided, after giving a day to dry the provisions stored in the boats, to abandon the voyage.

Returning to the drays, another attempt was made to force a way over the broken country near the range. Four days after leaving the Namoi a tribe of natives was encountered, but Mitchell did not seem to have possessed the tact which characterized many of the other explorers when dealing with the blacks. The only result of the attempted intercourse was to send the blacks off with every token of anger, and the explorers continued the way through the difficult country. Water was soon an object of much interest, for as they went further from the river, they found it more hard to discover, until almost a crisis was reached when for two days they had been without any. The appearance, on January 9, of another stream crossing their path was a great relief, and in order to allow the cattle to recuperate somewhat, a day's halt was called on the banks of the stream, which was recognized as the Gwydir, also discovered and named by Allan Cunningham.

While his party was resting, Mitchell crossed the stream on horseback. Seeing a kangaroo among the tall grass, he was riding towards it when he saw an armed native also approaching it. "On observing me he stood and stared for a moment, then took one step back, and, swinging his

right arm in the air, he poised one of his spears, and stood stretched out in an attitude to throw. He was a tall man, covered with pipe-clay, and his position of defiance, as he could never have before seen a horse, was manly enough. But it was not prudent to retire at that moment, although I was most anxious to avoid a quarrel. I therefore galloped my horse on to the native, which had the desired effect, for he immediately turned and disappeared at a dog-trot among the bushes." (Mitchell's "Journals.") It was scarcely to be wondered at that later in the day the natives collected on the far side of the stream, beating their spears and shouting "witefeller," in evident challenge for a fight. But as they did not attempt to cross the stream they were not fired on.

As it was necessary to get well behind the Nundowar Range, according to "the Barber," to reach the "Kindur," Mitchell proposed to follow the Gwydir for some distance as that promised to bring them nearer their desired locality. On their way they came upon a particularly interesting native village, of which Mitchell gave the following description:—

"In crossing one hollow we passed many huts of a native tribe. They were tastefully distributed amongst drooping acacia and casuarina. Some resembled bowers under the yellow fragrant mimosa; some were isolated under the deeper

shades of the casuarina, while others were placed, some socially, three or four together, fronting to one and the same hearth. Each hut was semi-circular, or circular, the roof conical, and from one side a flat roof stood forward like a portico, supported by two sticks. Most of them were close to the trunk of a tree, and they were covered, not as in other parts, by a sheet of bark, but with a variety of materials, such as reeds, grass, and boughs. The interior of each looked clean, and to us passing in the rain, gave some idea not only of shelter, but even of comfort and happiness."

The state of the country generally was very unfavourable for travelling. For two days the teams were toiling to drag the drays through the heavy sodden soil of flats, three hours being occupied in moving two miles; and within the next few days every one was searching for water to give the parched animals. The appearance of yet another river crossing their course on January 22 was the cause of considerable rejoicing on the part of the men, but it was a serious comment upon the discretion of the Government in accepting the fanciful story of the great river as told by the bushranger Clarke. The position in which it was found and the direction of its flow, gave the lie direct to the reported existence of the "Kindur," and Mitchell took advantage of the

opportunity to await the arrival of the extra stores, which were already needed by the men.

Limited journeys were also made along the river, of which the native name was Karaula, but which afterwards turned out to be the Darling, discovered by Sturt. The Gwydir and the Namoi were both found to be tributaries to the Darling, the waters of which were fresh in some places and salt in others. The exploring party pushed on as far as the spot where Sturt had reached, and found the water quite salt there, although above and below it became fresh.

It was not until February 6 that anything was heard of the expected load of provisions. On that day, one of the three men—the assistant, Finch—reached the camp on foot and alone. The story he brought with him effectually put an end to further search being made for the mythical "Kindur." He had gone on in front of the dray and the two men to ascertain the quality of the country and the distance to water ahead. They should have overtaken him at his camp, but as they did not, he rode back. He found the dray turned over, the contents rifled and scattered, and, under a heap of articles carelessly thrown together, the dead bodies of the two men. Blacks had surprised them, murdered them, and robbed them.

Taking some salt pork and some flour, Finch hurried away along the track of the main body,

travelling by day, and sleeping by night without a fire lest the gleam of it should attract the blacks to him, and cause him to share the fate of his late companions. Without any knowledge how near or how far the main body might be, he could only push forward, trusting to luck to overtake them and escape from the black fellows' spears.

Mitchell at once started away with a small party to the scene of the murder, finding it just as Finch had described. The men had evidently been attacked while sleeping, and their skulls battered in, after which the blacks had looted the stores. That they were wild was shown by the way they neglected to touch either the tea, sugar, or tobacco, articles to which the half-civilized native was especially partial. All that could be done, therefore, was to bury the remains of the two men, and to collect whatever remained of the stores, and return to the main camp. In the minds of the men a hatred was slumbering against the natives for the murder of their two sleeping comrades, and, given a fair occasion for punishment, the tribes would have suffered harshly at their hands. But no such occasion arose, the conduct of the natives being exemplary all the way back to the settled country. They, however, were duly warned of the approach of the white men, for, as Mitchell wrote in his "Journals : " " When we reached the head of the highest slope near the place, a dense

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column of smoke ascended from Mount Frazer, and subsequently other smokes rose, extending in a telegraphic line far to the south along the base of the mountains, thus communicating to the natives who might be upon our route the tidings of our return."

CHAPTER IX.

MITCHELL AMONG THE MYALLS.

THE complete overthrow of "the Barber's" fanciful tale brought home to those in authority the folly of heeding the wild unsupported statements of escaped convicts, while treating with almost indifference brilliant discoveries of new topographical features. But the Australian world of the day was terribly narrow, so narrow, indeed, that there was no room for any save the leading stars to shine; and all who were sufficiently foolish or unfortunate to display capabilities which would have more become the superior than the inferior, sooner or later found it convenient to remove, while the former stayed on and basked in the glory others had won. To the curious about such things, a connection may be manifest between the haste with which the Surveyor-General of the colony started away across partly explored country to chase the phantom of a condemned man's brain (Clarke, at the time of telling the tale of the "greatest" river, was under sentence of death,

but was reprieved), and the sceptical, almost contemptuous, tone in which he criticized Sturt's discoveries and sought to discredit his deductions. The reported saltiness of the Darling at one place, and its freshness where it entered the Murray, as well as the suggestion that it *did* enter the Murray, were sources of practically indignant protest by Mitchell—until, in his search for the "Kindur," he found part of the statement true, and by his own exploration demonstrated the correctness of the other surmise.

Three years, however, were allowed to go by before another expedition was fitted out to trace the Darling down from its junction with the Gwydir, the Namoi, the Castlereagh, and the Bogan (Sturt's New Year Creek) to its junction with the Murray—as claimed by Sturt.

On March 9, 1835, Mitchell started at the head of a finely equipped party, comprising two assistants (one of whom was Richard Cunningham, brother of Allan, the companion of Oxley, and discoverer of much new country) and twenty-one men. In one month they had progressed sufficiently to reach the plains which stretched away from the Macquarrie swamps to the Darling, their chief difficulty being occasional scarcity of water. On April 17, as they were nearing the valley of the Bogan, the supply of water was more than usually scanty, and Mitchell rode on ahead,

searching for some to which he could have the parching bullocks led. Returning to the main body after a fruitless search, he was told that Cunningham had set out after him, and had not been seen since. As, however, Cunningham was in the habit of riding off by himself, no particular attention was paid to the matter, and Mitchell again started out in search of water, this time finding some about three miles away, to which the cattle were at once led. Further examination showed that the water was at the junction of the dry creek the explorers had been following and the Bogan; and Mitchell, leaving the cattle to pass the night by the water, rode back to the main camp, reaching there about eleven o'clock at night. Cunningham was still absent, but as he might have gone further than he intended and camped for the night, no special anxiety was felt.

As he did not appear in the morning, a gun was fired every few minutes and a bugle blown, up to eleven o'clock, at which hour the cattle came up from the water, and the teams being yoked to the drays, camp was moved down to the water-hole. It was now believed that Cunningham would pick up the track and follow the main body to the new camp; but as the day passed and he did not appear, some uneasiness began to be experienced. The following morning, April 19, there was still no sign of the missing man, who had now been away

two days and two nights, probably without either food or water.

An active search was then instituted, and for days was kept up without avail, until, on April 23, two of the men found his track where they had first looked, and on April 28 his dead horse, his gloves, whip, and some other oddments. Then his track, which had been inexplicably missed on April 19, was followed carefully out and mapped, so that every turn he had taken was known up to an area of bare hard earth, which had taken no impression of his footsteps. It was seen how he had ridden out and back to within a mile of the main track; how his horse had been tied to a sapling while he lay down and slept; how the horse had snapped its bridle and set off in search of water by itself; and how its master, when he awakened, had first wandered in search of his horse, had then satisfied his hunger on a dog he had with him, and finally had walked away in a straight line towards the distant course of the river, until his footsteps reached the hard earth, when they vanished. For seventy miles his track was followed, winding one way and another; it had crossed those of the men searching for him, and he had followed them sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly.

The next clue was furnished by two natives some of the men met, and who made sign, that a white man had gone down the Bogan in company

with several myalls, or wild blacks. A careful examination of the sandy river-bed revealed Cunningham's tracks, and beside them the imprint of a naked foot. They were lost for a time, although when first discovered it was plainly shown how he had almost leaped across one patch of sand to a pool of water, and had thrown himself down to drink. On April 30, thirteen days after his disappearance, Cunningham's tracks were again found in company with those of black fellows', and as the men were pressing forward, their attention was arrested by a singular phenomenon. Suddenly a dense cloud of smoke rose over the bush away to the south. Believing that it might be a signal from the missing explorer, Mitchell and one man at once rode hard towards it, when they were amazed to see it cease as suddenly as it began. They rode on, but could neither hear nor see a human being in the vicinity.

The next day they came upon the remains of a fire and some burnt mussel-shells, the track still leading on. The following day two natives, one named Tackijally, being able to speak a little broken English, were brought in. Tackijally was wearing an old silk handkerchief which the men fancied had belonged to Cunningham, but this was shown to be an error. Whether the sudden outburst of smoke had anything to do with the matter, or whether the ceremony which occurred

on May 2 had any significance in connection with it, cannot be said, but Cunningham was already dead, and at the hands of the blacks. The story, as subsequently learned, was that the blacks had found him wandering without food, and had fed him and kept him with them, treating him kindly until, possibly from worry and anxiety, or possibly only in their imagination, he became deranged, and terrified them. Fearful lest he should harm them or theirs, they quickly killed him, and in all probability disposed of his body by cannibal rites.

On May 2, probably about the time of Cunningham's death, Tackijally and his comrade came to Mitchell, and induced him to follow them down the stream.

"I rode with the natives, at their request, towards some point lower down. There, by their coo-ees and looks, they seemed to be very anxious about somebody in the bush beyond the Bogan. At length a man of mild but pensive countenance, athletic form, and apparently about fifty years of age, came forth, leading a very fine boy, so dressed with green boughs that only his head and legs remained uncovered, a few emu feathers being mixed with the wild locks of his hair. I received him in this appropriate costume as the personification of the green bough or emblem of peace.

"One large feather decked the brow of the chief,

which, with his nose, was tinted with yellow ochre. Having presented the boy to me, he next advanced with much formality towards the camp, having Tackijally on his right, the boy walking between and rather in advance of both, each having a hand on his shoulder. The boy's face wore a holiday look of gladness, but the chief remained so solemn and serious, but without any symptoms of alarm, that my recollection of him then, and as he appeared the next day when he was better acquainted with us, is as of two distinct personages."

The boy was called Talambe Nadoo, but he was not the son of the chief, who, however, took particular care of him. The tribe gloried in being recognized as myalls, or wild black fellows, and it was observed that during the ceremony of presenting the bough-clad boy to Mitchell, all the natives except those actively engaged in the presentation rigidly kept out of sight and sound.

Two days later Mitchell had another opportunity of observing some curious native signals, but as he did not know of Cunningham's death at the time, it never occurred to him to connect the phenomena he observed with any ill-treatment of the missing explorer by the blacks. As the party was slowly moving along its course, further search for Cunningham being considered quite useless, a range of hills was seen which Mitchell believed to be the range named Mount Granard by Oxley.

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Proceeding to the top with some of the men, he was surprised to see smoke ascending from the very summit, which, however, was so covered with sharp stones that it was found impossible to urge the horses to the spot from where the smoke was rising. No blacks were to be seen, but as they turned their gaze round the horizon, a similar long thin column of smoke was seen rising from every eminence within sight.

They travelled for forty miles that day, neither seeing nor hearing a black, but as soon as they lay down to sleep, they heard fire crackling in the bush close at hand, and were compelled to mount guard all night in consequence. Nothing, however, came to disturb them, but almost immediately they started in the morning, they entered a burning mass of forest. It was evident, by the way the fire was burning in various places, that the natives had intended the blaze to spread as quickly as possible. Huge trees fell now and then with a crashing sound as loud as thunder, while others were swaying just ready to fall. The country was open forest (tree-covered, with grass growing between the trees), and the smoke rolled along in vast clouds, adding considerably to the impressiveness of the scene. For five miles they rode through such surroundings, expecting every moment to come upon a body of hostile blacks. The want of water was beginning to tell on the

horses, and as there seemed to be none nearer than the camp on the river, they had to push onward. Three young natives were met, one of whom ran away, but the other two remained stolidly working at their task, which was to grub up the roots of trees and cut them into lengths in order to extract the moisture. Mitchell gave a tomahawk to one, and he took it, resuming his work without more than a glance at the white men.

On rejoining the main party Mitchell ordered a general advance, the black Tackijally accompanying them as guide, and explaining to them that before approaching water they must always signal in case there were blacks camped there, so as to avoid alarming them. The ignoring of this hint was productive of almost fatal consequences a few days later. One of the men, seeing a water-hole between the trees, hastened towards it. A black fellow was sitting at a fire beside it, and as the white man came suddenly upon him, he threw his boomerangs and a fire-stick at the intruder. A boomerang struck the white man on the leg, and the pain of the blow made him at once raise his gun and fire. The black ran off, screaming and bleeding, straight in the direction where Mitchell was taking observations, and so was secured and prevented from raising the rest of the tribe to battle. As it was, Mitchell had him taken to the

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camp, where his wounds were dressed and attended to, after which he was given food and presents, and left the camp apparently very well satisfied with his adventure.

On May 25 they came upon a river which was at once recognized as the Karaula or Darling, and Mitchell had a stockade erected, intending to proceed down the river with some of the men in the boats, while the animals, the drays, and the remainder of the men, stayed behind in the permanent camp. But the first trip in the boats showed that the river was too full of rocky ledges between the reaches for safe travelling, and the party returned to the camp, which was broken up as the journey overland was resumed. It was found, at the point where they came upon it, that the river was only two hundred and fifty feet above sea level, although a flow of some hundreds of miles had to be covered before it reached the Murray, which again was many hundred miles from the ocean.

Proceeding down the Darling, the explorers met several tribes of natives in the region where Sturt journeyed. But the tribes only numbered a few individuals, all of whom were marked as if with small-pox, the disease which Sturt had noticed as being so prevalent amongst them during the dry season when he was there, having evidently been terribly fatal. In one instance five blacks

met them, and made signs that six summers before they had seen other white men, but that since then all the other members of the tribe had died, and the five alone remained. As this meeting occurred near the spot where the Darling suddenly became salt, it was probable that the five were the surviving remnant of the powerful tribe Sturt had encountered, and whose village contained seventy huts.

Lower down the stream, Mitchell and his men found the tribes more numerous — and more troublesome. There was no evidence that they had ever seen white men before, and when the preliminary ceremonies of introduction were over, they manifested a curiosity that was by no means pleasing. The white men's clothes and boots puzzled them considerably, and they could not always understand very easily that underneath the clothes there was the man; they rather inclined to the belief that the clothes were actually part of the man. The existence of pockets was a never-failing source of amusement to them, and as soon as one hand came out another went in, until a man was busy rescuing whatever he had in his pockets from the inquisitive hands. From examining the clothes the blacks turned to the stores, and a rigid guard had to be maintained to prevent everything that was movable being carried off time and again. But

the meetings usually passed off with good humour on both sides, and the blacks ultimately retired very happy with one or two metal tomahawks and some iron nails.

No instance of direct hostility from the blacks occurred until June 27, when they had succeeded in passing down the river for some two hundred miles. Mitchell described the occurrence, a curious one, as follows:—

“A man came in to report that a native had pointed a spear at him when he was on the river bank with the sheep. On his holding out a green bough, the man had also taken a bough, spit upon it, and then thrust it into the fire. On hastening to the spot with three men, I found the native still there, no way daunted; and on my advancing towards him with a twig, he shook another twig at me white in a new style, waving it over his head, and at the same time intimating with it that we must go back. He and the boy then threw up dust at us, in a clever way, with their toes. . . . We were seated in the usual form about one hundred yards from him, and the savage held a spear, raised, in his hand. At length he retired along the river bank, making it evident by his gestures that he was going for his tribe, and singing a war-song as he went, the boy in particular seeming to glory in throwing up the dust at us.

"About half-past four in the afternoon a party of the tribe made their appearance in the same quarter, holding out boughs, but according to a very different ceremonial from any hitherto observed towards us by the aborigines. They used the most violent and expressive gestures, apparently to induce us to go back whence we had come. I again advanced, bearing a green branch on high, but the repulsive gestures then becoming much more violent than before, I stopped at some distance from the party. The work which the blacksmith was doing at the portable forge by the river bank seemed to excite their curiosity, and two men crept up to them. Hearing at length much laughter, I concluded a truce had been effected, and walked forward with my branch. But on going to the spot, I found that all the laughter came from our party, the natives having refused to sit down, and continuing to wave their branches in our people's faces, having also repeatedly spit at them, the whole of which conduct was good-naturedly borne in hopes of establishing a more amicable intercourse. As a peace-offering, I presented the man, who appeared to be the leader, with a tomahawk, the use of which he immediately guessed by turning to a log and chopping it. Two other stout fellows (our morning visitor being one of them) then rudely demanded my pistols from my belt, whereupon I

drew one, and, curious to see the effect, fired it at a tree.

"The scene which followed I cannot satisfactorily describe or represent, although I shall never forget it. As if they had previously suspected we were evil demons, and had at length a clear proof of it, they repeated their gesticulations of defiance with tenfold fury, and accompanied the action with demoniac looks, hideous shouts, and a war-song—crouching, jumping, spitting, springing with the spear, and throwing dust at us, as they slowly retired. In short, their hideous crouching postures, measured gestures, slow jumps, all to the tune of a wild song, with the fiendish glare of their countenances, at times all black, but now all eyes and teeth, seemed a fitter spectacle for pandemonium. Thus the savages retired slowly along the river bank, all the while dancing in a circle like the witches in *Macbeth*, and leaving us in expectation of their return, and perhaps an attack in the morning. Any further attempt to appease them was out of the question."

They returned the next afternoon, and were much more peaceably inclined, allowing Mitchell to meet them without any repetition of the previous day's performance. But it was soon evident that their real object in coming was to obtain a closer view of the forge, for as soon as the formalities of meeting were over, they drifted

over to that part of the river bank where the blacksmith was working. Directly they arrived they began stealing everything they could put their hands on, never heeding if any of the other men were watching them, so long as the blacksmith did not see. They evidently considered he was the only person affected, and objected to any one else checking them. They used their toes as easily as their fingers, and would look the blacksmith straight in the face, with their hands in front of them, while laying hold of a piece of iron with their toes, and passing it to a comrade behind them. At last one of them tried to take up a file from off the forge, and the blacksmith, growing impatient, pushed the delinquent as he took the file from him. At once the native flung dust up with his feet, started the war-chant and danced, spitting and dust-throwing and scowling, round the blacksmith. The example, however, was not followed by the others, who were still too busy trying to steal. They were closely watched and checked ; but after they had departed, peacefully, it was discovered they had carried with them some of the forge tools, as well as some odd pieces of iron.

When, a day later, the party resumed the march, this tribe suddenly reappeared, painted and armed, and sang their war-songs and danced their war-dance as the white men passed along,

but made no other attempt at molestation. Mitchell rode on without heeding them, and during the day they were left far behind. For a week few natives were seen, but on July 6 a small tribe was encountered whose actions were also unusual. Mitchell wrote:—

“Nine natives approached the party while on the march, and appeared very well disposed, frank, and without fear. They carried no weapons. While we halted, I perceived through my glass a party of about seventeen on a small eminence near the river bank, and nine others, whom I supposed to be those who had been with us, joined them, upon which a large fire was made under the trees. Around this fire I distinctly saw them dance for nearly half an hour, their bodies being hideously painted white, so as to resemble skeletons. I am rather inclined to suppose, considering the circumstances under which the tribe higher up danced, that it was connected with some dark superstition resorted to, perhaps, in the present instance, either to allay fear or to inspire courage. I saw several gins carrying children in cloaks on their backs, some of whom, and several of the children also, danced.”

Although this small body manifested only peaceful intentions, the explorers were soon to have reason to doubt whether their manifestations



MEETING THE MYALLS.

were correctly interpreted. But before having that unpleasant experience, they came upon still further signs of the fatal sickness which had recently visited the tribes in the vicinity. After crossing some sandy ground, they came on a hill near the banks of the river. Ascending it, they found three large tombs on the summit, each of which was twelve feet long, five feet high, and oval in shape, and stood in the centre of an artificial hollow. The top of each mound or tomb was covered with withered branches; the ground on the top of the hill and all around the tombs was barren and bare, save for one dead tree, the branches of which hung over the tombs, forming a dreary but appropriate foreground to the boundless level expanse of wooded country which spread as far as the eye could reach.

At the base of the hill the river took a sharp turn, and near this they found the ruins of a native village. One group of huts had fallen into utter decay, but on the side of the hill there were several, the thatched roofs of which were still intact. One hut in particular attracted Mitchell's attention. It was large enough to comfortably accommodate fifteen persons, and the roof was cut away at one side so that the smoke from the fire (the ashes of which still lay on the ground) could escape, while yet every one in the hut could share the warmth. In it there were large bundles

of wild flax, half prepared for the making of nets, but which had been lying so long as to have decayed. The village had probably been the home of the tribe for whom the mounds on the hill had been raised.

Continuing their journey, on July 8 they came upon a large lagoon, which they at first took to be the river. They also came upon a number of natives at the same place, to whom, in accordance with their usual custom, the white men gave tomahawks and similar gifts, and the blacks retired. But only for a time. The following morning they returned, bringing with them several more, and all at once began to beg or steal whatever they saw. They followed the men on the march, constantly worrying the drivers of the drays, who could scarcely heed their teams, so incessant were the attempts made by the blacks to steal even the yokes off the bullocks. Matters looked so threatening that Mitchell was careful to select a site for the camp suitable for defence. The cattle were showing such signs of distress that a day or so of rest was absolutely necessary; but even as the camp was being formed, the numbers of the blacks steadily increased, the new arrivals approaching the camp without any of the usual ceremonies. To impress them Mitchell ordered one of the men to shoot a crow which was flying over their heads; but as soon as the bird fell, the

chief dashed off to catch it before it struck the ground. A clasp-knife was given to another, and he at once tested its use by cutting through one of the tent ropes, which he tried to purloin. As he was prevented, he flung his fire-stick into the tent.

At length they succeeded in getting the blacks out of the camp, when two old men performed a ceremony outside. "They moved slowly in opposite directions round the camp, one waving a green branch over his head and occasionally shaking it violently at the white men, and throwing dust at them, and then sitting down and rubbing himself over with dust. The other took the band from his head, and waved it in the air with equal violence, and also throwing dust. When they met, after each had passed halfway round the camp, they turned their backs to one another, waving their branches as they faced about, shaking them at us, and rubbing themselves with dust. On completing the circle, they went up to one of the camp-fires and sat down, but would give no explanation of their dance."

Subsequently the tribe gave an exhibition of fishing skill on the river, in front of the camp. The chief stood in a small bark canoe, and nine young men ran down the stream, and a similar number up, until the chief gave a signal, when the eighteen plunged in and hastened towards him,

diving and swimming; but whenever one dived, he came to the surface with a fish impaled on the point of his short spear. When they reached the canoe they made for the shore, where a circular fire was built, into the centre of which circle they sprang to get warm (for a cold wind was blowing), while an equal number started up and down the reach in a similar manner.

The next day saw more natives assemble, until such a crowd had congregated that Mitchell began to get uneasy, and debated whether it would not be wise to turn back rather than face the odds arrayed against him. His party had travelled three hundred miles down the Darling, and nearly all of it through country which he believed would have been a desert save for the river. As he was still debating, he heard the sound of a shot from the direction of the river, followed almost at once by several more, and a chorus of yells from the blacks.

Hastily the men in camp got their weapons and prepared for the attack, but instead the firing was continued down the river. Then it ceased, and everything was silent.

The men in camp waited anxiously, as they did not dare to leave the camp unprotected while they went away to learn the cause of the commotion. Presently they saw one of their number approaching slowly. As he came nearer they saw that he was

wounded. His story, when he reached the camp, was to the effect that as he was bringing water from the river, the chief had come, seized hold of the can he was carrying, and struck him senseless with his club. A man who was covering him at once fired, and wounded the chief in the groin. Blacks now sprang out from behind the trees, and one was just hurling a spear at the man who had first fired, when another man shot him. The blacks massed together, and one man, firing into the crowd, shot a gin who had a child on her back, and who rolled down the bank into the river. The natives retreating, the men bethought them of two of the bullock-drivers who were further down the stream with some of the bullocks. They ran to warn them, and arrived in time to see one of them just stoop down so as to avoid two spears which the blacks had thrown. Firing was then resumed, until the natives fled across the river, when all the men returned to the camp.

The commencement of hostilities in earnest decided Mitchell as to starting back, and he at once gave the order to prepare for the homeward journey. Throughout the night after the skirmish the men slept by their arms, and the guards were doubled; but the only sounds that came to them were the wails of the gins on the other side of the river for the slain. In the morning a death-like stillness reigned, and as the explorers formed up

for the march, they momentarily expected an attack, which, however, never came.

On the return journey they encountered again the Spitting tribe, as they had named the first hostile natives they met on the outward march, and the blacks showed their welcome by setting fire to the bush all round the white men's camp, and compelling them to move five miles further on, and even then to charge the mob with fixed bayonets and fire bullets over their heads before peace was assured. Mitchell had come to the conclusion that the constant giving of presents merely excited the black fellows' greed, and made them believe the white men were afraid of them; consequently he abstained from giving any on the homeward journey, and found that it saved him and the men a great deal of annoyance from the blacks.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHTING BLACKS OF THE DARLING.

THE expedition led by Mitchell, with a view of tracing the Darling from the point where Sturt discovered it, near the junction with the Bogan, to the point where the same explorer said it joined the Murray, having failed in consequence of the fatal collision with the natives, the Government of the colony determined to send yet another party to prove or disprove Sturt's statement. This time the journey was to be down the Murray to the point where the river, which Sturt asserted was the Darling, flowed into it, and thence back along the course of the tributary, until it was demonstrated whether it was the Darling or not. Again the expedition was fitted out on a generous scale; again the leadership was entrusted to Mitchell; and again he was turned back from his undertaking by another fatal collision with the natives. The defeat, however, was a blessing in disguise, for it led Mitchell to stumble upon a discovery and of territory which

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has since proved to be the richest and most fertile in the south of the continent.

The decision of the Government to further explore the Darling was arrived at towards the end of 1835, and on March 17, 1836, Mitchell set out at the head of a party numbering twenty-five in all. His first course was to the Lachlan, which he found to be almost dry; but he managed to push on until he arrived, on March 30, at the tree Oxley had marked, nineteen years before, when he turned to the south from what he believed to be the shores of the inland sea. Mitchell also turned to the south at this spot, with the intention of proceeding to the Murrumbidgee, the river which Oxley failed to discover, although he was within a day's march of it.

The services of a partly civilized black, named Piper, was secured as guide from one of the stations on the Lachlan, and to his assistance a great measure of the success of the expedition was due; while it is questionable whether the party would have come safely through the many difficulties of the journey had it not been for the unerring instinct and quick intelligence of this native guide. Soon after leaving the Lachlan, a solitary hut was discovered, around which were three rows of small ridges of earth, the floor of the hut being smooth and covered with a bed of rushes. This, Piper explained, was the grave

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of a black who had been killed, the bed of rushes being occupied every night by some near male relative of the deceased until his death was avenged, or until the flesh had all gone from the dead man's bones and "he went away." No fire was allowed near the hut while the vigil was kept, and no one but the watcher was permitted to go near it.

From the tribe to which the man had belonged, Piper learned that the approach of the white men was already known to the tribes on the Darling, and that the warriors of the tribe with which the collision had occurred on the previous expedition were already advancing to meet and fight their foes of the preceding year. This information was scarcely given the consideration it deserved, Mitchell being more than sceptical (until stern facts compelled his conviction) of the stories told by the blacks. It seemed quite impossible to him that the aborigines should be able to transmit intelligence of events over thousands of miles of country more rapidly than a horseman could ride, and, moreover, across territory occupied by tribes in open hostility, if not at war with one another. After his return from his previous journey along the Darling, he had been amazed to learn that the news of Cunningham's death had reached the outlying cattle stations of the colony before it was known to the members of

the expedition. The name of the victim was not known, the news which filtered through the black fellows, camping near the stations, to the stockmen, and so on to Sydney, being merely that one of Mitchell's party had strayed into the bush and had been slain by the natives, who were afraid of him. But that such accurate information could be transmitted by such simple means as the columns of smoke he himself had looked at and wondered at, was altogether beyond the comprehension of a man so rigidly bound by conventional routine as to be unable to go upon a ride through the bush without his military sabre dangling at his side.

Perhaps it is typical of what was then the system of government and authority in Australia; but from the present-day standpoint, when individual freedom and liberty of action form the dominant note, there is considerable humour in the spectacle of an exploring party in which discipline was so severe that no man was permitted to take a drink from a stream or pool he was passing without first obtaining the commanding officer's sanction to fall out for the purpose. A modern explorer might reasonably question the advantage of compelling his men to march and mount guard with fixed bayonets, as Mitchell did; but in nothing did he show his military enterprise so conspicuously as when, on learning the absolute

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necessity of shouting a warning coo-ee on the approach to a water-hole or native camp, if a conflict were to be avoided, Mitchell issued orders to his bugler "to sound a call" whenever a camp or water-hole was approached. The result of substituting for the coo-ee, which the blacks did understand, a bugle call, which they did not understand, was an unnecessary terrifying of the aborigines, as the not infrequent hurling of spears and boomerangs at the intruders testified.

After successfully traversing the barren country lying between the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee, and which proved too great an obstacle for Oxley's advance, Mitchell and his party arrived on the banks of the latter river. Guided by the map of Sturt's journey, they left the Murrumbidgee and travelled direct to the Murray, striking it, on May 23, at a reach where the stream was one hundred and sixty-five yards wide. The following day they left it in order to take a more direct route for the Darling than would have been afforded by tracing down the Murray to the junction.

The river had not been left many miles behind when the smoke of a black fellow's fire was seen ahead, and Piper was sent forward to announce the approach of the expedition. He saw some men and women round the fire, but they retired as he advanced towards a thick belt of timber

about a mile away, whither the explorers followed. As soon as they penetrated into the wood, they were surprised to see that it completely encircled a lake which was about sixteen miles in circumference, and which swarmed with natives, many of whom were fishing from the bark canoes on the water.

The appearance of the white men had evidently been preceded by a general alarm, for the blacks on the beach all round the lagoon were hurrying towards the far side, and the men in the canoes also paddled in the same direction. As Mitchell stood surveying the unexpected scene before him, and noticing how a ridge of red earth ran round the lake considerably higher than the level of the land beyond the wood, a few natives came up, and, in talking with Piper, explained to him that the Murray (Milliwa was the native name) was joined by another big stream from the north a short distance away. They offered to act as guides to the spot, and Mitchell accepted their help. Upon the expedition being again started, it was noticed that fresh activity prevailed amongst the natives round the lagoon, and it was not long before the white men were joined by several small parties of natives.

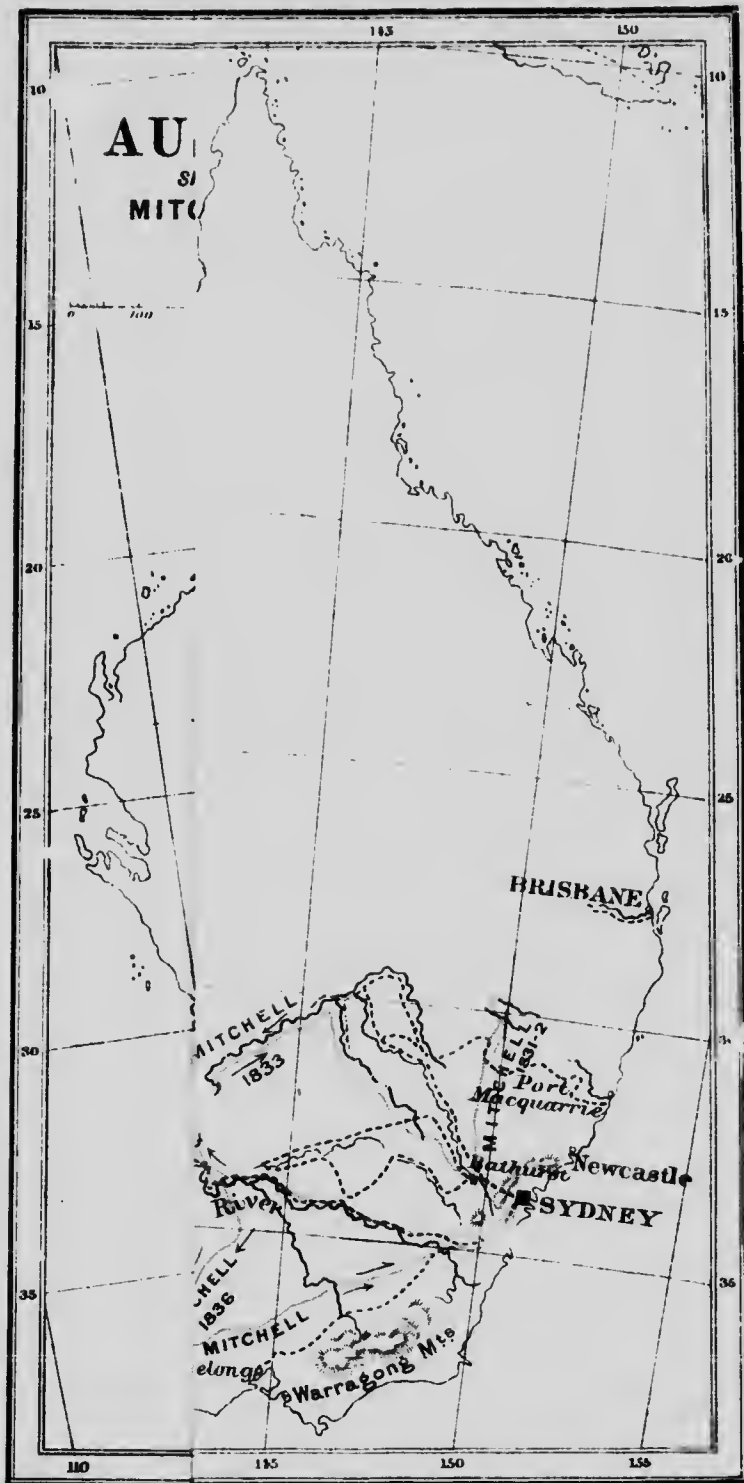
Those who had offered to act as guides brought the explorers direct to a camp by a water-hole, but by the time the expedition reached there the

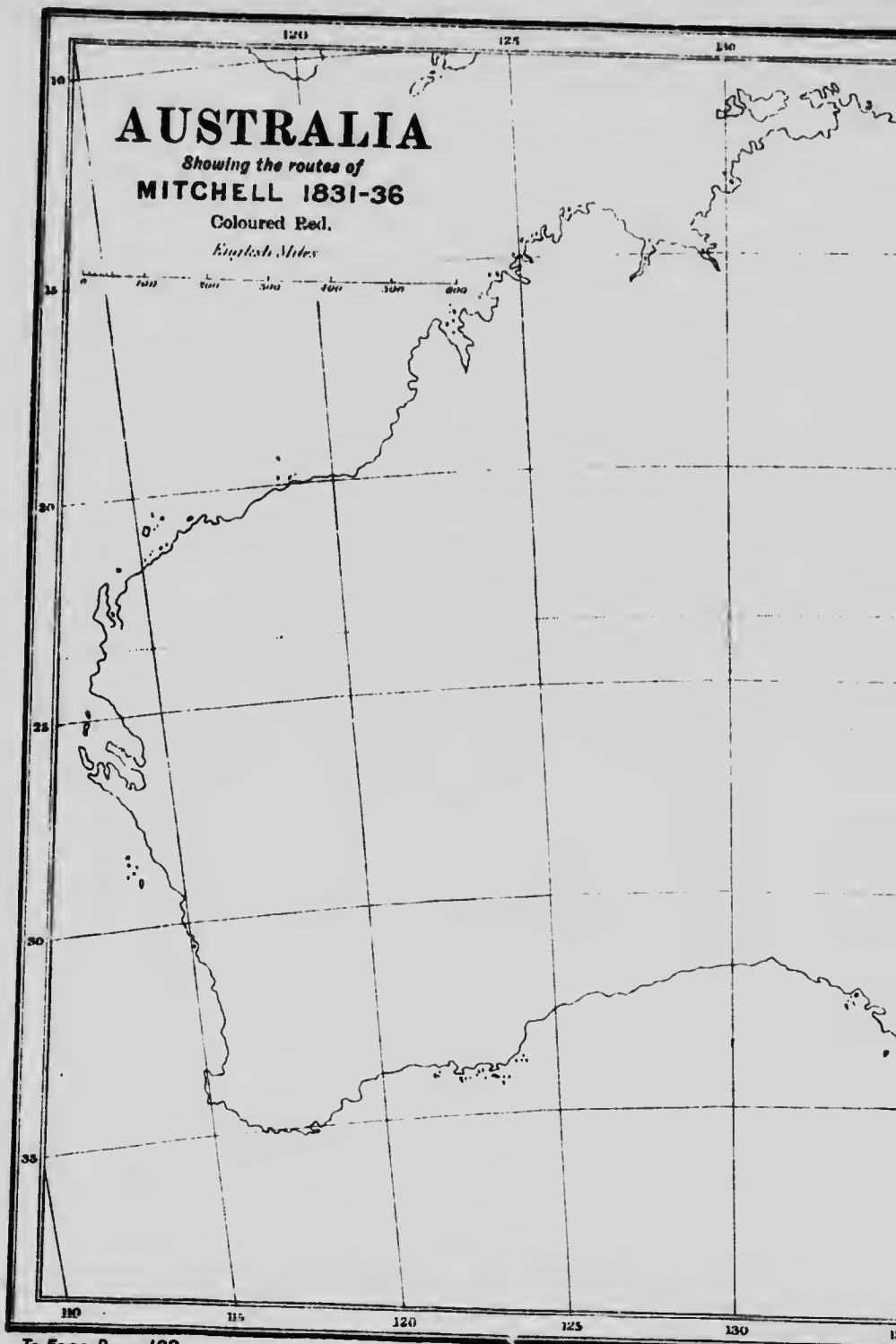
number of blacks marching with it had grown enormously, and every minute fresh batches were arriving. A place was pointed out as being very suitable for the white men to camp, but Mitchell made his own selection; he had recognized many of the natives surrounding them as members of the tribe his party had fought a year before higher up the Darling, and who, he had been warned, were advancing to meet and fight him on the Murray. He was sufficiently acquainted with the war methods of the myalls to know that, if possible, the "fight" would take place while the white men were sleeping; consequently he was particularly careful in selecting a site for his camp which would give him the advantage in the event of an attack. But there were little signs of attack as they made their camp. The blacks manifested neither surprise nor regret at their suggestions being discarded, making their own camp-fires away from those of the white men.

A careful watch was maintained throughout the night by the explorers, though, for all they knew at the time, there was not a moving creature near them, a few almost insignificant marks on the ground in the immediate vicinity, and guardedly pointed out by Piper, showing how stealthily the warriors had crept up during the night ready to hurl their spears if they could do so in safety to themselves. The men, however, showed nothing

of it in the morning when they came over to the white men's camp; nor did they deny the fact that they were the same tribe Mitchell had encountered, with such fatal consequences, on his former journey. They explained that they had fled on that occasion from the Darling, and had not gone back until the summer, when they found the white men had retired. Two bullocks had been abandoned by the expedition, and these the natives killed and devoured, some young warriors proudly showing Mitchell necklets made from the teeth of his slaughtered cattle.

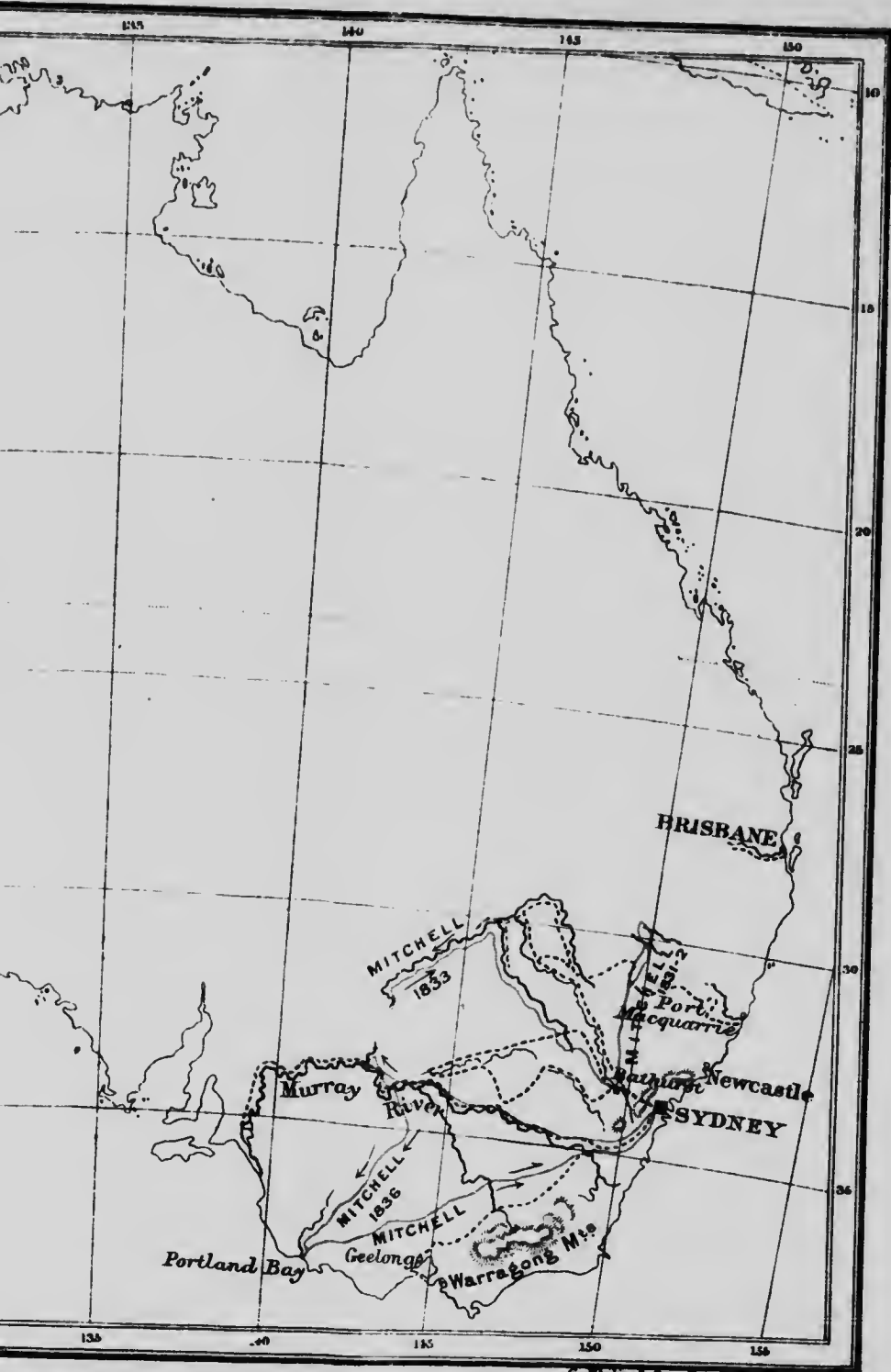
An old chief brought up two young girls and a boy to Mitchell, and explained that they were the orphans of the gin who had been shot. One of the girls was especially light in colour and good-looking, and the chief offered to exchange her for a tomahawk. He made the offer in apparent good faith, but in his eyes, as well as in those of the other men, there was a flickering light that warned the white men to be ever on the alert. In the afternoon the women and children left the blacks' camps soon after the arrival of two small parties of warriors, whose advent caused considerable excitement amongst the other natives. Then some of the party who had been in the skirmish recognized the natives who had thrown the spears at the white men, and who up to that moment had either kept out of sight or disguised themselves. Mitchell





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tried to smooth matters over by inviting, in native fashion, some of the chiefs to sit with him, but nothing subdued the angry light in their eyes. As night closed in they made a ring of fires round the camp of the explorers, and it was almost impossible to keep them away from the drays without resorting to violence. Everything that they could lay their hands on they tried to steal, and the patience of the white men was sorely tried before the blacks were driven back to their ring of fires.

The situation, however, was still serious, for it was evident an attack was intended before the morning. To divert their intention, Mitchell determined to appeal to their superstitious fears. Bringing his men together, he fired off a sky-rocket from their midst, the men cheering wildly as it rose in the dark. Their cheer was answered by a yell of terror from the blacks' fires, and every warrior dashed away into the bush, leaving only one old man in the camp. But the impression created was only temporary. The warriors would not return to their fires, but they were soon heard calling from the bush for the white men to come and join in a corroborree. They were told to commence the dance first, and then the white men would come, it being rightly judged that they were too excited to do so, and for the remainder of the night they were satisfied with calling from the distance. With the morning a party of old men approached,

and as they sat talking with Mitchell, the branches of a dead tree were suddenly set on fire. Almost at once a heavy smoke rose directly to windward of the camp, and without further ceremony Mitchell ordered the camp to be struck and the teams yoked up, while a section of the men advanced towards the blacks with fixed bayonets, retiring at the sound of the bugle. The manoeuvre impressed the warriors enough to make them fall back into the bush again, and before they again emerged the party was on the march for the Murray. On the way they passed over a sterile tract of sandy country, but without shaking off all the blacks, those who still followed them telling Piper that the others had gone on before the white men to fight them when they reached the river. They also told him that they were the same tribe who were going to kill the white men in the canoes on the river some years before. Mitchell, still sceptical, asked Piper to get more particulars; and he was then told how the white men had been saved through the intervention of a chief, since dead, whose tribe lived further up the river.

Proceeding down the river, the white men came upon a vast crowd of natives; and seeing that a conflict could not be much longer postponed, Mitchell determined to drive them back. Dividing his men, he tried to get the blacks between two sections; but they realized their danger and at once

poised their spears. One of the white men, uneasy in the face of so much danger, pulled the trigger of his rifle. At the sound of the report the natives wavered, but to the other white men it was as a signal, and a volley was poured in amongst the horde of blacks before they could turn. A moment later and they were flying down the bank and plunging into the stream, the white men rushing after them and firing at them as they swam for the other side.

The explorers were so much occupied in the fight that the teams of bullocks and drays were left to take care of themselves. As Mitchell expressed it, "This collision took place so suddenly that no man had thought of remaining at the heads of the horses and cattle, nor was I aware of this until, on returning to them, I found the reins in the hands of Piper's gin, a tall woman, who, wrapped in a blanket, with Piper's sword on her shoulder, and having a blind eye, opaque and white, like that of some Indian idol, presented rather a singular appearance as she stood, the only guardian of all we possessed. Her presence of mind in assuming such a charge on such an occasion was very commendable, and very characteristic of the female aborigine."

As events subsequently transpired, the unpremeditated attack on the blacks was probably the means of saving the lives of all the explorers.

Mitchell had ridden on ahead of the drays, and, returning suddenly, found from eight to ten black fellows around each white man. These constituted the second division of the tribe, and, being in ignorance of what had occurred with the first division, the men were carrying out their part of the pre-arranged programme, and were waiting for the arrival of the others to put the plan into operation. As Piper explained it, the warriors regarded the men's clothing as impervious to spears and their hats as protection against the clubs; but they had surreptitiously measured strength for strength, and finding they were quite equal on that point, they had arranged to seize the white men, on a basis of eight to one, when the first division, rushing up with war-shouts, threw the expedition into confusion. As soon as they learned, however, what had happened to their comrades, they dropped behind and disappeared in the bush, and the explorers continued their return journey in peace.

Two days later they arrived at the spot where the Darling flowed into the Murray. The former river was not in such swift flood as when Sturt saw it, but the characteristics which had impressed him and convinced him that it was the Darling, convinced Mitchell also. He had been loth to accept Sturt's statement until the river had been explored back to the Bogan; he was now

on the river for the purpose of carrying out that exploration; but his mind had undergone a change since he started, and, accepting Sturt's judgment as reliable, after opposing it for years, he turned back upon his tracks to follow the Murray up to the Murrumbidgee. Subsequently he crossed the Murray, and by striking to the south stumbled upon the rich district which he named Australia Felix (but which is now part of the colony of Victoria). To this discovery more than to anything else does Mitchell owe his reputation as an explorer.

On the journey to the south, at one stage, they spent the day in crossing an absolutely treeless plain, and as night was closing in they arrived at a thick clump of timber, in which, however, they could not find enough dry wood to make a blazing fire. The temperature was 29° Fahr., and the white men shivered in their tents, wrapped up in their thick blankets, while "on that freezing night the natives, according to their usual custom, stripped off all their clothes previous to lying down to sleep in the open air, their bodies being doubled up round a few burning reeds. We could not understand how they could lie thus naked when the earth was white with hoar-frost; and they were quite at a loss to know how we could sleep in our tents without a bit of fire to keep our bodies warm." (Mitchell's "Journals.")

For days the route followed was over sandy country, sparsely timbered, in which the search for water was a constant and trying necessity. Then the land became more fertile, and was fairly well watered by creeks and rivers, the level flats giving place to undulations as the blue haze of a range appeared along the horizon. As they approached it, the mountains stood out bold and lofty, recalling to Mitchell the Grampian Hills, after which he named the range. Ascending one of the highest with two or three men, Mitchell, after spending a dreary and uncomfortable night without a fire and with heavy sleet falling, discovered that away to the east the country became very mountainous and apparently difficult, while to the west it was open, with only occasional eminences. He therefore directed his course towards the south-west, finding that the country improved every day. A fair-sized stream, the Wimmera, was crossed, and Mitchell made the ascent of a hill in the vicinity, to which he gave the name of Mount Arapiles. From the summit he made the discovery that he was in the centre of a district covered with circular lakes, of which he wrote: "From the spot where I then stood I counted twelve such lakes, most of them appearing to have a crescent-shaped mound or bank on the eastern side. This certainly was a remarkable portion of the earth's surface, and much resembled

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that of the moon as seen through a telescope."

At first Mitchell was disposed to regard the lakes as extinct volcanic craters which had become filled with rain-water, but closer examination revealed the curious fact that while some of the lakes were filled with fresh water, others were more salt than the ocean. He thereupon evolved the theory, which has been largely endorsed by subsequent scientists, that the lakes owed their existence and form to the gradual rising above sea-level of that portion of the continent, the rising not having advanced sufficiently to create a watershed of the area affected and so induce the water to flow in streams. The crescent-shaped mounds on the eastern sides he attributed to the prevailing westerly winds carrying across to the eastern side anything which floated on the surface of the lakes, the aggregation of vegetable and other fragments in the course of centuries producing the mounds.

Leaving Mount Arapiles, and directing his course still more to the south, Mitchell found the country becoming so luxuriant that he had scarcely anything else to say about it in his "Journals." Game was very plentiful, and the effect of the fertile nature of the land was clearly shown on the native inhabitants. Such as were seen were in possession of articles undreamed of by the ruder tribes of the interior. Bags and baskets neatly

made of wicker-work were used to carry articles, the women carrying mats of the same material to sit upon, and wrapping themselves and their children in well-made fur rugs. The native huts were also quite different to those observed in other parts of the continent. They were circular in form, and made of straight rods meeting at an upright pole in the centre, the outside being first covered with bark and grass, and then entirely coated with clay. The fire was lit in the middle of the floor, and a hole was left in the top of the roof for the smoke to escape. The huts were evidently permanent habitations, very distinct from the temporary structures of those tribes living in the interior, and who were compelled to be nomads by the scarcity of food and water.

The last day of July was marked by the discovery of a stream, to which the name Glenelg was given. For many days past the travelling had been in marked contrast to that in the waterless and often grassless regions more to the north. Feed for the cattle was abundant on all sides, water was plentiful, and the men only had to shoot either waterfowl or kangaroo whenever they desired fresh meat. The scenery was magnificent, the foliage along the banks of the Glenelg being so varied and vivid that the explorers were forcibly reminded of their native land. Mitchell was confident that so fine a stream must flow into the sea

through a deep harbour, and he pushed on so as to verify his expectations. But he was only to experience disappointment so far as his hopes were concerned, for, on reaching the sea, he found that a big sand bar stretched across the mouth of the river, while in the bay beyond he saw a brig riding at anchor. Houses were discovered at a sheltered spot on the shore, and for a moment the explorers were uncertain whether they were in the presence of a bushranger's stronghold, or whether they themselves would be taken for bushrangers and treated accordingly. Fortunately neither surmise was correct. The settlement was that of the Henty family, one of the earliest formed in what is now Victoria, and the brig was a whaler engaged in the fishery off the coast of Portland Bay, as the inlet was already named.

After a brief stay, the expedition resumed its march to Sydney, passing inland again until it came to the Dividing Range which runs across Victoria, and which they skirted. At one point Mitchell ascended a hill, from whence he obtained a clear view of Port Philip, on the shores of which he fancied he could see some white tents. The hill he named Mount Macedon—now a fashionable summer resort from Melbourne.

Only once on this return journey were the explorers troubled by the natives. On one occasion a tribe came up to their camp, and would not go

away when night closed in. Mitchell had with him a hideously ornate mask, which he had carried in order to scare away the blacks if necessary. While two men, armed with speaking-trumpets, hid themselves under the boat-carriage, another man was decorated with the mask, and given a blue light in one hand and a rocket in the other. Emerging from the tent where he had been dressed, he lit the blue light, and danced towards the place where the blacks were gathered, firing off the rocket over them as he went, the men with the speaking trumpets making a horrible din, and the remainder of the party shouting and cheering. The blacks vanished, leaving behind them, in their haste, some crude clubs they had been fashioning with the tomahawks Mitchell had given them to induce them to go away, and which were doubtless intended for the white men's benefit before the morning.

CHAPTER XI.

EYRE TRAVERSES THE GREAT BIGHT.

THE discovery of the rich and fertile district, to which Mitchell gave the name Australia Felix (a cumbersome title, which has long since been merged in the more appropriate "Victoria"), was followed immediately by a wave of settlement; and in a few years from the time when white men first viewed the picturesque reaches of the Glenelg River, all the country that it drained was "taken up" and occupied by the flocks and herds of the squatters. Nor was the influx limited to the land round the Glenelg. The fertile plains over which Mitchell had guided his party, and which he described in such glowing language in his "Journals," were also occupied, and settlement extended so far back that it overlapped the borders of the unexplored. Men coming out from the more settled regions were compelled to go further and further afield, and every year the knowledge of the country was enlarged, and the immense area of the continent yet to be opened up brought more forcibly home to the inhabitants.

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The Government, perfunctory, conventional, and traditional, was rather startled than anything else at the impetus given to settlement by the discovery Mitchell had stumbled upon. The creation of new pastoral areas hundreds of miles away from the centre of control, and greater in extent than those already existing round Sydney and the other official establishments, was the reverse of pleasing to an executive with a limited range of expenditure and a restricted capacity for expansion. The efforts to found fresh "establishments" in the new regions were not always successful, owing to the undue energy which the ordinary free settler displayed in reaching the ground first, and occupying for pastoral purposes all the sites which the Government might, in time, have devoted to "colonial" purposes. An official establishment set up on the fertile banks of the Brisbane River was seriously jeopardized by the advent of free settlers, who utilized every available acre of land for the production of agricultural and pastoral wealth, after the land had been officially declared to be unfit for cultivation, because neither split peas nor prepared rice would grow in it. The idea of the great inland sea having been utterly exploded, and the opposite theory of the interior desert becoming more untenable every year, the problem of the vast solitudes which lay beyond the utmost limit of settlement, or exploration, ceased to interest the official world. The efforts

of the executive to unlock the secrets not always being attended with quite the results desired or anticipated, the governors and their immediate advisers saw little necessity to fit out further exploring cavalcades. But all the while settlement was extending, men were roaming farther and farther in search of fresh pastures for their growing flocks and herds, and a new generation of settlers was coming into existence, a generation of men who desired to emulate if not eclipse the work of their predecessors, and who, not being brought up under Government protection, were used to doing things for themselves and by themselves.

Of that class, foreshadowed by Hume, a prominent example was Edward John Eyre. Originally the holder of a small station to the north of Adelaide, he was one of the first to take cattle overland from Port Philip to what is now the South Australian capital. In 1838 he set out to solve a local problem, and find the ultimate outlet of the Wimmera, one of the rivers crossed by Mitchell in his last journey from the Murray to the coast. The general idea of the time was that the Wimmera was one of the streams observed to flow into the south side of the Murray; but Eyre came back with the information that it flowed into a lake, some forty miles in circumference (Lake Hindmarsh), from which he could find no outlet.

This trip brought him prominently before the

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settlers of the south as an enterprising and capable explorer, and he still further enhanced his reputation in this respect by making two short journeys to the barren country lying to the north of Spenser's Gulf, in South Australia, and exploring round Flinders Range and Lake Torrens. Consequently his name was in everybody's mouth when, in 1840, a suggestion was made amongst the settlers of Adelaide to find an overland route from that town to the distant settlements on the southern coast of Western Australia.

A meeting was held in Adelaide to discuss the project, and Eyre's name being publicly coupled with the enterprise, he undertook the leadership of any party that might be formed. South Australia had been founded into a colony distinct from New South Wales, and the then Governor, Gawler, authorized a contribution of £100 towards the expenses of the expedition. The public subscribed another £500, and Eyre himself made up the balance of £1200 required. The expedition was first proposed in April; on June 18, Eyre and his companion, E. B. Scott, set out from Adelaide to join the main body, consisting of four white men and two black boys, which had already started with the stores and stock. The latter was composed of thirteen horses and forty sheep, the larger proportion of the stores being sent to the head of Spenser's Gulf by the cutter *Waterwitch*.

Travelling by easy stages, the men reached the head of the Gulf by July 8, two days in advance of the cutter, and Eyre occupied that time by paying a flying visit, accompanied by one of the black boys, to the district round Lake Torrens. The state of the country observed on that occasion was far from promising. Several dry lake basins were traversed, the surfaces of which were glistening white with salt left by the evaporated water, and many which contained some liquid were more salt than the ocean. To find fresh water for themselves, and food for their horses, taxed both Eyre and his companion, while the constant spectacle of the mirage added enormously to their labour and trouble. So marked was this phenomenon in this particular district that time after time both Eyre and the black boy were deceived, hurrying forward to what they were certain was a fine sheet of water only to see it melt away as they approached.

By the time they returned to the camp they had gained very little fresh information beyond the fact that grass and water were scarce, and the natives were very shy and extremely inferior in appearance. For three weeks they were engaged in forming their depôt camp, where the bulk of the stores were to be left during the preliminary expeditions into the barren country to the north. At last, on July 25, the march commenced along the route Eyre and

his black boy had passed over. As they advanced the state of the country became worse, water was scarcer every stage, and grass almost ceased. The strain upon the horses was so severe that whenever a spot was reached where there was some water and feed, however dry, a rest was absolutely necessary if the horses were not to be hopelessly knocked up. During such compulsory halts, Eyre ranged the route ahead in search of another camping-place.

On one of these subsidiary expeditions he saw three blacks in the distance, and immediately rode after them in the hopes of learning where water was to be had. As he galloped up, one of the natives turned and poised his spear. Eyre could not check the speed of his horse quick enough to avoid the weapon, so he drove his spurs home and pulled its head on one side, swerving just in time to escape. The black refused to give any sign beyond waving Eyre to retire, and when he did so, the black ran off in the opposite direction after his companions, who had already gone away. On another occasion, Eyre came upon a camp so suddenly that the flying blacks left two little children behind at the fire. In the hopes of placating the parents, Eyre tied a red handkerchief round the neck of one of the children; but on subsequently returning, he found the handkerchief had been thrown away, and the ground all

around the fire strewn with green boughs, showing that the natives regarded the white man as some evil monster against whom supernatural protection was needed.

During his absence, he suggested to his overseer the advisability of securing the assistance of any natives, seen near the camp, in search for water. The suggestion was interpreted literally, for upon a tribe appearing in the distance, the overseer rode after them until he overtook one—a woman—of whom he made a prisoner, detaining her at the camp for two days. As no information could be gleaned from her, and she was terribly frightened, she was given food and presents and sent away. On Eyre's return, a day or so later, he found the camp surrounded by the warriors of the tribe anxious to avenge the indignity. They were all very inferior in form and appearance to the natives elsewhere, and their hostility did not extend beyond lurking round the camp.

Two months were occupied in vain efforts to penetrate the barren wastes lying round Lake Torrens, and at last, failing to see a route through that locality, Eyre took his party back to his dépôt camp, and, after a good rest, round to the other side of Spenser's Gulf. From there efforts were made to find a route more to the west than the north, but the experience they had was only a variation of that nearer Lake Torrens. In the

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meantime, also, the stores were running low, and it was necessary to send men back to Adelaide for a fresh supply. Advantage was also taken of the opportunity to reduce the number of the party, two men being sent back.

Upon the arrival of the further supply of stores, Eyre determined to make the effort to get round to Western Australia by the coast-line of the great Australian Bight. To ascertain the character of the country to be journeyed over, Eyre, with one white man and a black boy, set out, pending the arrival of the stores, to penetrate round the head of the Bight. Passing over dry, sterile, sandy country, where it was difficult to obtain either grass or water, they at length encountered a small tribe of natives, from whom they learned that there was no water within a five days' march inland, while at least six days were needed to get round the head of the Bight. Under these circumstances, Eyre returned to the camp at Streaky Bay, and awaited the return of the *Waterwitch* with stores.

He subsequently made another attempt, and succeeded in getting forty-five miles round the head of the Bight, but only after considerable difficulty. In addition to the want of grass and water, the small party experienced exceptionally trying weather. One day, Eyre wrote, "we had halted about eleven in the midst of a low, sandy flat not far from the sea, thinking that by careful

examination we might find a place where water could be procured by digging. There were, however, no trees or bushes near us, and the heat of the sun and the glare of the sand were so unendurable that I was obliged to get up the horses and compel the men to go on a little further to seek for shelter. Proceeding one mile towards the sea, we came to a projecting rock upon its shores, and as there was no hope of a better place being found, I tied up my horses near it. The rock was not large enough to protect them entirely from the sun, but by standing close under it their heads and necks were tolerably shaded. For ourselves, the recess of the rock afforded a delightful retreat, whilst the immediate vicinity of the sea enabled us every now and then to take a run and plunge amidst its breakers, and again return to the shelter of the cavern. For two or three hours we remained in under the protection of the rock without clothes, and occasionally bathing to cool ourselves."

Later on they again started digging for water, but the sand was so soft that as soon as they made a small hole it filled up again, until fatigue compelled them to desist and remain thirsty. When the sun went down, the wind changed, the temperature falling so rapidly that they were chilled to the bone, the absence of wood for miles compelling them to go without a fire; and thus,

within a few hours, they found it almost impossible to withstand the heat and the cold.

Their trials were, however, rewarded on the following day, when they succeeded in rounding the head of the Bight. There they came upon a tribe of natives busily engaged in gathering a small red berry which grew in profusion on stunted bushes. As soon as the blacks realized that no harm was intended, they offered the white men a share of the berries they had gathered. Nor was this the limit of their hospitality. There was a small hole from whence the natives had obtained water, and the white men tried, unsuccessfully, to make it sufficiently large to water the horses. They were again quite unable to prevent the sand from falling in, more especially as they only had the shells, which the natives had been using, as spades. One of the younger black fellows, seeing their difficulty, motioned them to get away, when he jumped into the hole, and in a very short space had the well enlarged. Sitting up in it, he thus kept the sand from falling in while he ladled out the water. The horses required a great deal to drink, and when the first black fellow became fatigued, another took his place, the two working alternately until both horses and men were satisfied.

Eyre learned from these natives that there was neither water nor grass for many miles to the

west, and that the country was barren and dry along the top of the cliffs, the first water being found where a break in the rocks occurred. During the short journey of forty-five miles taken beyond the head of the Bight, Eyre found that the country was a level tableland ending in precipitous cliffs descending some four hundred feet to the sea. With the exception of a narrow band of conglomerate sandstone, the cliffs were composed of a dark greyish brown limestone on the top, and a soft chalky stone on the lower half, the latter being considerably worn away by the ever-restless breakers rolling in from the south, until the upper portion overhung tremendously.

By the time that he had returned to the main camp, Eyre had made up his mind that a search for a route to Western Australia was useless by any other way than along the top of the cliffs of the Great Bight. A further supply of stores was to arrive from Adelaide about the middle of January, 1841, and he decided to send back in the boat all the members of the party with the exception of himself, his overseer, John Baxter, and the black boys, with whom he would undertake the journey, which, even from the glimpse already obtained of the country to be traversed, seemed hopeless.

In place of the *Waterwitch*, a cutter, the *Hero*, arrived with the stores, and also brought a black

boy from King George's Sound, whom Eyre had brought from Western Australia on the occasion of a former visit. Wylie, as he was named, was at once added to the overland party, and the remainder returned to Adelaide in the *Hero*.

On February 24, 1841, the party, consisting of the two white men, three black boys, nine horses, a Timor pony, a foal, and six sheep, was ready to start, all surplus stores being buried in case the route was found impracticable and a return was compulsory. (In 1861 these stores were unearthed, having been preserved in the sand for the space of twenty years.) As a start was about to be made, two figures were seen approaching. They were the captain of the *Hero* and Mr. E. B. Scott, sent back from Adelaide to try and dissuade Eyre from an undertaking which every one regarded as hopeless. The command of an expedition from Adelaide to the north of the continent, overland, was offered as an inducement to Eyre; but he was not to be dissuaded from the scheme he had formed. The meeting put back the start until the next day, and then a further delay was caused by the pack-horses bolting and throwing their loads, so that it was not until February 26 that the journey was actually begun.

In the early part of the journey the dry drifting sand was a source of great irritation. It was so fine that nothing could escape from it, and while

it penetrated through clothes and blankets, it formed a film on the top of their tea, and irritated their eyes, ears, and nostrils. Their provisions were affected by it, and when they lay down at night it collected around them until by the morning they were almost buried. They were also tormented by swarms of large flies, the bite from which was extremely irritating. A few days after starting they stumbled upon some fragments of wreckage on the shore, sun-bleached and ancient, but with no sign of a name or date on any of the articles, which comprised the remains of an old-fashioned tiller-wheel, a broken mast, and some copper sheathing.

March 7 saw them start from the spot where the natives had pointed out water on Eyre's former preparatory journey, and they entered upon what was the first long, waterless stage of this extraordinary journey. From what the blacks had told him, Eyre did not anticipate reaching the next water under one hundred miles. In order to push forward so as to find it and return to the others with the welcome intelligence, Eyre, accompanied by one black boy, and driving the sheep, set off ahead of the others, and by nightfall had travelled twenty-four miles. The next day twenty-six were covered, the country being open and, near the sea, having a growth of low dwarf ti-tree and small prickly bushes. Further from

the coast the plains were very extensive and level, divided by belts of scrub or shrubs. There was no perceptible inclination of the country in any direction, the level land running to the very borders of the sea, where it abruptly terminated, forming steep and precipitous cliffs, which it was quite impossible to descend anywhere, and which had an elevation above sea-level of some four hundred feet.

The third day of the stage was marked by signs of weariness on the part of the stock. Rain threatened but none fell, and at night, instead of camping till the morning, they resumed the journey by moonlight, as the stock could not eat the dry grass, of which there was only a scanty supply, in their thirsty state. After travelling ten miles they came upon a track which they believed to be a native path, and which they followed, anticipating that it would lead to water. But it terminated abruptly at a large circular hole in the limestone rock, which, in rainy weather, could have contained a considerable quantity of water, but which was as dry as the surrounding waste.

They pushed on until three in the morning, when the horses and sheep knocked up, and they were compelled to stop, though not before both Eyre and his companion needed the rest. In his account of the journey, Eyre wrote: "Mechanically

my legs kept moving forwards, but my eyes were every now and then closed in forgetfulness of all around me, until I was suddenly thrown down by getting entangled amongst the scrub, or aroused by a sudden blow across the face from the recoil of a bough after the passage of the boy's horse." But by this forced march they had made the distance from the last water ninety-three miles, and when they lay down they slept without waiting either to wrap their blankets around them or to light a fire.

The halt, however, was a brief one, and in two hours they were again on the move, desiring to make as much progress as possible before the scorching heat of the day set in. As day broke they obtained a splendid view of the precipitous coast. "Distressing and fatal as the continuance of these cliffs might prove to us, there was a grandeur and sublimity in their appearance that was most imposing, and which struck me with admiration. Stretched out before us in a lofty, unbroken outline, they presented a singular and remarkable appearance of massy battlements of masonry, supported by huge buttresses, all glittering in the morning sun, which had now risen upon them, and made a scene beautiful even amidst the dangers and anxieties of our situation. It was indeed a rich and gorgeous view." (Eyre's "Expeditions.")

By midday the condition of the sheep was so pitiable that they hampered the advance of Eyre and his black boy. A pen was hastily erected of bushes, and the sheep yarded, a signal-post, with a red handkerchief as a flag, being erected to attract the attention of the overseer and his party when they reached the place. Then Eyre and his companion pushed on as fast as the horse they had with them could travel. In a few miles they came upon a native track, and after following it for ten miles, they saw the cliffs ahead were gradually receding from the shore, leaving a stretch of country between them and the ocean.

The native track suddenly ceased at a deep rocky gorge in the cliffs, around which were several holes in the rock, all capable of holding plenty of water, but all were found to be absolutely dry. This was a bitter disappointment, for their horse had now been four days without a drink, and of the small store they carried for their own use, the last drop had been consumed when they left the sheep. Still they pushed on, hoping to see a break in the cliffs before night came. About dusk they came upon another native track, along which they hastened, a parching thirst coming upon them, while their horse was hourly becoming more and more distressed.

The morning of March 11 broke dark and cloudy, and for a while they expected rain, but

the clouds soon cleared away. Shortly after day-break they reached the edge of the cliffs, from whence they had a good view of a sandy valley they had been travelling round, and which the thick scrub had prevented them from examining before. Some miles back Eyre saw some sand-hills near the sea, and it immediately occurred to him that the place the blacks had told him water was to be found might be these hills which they had passed in the dark. "The bare idea of such a possibility was almost maddening, and, as the dreadful thought flashed across my mind, I stood for a moment undecided and irresolute as to what I should do. If we returned and there was no water, the horse could never make up the lost ground; if we went on and left what was the site of the water, we should be going to certain destruction."

In this terrible quandary Eyre carefully examined the country ahead, and fancied he could make out, in the far distance, a break in the cliffs. He at once decided to advance, and they continued along the native track for another seven miles before the cliffs began to recede from the sea. The track continued down the steep sides of the rock to the sandy beach below, but the descent was full of difficulty for the wearied horse. The air at the level of the sea was refreshingly cool, and they travelled along the water's edge (where they had

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to constantly prevent the horse from drinking the salt water) for a mile and a half before they saw, in amongst some low sandhills, the traces of black fellows' wells. While one held the horse from the sea-water, the other scraped the sand away with the shells the natives had left; but not until the hole was five feet deep did they come upon moisture.

As soon as they had drank they gave the horse sparingly (for it had had none for five days), and then tethered it away from the water where there was some dry grass. Their next work was to sink two more wells, so that when the remainder of the party arrived, there would be no delay in watering the stock. By the time this was done and the horse given a further supply, it was dark, and they camped until the following morning.

As soon as it was light they started back to meet the others with the news that there was abundant water ahead, and, meeting them in very much better condition than Eyre anticipated, they all returned to the water. This was the sixth day since they left the previous water, during which they had travelled a hundred and thirty-five miles, the animals without a drink, and the men on a very short supply. Nor had the animals fed, the grass met with being dried and withered, and quite impossible for the parched creatures to eat.

Eyre decided to rest for a week by the water

before resuming the journey. The day after their arrival was one of intense heat, greater than they had experienced, and there was little doubt in their minds that had they been compelled to pass such a day without water, none of them would have survived.

The traces of natives all around their camp were numerous, and once they saw the gleam of a native fire at night, but no blacks were actually seen. The cliffs receded eight or ten miles back from the sea, the intervening land being flat and sandy, without either grass or trees, but with the dry basins of lakes, on the surface of which the crusted salt glittered like snow. Round the water the big flies met with earlier in the expedition were very numerous, and their attacks were incessant, on one occasion Eyre counting as many as twenty-three settled on his leg over a space of about eight inches square. Their bites were both painful and irritating.

On March 18 the journey was resumed along the seashore, and by the next day forty miles had been covered ; but the horses showed signs of suffering, and as only salt water was found by digging, Eyre sent the horses back for a further rest, while he remained alone, in charge of the sheep and the baggage, with an allowance of six pints of water for six days' consumption !

The horses returned with water on March 25,

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and the following day, having abandoned everything except what was absolutely necessary, so as to lighten the loads on the horses as much as possible, and killed one of the sheep for food, they again resumed the journey. A large tribe of natives was met the next day busily engaged in gathering berries from the bushes along the shore, but they were so terrified at the sight of the horses that they would not allow Eyre to approach them. A high tide compelled the explorers to camp about midday, and during the enforced leisure Eyre had an interesting experience of the natives' resourcefulness under difficulties, and of which he gave the following account:—

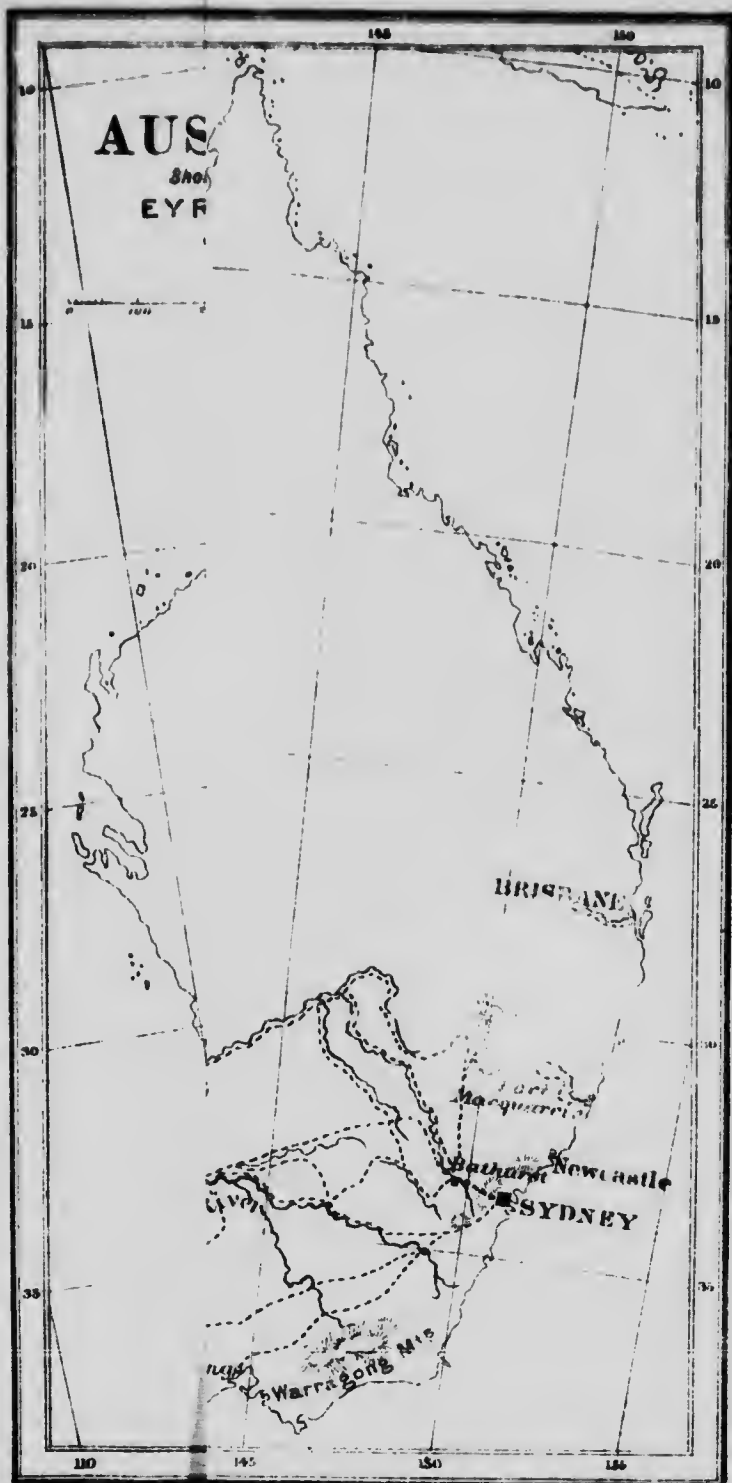
“Whilst in camp, during the heat of the day, the native boys showed me the way in which natives procure water for themselves when wandering among the scrubs, and by means of which they are enabled to remain out almost any length of time in a country quite destitute of surface-water. I had often heard of the natives procuring water from the roots of trees, and had frequently seen indications of their having so obtained it, but I had never before seen the process actually gone through. Selecting a large, healthy-looking tree out of the gum-scrub, and growing in a hollow or flat between two ridges, the native digs round at a few feet from the trunk to find the lateral roots. To one unaccustomed to

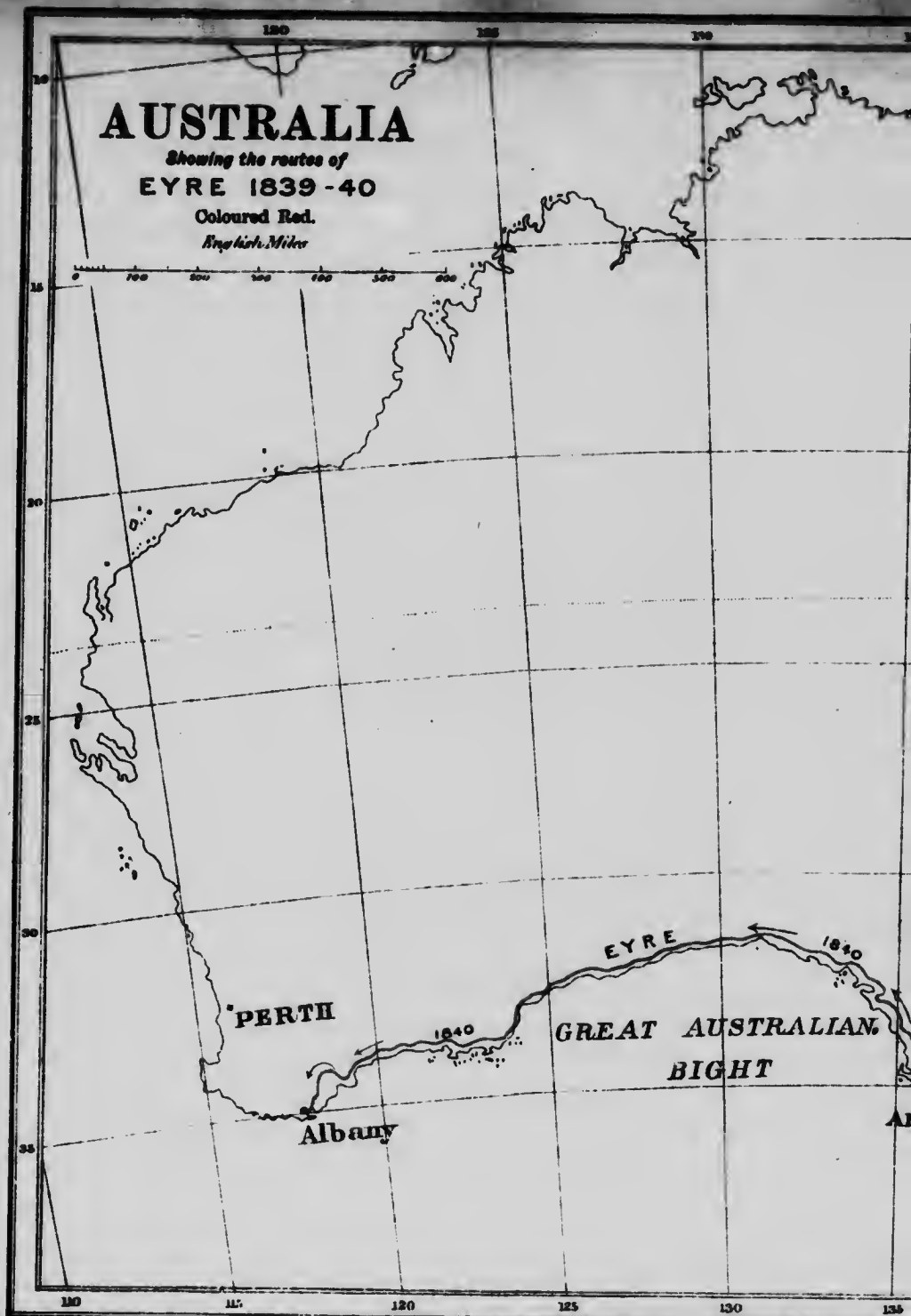
the work it is a difficult and laborious thing frequently to find these roots, but to the practised eye of the native some slight inequality of the surface, or some other mark, points out to him their exact position at once, and he rarely digs in the wrong place. Upon breaking the end next to the tree, the root is lifted and run out for twenty or thirty feet; the bark is then peeled off, and the root broken into pieces, six or eight inches long, and these again, if thick, are split into thinner pieces; they are then sucked or shaken over a piece of bark, or stuck up together in the bark upon their ends, and water is slowly discharged from them. If shaken, it comes out like a shower of very fine rain. The quantity of water contained in a good root would probably fill two-thirds of a pint. I saw my own boys get one-third of a pint out in this way in about a quarter of an hour, and they were by no means adepts at the practice, having never been compelled to resort to it from necessity." (Eyre's "Expeditions.")

The route along the shore was frequently so difficult that it was necessary to wade in the sea itself, and at such times the horses made frantic efforts to reach and drink the salt water. The strain of this second waterless stage seemed to affect them more than the first, and on the third day from water the Timor pony collapsed. The

other horses, suffering more from thirst than they had before, followed the men about like dogs when the camps were formed, and showed in many piteous ways their distress. The overseer also began to suggest the futility of continuing the journey and the advisability of returning. The black boys, having enough to eat and drink, were quite satisfied, and Eyre, having once set out, resolutely refused to turn back.

Horse after horse began to give in, and even the strongest was evidently unable to go very much longer without water. Holes were constantly being scraped in the sand, but only to discover either rock or salt water. On the 29th the last drop of water was used by the men for their breakfast, and throughout the day they toiled on, the outlook becoming more gloomy every hour. On the night of the 30th some dew fell, and the straits to which they were reduced may be gauged from the following extract from Eyre's diary: "Leaving the overseer to watch that the horses did not stray, I took a sponge and went to try and collect some of the dew which was hanging in spangles upon the grass and shrubs. Brushing these with the sponge, I squeezed it, when saturated, into a quart pot, which, in an hour's time, I filled with water. The native boys were occupied in the same way, and by using a handful of fine grass instead of a sponge they





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collected about a quart between them. Having taken the water to the camp and made it into tea, we divided it amongst the party, and never was a meal more truly relished, although we ate the last morsel of bread we had with us, and none knew when we might again enjoy either a drink of water or a mouthful of bread."

The sand becoming white as they advanced, and some low hills appearing back from the sea, they again scraped away the sand in the hopes of finding water. After going some distance down, the sand became moist, and the overseer exclaiming that the moisture was not salt, they kept at their labour until a hole six feet deep was scraped away, at the bottom of which fresh water gradually collected, and the second waterless stage, lasting seven days, was over.

As soon as there was enough water, the horses were given four gallons each, and then driven away to where there was some dry grass until the evening, when another four gallons was given to each. "While thus engaged, a very fine-looking native with his wife and family passed us, and halted for a few minutes to observe us and procure a drink from the well we had made. This man did not seem at all alarmed, and made signs that he was going to sleep a little further along the coast, where there was also water, pointing to the white sandhills about five miles from us.

The language he spoke seemed to be that of the other natives we had met with along the Great Bight, nor did the King George's Sound native understand him a bit better than he had done the others." (Eyre's "Expeditions.")

The explorers remained in camp near the water until April 5, when they moved on to the next water, five miles away. The black boys had speared some stinging-ray in the shallow water on the beach, and as they were very similar to skate in appearance, Eyre decided to use them as food. In three or four days, however, all the party became seriously ill, and as almost all the flour was consumed, they were in great difficulties for food to carry them through. The last of the sheep had been killed at the previous water, and as one of the horses was in a very poor condition, almost too weak to stand, they killed that, and "jerked" the meat by dipping it in the sea and hanging it up to dry. The black boys gorged themselves on the remainder of the carcass as long as there was a scrap of meat on the bones, but this meat also made them ill for some days. The sickness, however, did not prevent them from stealing some of the "jerked" meat; and upon the theft being discovered, two of them made some spears and left, saying they could do better by themselves. In four days they returned, saying that they were starving, and asked to be allowed to join the

camp again. As they appeared to have repented, Eyre allowed them to remain—a kindness which subsequent events did not justify.

Having rested for twenty-eight days, camp was broken up on April 27, and the third and last waterless stage entered upon. For three days the journey was unmarked by any special incident; and on the camp being made on the third night out, the country then being flat with a rocky surface covered with low scrub, the first watch was taken by Eyre. The circumstances which followed are best told in his own words.

“The night was cold and the wind blowing hard from the south-west, whilst scud and nimbus were passing very rapidly by the moon. The horses fed tolerably well, but rambled a good deal, threading in and out among the many belts of scrub which intersected the grassy openings, until at last I hardly knew exactly where our camp was, the fires having apparently expired some time ago. It was now half-past ten, and I headed the horses back in the direction in which I thought the camp lay, that I might be ready to call the overseer to relieve me at eleven. Whilst thus engaged, and looking steadfastly around among the scrub to see if I could anywhere detect the embers of our fires, I was startled by a sudden flash, followed by the report of a gun, not a quarter of a mile away from me. Imagining that the overseer had mistaken

the hour of the night, and, not being able to find me or the horses, had taken that method of attracting my attention, I immediately called out, but as no answer was returned, I got alarmed, and, leaving the horses, hurried up towards the camp as rapidly as I could.

"About a hundred yards from it I met the King George's Sound native (Wylie) running towards me, and, in great alarm, crying out, 'Oh, massa! Oh, massa! Come here.' I could gain no information from him as to what had occurred. Upon reaching the encampment, which I did about five minutes after the shot was fired, I was horror-struck to find my poor overseer lying on the ground, weltering in his blood, and in the last agonies of death.

"Glancing hastily around the camp, I found it deserted by the two younger native boys, whilst the scattered fragments of our baggage, which I left carefully piled under the oilskin, lay thrown about in wild disorder, and at once revealed to me the cause of the harrowing scene before me.

"Upon raising the body of my faithful but ill-fated follower, I found that he was beyond all human aid; he had been shot through the left breast with a ball, and he expired almost immediately. The frightful, the appalling truth now burst upon me, that I was alone in the desert. . . . The horrors of my situation glared upon me in

such startling reality as for an instant almost to paralyze the mind. At the dead hour of night, in the wildest and most inhospitable wastes of Australia, with the fierce wind raging in unison with the scene of violence before me, I was left with a single native, whose fidelity I could not rely upon, and who, for aught I knew, might be in league with the other two, who perhaps were even now lurking about with the view of taking away my life as they had done that of the overseer. Three days had passed since we left the last water, and it was very doubtful when we might find any more. Six hundred miles of country had to be traversed before I could hope to obtain the slightest aid or assistance of any kind, whilst I knew not that a single drop of water or an ounce of flour had been left by these murderers from the stock that had previously been so small."

He found that the blacks had taken all the arms except a rifle, which was choked with a bullet, and a pair of pistols for which there was no ammunition. Hastily obtaining them, he hastened with Wylie after the horses, which had strayed into the scrub, being compelled to stay with them until daylight.

"With an aching heart and in most painful reflections, I passed this dreadful night. Every moment appeared to be protracted to an hour, and it seemed as if daylight would never appear.

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About midnight the wind ceased, and the weather became bitterly cold and frosty. I had nothing on but a shirt and a pair of trousers, and suffered most acutely from the cold; to mental anguish was now added intense bodily pain. Suffering and distress had well-nigh overwhelmed me, and life seemed hardly worth the effort necessary to prolong it. Ages can never efface the horrors of this single night, nor would the wealth of the world ever tempt me to go through similar ones again. At last daylight dawned once more, but sad and heart-rending was the scene it presented to my view upon driving the horses to what had been our last night's camp. The corpse of my poor companion lay extended on the ground with the eyes open, but cold and glazed in death. The same stern resolution and fearless open look, which had characterized him when living, stamped the expression of his countenance even now. He had fallen upon his back four or five yards from where he had been sleeping, and was dressed only in his shirt. In all probability the noise made by the natives in plundering the camp had awoke him, and, upon his jumping up, with a view of stopping them, they had fired upon and killed him."

In the haste of their flight the blacks had left forty pounds of flour, a little tea and sugar, and four gallons of water, as well as overlooking some ammunition. Fearing a return of the runaways

and an attack upon himself, as well as being in doubt how far the remaining black, Wylie, would be loyal to him, Eyre tried to melt the jammed ball out of the rifle barrel. Unknown to him, there was also a charge of powder in it, and the heat of the fire exploded the charge at a moment when Eyre was holding the other end of the barrel, the bullet just grazing his head. He, however, felt secure when he had the rifle reloaded, and had also managed to load both pistols.

The horses were laden with the few provisions remaining, and Wylie was ordered to lead the first horse, while Eyre went up the rear, having, before leaving, wrapped the murdered overseer in his blanket where he fell, the surface of the ground, consisting of rock, making it impossible for a grave to be dug.

After journeying for ten miles, Eyre and his solitary companion stopped until the heat of the day was past. About four in the afternoon, as they were resuming the journey, two white objects appeared amongst the scrub, which turned out to be the two runaways enveloped in their white blankets. Eyre approached them with his rifle, determined to shoot the elder of the two if they came near, but they retired as he advanced. They both carried shot-guns with the barrels pointing at him, and in the hopes of being able to rush them and wrest the gun from the elder, Eyre laid

his weapons down ; but the black boys still retired. He thereupon went back to the horses and resumed the march, the black boys following in the distance, and shouting out for Wylie to join them. Finding that no further notice was taken of them, they set up a dismal howling, following in the distance until the denseness of the scrub concealed them ; nor were they seen or heard again.

The journey was continued, waterless and wearying, through the almost interminable scrub of dwarf bushes. Once some holes were found which in the rainy season must have been full of water ; but there was not a drop in any of them. "In only one deep hole did we find the least trace of moisture ; this had at the bottom of it perhaps a couple of wine-glasses full of mud and water, and was most carefully blocked up from the birds with huge stones. It had evidently been visited by natives not an hour before we arrived at it, and I suspect they were as much disappointed as we were upon rolling away the stones to find nothing in it." (Eyre's "Expeditions.")

The severity of their task was beginning to tell upon both horses and men. "As for ourselves," Eyre wrote, "we are both getting very weak and worn out as well as lame, and it was with the greatest difficulty I could get Wylie to move after he once sat down. I had myself the same kind of apathetic feeling, and would gladly have laid down and slept

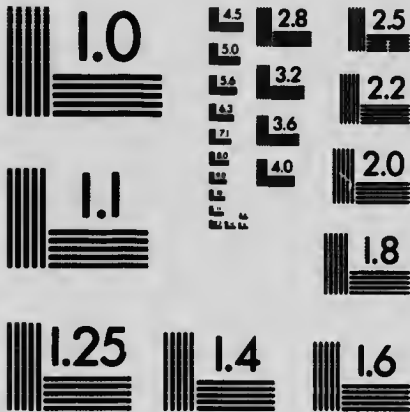


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for ever." This was the state in which they were on May 8, the seventh day since leaving the last water, when they saw, showing over the scrub bushes, sandhills some ten miles away. It was a likely spot for water, and their drooping energies were roused by the possibility sufficiently to enable them to push forward through the surrounding scrub. By midday they came upon a place where black fellows had evidently dug for water, and they set to work and scooped out a hole some five feet deep before they could obtain enough to fill a pannikin. But they had reached water at last, after journeying for a hundred and fifty miles over a rocky, barren, scrubby tableland, made still more desolate to Eyre by the tragedy which had been enacted upon it.

They rested two days, and then resumed the journey, a flight of black cockatoos passing over them satisfying Eyre that they were nearing better country. One of the horses knocked up before they had completed ten miles, and they were compelled to camp again, being fortunate to find more water by digging, in addition to which slight rain fell, and the water collected in crevices of the rock. But the rain had come too late to save the sick horse, and, seeing that it could not possibly recover, Eyre killed it, and "jerked" some of its flesh. The death of the horse was a great event to Wylie, who, in accordance with the instincts

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of his race, was joyful at the prospect of an unlimited gorge. As illustrating the capacity of a black fellow for consuming food, Eyre put on record some of Wylie's achievements during this part of the journey, for the country steadily improving, and both game and water being fairly plentiful, there was no need for short rations.

The day the horse was killed Wylie roasted about twenty pounds to eat during the night, though he was cutting off pieces and roasting and eating them all the time the animal was being skinned and cut up. "By-and-by, massa, you see me *pta* (eat) all night," he told Eyre; and he kept his word, though he complained in the morning that he had a pain which would not allow him to work, and which he attributed to long abstinence from water, the cause, also, of his inability to consume as much as he thought he should of the horseflesh. Nevertheless, he was eating all day as well as all night.

On May 11 Eyre records in his account of the expedition that Wylie ate, between supper and breakfast, six and a half pounds of cooked meat: and on May 18 he consumed, as one meal, a pound and a half of horseflesh and some bread; the entrails, paunch, liver, lights, tail, and two hind legs of a kangaroo; a penguin he had found dead on the beach; the whole of the hide from the kangaroo after merely singeing the hair off; and

concluding with the tough skin of the penguin ; after which he made a little fire and lay down beside it, sleeping soundly and peacefully.

By May 19 they were in good grass country, and a camp was made for the purpose of allowing the remaining horse to benefit by the feed available. Near the spot selected, Eyre found a tree on which were cut the words, " Ship *Julian*, 1840. Haws, 1840, and C.W.," the marks probably made by some of the crew of a whaling vessel visiting the coast. While the horse was picking up flesh and strength, the two men were also able to obtain better food than the jerked horseflesh, there being numerous kangaroo in the bush, and abundance of good fish and crabs to be caught from the rocks along the shore. By the 26th, when the march was resumed, both men and horse had greatly benefited by the rest, and, as the country continued well wooded, grassed, and watered, the grave anxieties of the past few weeks were relieved.

Ascending a hill on the coast on June 2, Eyre was amazed to see below him, in a big bay, two boats apparently engaged in fishing. He and Wylie did all they could to attract the attention of the men in them, but without avail ; and they were sitting moodily watching them, depressed and disappointed, when the masts of a ship were observed showing over a small island below their resting-place, and about six miles out to sea. They

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were more fortunate in their efforts to attract attention from the ship, which turned out to be the French whaling barque *Mississippi*, commanded by an Englishman, Captain Rossiter, who did everything in his power to assist the travellers.

With a replenished stock of provisions, Eyre and his companion resumed the journey, celebrating the anniversary of the commencement of the expedition on June 18 in country that afforded them everything they needed in the way of game and water, and food for the horse. Without any exceptional incident, they journeyed on until June 30, on which day they came in sight of the hills round King George's Sound, the sight of which made Wylie wild with delight.

A week later, having been delayed by low-lying flooded country and deep inlets of the sea, the small party entered the little township of Albany to the amazement of the inhabitants, both black and white, Eyre finding his friends and acquaintances had but recently put off the mourning they had worn after the news of his death, received months before. Thus terminated one of the most daring, adventurous, and romantic expeditions ever undertaken in Australia, one which only added to the knowledge of the continent an account of a dreary, barren, waterless waste, but contributed to the stock of Australian history a record of undeviating courage and undying energy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PAINTED CAVES OF WESTRALIA.

IN 1836 a suggestion was made to the Imperial Government by Captain (subsequently Sir George) Grey for the despatch of a small expedition to explore the north-western portion of the Australian continent with a view of ascertaining whether any large stream entered the ocean in that neighbourhood. The scheme was approved, and the party left England with instructions to land in the north-west of Western Australia, near Dampier's Land, and proceed overland in a southerly direction to the Swan River Settlement (now Perth).

On December 3, 1836, in the height of the Australian summer, Grey and his companions arrived in a small schooner off Hanover Bay. The sight of land was so pleasant after the long sea voyage that, in spite of its rocky appearance, Grey decided, with five companions and three dogs, to go ashore and walk round the bay in order to ascertain its dimensions. The result of such an undertaking, under the conditions, was

foregone, and yet it did not appear to have been realized by the leader. Describing this first enterprise of the expedition, Grey wrote: "The sun was intensely hot. The long and close confinement on board a small vessel had unfitted us all for taking any violent or continued exercise without some previous training, and the country in which we landed was of a more rugged and precipitous character than any I had ever before seen; indeed, I cannot more clearly describe the hills than by saying that they appeared to be the ruins of hills, composed as they were of huge blocks of red sandstone, confusedly piled together in the wildest disorder, and so overgrown with spinifex and scrub that the interstices were completely hidden, and into these one or the other of the party was continually slipping and falling. The trees were so small, and their foliage so scanty and slight, that they afforded no shelter whatever from the burning rays of the sun, which appeared to strike up again from the sandstone with redoubled heat, so that it was really painful to touch or stand upon the bare rock."

They had landed with only two pints of water between them, and were consequently soon tortured by a parching thirst, which they were unable to satisfy. The heat also produced a feeling of great lassitude, under the influence of which they could hardly rouse sufficient energy to walk. Upon

the dogs the effect of the heat was speedily fatal, and before the party had advanced a mile from the spot where they landed, the three dogs had fallen dead. The men still straggled on, until those in front called out that there was a pool of water ahead. At once fresh life was given to all, and they hurried forward to the pool, throwing themselves on the ground round it, and drinking copiously of what, in their haste and indiscretion, they did not realize was brackish water. They had left the shore to reach the pool, which was some little distance inland, the country all around them being very broken and rugged; and in trying to force their way over it, the effect of the brackish water they had imbibed was very soon painfully manifest. The thirst returned with redoubled vigour, their mouths and throats becoming so parched that they could scarcely speak, while the last man also returned, and Grey had to use his utmost labours to induce some of the men to move on.

He now recognized that the only course was to return to the shore and signal to the schooner; but as they were out of sight of the sea, he had to find the way first while his men straggled behind. Upon reaching the shore, he stripped and lay in the water, by which means he somewhat reduced the torture of the thirst; and as soon as the men appeared, one by one, they

followed his example, and profited by it. But although they reduced their sufferings, they were, unconsciously, exposing themselves to imminent danger. They had landed at a part of the coast teeming with hostile natives, as subsequent experiences proved them to be, and were throughout this journey constantly watched and followed. Their escape from attack was probably due to the uncertainty, on the part of the blacks, as to what they really were.

The schooner was not visible from the place where they came out on to the coast, and Grey, accompanied by one man, walked further round the shore, in order to signal for a boat to take off the now almost incapacitated members of the party. An arm of the sea, running far inland, blocked their progress, and as Grey only could swim, he decided to cross it, and go on alone until he could see the schooner. Plunging in, he had not taken ten strokes before he discovered that the tide was running so furiously that he had to exert himself to the utmost to avoid being carried out to sea. He had a pistol in his hand so as to be able to attract the attention of those on board the schooner when he reached the other shore, for evening was fast closing in; but he was unable to swim against the current and hold the pistol out of the water at the same time, and the powder became saturated.

Approaching the other side, he saw the head and shoulders of a black fellow showing just above a bank, and as soon as he reached water sufficiently shallow to stand, the black shouted and disappeared. Grey hastened to a point from whence he could see the schooner, and tried to attract attention by shouting, darkness having now come on. The only result of his exertions seemed to be to attract the notice of the blacks, whose yells resounded through the bush behind him. Anticipating an attack, and knowing his inability to make the men on the schooner hear, Grey crept back along the shore until he came upon a narrow opening, into which he crept and huddled up.

Wearied out by his exertions, he slept as he lay in the small cave, and only awakened to hear his own name being called by the men in a boat, who were searching for him along the shore.

The experience this preliminary survey satisfied Grey and his companions that their movements would have to be more carefully arranged unless disaster were to be the end of the expedition. In order to avoid a repetition of it, a depôt camp was necessary on shore as a base; and after spending a day or so in finding a suitable site for one, the party commenced landing stores and otherwise making arrangements for their comfort during the absence of

the schooner on a trip to Timor for the purchase of ponies. By December 16 the schooner was able to get away; and on the following day, Grey and two men set out to briefly explore the broken sandstone country lying behind the camp.

After considerable and heavy climbing up a precipitous gorge, the small band emerged on to a tableland curiously broken here and there by sandstone pillars rising above the ordinary level like the remains of "a ruined aisle." They were sometimes covered with creepers, but more often were bare stone blocks, and for a time Grey was puzzled to account for their appearance, until, indeed, he saw others in course of formation. The sandstone was of a type easily worn through by water, and during the tropical rain squalls, the surface was covered with water, which rushed off so rapidly as to wear deep crevices into the sides of the flat strata of stone. In course of time masses were thus isolated, and being further exposed to the action of the weather, were worn away, until only the harder portions remained as columns or pillars standing on the upper surface of the next underlying stratum.

The rain squall which afforded Grey the opportunity of observing the action of water on the rock also enabled him and his companions to obtain an advantage over, and save their lives from a band of armed natives. As they sought

for shelter from the rain, they noticed an overhanging ledge of rock, to reach which they had to turn sharply round a dwarf pillar, so that, when they were squeezed up under the ledge, they commanded a view of their own track up to and round the pillar. Scarcely were they sheltered when they saw a native, with a spear in his right hand fitted to his throwing-stick, and several more loose in his left hand, emerge from the bush on their track. His body was crouched down until his back was very little higher than his knees; his eyes were intently fixed on the footsteps he was tracing, and his form, covered with dabs and lines of yellow and red ochre, moved so silently that not a sound reached the white men. Directly he was clear of the bush, they saw another native following exactly in his footsteps, equally bent down and equally silent, and yet another behind him, and so on, until a total number of thirteen was counted. Every man carried spears, a throwing-stick, and a club, and moved steadily onwards, until the leader, turning round the pillar, faced directly where the white men sat.

He sprang back with a wild yell, which was echoed by his followers, and answered in a loud chorus from the top of the rocks under which Grey and his companions were crouching. The leader, as he sprang back, poised the spear in

his right hand, and his example being followed by his comrades, a conflict seemed to be inevitable. In vain Grey stood up and made pacific signs; the only reply was an angry shout and a quivering of the spears.

To alarm them Grey raised his rifle and fired over the leader's head, and as the ball cut its way through the foliage beyond, all except the chief dashed into the bush and vanished. But the chief stood his ground, with his spear ready for throwing, and staring at Grey with a haughty fearless expression. Moved to admiration at the undaunted courage of the native in the presence of what, to him, must have been a most inexplicable phenomenon, Grey lowered his rifle and repeated his signs of peace. The black fellow watched him, and then, lowering his spear, sprang into the thicket, and vanished without a sound; whereupon the white men returned rapidly to their camp.

While waiting the return of the schooner with the ponies, several small trips were made in the immediate neighbourhood of the camp, and abundant evidence obtained of the fact that there was a considerable native population in the vicinity. Tracks, as plain and as well worn as those leading to a country farmhouse, were found in the bush, a unique discovery being a heap of broken cockle-shells, measuring over ten

feet high, found above the shore. But no black fellow was actually seen.

The schooner returned from Timor on January 16, 1837, with twenty-six ponies for the use of the expedition. They were wild, sturdy little animals, and gave an enormous amount of trouble in being brought ashore, but once landed, they were laden with packs, and the expedition set off into the interior. The sandstone ridge behind the bay was found to be very difficult to get over, and in passing up the narrow gorges, accidents to the ponies and consequent delays were very numerous. In addition to the accidents, the ponies suffered severely from sickness, and no less than fourteen out of the twenty-six were soon dead.

In order to find a more easy route, Grey and two men set out ahead of the main party. One of the three, armed with an axe, chipped a piece out of the trees as they passed, so as to enable them to find their way back again to the camp; but Grey, happening to observe that the man had failed to chip one prominent tree, sent him back to remedy his oversight. As he did not at once return, Grey called, and went back to look for him, but failed to see him, and again called. The events which immediately ensued are best told in Grey's own words.

"Suddenly I saw him close to me, breathless and speechless with terror, and a native, with his

spear fixed in a throwing-stick, in full pursuit of him. Immediately numbers of other natives burst upon my sight; each tree, each rock, seemed to give forth its black denizen, as if by enchantment. A moment before the most solemn silence pervaded the woods—we deemed that not a human being moved within miles of us—and now they rang with savage and ferocious yells, and fierce armed men crowded round us on every side, bent on our destruction. . . . As soon as I saw the natives around me, I fired one barrel of my gun over the head of him who was pursuing my dismayed attendant, hoping the report would have checked his further career. My shot stopped him not; he still closed on us, and his spear whistled by my head; but whilst he was fixing another in his throwing-stick, a ball from my second barrel struck him in the arm, and it fell powerless by his side. He now retired behind a rock, but the others still pressed on.

“I now made the two men retire behind some neighbouring rocks, which formed a kind of protecting parapet along our front and right flank, while I took post on the left. . . . In the meantime our opponents pressed more closely round; their spears kept whistling by us, and our fate seemed inevitable. A light-coloured man sprang forward to a rock not more than thirty yards from us, and, posting himself behind it, threw a spear

with such deadly force and aim that had I not drawn myself forward by a sudden jerk, it must have gone through my body, and as it was, it touched my back in flying by. Another well-directed spear from a different hand would have pierced me in the breast, but in the motion I made to avoid it, it struck upon the stock of my gun, of which it carried away a portion by its force.

"All this took place in a few seconds of time, and no shot had been fired but by me. I now recognized in the light-coloured man the old enemy who had led on the former attack. By his cries and gestures he now appeared to be urging the others to surround and press on us, which they were rapidly doing. I saw now that but one thing could be done to save our lives, so I gave Coles my gun to complete the reloading, and took the rifle. Stepping out from behind our parapet, I advanced to the rock which covered my light-coloured opponent. I had not made two steps in advance when three spears struck me nearly at the same moment, one of which was thrown by him. I felt severely wounded in the hip, but knew not exactly where the others had struck me. The force of all knocked me down, and made me feel very giddy and faint. But as I fell I heard the savage yells of the native's delight and triumph; these recalled me to myself, and, roused by momentary rage and indignation, I

made a strong effort, rallied, and in a moment was on my legs, the spear was wrenched from my wound, and my haversack drawn closely over it, that neither my own party nor the natives might see it, and I advanced again steadily to the rock. The man became alarmed, and threatened me with his club, yelling most furiously; but as I neared the rock, behind which all but his head and arm was covered, he fled towards an adjoining one, dodging dexterously, according to the native manner of confusing an assailant and avoiding the cast of his spear; but he was scarcely uncovered in his flight when my rifle-ball pierced him through the back, between the shoulders, and he fell heavily on his face with a deep groan.

"The effect was electrical. The tumult of the combat had ceased; not another spear was thrown, not another yell uttered. Native after native dropped away, and noiselessly disappeared. I stood alone with the wretched savage dying before me, and my two men close to me behind the rocks, in the attitude of deep attention, and as I looked round upon the dark rocks and forests, now suddenly silent and lifeless, but for the sight of the unhappy being who lay on the ground before me, I could have thought that the whole affair had been a horrid dream.

"The natives had all concealed themselves, but they were not far off. Presently the wounded man

made an effort to raise himself slowly from the ground; some of them instantly came from behind the rocks and trees, without their spears, crowding round him with the greatest tenderness and solicitude. Two passed their arms round him, his head drooped senselessly upon his chest, and with hurried steps the whole party wound their way through the forest, their black forms being scarcely distinguishable from the charred trunks of the trees as they receded in the distance." (Grey's "Journals.")

The fight was over, for the natives vanished, and did not reappear during the remainder of the time the explorers were in the district; but for the time being, Grey was severely wounded in the thigh, one of his men (the one who had run from the blacks) was helpless through fear, and the other was too confused to be able to load a rifle. In this predicament Grey had to dress his wound, and while leaning on one man, direct the other back to the camp, at the same time momentarily expecting the attack to be renewed.

They had to cross a small creek on their way, and the exertion told so seriously on Grey, already weakened very much from loss of blood, that when he reached the other side he sank to the ground unable to go further. He ordered his men to carry him to a tree which grew upon a slight rise, and set him with his back to it, and place his rifle on his knees. While they hastened on to

the camp for further assistance, he sat, with his finger on the trigger, momentarily expecting the natives to burst out upon him, but determined to sell what he believed to be, at the moment, only a brief span of life, as dearly as he could. Assistance from the camp, however, soon reached him, and he was conveyed back, after his wound had been dressed, on a roughly made stretcher, and accommodated, as well as the resources of the camp would allow, with care and attention. For more than a month he was incapacitated, and even when he insisted, on February 27, upon being lifted into a saddle so as to resume the journey, he was far from recovered. Indeed, the surgeon who was with the party ultimately prevailed upon him to return to the depôt on Hanover Bay in consequence of the continued bad state of the wound. But before that time Grey discovered a river (which he named the Glenelg), along the rocky banks of which he came upon the painted and carved caves, a find which, with his exciting brush with the natives, made the expedition noteworthy.

The river, when first the explorers came upon it, appeared to be a magnificent stream in the midst of luxuriant country. They ascended its banks, filled with enthusiasm at the discovery, but their joy was short-lived. A ledge of rock barred the course of the stream, and above the rapids it caused, the river shrank into an ordinary creek,

while the banks changed from luxuriantly grassed flats into sandstone ridges. As they continued their way slowly up the stream, the shouts of natives were heard, and tracks were found near the camp of the expedition, but the natives themselves kept carefully out of sight. More than that, the tracks disappeared as if by magic. The white men followed them for a time, and then they ceased, so suddenly and so completely that "not a twig was broken, not a stone was turned, and we could not observe that even the drops of rain had been shaken from a single blade of grass." In searching for further signs, however, the discovery was made which formed, perhaps, the most distinguishing feature of the expedition.

In describing it, Grey wrote: "My attention was drawn to the numerous remains of native fires and encampments which we met with, till, at last, on looking over some bushes at the sandstone rocks which were above us, I suddenly saw from one of them a most extraordinary large figure peering down upon me. Upon examination this proved to be a drawing at the entrance to a cave, which, on entering, I found to contain many remarkable paintings. The cave appeared to be a natural hollow in the sandstone rocks; its floor was elevated about five feet from the ground, and numerous flat broken pieces of the same rock, which were scattered about, looked at a distance

like steps leading up to the cave, which was thirty-five feet wide at the entrance and sixteen feet deep; but beyond this several small branches ran further back. Its height in front was rather more than eight feet, the roof being formed by a solid slab of sandstone about nine feet thick, and which rapidly inclined towards the back of the cave, which was there not more than five feet high.

"On this sloping roof the principal figure which I have just alluded to was drawn. In order to produce the greater effect, the rock about it was painted black, and the figure itself coloured the most vivid red and white. It thus appeared to stand out from the rock, and I was certainly rather surprised at the moment that I first saw this gigantic head and upper part of a body bending over and staring grimly down at me.

"Its head was encircled by bright red rays, something like the rays one sees proceeding from the sun when depicted on the sign-board of a public-house; inside of this came a broad stripe of very brilliant red, which was coped by lines of white, but both inside and outside of this red space were narrow stripes of still deeper red, intended probably to mark its boundaries. The face was painted vividly white and the eyes black, being, however, surrounded by red and yellow lines. The body, hands, and arms were

outlined in red, the body being curiously painted with red stripes and bars.

“Upon the rock which formed the left-hand wall of this cave, and which partly faced you on entering, was a very singular painting, vividly coloured, representing four heads joined together. From the mild expression of the countenances I imagined them to represent females, and they appeared to be drawn in such a manner and in such a position as to look up at the principal figure which I have before described. Each had a very remarkable head-dress, coloured with a deep bright blue, and one had a necklace on. Both of the lower figures had a sort of dress, painted with red in the same manner as that of the principal figure, and one of them had a band round her waist. Each of the four faces was marked by a totally distinct expression of countenance, and although none of them had mouths, two, I thought, were otherwise good-looking. The whole painting was executed on a white ground.

“The next most remarkable drawing in the cave was an ellipse, three feet in length and one foot ten inches in breadth. The outside line of this painting was of a deep blue colour, the body of the ellipse being of a bright yellow dotted over with red lines and spots, whilst across it ran two transverse lines of blue. The portion of the

painting above described formed the ground or main portion of the picture, and upon this ground was painted a kangaroo in the act of feeding, two stone spear-heads, and two black balls; one of the spear-heads was flying to the kangaroo and one away from it, so that the whole subject probably constituted a sort of charm by which the luck of an inquirer in killing game could be ascertained.

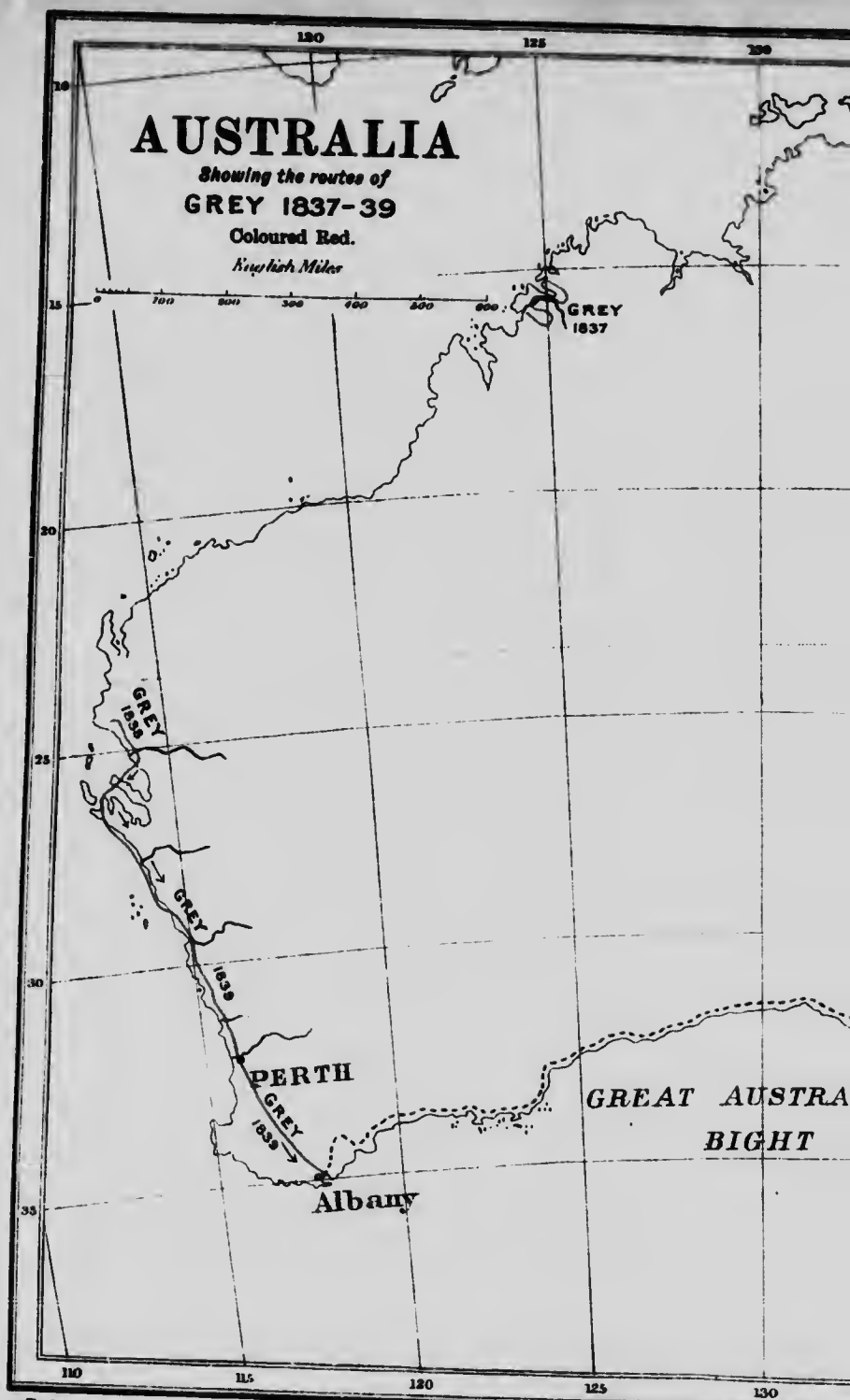
"There was another rather humorous sketch which represented a native in the act of carrying a kangaroo, the height of the man being three feet. The number of drawings in the cave could not altogether have been less than from fifty to sixty, but the majority of them consisted of men, kangaroos, etc., the figures being badly and carelessly executed, and having evidently a very different origin from those which I have first described. Another very striking piece of art was exhibited in the little gloomy cavities situated at the back of the main cavern. In these instances some rock at the sides of the cavity had been selected, and the stamp of a hand and arm by some means transferred to it; this outline of the hand and arm was then painted black, and the rock about it white, so that on entering that part of the cave, it appeared as if a human hand and arm were projecting through a crevice admitting light.

"After having discovered this cave, I returned

to the party, and, . . . proceeding some distance, we found a cave larger than the one seen this morning, but which contained no paintings. I was moving on when we observed the profile of a human head and face cut out in a sandstone rock which fronted the cave. This rock was so hard that to have removed such a large portion of it with no better tool than a knife and hatchet made of stone, such as the Australian natives generally possess, would have been a work of very great labour. The head was two feet in length and sixteen inches in breadth in the broadest part. The depth of the profile increased gradually from the edges, where it was nothing, to the centre, where it was an inch and a half. The ear was rather badly placed, but otherwise the whole of the work was good and far superior to what a savage race could be supposed capable of executing. The only proof of antiquity that it bore about it was that all the edges of the cutting were rounded and perfectly smooth, much more so than they could have been from any other cause than long exposure to atmospheric influences."

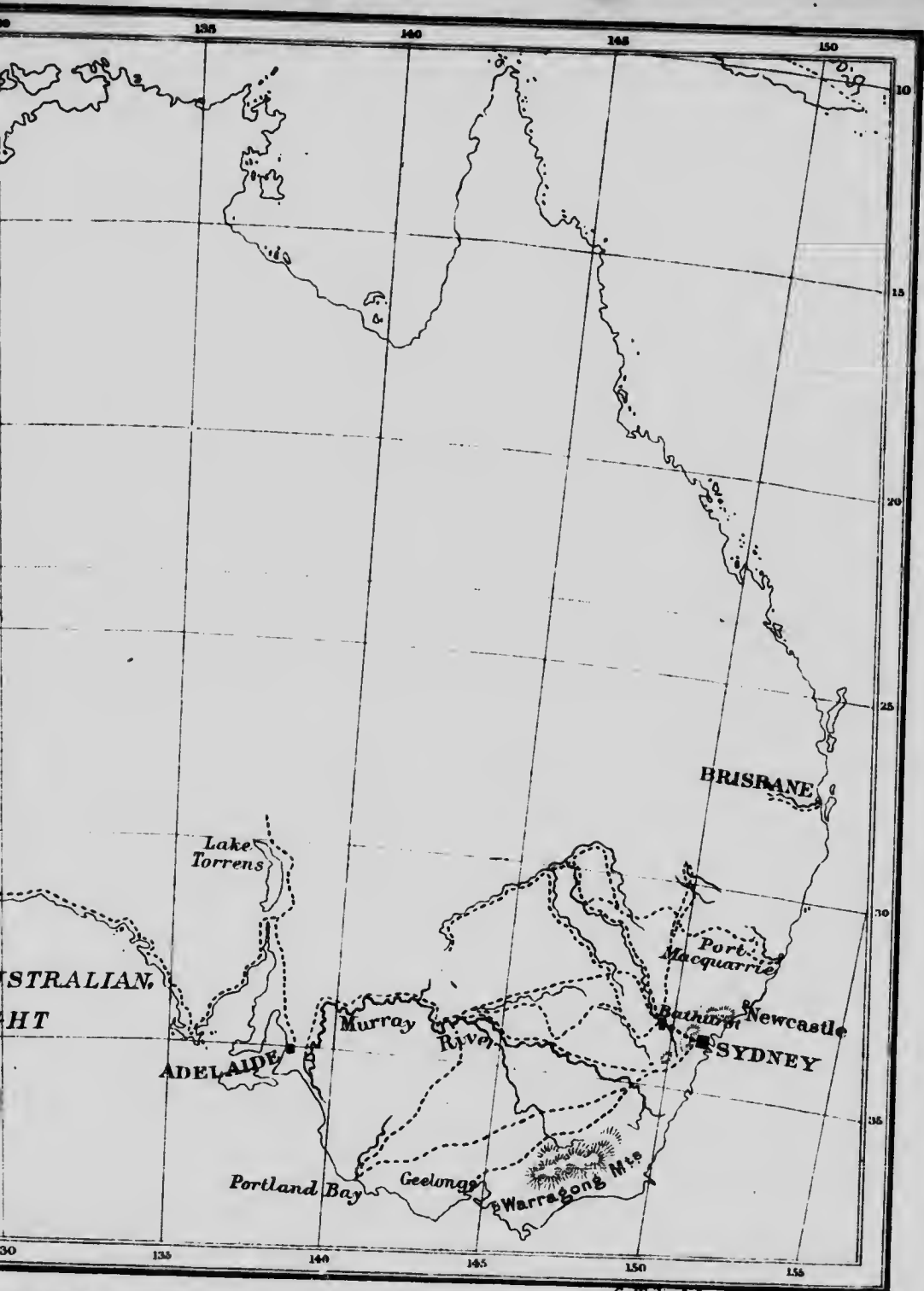
Some days subsequently other caves were found in which the walls had also been decorated. In one "the principal painting was the figure of a man, ten feet six inches in length, clothed from the chin downwards in a red garment, which reached to the wrists and ankles; beyond this

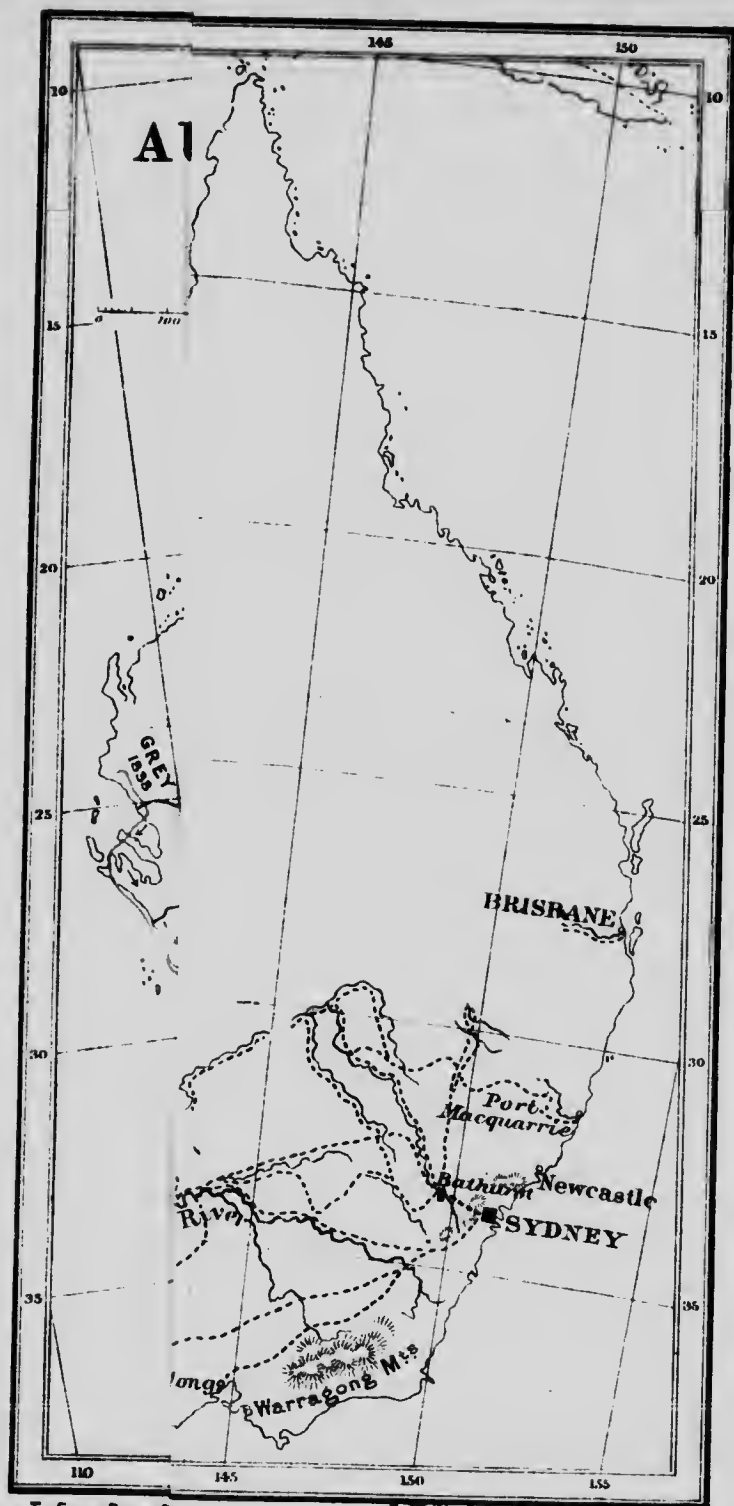
dress the feet and hands protruded, and were badly executed. The face and head of the figure were enveloped in a succession of circular bandages or rollers, or what appeared to be painted to represent such. These were coloured red, yellow, and white, and the eyes were the only features represented on the face. Upon the highest bandage, or roller, a series of lines were painted in red, but although so regularly done as to indicate that they have some meaning, it was impossible to tell whether they were intended to depict written characters or some ornament for the head. This figure was so drawn on the roof that its feet were just in front of a natural seat, whilst its head and face looked directly down on any one who stood in the entrance of the cave; but it was totally invisible from the outside. The painting was more injured by the damp and atmosphere, and had the appearance of being much more defaced and ancient than any of the others which we had seen. There were two other paintings, one on each of the rocks which stood on either side of the natural seat. They were carefully executed, and yet had no apparent design in them, unless they were intended to represent some fabulous species of turtle; for the natives of Australia are generally fond of narrating tales of fabulous and extraordinary animals, such as gigantic snakes, etc. One of the party walked



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To Face Page 2

E. Philip & Son, London & Liverpool

straight up the cavern until he reached the slab at the end, and seated himself. To his own and our surprise, his bare head just touched the roof of the cave, and on examining this part of it, we found it fairly polished and very greasy, from all appearances caused by the constant rubbing against it of the head of a person whilst seated on the rock. This and other circumstances led us to conjecture that the cave was frequented by some wise man or native doctor who was resorted to by the inhabitants in cases of disease or witchcraft. We saw many footmarks about, and found other signs of the close presence of natives, but they themselves remained invisible."

CHAPTER XIII.

LEICHHARDT IN THE NORTH.

THE east, the south, and the west of the continent having been explored, and, where the country permitted it, opened up for settlement, the north began to attract the attention of explorers. This was an inevitable preliminary to the great undertaking of a transcontinental expedition, which, when completed, laid bare to Australians the magnificence of their heritage, and disproved the earlier theories of the departmental explorers who, had they been allowed to have their way, would have smothered the vast wealth of the territory under their official misapprehensions, as they strangled, for nearly twenty-five years, the national progress of the country by hiding from public knowledge the discovery of gold.

The exploration of the north is peculiarly associated with the name of Ludwig Leichhardt, a man who, having accomplished the first journey across what is now the colony of Queensland, from

Moreton Bay in the south, to beyond the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north, and made known a pastoral, agricultural, and mineral area twelve times the size of England and Wales, set out on another expedition to journey from the east coast to the west, and disappeared, with all his comrades, so completely that no trace has ever been found which would explain the fate of the expedition. That Leichhardt did undoubted and valuable service in his first big journey is not to be denied; but of those which he led subsequently, two were practical failures, and the third, as has been stated, terminated in disaster as mysterious as it was complete. The eye of the embryo nation, just beginning to manifest symptoms of vitality, was, however, upon him after his brilliant exploit of reaching the north, and in the widespread interest in his doings and sorrow at his end, the work of other explorers in this locality may have been overlooked by the public.

The idea of journeying to the north was originally a Government scheme. Mitchell attempted it, and succeeded in nearly getting half-way; Sturt essayed it from another starting-place, and became so hopelessly involved in stony country (and in so dry a season that he proclaimed it to be a vast stony desert) that he returned almost blind and dying. Then another official scheme was propounded and discussed.

It was at this time that Leichhardt came forward. He had, during his residence at Brisbane, devoted himself to scientific work, especially as regards botany and its kindred branches. This necessarily led him to take various expeditions, more or less extended, into the bush round the settlement, by which means he became thoroughly conversant with the exigencies of bush travel and rough-and-tumble hardship.

Along the northern coast, what now forms a portion of the Northern Territory of South Australia, the Government had established a settlement. As was not unusual with officially selected sites, the settlement proved a failure, earthquakes and hurricanes combining with fever and ague to demonstrate that the place was as unsuitable for white men to reside as the land in the immediate vicinity was useless for cultivation. The Government considered that a route, overland, to the more closely settled areas in the south, was alone necessary to make the northern colonial establishment a success, and it was the discussions which ensued upon this idea that fired the energy of Leichhardt.

At first, anxious merely to go with the expedition as a member, he waited until the proposal began to assume some definite form. He continued waiting until, growing weary, he formulated a scheme of his own. What resources he possessed

he staked, for his scheme was to organize, fit out, and lead an expedition himself. He was far from being a wealthy man, but he was well and widely known, and when he mooted his plan at Brisbane, several of his friends contributed to the funds, though several refused on the grounds that they would not help him to commit suicide. Proceeding to Sydney, he was enabled to obtain sufficient money to fit out a small party of eight white men and two black boys, with horses, some cattle, and flour, tea and sugar, for a few months.

Thus equipped, he set out from Brisbane, in September, 1844, on a journey of over three thousand miles through absolutely unknown country, for Port Essington, the Government settlement of the distant northern coast. Throughout the journey fortune certainly favoured the brave. At the latter portion of it, the want of water slightly inconvenienced them, and their stock suffered, while once there was a fatal encounter with the natives; but as a general rule Leichhardt had the benefit of a good season all the way through.

The party were not entirely the first white men, however, who had penetrated the interior. On December 31, 1844, Leichhardt wrote in his "Journal": "Brown (one of the black boys) accompanied me to reconnoitre the country, and we had scarcely travelled two miles along the creek when my attention was attracted by the

remains of a hut, consisting of a ridge pole and two forked sticks, both having been cut with a sharp iron tomahawk. Neither of us doubted that this was the work of a white man, probably a runaway from the settlement of Moreton Bay. A few miles further on we came to a branch of the creek which turned considerably to the westward. I followed it, and found a shallow watercourse that came out of the scrub, which I also examined in search of water. It led me to another deep channel within the scrub, which looked unusually green, and contained some very deep water-holes; but there was no water in them. Turning round one of the bends, we saw a column of thick smoke rising from its left bank near a fine pool of water. It was evident that a camp of natives was before us. We rode cautiously up to the water, near which we saw very numerous tracks, and then, stopping to look round but without dismounting, we were very soon discovered by one of them, who, after staring at us for a moment, uttered a cry resembling, 'White fellow, white fellow,' and ran off, followed by the whole party. We then rode up to the camp and found their dinner ready, consisting of two eggs of the bush-turkey, roast opossums, bandicoots, and iguanas. In their dillies (small wicker baskets) were several roots and tubers of an oblong form, about an inch in length and half an inch broad, of a sweet taste

and an agreeable flavour even when uncooked. There were also balls of pipe-clay to ornament them for corroborrees, good opossum cloaks, kangaroo nets, and dillies neatly worked of koorajong bark, and some spears made of the brigalow acacia. All were forgotten in the suddenness of their retreat. Brown thought that one of them looked like a half-caste, and as they called, so far as we understood, 'White fellow,' I felt confirmed in my supposition, either that a white man was with them or had lived among them very recently."

Few records of exploring expeditions are so free from incident as the account of this journey of Leichhardt's party. During the first half of 1845 day followed day without anything of a more exciting character occurring than the crossing of occasional deep creeks and the skirting of dense scrubs. The country, as they advanced to the north, was everywhere well grassed and well watered; and when, above the Tropic of Capricorn, they encountered the varied flora of tropical countries, it was difficult to believe that they were in the same land as that whose sandy desolation had been the constant complaint of Oxley. The rich vegetation, the brilliant plumage of many new birds, the constant occurrence of fruits hitherto unknown in the country, and similar discoveries made up the daily record of the explorers.

Game was plentiful, and so they had not as yet suffered any inconvenience either from want of food or water. Natives were numerous all along the route, as was to be expected from the character of the country; but they were either excessively shy, hastily retiring out of sight, or quite friendly. They showed a great deal more intelligence than the natives of the south, and were very peaceful.

The first exception to this general rule of peace was experienced in the latter end of June. By this time the party had attained a position on the northern Cape York Peninsular, some distance beyond the southern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria. On June 14 the discovery of native huts, or gunyahs, built in two stories, told them that they were in the vicinity of natives quite different to those of other known parts of Australia. A fortnight later they met some of the natives, who presented a fine appearance, and who regarded both horses and cattle without any of the usual symptoms of fear manifested by blacks when they first saw either animal. Indeed, so little were they affected by the sight, that while some of the men were carrying on a conversation by signs with the white men, one or two others were observed driving away the bullocks towards some low bushes, behind which other natives were waiting, with spears, in readiness to kill them. A shot from a rifle, fired

over their heads, dispersed them, and the journey was resumed.

Perhaps had Leichhardt had more practical experience of the warlike ways of the blacks during the expedition, the one fatality which mars the pages of the history would never have occurred. In spite of the reason for caution shown by the attempt of the local black fellows to drive off and spear the cattle belonging to the expedition, Leichhardt, on the day following, June 28, allowed the camp to be made in a thickly timbered district, the most suitable place, from the black fellows' point of view, where an attack could be made upon it. So secure did they feel that the white men neglected even to have one of their number on watch, with the result that just as they were about to retire to their tents for the night, a shower of spears, coming from all directions, fell around them.

The tents being pitched in accordance with each man's fancy, they were naturally scattered, and to this one chance circumstance may be attributed the fact that any of the party escaped with their lives. The attacking tribe was not numerous enough to send more than a few spears at each tent. Two men, standing together outside one of the tents, fell to the ground badly wounded, and the naturalist of the party, Gilbert, rushing out of his tent at the alarm, received a spear in a

downward flight between the neck and collar-bone, and fell dead.

Every one who was able to seize a firearm of any description fired into the bush on all sides, fortunately without hurting any of the horses and bullocks. Whether any of the blacks were hit was never known, although the noise of wailing heard by the white men the next morning suggested that some had been killed. The volley certainly made them retire, and the explorers were left undisturbed to attend to their wounded. Gilbert was found to be quite dead, and the other two, Roper and Calvert, painfully injured with barbed spears. The extraction of the barbs from the wounds was successfully performed, and the body of Gilbert was buried where it lay, a huge fire being made over the grave subsequently, so as to obliterate all signs of it from the blacks, and thus prevent the possibility of exhumation.

In order to avoid the chance of another collision, Leichhardt broke up camp directly it was daylight, making the two wounded men as comfortable as possible on horseback. They continued the march until they were out of the thickly timbered country, and although they frequently heard the natives near them, none were seen. The conflict, however, warned Leichhardt against pushing further to the north in the Peninsular. Reports of voyagers along the coast gave the natives a sinister name

for warlike habits, and after the fatal experience of their methods, Leichhardt turned his course more to the south-west. By July 5 the party reached the southern shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, along which they journeyed for some days, having, on July 7, a unique experience of the black fellow.

They had formed their camp for the night, and were setting things in order when "a black fellow glided like a ghost into our camp and walked directly up to the fire. Those who saw him first called out, 'Black fellow! black fellow!' and every gun was ready. But the stranger was unarmed, and evidently unconscious of his position, for when he saw himself suddenly surrounded by the horses and ourselves, he nimbly climbed a tree to its very summit, where he stood between some dry branches like a strange phantom or a statue. We called to him, and made signs for him to descend, but he not only remained silent, but motionless, notwithstanding all the signs and noise we made. We then discharged a gun, but it had not the intended effect of inducing him to speak or stir. At last I desired Charlie (one of the two civilized blacks accompanying the expedition) to ascend a neighbouring tree, and show him that we could easily get him if necessary.

"This plan was more successful, for no sooner were Charlie's intentions perceived than our friend gave a most convincing proof of his being neither

deaf nor dumb, by calling out most lustily. He 'poohed,' he 'brrrd,' he spat, and coo-eed. In fact, he did everything to make the silent forest re-echo with the wild sounds of his alarm. Our horses, which were standing under the tree, became frightened, and those which were loose ran away. We were much afraid that his coo-ees would bring the whole tribe to his assistance, and every one eagerly proffered his advice. Charlie wished to shoot him, 'or' he said, 'you will all be killed. I don't care for myself, but I care for your being killed and buried.' Others wished to remove from the spot and so give him an opportunity to escape. I was, of course, horrified at the idea of shooting the poor fellow, whose only crime, if so it might be called, was in having mistaken our fire for that of his own tribe. So I went to the fire where he could see me distinctly, and then made signs for him to descend and go away. He then began to be a little more quiet and to talk, but soon hollered again, and threw sticks at myself, at my companions, and at the horses. We now retired about eight yards to allow him to escape, which we had not done before because I feared he might imagine we were afraid of his incantations. He sang a most remarkable corroborree, and cried like a child, frequently exclaiming, 'Mareka! Mareka!' a word probably identical with Marega, the name given by the

Malays to the natives on the north coast, which is also called Mareja. After continuing his lamentations for some time, to all of which we took no notice, they gradually ceased, and in a few minutes a slight rustling noise was heard and he was gone." (Leichhardt's "Journal.")

The next morning the whole tribe, armed with spears and clubs, appeared in the distance, and watched the explorers break up camp, but without attempting to interfere in any way.

As they proceeded round the Gulf, they found the country considerably changing from what they had been experiencing. The timber became more scanty, the grass not so fresh, although still abundant, and, more important than all, water was not so easily obtained. Proceeding across the flat district to the south of the Gulf of Carpentaria, on September 9 they came upon sandstone country, which soon developed into a high tableland, broken with deep gorges having precipitous sides. It was the same class of country that had baffled Grey when he sought a way overland from Hanover Bay, in the north-west, to the Swan River Settlement; it was similar country, on a smaller scale, to that which for so many years checked the advance of the early settlers from the fertile district round Sydney to the rich plains of Bathurst, by the barrier of the Blue Mountains.

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To Leichhardt and his companions it was a grave trial. Their provisions had long since been exhausted, and they were compelled to rely almost entirely upon what they could kill with their guns; their bullocks were all consumed, and the number of their horses very considerably reduced, several having been drowned in crossing deep and rapid streams, or killed in falling down the steep rocky declivities of the sandstone country. Their clothes were worn to rags, and their boots reduced to such a state that they scarcely afforded any protection to the feet. But in spite of these trials, the two men who had been wounded by the blacks had recovered from their injuries, and the remainder of the party enjoyed good health in spite of the privations. For two months they were struggling to escape from the tangle of sandstone gorges and chasms; and when, on November 17, they caught sight of a wide fertile valley, they thought that at last their trials were over. The valley, however, was viewed from the summit of cliffs some eighteen hundred feet high, down which they could find no means of clambering. Seeking a way further back led them into more ravines and gorges, and only after five days' constant struggling and climbing did they succeed in reaching the valley. Game was naturally scarce in the country they had been passing through, and little time could be given to seek for it, so that while they were trying to

find a path from the tableland to the valley, eighteen hundred feet below, the explorers chiefly subsisted on a soup made of stewed green-hide.

They travelled down the valley and over the range which formed the opposite side of it, when they fell in with a tribe of natives, who came up to them with effusive friendliness, repeating words which the white men failed to recognize as English. They, however, gave the explorers food, and showed them on their way until another tribe was encountered, the members of which immediately asked for flour and tobacco. When their request was not complied with, they told Leichhardt he was "no good," but that the white men further on were "very good" (the words the first tribe had struggled to say). The news that they were near the settl['] was such a joyful surprise to the explorers t[']. They paid little attention to the uncomplimentary terms used towards them. The blacks guided them further on their way, until they came within the territory of the tribe in which Port Essington was situated. Here the natives also treated them well, and sent on word to the settlement of th[']ir approach. Leichhardt and his companions arrived on December 17, 1845, fifteen months after leaving Brisbane, during which time they had journeyed over three thousand miles over absolutely unknown country, thickly populated with natives, but with whom, saving the occasion

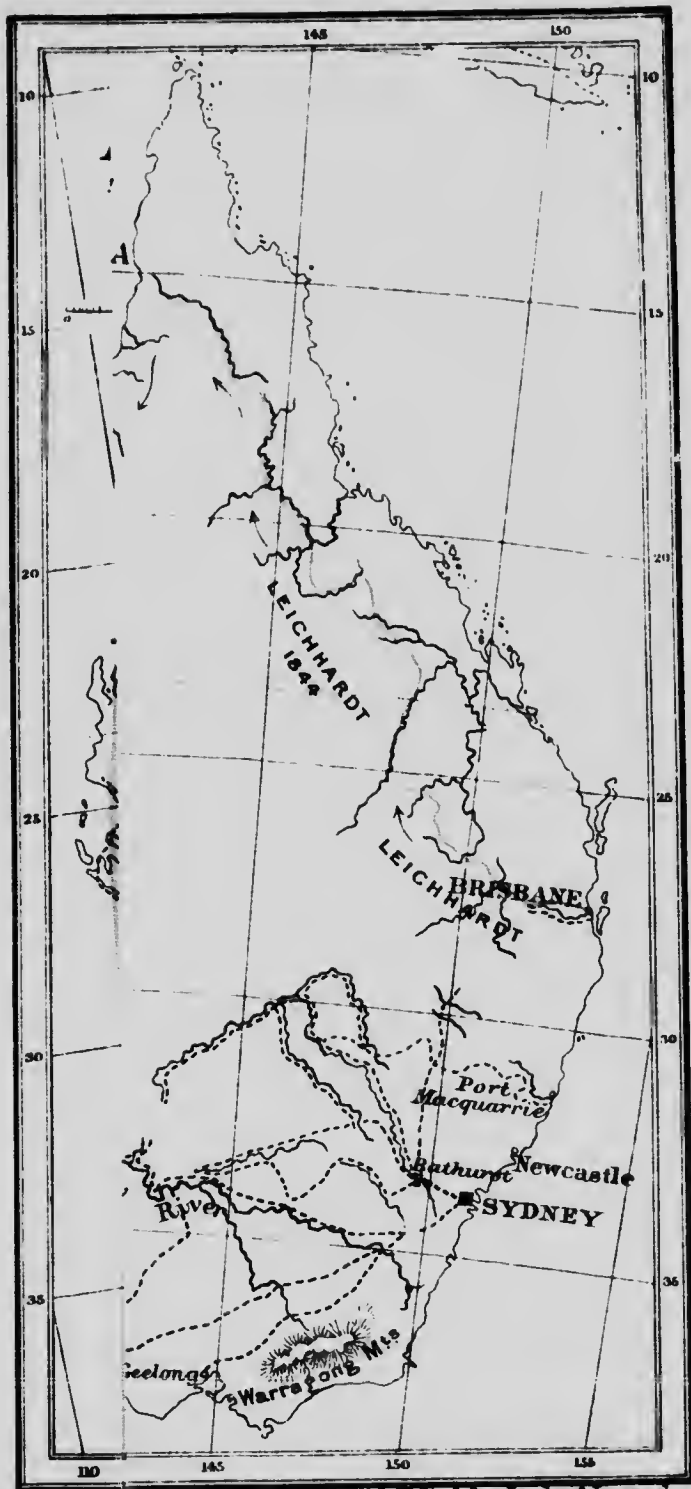
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when Gilbert met his death, they were always on friendly terms.

As was frequently the case with the early explorers, Leichhardt heard of his own death and the massacre of all his party when he arrived at Port Essington. His friends in the south, growing alarmed at the prolonged silence, had sent out a search party, which had returned with what were considered to be ample reasons for believing the entire expedition had been destroyed. The news of this supposed disaster was widely circulated, and when the reappearance of Leichhardt and his companions exploded it, the natural result was to make them popular characters. But when to this touch of romance was added the information they brought back of thousands of square miles of rich fertile land lying idle and unoccupied, the popular feeling grew apace, until Leichhardt was hailed as the "Prince of Explorers," and the work of other men was almost forgotten before the enthusiasm which existed for him.

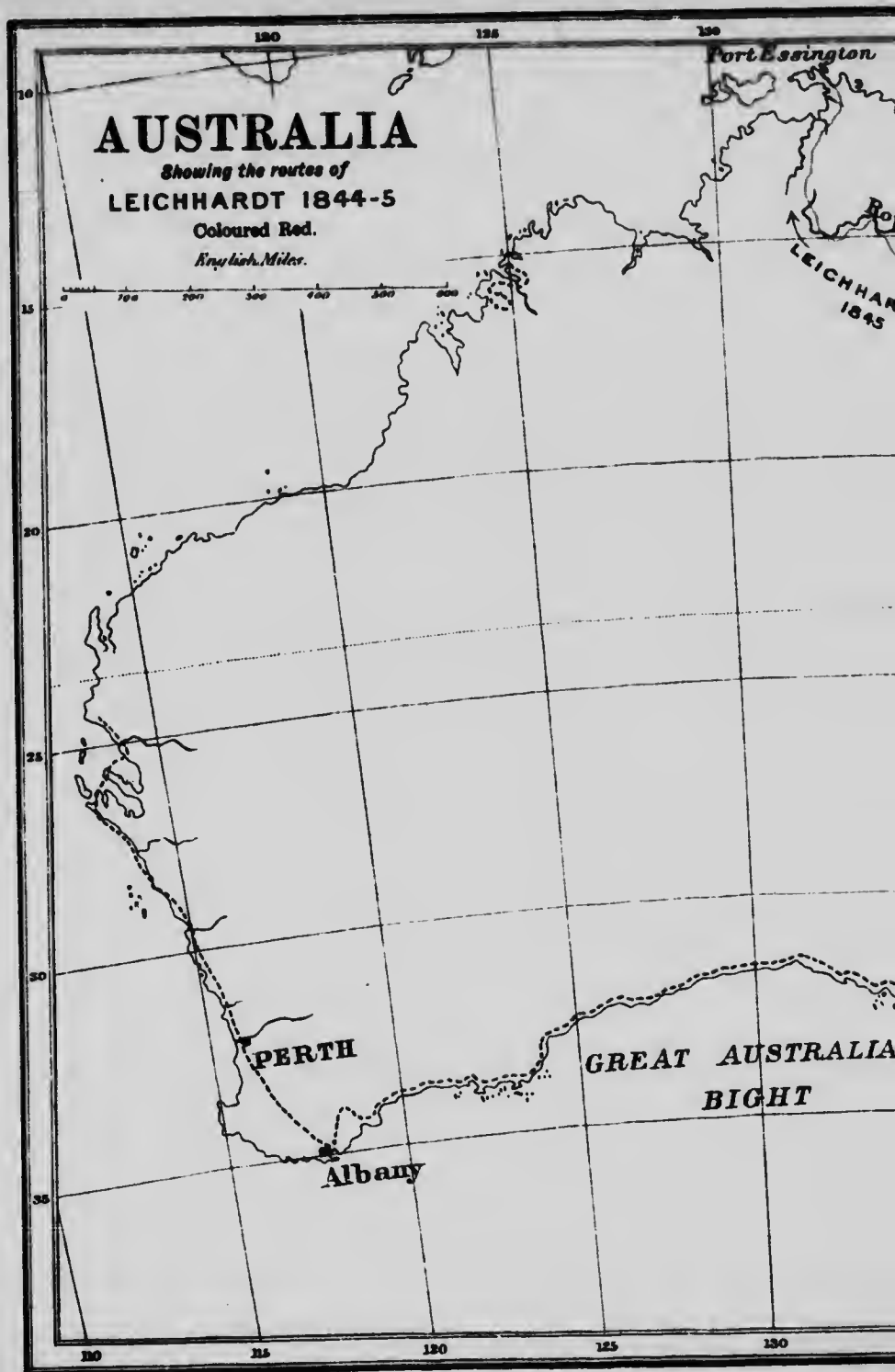
It is not, therefore, difficult to understand the widespread feeling of anxiety which arose a few years later, when "fatal 1848," as it has been termed, claimed Leichhardt as one of the victims of exploring disaster.

After his return from his brilliant Port Essington trip, he led two other expeditions, both of which were well fitted out, and both of which can only



To Face A

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be termed failures. In the meantime Sturt again entered the field to force a route from south to north, but the barren country to the north of Adelaide (which subsequently yielded to the courage and perseverance of McDowall Stuart, who was with Sturt as draughtsman of the party), combined with the rigours of a dry season, scattered Sturt's resources, and drove him back to Adelaide weak, ill, and almost blind. Leichhardt's reply to the south-north route was an expedition to go from the east coast to the west, but a brave start was soon followed by a useless return. He again set out to connect Mitchell's tracks with his own to Port Essington, and again returned, having accomplished nothing. But he was not discouraged, nor was the confidence of the public shaken. In 1848 he was given the command of a second expedition, fitted out to cross the continent from east to west. The most westerly station in Southern Queensland at the time was McPherson's, on Cogoan Creek. From there Leichhardt wrote a last letter as he was about to start into the unknown land beyond. That was the last ever heard of him or any of his party. As completely as though they had been swallowed up by the earth, they vanished. A few trees were subsequently discovered marked L, but as a man named Luff, who accompanied McDowall Stuart over that part of the country, had a particular

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fancy for marking trees with his initial, it is very much open to question whether even the L-trees can be regarded as reminiscences of Leichhardt.

What the actual fate of the party was has been the subject of much speculation. The fate which overtook the party led by Kennedy, and which set out in the same year, may have been a parallel in suffering and disaster to that of the last, and lost, Leichhardt expedition.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SLAUGHTER OF KENNEDY.

THE story of Kennedy's expedition for the exploration of Cape York Peninsular is the most tragic of all Australian exploring records, and, with the exception of Leichhardt's last journey, the one most marked by fatality.

Leaving Sydney on April 29, 1848, Kennedy, accompanied by ten white men and one black fellow, proceeded to Rockingham Bay, on what is now the North Queensland coast, by sea. By the end of the year, two of the white men, Carron, the botanist of the party, and Goddard, and the black fellow, Jacky Jacky, were all that remained, the spears of the natives, fever, and starvation being responsible for the remainder. The party was well found, having plenty of provisions and stock (horses and sheep), and it was arranged that a vessel should proceed to Port Albany at the north end of the peninsular, to await their arrival, which, it was expected, would occur towards the end of the year.

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Rockingham Bay was reached on May 21, and as soon as some of the party landed, they were met by a tribe of natives, who, however, evinced no hostility, but expressed and showed surprise at the number of horses and sheep the explorers had with them. By the end of the month everything was landed, and on June 5 a start was made from the camp. The country along the coast was flat and swampy, intersected with creeks and covered with an almost impenetrable scrub, the closely growing trees and shrubs being rendered still more of a barrier by the presence of the "lawyer vine," a long, slender, creeping cane, which twined from stem to stem and threw out long tendrils armed with inward curving spines. Carron, anxious soon after landing to secure some of the many new botanical specimens he saw on all sides, attempted to reach one by pushing aside a hanging festoon of "lawyer." At once he found that he was held in half a dozen places, and the more he struggled, the more the hooked tendrils clung to him. Only by slowly and carefully cutting through the stems which held him was he able to extricate himself from the difficulty. To force a way through such a scrub with stock and laden pack-horses was necessarily a tedious and slow process; but the constant occurrence of creeks, some of them too deep to be waded, caused further delays before the party

was able to escape from the coast and penetrate to the higher ground which lay behind. Even there the vegetation was extremely rank and luxuriant, and a route had to be cut for the expedition to pass.

The natives of the locality were of a higher grade than those of the southern districts. Much more ingenuity had been noticed by Leichhardt to have been used in the construction of the huts, or gunyahs, of the northern myalls; and Carron, while collecting specimens of new plants, came upon an interesting village, "consisting of eighteen or twenty gunyahs of an oval form, about seven feet long and four high, and at the southern end of the camp was one large gunyah, eighteen feet long, seven feet wide, and fourteen feet high. All of them were neatly and strongly built with small saplings stuck in the ground, arched over and tied together at the top with small shoots of the climbing palm (lawyer vine). They were covered with the bark of a large ti-tree fastened to the saplings with palm-shoots. A small opening was left at one end from the ground to the top, and the floors were covered with long dry grass." Inside the big hut was a large shield of hard wood, two feet in diameter, convex on one side and flat on the other, the convex side being painted with red rings and crosses, while on the flat side there was a handle cut out of the solid

wood. In the same hut were four wooden swords, three and a half feet long and four inches broad, sharp at both sides and thick in the centre, with a slightly curved round handle about six inches long. They were made of very hard wood, and were much too heavy to wield with one hand. There was also a number of fishing-lines made from grass, with hooks attached, of various sizes, made from mussel-shells. In the centre of the camp were four large ovens constructed by digging a hole in the ground about three feet in diameter and two feet deep, which was filled with small stones to within six inches of the top. Upon these stones the fire was lit and kept alight until the stones were all heated, when the ashes were brushed aside and the food roasted on the hot stones. Large shells and calabashes, made from wild gourds, were in every hut, evidently for holding water.

After leaving the place on the coast where they landed, the explorers came in contact with few natives until July 4. The difficulty of cutting through the dense scrub was still very great, and Kennedy, with three men, pushed on ahead of the main party to see if the country improved at all. They encountered a band of natives, armed with spears, who made a threatening demonstration. The white men made peaceful signs, and attempted to approach, when one of the blacks threw his

spear, which narrowly missed one of the white men. The aspects being now very threatening, Kennedy and his companions fired, and four blacks fell. The rest disappeared in the scrub, and the white men continued their way without further interruption.

By July 18 they had penetrated the range as high as two thousand feet, the scrub continuing so dense that they were never able to travel more than five miles a day, having to cut their way almost every yard of the route. The undergrowth was infested with leeches, which worked their way inside the men's boots, and sucked the blood from their legs and feet. At night, also, the leeches were a great pest, the men, unless very carefully selecting the place where they slept, waking in the morning to find themselves covered with blood.

The travelling through the scrub where there was little grass told severely on both the sheep and horses. The former lost flesh to such an extent that they had all been killed and eaten by August 17, on which day horseflesh had to be substituted. It was a change not particularly relished by some of the men, but the alternative of hunger soon overcame all scruples.

From day to day the experience was very much the same, a few miles being added to the journey and a few new botanical specimens noted or added to the collection. The blacks were wonderfully

quiet after the collision on July 4, and none were either seen or heard until the night of September 10. Then, during the first watch, the man on guard heard a movement in the scrub. A moment later there was a chattering, and almost immediately three spears whizzed past him and fell in the fire. The man fired his rifle in the direction where he had heard the chattering, and the noise alarming the camp, a volley was fired into the bush all round. But no sound answered the shots; everything was so still and quiet that had not the spears been in the camp to support the man's statement, his alarm would have been put down to fright. As it was, two things were manifest. Black fellows were following them, armed and angry, and no chance of avenging the injury to those who were shot on the former occasion would be allowed to pass by them. It was only by the most rigid care that an attack could be warded off, for as the blacks had followed so far, there was little doubt but that they would follow until, by good luck or good management, from their point of view, the white men were at their mercy. Then the story would be brief and fatal. And so it happened.

After that night-attack black fellows were frequently seen lurking in the scrub, and always, when they saw they were discovered, they threatened the white men with their spears. Now and

again a spear would come whizzing through the thick vegetation past a man who might be for a moment standing alone; occasionally a number of spears would fall into the camp or round the men as they stood together. On such occasions no black fellows were seen, and although rifles were always discharged in reply, no black seems to have been hit. The blacks were in their own land, and fighting under the conditions they understood, and in that respect the white men were the inferiors. It was only a question of time for the blacks before their tactics succeeded, and they could afford to wait. When they had won, and the white men were defeated, punishment fell upon them, as it fell on many a native tribe, merciless, bloodthirsty, and cruel. And yet no one stopped to heed the simple fact that, although all the men of that expedition were, time after time, absolutely at the mercy of the blacks, only those were speared who took part in that first fatal encounter.

On October 2 the dense scrub gave place to an open stretch of country well covered with grass. What horses remained were sadly in need of a rest and plentiful feed, and the men, grateful at escaping from the constant labour of cutting a road through the twisted mass of lawyer vines and shrubs, spread out over the plain. The grass was dry, and the breeze was blowing behind them, and in the distance they fancied they saw a creek,

towards which they hastened, when on the breeze there came the heavy smoke of burning grass. The blacks had fired it behind them.

By the merest chance, in their flight from the line of flame sweeping down upon them, they saw where a patch of the grass had been already burned, and they took refuge upon it, having only the smoke and the heat to contend against till the fire had rolled across the plain and left it black and smoking. With the feed for their horses destroyed, there was only one course open, and that was to push on as fast as they could. They made their way over the burnt-up plain, and reached the scrub once more. The horses were so poor that when one was killed for food only sixty-five pounds of meat was obtained; while the men were living on such short rations, that when a horse fell sick and was bled to revive it, they caught the blood and mixed it with their small ration of flour to boil. So careful were they compelled to be, that after the horseflesh was cut up, they hung it in the smoke of the fire, to "drive out the maggots which were thick in it." And so they existed.

On October 9 a great many natives suddenly came upon them from all directions, making a great noise, and signing to them to go away. Not desiring a conflict if it could be avoided, the white men moved away, and at once a shower of spears fell around them, a horse being badly hurt. There

was no alternative but to fire, and upon hearing the shots the blacks vanished. But two days later some more natives were met at a time when the explorers were sorely in need of water, and upon making their wants known, the blacks disappeared into the bush, and returned with water carried in a vessel made from strips of bark tied together.

The situation of the expedition was now sufficiently precarious to warrant a departure being made from the original route, and an effort was made to reach the coast. On the way thither a strip of country was passed which had suffered very severely from a hurricane. Every tree was either snapped off short just above the ground or torn up by the roots, the area affected being two miles in width, and the direction of the hurricane from south-west to north-east. For the rest of the way to the coast, the route alternated between belts of scrub and rocky ridges, both equally difficult to travel over. When at length a suitable place for a camp was arrived at above the coastal fringe of dense mangroves along Weymouth Bay, the first week of November had passed.

By the original arrangement, the expedition should have been at the end of the peninsular long before that; and Kennedy had no doubt but that the schooner, which was to meet and convey the party back to Sydney, had already reached the rendezvous. One of the men was so seriously ill

that it was impossible to think of the whole of the members proceeding, the few horses remaining and their impoverished condition making a split still more advisable if the waiting schooner were to be communicated with at all. Leaving Carron in charge of the Weymouth Bay camp, Kennedy, Jacky Jacky, and three white men, set out on November 11 to complete the journey to Port Albany, where the schooner was to wait. So confident was Kennedy of reaching his destination promptly that he only took a week's provisions, and arranged with Carron a set of signals to be used when the schooner appeared off the bay.

A week after Kennedy's departure one of the men left at the camp died, and two days later natives came round the camp bringing their women (who wore neatly fringed girdles round their loins and shaded themselves under palm leaves) with them. Carron and his companions kept them out of the camp, and ultimately induced them to leave. But the following day the warriors, to the number of sixty, returned, armed with spears and painted. To drive them away the men had to get their firearms.

Another man died on the 20th, and no blacks appeared while he was being buried, a task which severely strained the diminished strength of the survivors. On the 21st the blacks reappeared, and, forming round the camp, held their spears poised

as they shouted and danced, showing, in pantomime, how they would spear the men, and how the men would suffer when they were wounded. So threatening did they appear, that for hours the weakened and starving men had to stand with their weapons ready to repel an attack, and, seeing this, the natives made peaceful signs to induce them to lay aside their rifles. The overtures, however, were not successful, and a sudden flight of spears into the camp showed the sincerity of them. A volley from the rifles knocked one black over, and the rest disappeared, carrying the injured one away with them.

For some days they did not reappear, and on the 26th another man died, the survivors scarcely being able to carry his body out of the camp to the place where they had buried the others.

A gleam of hope came to them when, on December 1, they saw a schooner making into the bay. At once the pre-arranged signals were hoisted, a big fire was made, and rifles were fired, to let the people on board know where the camp was. Momentarily expecting the arrival of a rescue party, the men began to get their specimens, records, and things together for conveyance to the schooner. Night came on, and they were still busily engaged so as to be ready when the day dawned. But when it did their hopes were shattered. The schooner was seen sailing out of the bay.

The condition and prospects of the party were now appalling. All the flour was eaten, and they had no meat. A few shellfish were gathered along the seashore, but the men dare not go very far from camp lest the blacks should come upon them and spear them. Another man was found one morning dead by the creek which flowed past the camp to the sea, and the remaining four were too weak to do more than sew a blanket round him, weight it with stones, and roll him into the brackish water. Their dog, the last of their animals, was killed and eaten, and in their reduced state they were continually called upon to stand to their arms through the natives coming round. Sometimes they brought some fish, or the intestines of turtle, for the starving white men; but it was always evident that they were on the alert to rush the camp directly they saw the white men unprepared. On December 28 Carron and Goddard were the only survivors, their two comrades being found dead in the morning, and while they were trying to remove the bodies about fifty armed blacks surrounded the camp. The two were compelled to desist from their melancholy task so as to stand to arms, the blacks, making peaceful signs, trying to advance while they dragged their spears along on the ground with their toes. For two hours this continued, until Carron, overcome with weakness, fell to the

ground, and his companion fired, whereupon the blacks scattered.

When they had retired, the two white men, after great toil, succeeded in dragging the remains of their late companions to a thick patch of scrub, where they covered them over with branches, being too weak to make a grave for them. To the survivors the outlook was absolutely hopeless, and they returned to the camp wondering which one would wake in the morning to find the other dead. When, soon after daylight, the blacks rushed up and into the camp, they seized their rifles, expecting that the end had come, for it was impossible to hold out against the crowd of savages. But the natives came unarmed, and brought a dirty piece of paper, on which there was some writing, totally illegible, however. The arrival of another mob of blacks, this time armed and yelling, made Carron and his companion believe the paper was merely a ruse, and they were about to fire on the blacks, when they saw some white men break out of the scrub and rush towards them, led by Jacky Jacky.

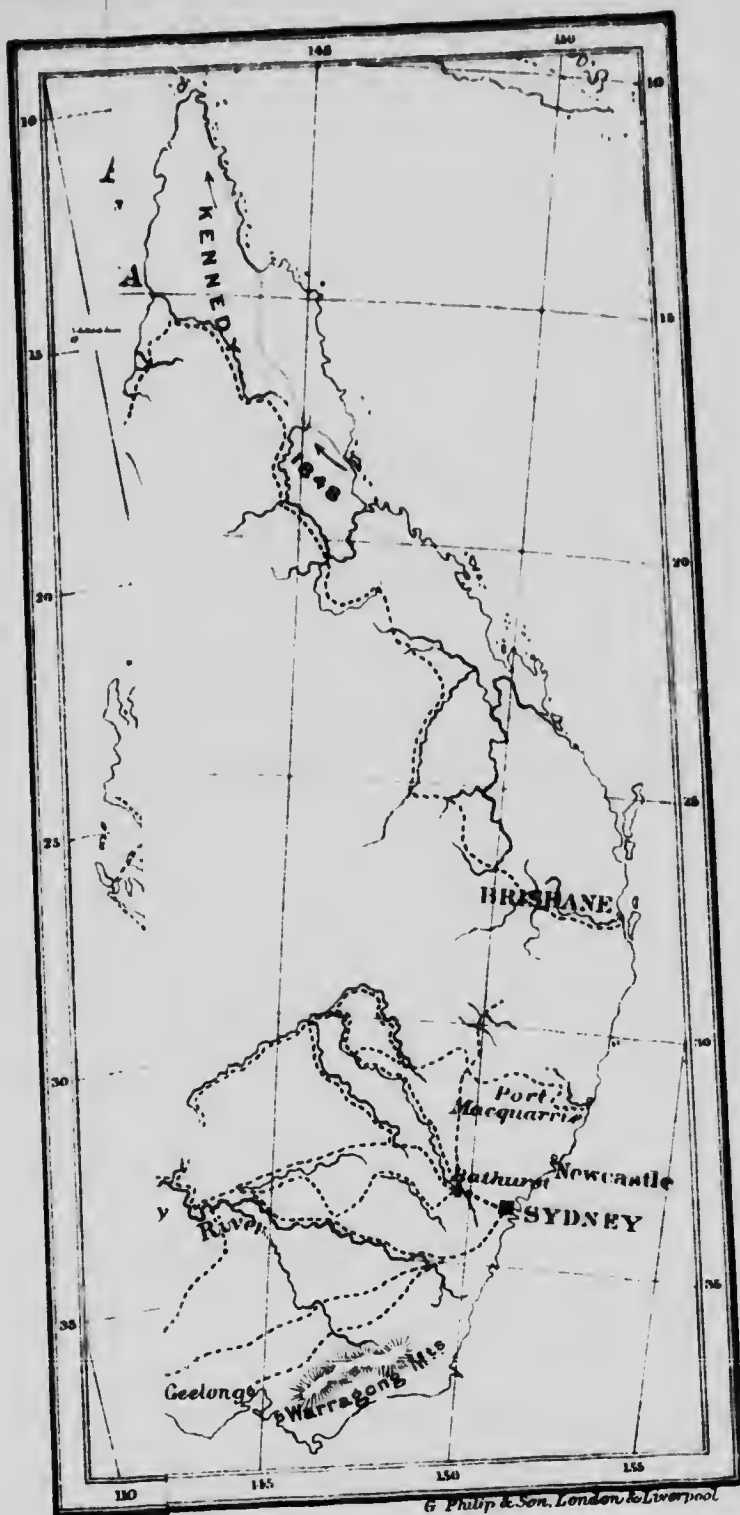
The men who thus arrived so providentially were Captain Dobson and Dr. Vallack, of the schooner *Ariel*, the vessel which was to have met the expedition at Port Albany. Their appearance satisfied Carron that Kennedy had managed to get through safely, but neither he nor his companion, Goddard, had strength to ask. Indeed,

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Carron's state was so pitiable that the bone of his right elbow had broken through the skin, and he was unable to walk from the camp to the boat, while Goddard was little more than a living skeleton. As much as could be taken of the specimens and records was carried away, and the rest abandoned to the blacks, who were crowding round in a very threatening manner. When the schooner was reached, the story of the disaster that had befallen the other half of the expedition (of which Jacky Jacky was the sole survivor) was told.

Soon after leaving the main camp at Weymouth Bay, one of the men accompanying Kennedy accidentally shot himself. The country further to the north was even more difficult to get through than that to the south of the main camp, and the horses were soon knocked up and the men worn out, for with one of their number incapacitated, the work of cutting a way through the dense scrubs, and getting the horses and stores over rough parts, was terribly severe on the remainder.

The limited supply of provisions brought with them was soon exhausted, and they were forced to rely upon horseflesh and an occasional crow or hawk one or the other might shoot. Such fare was bad enough for the uninjured members of the party; for the wounded member it was practically fatal, and his condition became so critical that the



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leader decided to leave him and the two white men in a camp at Shelbourne Bay while he and his black boy pushed on to Port Albany.

Of the three left in camp nothing was ever definitely known; but there is little doubt that the blacks completed with their spears the work starvation and fever had not done. When the *Ariel* arrived in Shelbourne Bay no camp was to be seen, and no reply was made to signals; but some blacks were seen wearing shirts, and a few relics of the men's kits were found in a native canoe.

Kennedy and Jacky Jacky pushed on as fast as their diminished strength would allow; and they had not gone very far before the black boy realized that native warriors were on their track, steadily following them. The black boy urged that the horses should be abandoned, as they were not only becoming weaker every day, but they made too plain a track for the natives to follow. Kennedy would not agree to this, possibly doubting that the danger was as great as the black boy asserted, in addition to feeling too weak to proceed without them.

By this time they had reached nearly to the Escape River, within a few miles of Port Albany, where it became evident that the natives had succeeded in surrounding them, and were closing in upon them. Throughout the night the two sat watching for the attack they knew must come.

Nothing, however, occurred, and in the morning they were walking through the scrub, Jacky Jacky urging Kennedy to constantly look behind him lest he was speared in the back unawares.

A shower of spears fell about them, one striking Kennedy in the back and the other in the leg. As he fell he cried to his black boy to shoot, and Jacky fired at the first native he saw, hitting him in the face. More spears were thrown, again wounding Kennedy; and then, while the natives carried off their wounded man, Jacky went to the assistance of his master, pulling out the spears that were sticking in him.

The conflict was renewed, spears coming through the scrub from all directions. Kennedy aimed his rifle, but the charge missed fire, and another spear entered his side, while Jacky was speared above the eye. The horses were also speared, and began to prance and jump about, ultimately loosening their saddle-bags. Jacky took Kennedy, who had again fallen, on his shoulder, and supported him to the shelter of an ant-hill, against which he rested him, and then ran to seize the saddle-bags.

When he came back, he found Kennedy surrounded by natives, who left as Jacky approached. The black boy tried in vain to rouse his master. All that Kennedy could say before he died was to tell Jacky to carry his note-book to the ship and save the others.



THE DEATH OF KENNEDY.

Jacky, as soon as he had recovered from his grief at the death of Kennedy, carried the body into a dense part of the scrub, scraped out a grave with the aid of a tomahawk, took off some of his clothes to wrap round the head of the slain explorer, and then reverently completed the burial. His next care was to obliterate all traces of the grave, so that the wild blacks should not find it and exhume the body; and when that was performed to his satisfaction, he crept away through the scrub. For some days he travelled, now wading in the creek with the water up to his neck; now lying exhausted under the shelter of thick-leaved shrubs, until he had recovered sufficiently to crawl a few miles further; without a fire by night or food by day, guarding faithfully the note-book the dying Kennedy told him to take to the ship, Jacky struggled on, until he reached the shore within sight of the schooner.

His appearance and signals were at first productive of suspicion to those on board; but when at last a boat was sent, and Jacky, starving and wounded, was brought from the shore, it did not need the presence of Kennedy's notes to corroborate the pitiful tale he told. A start was at once made for Shelbourne Bay, where, however, no trace of camp or men could be found. From thence the schooner went to Weymouth Bay, with what result is already known.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CENTRE OF AUSTRALIA.

THE mystery surrounding the disappearance of Leichhardt and his party, following so soon after his brilliant journey from Brisbane to Port Essington, resulted in the formation and despatch of a number of search-parties from various parts of the continent. Although no tangible evidence was obtained as to the exact fate of Leichhardt and his companions, an amount of information was obtained about districts hitherto unexplored, and an impetus was given once more to the work of penetrating into the unknown. Many new men came into the field, one of the most successful of whom was John McDowall Stuart, who was the first man to reach the centre of the continent, thus effectually dispelling for ever the last remaining vestige of either the "inland sea" or the "great desert" theory. More than that, he was the first explorer to benefit Australia by crossing from the south coast to the north; for although the ill-fated and worse-managed Burke and Wills party succeeded in

being the first to cross, the journey was barren of results, being little more than a reckless scuttle from point to point, the few observations made being mostly erroneous. On the other hand, the journey of McDowall Stuart gave South Australia a knowledge of the interior which enabled it to run the overland telegraph line from Adelaide to Port Darwin, and in this respect lead the rest of the Australian colonies in development and progress.

McDowall Stuart first appeared as an explorer by becoming the draughtsman to a party with which Sturt attempted to reach the interior, an expedition which was driven back by the rigid drought prevailing at the time, and the strain of which almost killed the gallant officer. Stuart inherited, as it were, some of the best qualities of his leader; and in 1858 he set out, with one white man, a black boy, and six horses and stores for six weeks, to explore the country beyond Lake Torrens, from whence Eyre was driven back before he crossed to Western Australia along the cliffs of the Great Bight. Stuart was away for three months, and the news he brought back completely changed public opinion as to the value of the country beyond Lake Torrens and behind the sandy coast of the Great Bight.

He led two more small parties, aiming towards the centre of the continent; and although not

reaching there, he was gradually opening the route, until, in 1860, he was possessed of sufficient resources (mainly through the generosity of two South Australians, Messrs. Chambers and Fiske) to enable him to realize his ambition. Leaving Adelaide in March, 1860, he followed his previous tracks as far as Chamber's Creek. From that point the country was new to him.

The first notable feature of the journey was the discovery, on April 6, of a curious natural phenomenon in the form of Chambers' Pillar. In the distance its appearance was that of a huge locomotive; but, as it was approached, the funnel of the engine gradually detached itself from the boiler, until the latter was seen to consist of a low range, while the former became an isolated column of sandstone rock, standing on a conical base some hundred feet high. The pillar itself rose one hundred and fifty feet from the top of the conical hill, its summit being embellished with two small pinnacles. The sides were perfectly perpendicular, and the block measured twenty feet by ten feet square. In the neighbourhood were other rugged and broken masses of sandstone, which, in the distance, assumed the appearance of ruined castles, and gave a further picturesque romance to the scene.

After passing the region of the Pillar, the route lay through sandy country, but by no means

barren, the fact that within a year of Stuart passing over it settlers had come out and occupied it with their flocks and herds, sufficiently demonstrating its capabilities.

By April 21 he had penetrated almost to the centre, an instance of rapid travelling which would have been absolutely incredible to the men who first essayed to open up the unknown interior. Nothing, perhaps, affords a greater contrast to the methods of the "official" explorer, and those of the self-reliant man with an aptitude for the rough-and-tumble of colonial life, than a comparison between Oxley's, or Mitchell's, proceedings, with their whole retinue of soldiers, servants, stockmen, draymen, boat-builders, and the rest, and the following extracts from Stuart's diary for April 21 :—

"Started at 7.30 across a scrub to another high hill. For seven miles the scrub is open and the land beautifully grassed. At twelve miles from the camp we crossed another gum creek coming from the range, and as far as I can see it turns to the N.E. After seven miles the scrub became much thicker. We had great difficulty in getting through from the quantity of dead timber, which has torn our bags and clothes to pieces. There are a number of gum trees, but mulga predominates. At fourteen miles we struck a large gum plain, and after a short time again

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entered a scrub. At about twenty-two miles met another arm of the gum plain with a large quantity of rocks nearly level with the surface. We found rain water in the hollows of these rocks. At thirty-two miles crossed the sandy bed of a large gum creek divided into a number of channels; too dark to see any water. Four miles further on came to a small gum creek with a little rain water. The creeks are running N.E. The soil is of a red sandy clay; the grass most abundant throughout the whole day's journey. Occasionally we met with a few hundred yards of spinifex. Wind S.E. Native tracks quite fresh in the scrub and plain. We also passed several old worleys (native huts)."

When they had travelled as far as they could for the day, their camp was soon formed. No military line of drays; no sentry with fixed bayonet; no outpost fires and bugle calls, as in the old official days. They flung themselves from the saddles; took the burdens from the horses, and hobbled them to prevent them from straying too far; lit a fire to boil their tea; and when the meal was over, rolled themselves in their blankets, and slept under the canopy of heaven till the approach of sunrise wakened them to another day's hard riding.

On April 22 he wrote: "To-day I find from my observation of the sun ($111^{\circ} 00' 30''$) that I am now camped in the centre of Australia. I have marked

a tree and planted the British flag there. There is a high mount about two and a half miles to the N.N.E. I wish it had been in the centre, but tomorrow I will raise a cairn of stones and plant the flag there, and call it Central Mount Stuart."

The next day he, with a companion, ascended the hill, and found "the view from the top to the north is over a large plain of gums, mulga, and spinifex, with watercourses running through it. The large gum creek that we crossed winds round this hill in a north-east direction, and at about ten miles it is joined by another. After joining they take a course more to the north, and I lost sight of them in the far distant plain. To the N.N.E. is the termination of the hills; to the N.E., E., and S.E., large broken ranges; and to the N.N.W. the ranges on the west side of the plain terminate. To the N.W. are broken ranges, and to the W. is a very high peak, between which and this place, to the S.W., are a number of isolated hills." (Stuart's "Expeditions.")

Having now arrived at the centre of the continent, in good health and with provisions enough to last them for some time, Stuart conceived the daring plan of pushing on with his two companions to the north, if possible to the coast. After leaving the neighbourhood of Central Mount Stuart, however, they were not very fortunate in striking water, and for some days they were short

of it. The country was not impossible, and with an occasional native well and water obtained by digging in the beds of creeks to help them, they continued travelling through May and well into June. Their progress was less rapid than it had been before they arrived at the centre; but when, on June 11, they found water, after being one hundred and one hours without it, they had travelled one hundred and twelve miles. The provisions were getting very low, and signs of scurvy were making their appearance, in spite of which the journey was continued, the nature of the country being well ascertained by short trips to the east and west of the main route.

The water at which they arrived on June 11 appeared to be permanent, and amongst the vegetation surrounding it a large number of native cucumbers were growing. These were found to be an excellent thing for relieving the scurvy, and the party decided to remain by the water for some days to rest and recuperate. On the 13th Stuart had an opportunity of observing the type and character of the natives inhabiting this part of the continent, of which he gave the following account:—

“About eleven o'clock I heard the voices of the natives. Looking round, I could see two in the scrub about a quarter of a mile distant. I beckoned to them to approach, but they kept



A SANDY PLAIN OF THE INTERIOR.

making signs which I could not understand. I then moved towards them, but the moment they saw me move they made off. About a quarter of an hour afterwards they again made their appearance on the top of a quartz reef opposite our camp, and two others showed themselves in about the same place as the two first had. Thinking this was the only water, I made signs to the two on the reef to come to the water, but they still continued talking and making signs which I could not understand. It seemed as if they wished us to go away, which I was determined not to do. They then made a number of ferocious gestures, shaking their spears and twirling them round their heads. I should think the younger was about twenty-five years of age. He placed a very long spear into the instrument they throw them with, and, after a few more gestures, descended from the reef, and gradually came a little nearer. I made signs of encouragement for him to come on, at the same time moving towards him. At last we arrived on the banks of the creek, he on one side and I on the other. He had a long spear and womera, and two instruments like boomerangs, but more the shape of a scimitar with a very sharp edge, and having a thick place at the end roughly carved for a handle. The gestures he made were now signs of hostility, and he came fully prepared for war.

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I then broke a branch of green leaves from a bush, and held it up towards him, inviting him to come across to me. As he did not seem to fancy that, I crossed to where he was standing, and got within two yards of him. He thought I was quite near enough, and would not have me any nearer, for he kept moving back as I approached. I wished to get close up to him, but he would not have it. We then stood still, and I tried to make him understand by signs that all we wanted was water for two or three days. At last he seemed to understand, nodded his head, pointed to the water, then to our camp, and held up his five fingers. I then endeavoured to learn from him if there was any water to the north or north-east, but I could make nothing of him. He viewed me steadily for a long time, began talking, and, seeing that I did not understand him, he made a sign that natives generally do on wanting something to eat, and pointed to me. Whether he meant to ask if I were hungry, or to suggest that I would make a very good supper for him, I do not know; but I bowed my head as if I understood him perfectly. We then separated, I keeping a careful watch upon him all the time I was crossing the creek. Before I left him the other one joined. The first was a tall, powerful, well-made fellow, upwards of six feet. His hair was very long, and he had a red-coloured net tied round his head, with the ends

of his hair lying on his shoulders. I observed nothing else that was peculiar about them. They had neither skins nor anything round their bodies, and were quite naked."

For the remainder of their stay at the water-hole they saw no more of the blacks; but a fortnight later, when at water some distance to the north, Stuart had a memorable meeting with three natives. First, two young men came to the camp with a present of opossums, small birds, and parrots; but as they immediately began to steal all that they could lay their hands on, Stuart ordered them off. Subsequently one of the two returned, in company with a young man and an old one. Two were wearing a curious sort of helmet made of feathers tightly bound together and fastened inside a net, the whole being gathered into a conical shape at the back. After trying in vain to understand one another by signs, the old man conversed with the two younger men very seriously, and then, turning towards Stuart, he advanced and gave a masonic sign. Stuart, somewhat taken aback, looked at him steadily, whereupon the old man repeated his performance in due form. Stuart replied, and the old man came close to him, patting him on the head and back and stroking his beard.

If the signs were, as the explorer maintained, correct masonic signs, the fraternal element was

not shared by all the tribes in the vicinity, for within a few days of this remarkable occurrence, Stuart encountered a tribe whose hostility and martial capabilities effectually barred his further progress.

On June 26 the party reached a creek with large sheets of water, and Stuart decided to follow it for some distance. Some blacks were seen encamped at one of the pools, and, wishing to avoid them if possible, a detour was made with the intention of camping for the night at the next water. Unfortunately, water was not met with as soon as anticipated, and as it was desirable to give the horses a drink that night, a return upon their tracks to the water-hole where the blacks had been seen was the only course open. As they rode back, it was noticed that the blacks had been following them, and in large numbers.

None were to be seen when Stuart and his companions arrived at the water-hole, and he came to the conclusion that they had moved so as not to meet the strangers, a not unusual proceeding on their part. Without any suspicion that an attack was premeditated, the explorers were following their leader "to the place where we crossed the creek in the morning, when suddenly, from behind some scrub we had just entered, up started three tall powerful fellows fully armed, having a number of boomerangs, waddies, and spears. Their

distance from us was about two hundred yards. It being so nearly dark, and the scrub we were then in placing us at a disadvantage, I wished to pass without taking any notice ; but such was not their intention, for they continued to approach us, calling out and making all sorts of gestures, apparently in defiance.

“I then faced them, making every sign of friendship I could think of. They seemed to be in a great fury, waving their boomerangs above their heads, bawling at the top of their voices, and performing some sort of a dance. They were now joined by more of their tribe, so that in a few minutes their numbers had increased to upwards of thirty; every bush seemed to produce a man. Putting the pack-horses on towards the creek, and placing ourselves between them and the natives, I told my men to get their guns ready, for I could see they were determined upon mischief. They paid no regard to all the signs of friendship I kept constantly making, but were still gradually approaching nearer and nearer to us. I felt very unwilling to fire upon them, and still continued making signs of peace and friendship, but all to no purpose.

“ Their leader, an old man, who was in advance, made signs with his boomerang, which we took as a signal for us to be off. They were, however, intended as tokens of defiance, for I had no sooner

turned my horse's head to comply with, as I thought, their wishes, than we received a shower of boomerangs accompanied by a fearful yell. They then set fire to the grass, and commenced jumping, dancing, yelling, and throwing their arms into all sorts of gestures, like so many fiends. In addition to the thirty that already confronted us, I could now see many others getting up from behind the bushes.

"Still I felt unwilling to fire upon them, and tried again to make them understand that we wished them no harm. Having now approached within about forty yards of us, they made another charge, and threw their boomerangs, which came whistling and whizzing past our ears, and one of them struck my horse. I then gave orders to fire, which stayed their mad career for a little. Our pack-horses, which were on before us, took fright when they heard the firing and fearful yelling, and made off over the creek. Seeing some of the blacks running from bush to bush with the intention of cutting us off from our horses, while those in front were still yelling, throwing their boomerangs, and coming nearer to us, we gave them another reception, and I sent Ben after the horses to bring them to a more favourable place, while Kekwick and I remained to cover our rear. We soon got in advance of those who still kept following, though beyond the reach of our guns, the fearful yelling

still continuing from more numerous voices, and fires springing up in every direction. It being now quite dark, with the country scrubby, and our enemies bold and daring, we could be easily surrounded and destroyed by such determined fellows as they have shown themselves to be. Seeing there is no hope against such fearful odds (ten to one at least) against us, and knowing all the disadvantages under which we laboured, I very unwillingly make up my mind to push on to our last night's camp. They are still following us up; I only wish I had four more men, for my party is so small that we can only fall back and act on the defensive." (Stuart's "Explorations.")

The next morning they saw signal-fires alight all round them, and Stuart decided to abandon the attempt to reach the north coast. Deploring the fact that his party was too small "to cope with such wily determined natives," he added, "if they had been Europeans they could not better have arranged and carried out their plan of attack. They had evidently observed us passing in the morning, had examined our tracks to see which way we had gone, and, knowing that we could obtain no water down the creek, but must retrace our steps, they lay in wait for us to return. Their charge was in double column, open order, and we had to take steady aim to make an impression. With such as these for enemies in our rear, and

most probably far worse in advance, it would be destruction to my party for me to attempt to go on."

Therefore he retraced his steps, and reached Adelaide in October, his return being the occasion of great rejoicing over his success, Parliament at once voting a sum to fit out another party to complete the transcontinental journey, at the head of which Stuart set out again in two months' time.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL ROUTES.

BURKE AND WILLS.

WHEN the track of the explorer ran across Australia from the south coast to the north, the last of what may be termed the grand trunk lines of exploration were completed, and the mysteries of the interior dispelled. There were still large areas which were yet left under the control of the black fellow, and from whence the kangaroo had not been driven by the approach of sheep and cattle; but they were surrounded by country that was known and, generally speaking, settled. Within such areas there might be patches, more or less extensive, of sterile barren land; within the known localities there might be mountain ranges still unexplored; but there could be no great rivers to be found; no such phenomena as volcanoes and boiling lakes; no race of men distinct from the ordinary black fellow and the minor variety of human types he displayed; no new order of animals of equal interest with the

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monotreme and the marsupial. Local discoveries, mineral discoveries, topographical discoveries of secondary importance there might be; but when the transcontinental route was marked, the "unknown interior" was a thing of the past, and the bottom fell out of the romance of Australian exploring.

It was not until 1860-62 that this crowning act of the pioneer was performed. Some six years earlier the discovery of gold had revolutionized the Austral continent, and made it other than "a convenient dumping-ground for the convict surplus of Great Britain." Or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to attribute this change, not to the discovery, but to the announcement that gold existed in the land, for the discovery had been made as far back as the "thirties," and the information suppressed by the then Governor, Sir George Gipps, lest the routine of his penal establishments should become disorganized were the fact made known.

One of the first results of the prosperity and energetic development which followed the free expansion of Australian life, was the formation of the rich province, which Mitchell had termed Australia Felix, into the self-governing colony of Victoria; and one of the earliest instances of Victorian enterprise was the public subscription (headed by Mr. Ambrose Kyte with £1000) for a transcontinental exploring expedition. The small

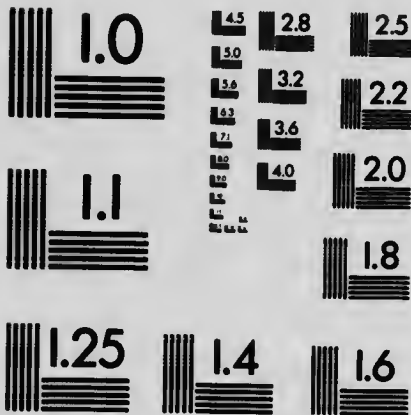
area, comparatively speaking, of Victoria (it is one thirty-fourth of Australia and about the same size as Great Britain) had been explored from one end to the other ; but at the time the colony was the most wealthy and public-spirited, and it undertook what could not merely be of interest to itself, but was of inestimable value to the remainder of the continent. Thus the fatal termination and the immediately unproductive results of the Burke and Wills expedition are to be the more deplored ; the absence of any detailed observations made on the journey rendered it necessary for the work to be done all over again, the only consolation to the colony which fitted out the expedition being that it was the first to cross the continent.

The expedition comprised fifteen men, a number of horses and camels (the latter specially imported from India), and twelve months' provisions. The leadership was given to a superintendent of the Victorian police, Robert O'Hara Burke, a man whose lack of qualifications for the position was only too clearly proved by the uninterrupted sequence of blunder and disaster which makes up the story of the expedition. Burke, prior to his arrival in the colony, had served in the Austrian cavalry as well as in the Irish constabulary. He was no bushman ; knew nothing of surveying ; was peculiarly deficient both in tact and discretion, and, on occasions, so hasty and headstrong as to



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have laid himself open to a charge verging on brutality.

The expedition left Melbourne amidst great enthusiasm on August 20, 1860. The second in command, Landells, quarrelled with Burke a few days after the start, and wisely returned. His place was filled by William John Wills, a young man under twenty-eight, who had been attached to the expedition from the Melbourne Meteorological Observatory, and had started as third in command.

The route arranged for the party was to proceed by the Darling River to Cooper's Creek (the Barcoo), a stream which flows from south-western Queensland to Lake Torrens in South Australia. A main depôt was to be formed there, after which the journey was to be resumed to the north until the Gulf of Carpentaria was reached. The plan was simple; the means of carrying it out were available; and when Landells, on his return to Melbourne, insisted that nothing but disaster would follow the party under Burke's leadership, no one heeded him. The chances of failure, let alone disaster, were so insignificant that his warnings were regarded merely as the vapourings of a disappointed and perchance envious man.

As soon as the expedition arrived at the Darling, Burke detached himself, Wills, and six others, and pushed on to Cooper's Creek, leaving the

remaining six to follow, with the bulk of the stores, at a more leisurely pace. Burke and his companions reached Cooper's Creek on November 11, and formed a temporary depôt while waiting the arrival of the second division. This, however, did not occur quite as expeditiously as Burke wished, and he therefore divided his small party of eight into two of four, one comprising himself, Wills, and two men (King and Gray), to proceed at once to the north, and the other to remain at Cooper's Creek, in charge of Brahe, with orders to return to the Darling if at the end of three months from the date of Burke's departure, he or his party had not returned.

Burke set out on December 16 with his three companions, six camels, two horses, and three months' provisions, the magnificent expedition which had been despatched with so much enthusiasm from Melbourne barely four months before now being scattered, the bulk of the stores and the scientific members on the outskirts of settlement by the Darling, four men and more stores to idle away three months on the Barcoo, and the leader, his second in command, and two men, scurrying across the continent with absurdly inadequate supplies, and without either the time or the training necessary to make those observations which alone could justify such erratic proceedings.

The diary kept by the leader of previous (and subsequent) expeditions has usually formed a complete daily record of the proceedings. Burke scarcely kept any, and that by Wills missed weeks at a time. In the report which Burke prepared on the return journey of the party, he casually observed, "In conclusion, it would be as well to say that we reached the sea, but we could not obtain a view of the open ocean, although we made every endeavour to do so."

According to the diary of Wills, they could not approach the shore with the camels because the ground was too soft, so Burke and he went on foot to the beach. They claimed to have arrived at the mouth of the Albert river; subsequent exploration showed they were not within a hundred miles of the Albert. What graver condemnation of Burke as a leader, or more complete corroboration of Landells's estimate was needed?

It took them two months to make the journey to the Gulf, travelling so fast as to allow no time to make notes or observations. They had one month's provisions for the homeward journey, camels and horses tired with incessant travel, and one man, Gray, ill. The last matter was of small importance to them, Wills noting in his diary that Gray was "gammoning."

Rations were reduced to eke out the small store that remained; the horses and some of the camels

died, and the men struggled on as best they could, Gray, suffering from dysentery, often lagging behind, unable ever to keep up with the others. It was while he was in this pitiable condition that Burke, suspecting him of stealing some flour, flogged him with a horse-whip. A few days later Gray was dead.

The story of this part of the journey, fortunately for the credit of Australian explorers, is unique, even in the days of military leaders and convict followers.

On April 21 the three survivors, with two camels, arrived at the depôt on Cooper's Creek. Brahe's party, delayed by sickness, had left the same morning. A note attached to a tree told Burke where to dig for provisions, and he and his companions quickly unearthed fifty pounds of flour, twenty of rice, sixty of oatmeal, sixty of sugar, and fifteen of dried meat. They and their camels were worn out, but a few days' rest would have benefited all, and have enabled them to follow the route to the Darling, where the rest of the expedition were supposed to be. This was the only rational course to adopt, and both Wills and King urged it. He held a different opinion. The only way he would return was to follow down the creek, strike Mount Hopeless (a name expressive of the views of the discoverer of it and the surrounding country), and so on to Adelaide.

With a loyalty that merited a better cause the other two gave way.

They followed down the creek, till one camel was dead, the other could scarcely walk, the provisions they brought from the depôt were almost exhausted, and the men themselves were on the verge of starvation. Then the creek disappeared into the sand of the plain, and their last camel also died. A tribe of blacks they encountered shared their sparse food (a small seed they called "nardoo") with them, and when they had gone, the three gathered nardoo as well as they could, and starved on it. Wills, as the stronger, struggled back to the depôt, and brought some of the provisions they had left there to his more needy companions; and a few days later they had to go back for more provisions, leaving Wills behind—to die.

This was June 26. Two days later Burke also died, and King alone remained, too weak to crawl back to the depôt. The return of the natives saved his life, for they took him with them to their camp, and shared their food with him until, on September 15, he was found by Howitt, the leader of one of the many search-parties sent out as soon as the tale of misery reached Melbourne.

It has already been stated that Brahe left the depôt on the morning of April 21, as Burke and his companions arrived there in the afternoon. At that time Brahe was encamped fourteen miles

away, his sick men not permitting a longer stage to be made. Resuming his journey the following day, he continued to follow the track back to the Darling, where he fell in with the other division, which had been wandering between the Darling and the Bulloo, with the men sick, and many of them dying of scurvy (four died: Dr. Beckler, Stone, Purcell, and Patterson), under the command of Wright.

Directly the two divisions united, Brahe and Wright hastened back to the depôt, anticipating that if Burke returned in the meantime he would remain there or follow the track home. Brahe reached there while Burke was struggling towards Mount Hopeless, and as no record was left at the depôt of his return, and Brahe did not examine the provisions to see if they had been touched, the fact that Burke and his companions had been at the depôt and gone on by another route was naturally unknown. Brahe, in his turn, failed to leave any mark or sign that he had visited the depôt again; and so, when Wills crawled back for some food to take to the starving Burke and King, he was unaware any of the other party had been there in the meantime, a deplorable muddle which would have been ludicrous were it not so tragic.

Thus it was that when the party on the Darling was reached again, a despatch was sent off post-haste to Melbourne, reporting that Burke and

party were lost, where no one knew. Not only Melbourne, but the whole of Australia was waiting for the news of the triumphant return of the expedition when this bombshell exploded. It is typical of Australia that in every colony only one idea found expression—the immediate despatch of search-parties.

From Queensland, W. Landsborough led a party from the neighbourhood of the Albert River; Walker led another due west from the most westerly station in Central Queensland; McKinlay started out from South Australia; and Howitt, who found King, started from Victoria. Later expeditions found the remains of Burke and Wills, and brought them back to Melbourne, where for many days angry and bitter recrimination existed between the supporters of the various leading characters, each party abusing the heroes of the others and defending their own, and all combining to cast aspersions, unjust and unmerited, on the character of men who had hastened out at the head of search-parties in the hopes of rescuing some of the ill-fated expedition. Thus an enterprise, begun by a noble-spirited generosity, was ruined by unfortunate incompetence, and left behind it a sense of irritation, which for years rankled, largely in consequence of futile efforts being made to represent as a hero one who had but few claims to the distinction.

McDOWALL STUART.

Immediately following the disastrous journey of Burke and Wills, the continent was again traversed, this time from Adelaide to the Indian Ocean, by John McDowall Stuart. So near were the two expeditions in point of time that it is almost impossible to avoid a comparison between them, though a comparison only intensifies the brilliant success of the South Australian leader, and shows his vigorous manly courage the more distinctly against the record of his Victorian rival. Let one fact stand for all. Stuart, who set out, barely a month after his return from a prolonged, difficult, and trying journey, to lead the expedition to the north, and who was, under the strain, reduced to a most deplorable state of health, brought his entire party home, after a twelve months' absence, with so complete a record of the country passed over, that his report was practically the basis of the Overland Telegraph survey.

Burke, within a few months of leaving Melbourne, had his party scattered, and in nine months seven of the expedition were dead, stores and stock were wasted, no reliable or useful records had been compiled as to the country passed over, and while he and Wills had certainly been "the first across," they might as well have remained in Melbourne for all the immediate benefit achieved.

Naturally there had been considerable emulation as to which colony was to possess the credit of having solved the remaining riddle of the interior. For the time being the tragic ending of the Burke and Wills expedition made such an impression on men's minds that they overlooked the sterling value of McDowall Stuart's work. But now that years have elapsed, a clearer view is possible, and the honour, justly earned, is paid to the memory of the indefatigable South Australian explorer by recognizing him as the foremost of the trans-continental voyagers.

Stuart returned to Adelaide in October, 1860, from his journey to the centre of the continent and Attack Creek, as he named the watercourse where his encounter with the blacks compelled his return. On November 29 he was on his way back at the head of another party which he conducted far beyond Attack Creek to a point where a dense growth of a hitherto unknown plant, since appropriately named "Stuart's hedgewood," barred the road in every direction except that along which they had come. The hedgewood was, as far as regards the obstacle it raised to the progress of explorers, a first cousin to the "lawyer vine" which had so strained the energies of Kennedy's ill-fated expedition. Almost from the roots the plant throws out branches which interlace and twist into a compact bulk as impenetrable as a quickset

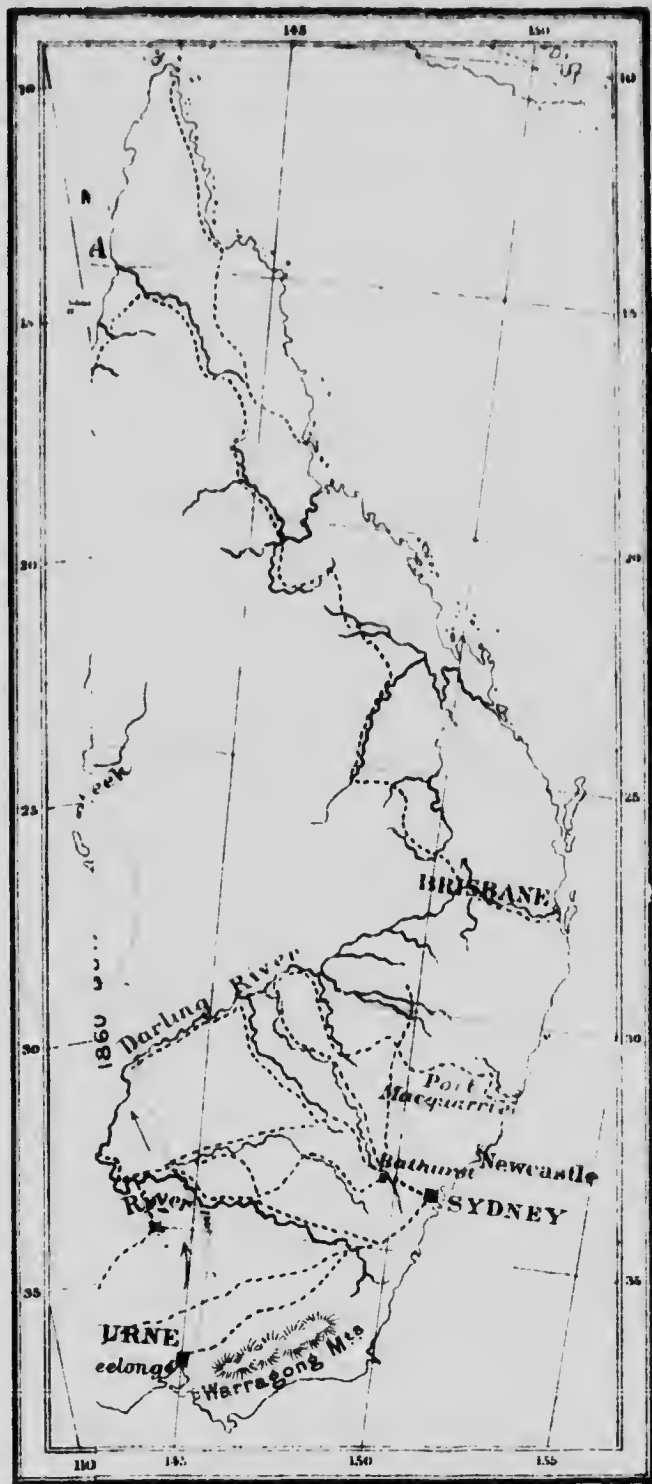
hedge ; and one only has to remember that miles of country were covered with this sort of vegetation, growing in all the freedom of unrestrained luxuriance, to realize what Stuart and his party had to do to get through it. They tried in every direction, and at last managed to find a place, after a week's struggle, through which they forced their way. The scrub gave way to an open grassy plain, and the belief that the way to the coast was clear was enhanced by the discovery of a fine sheet of water, to which the name Newcastle Waters was given. Another day's journey, however, brought them face to face with the hedgewood scrub again. Their efforts to get through were quite useless this time, and they had to own defeat. Their stores would not, in Stuart's opinion (and he always displayed great forethought for the safety of his companions), justify a wide detour ; he therefore ordered a return to Adelaide.

So well satisfied was the South Australian Government that Stuart was the ablest explorer in the colonies, that on his arrival he was offered the command of yet another expedition to complete the work he had begun. A year's rest would have been extremely beneficial to him after the prolonged hardships he had already undergone ; but Stuart was not the man to place himself before what he conceived to be his duty. The news of the Burke and Wills disaster greeted him on his

return to the south, and might have deterred a less resolute man from again attempting what he knew to be a tremendous undertaking; but Stuart was not one to be deterred by anticipated dangers. He accepted the offer made to him, and on December 29, 1861, passed the limit of settlement, following his own tracks once more to the north, at the head of eleven men, well horsed and provided with stores for twelve months.

They travelled rapidly to the centre, passing Central Mount Stuart on March 12, 1862, with scarcely any difficulty. Attack Creek was passed on March 28, the natives now manifesting a most friendly disposition towards the white men. By April 14 he was again at Newcastle Waters, and on the second day after arrival a wider detour than had been possible on the previous occasion enabled him to turn the flank of the scrub, his energy being rewarded by the discovery of another sheet of water (named Frew's Pond, after the man who first came upon it).

Stuart now believed his route was clear; but the pioneer explorers never knew from day to day what was going to happen next. The last thing that Stuart anticipated at this juncture was a repetition of his experience when Newcastle Waters were discovered, and yet it was what the following day produced. The party had merely burst through a weak patch in the hedgewood scrub;



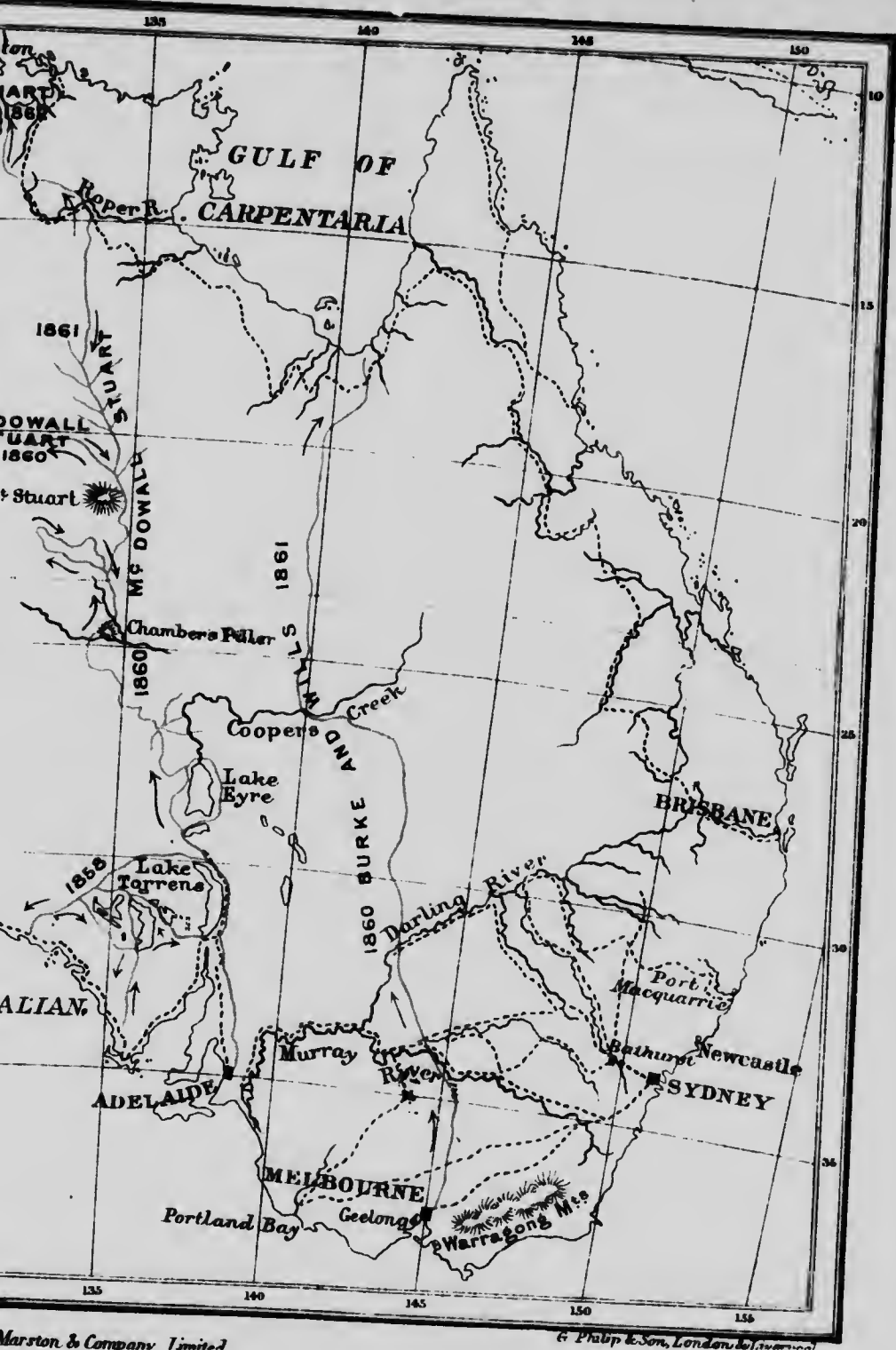
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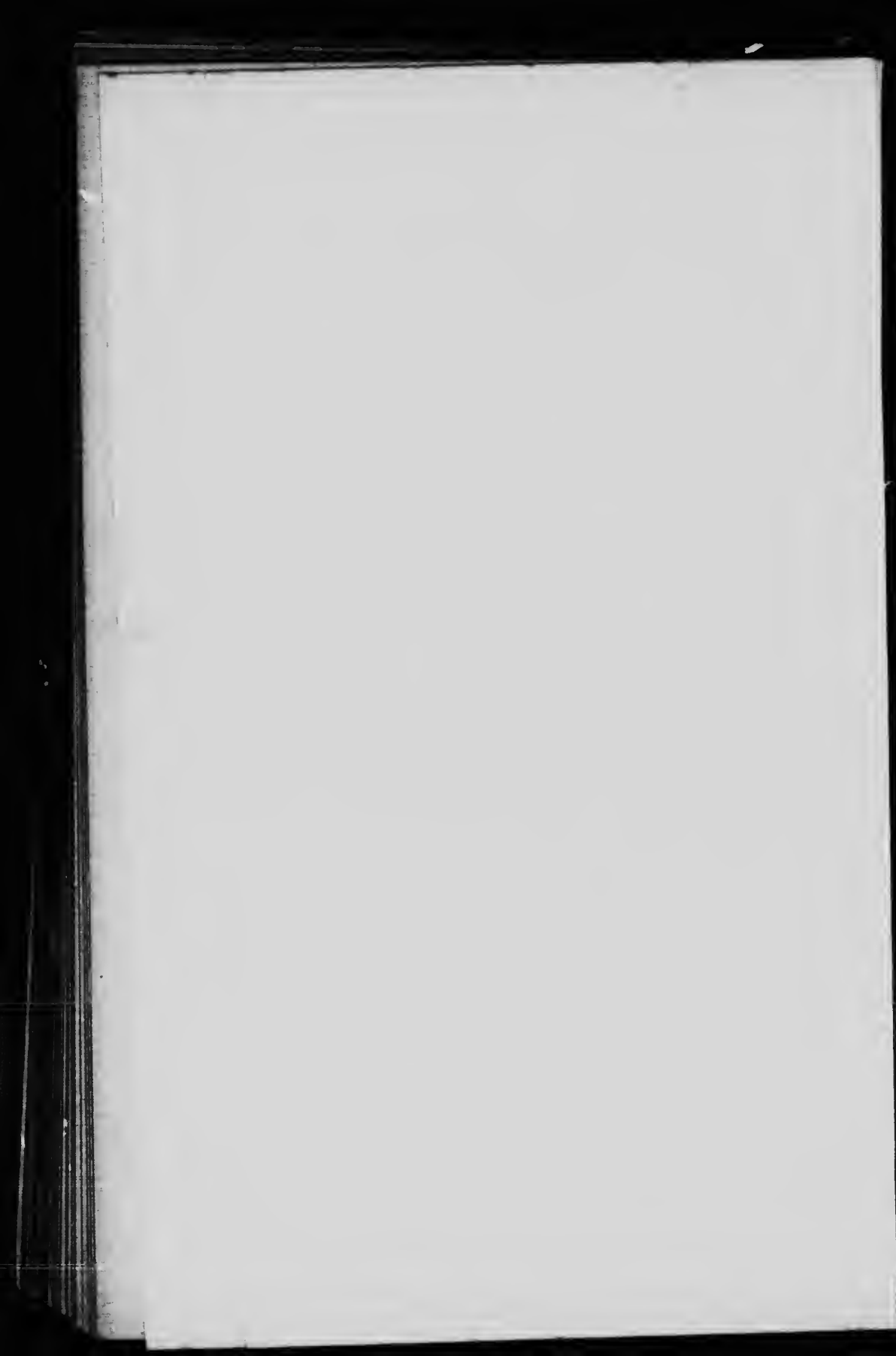
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there were still miles of it barring their progress in every direction. Day after day they rode in one direction after another in their efforts to disentangle themselves from this seeming interminable thicket, and not until the middle of May were they clear of it, thus showing the value of Stuart's caution in refraining them from pushing on when the barrier was first encountered beyond the Newcastle Waters the year before.

A series of chains of ponds and water-holes were now met with, the largest of which were named Daly Waters, after the then governor of the colony of South Australia, and here the expedition rested awhile. A creek ran from the ponds and was followed until it gave out in a swampy patch of country, whereupon Stuart made for the east.

In anticipation of long dry stages across desert country a supply of water-bags had been supplied with the outfit, but so far there had been little necessity to use them. As there were signs which led Stuart to believe a further change would shortly take place in the character of the country, he now had the water-bags filled in case the change should be to a waterless desert. Instead of this the men found that they were gradually entering a district in which trees, shrubs, and birds were different from those in the south. They were now well within the tropics, and the vegetation became more varied and picturesque as they advanced,

the country altering as they penetrated farther into the sandstone table-land, which extends from where Grey landed in the North West to where Leichhardt struggled with the gorges and precipices after skirting the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Stuart had come upon the belt midway between the two places.

When he turned to the east after losing the Daly Waters creek, he chanced upon the head of a creek he named the Strangeways. Following it down he found it joined a river he identified as the Roper river, named by Leichhardt. Crossing it, he directed his route up a northerly tributary which he named the Chambers. One of the horses getting drowned, the expedition rested while the animal was cut up and its flesh jerked and added to the provisions as a variety in the diet.

As they ascended the creek the proximity of natives was made manifest by the bush being constantly set on fire, and on June 30 they encountered a small party, one member of which was especially noticeable. Describing the meeting in his diary, Stuart wrote: "The old man presented a very singular appearance—his legs being about four feet long and his entire height seven feet, and so remarkably thin that he appeared to be a perfect shadow. Kekwick had a fishing-hook stuck in his hat, which immediately caught the old fellow's eye. He made signs of its use and

that he would like to possess it. I told Kekwick to give it to him, which seemed to please him very much." The following morning, however, sixteen black fellows came to Kekwick, and, bending their forefingers, hooked them in their mouths and pulled upwards, afterwards holding out their hands for the fish-hooks they desired. The supply did not permit the request being complied with, and Kekwick, to make amends for his inability to oblige them, led them to one of the horses and lifted up its lip to show them its teeth. But the sight was not pleasing. Evidently believing that the intention was to show them what would become of them, they jumped back; a man in the camp shot at a parrot at the same moment, and the noise of the report completed their discomfiture. With a chorus of yells they fled into the bush; nor did they again come near the white men.

On July 4 the expedition had arrived at the head of the Chambers, and Stuart found himself confronted with the precipitous gorges in the table-land which had so tried Leichhardt and his companions. Fortunately, after a journey of thirteen miles they arrived at the edge of a steep bluff, below which they could see a fine wide river flowing down a valley to the north. As it was almost certain that this stream would lead them to the ocean, Stuart named it the Adelaide.

Successfully descending from the table-land to the valley, the journey was continued along the banks of the stream, which were clothed with the picturesque and varied foliage of the tropics (a sure sign that the ocean was not far distant) and where vast swarms of mosquitoes inflicted constant annoyance and irritation on the explorers. The horses had become footsore in their clamber over the hard sandstone of the table-land, and, as many of them were walking lame, progress was not very rapid at this, the closing stage of the journey. It was not until July 24 that the triumph of standing on the seashore was achieved. Stuart, in his diary, thus describes it—

“Crossed the valley and entered a scrub which was a complete net-work of vine. Stopped the horses to clear a way while I advanced a few yards on to the beach, and was gratified and delighted to observe the water of the Indian Ocean in Van Dieman Gulf before the party with the horses knew anything of its proximity. Thring, who rode in advance with me, called out “The sea!” which so took them by surprise and they were so astonished that he had to repeat it before they fully understood what was meant. Then they immediately gave three long and hearty cheers.”

Stuart dipped his hands and feet in the ocean he had struggled so persistently to reach, and upon the largest tree his initials were cut. Later, when

they had approached as near to the mouth of the Adelaide as the soft ground would permit, a tall, thin tree was selected as a flagstaff, to which, when the branches had been cut away, the Union Jack was fastened, a record of the event, signed by all the members of the expedition, being buried in a tin case at the foot.

Having accomplished the object of the expedition, Stuart set out on the return journey the day after reaching the sea. With the knowledge of the country acquired on the outward journey, the homeward march was not delayed by the difficulties which had beset the explorers earlier in the year. But the constant strain to which Stuart had been subjected during this and the two previous expeditions commenced to tell upon him, and at an early period of the return trip symptoms of scurvy began to be manifest. By the time that the centre of the continent was reached he was seriously ill; but such was the vigour of the man that he would not give in even when he had to be assisted on and off his horse.

In the neighbourhood of Attack Creek the expedition witnessed a curious display of native ceremony. Stuart wrote—

“Last night, a little before sundown until after dark, we were amused by a farce enacted by the natives, apparently to keep us quiet and render us powerless. They commenced it some distance off

by raising a heavy black smoke (by setting fire to the spinifex) and calling out most lustily at the top of their voices. As the sun got lower I had the party prepared for an attack. On they came, the fire rolling before them ; we could now occasionally see them. One was an old man with a very powerful voice, who seemed to be speaking some incantation with the most fearful howl I ever heard in my life, resembling a man suffering the extremest torture. He was assisted in his horrid yelling by some women.

"As the evening got darker and they were within one hundred and fifty yards of us, the scene was very pretty—indeed grand. In the foreground was our camp equipment, with the party armed ready to repel an attack. On the opposite side of the creek was a long line of flames, some mounting high in the air, others keeping at a low flickering light. In the midst of the flames the natives appeared to be moving about, performing all sorts of antics, and behind them came the old man and his women. At every high flame he seemed to be performing some mysterious spell, while yelling in the same horrible tone and twisting his body and legs and arms into all sorts of shapes. They appeared like so many demons dancing, sporting, and enjoying themselves in the midst of the flames.

"At last they and the fire reached the water-hole, after continuing this horrid noise for nearly

two hours without intermission. As soon as they came in sight of the water, those in the front rushed down into it, satisfied their thirst, and were followed by all the others except the old man, who kept up his howls until they were stopped by a drink being conveyed to him. When they were all satisfied they went away, evidently convinced that their performance had kept us harmless during their approach to the water."

During October the attack of scurvy which afflicted Stuart became so severe that towards the end of the month he was unable to use his right arm, could barely swallow, and at sunset became blind. In November the attack became so acute that he was almost dead, having to be carried for days on a stretcher, unable to move or speak, and with his mouth in such a terribly blistered condition inside that he could not close his lips. He had wasted away to little more than a skeleton, and when the expedition reached the most outlying station, although he was sufficiently recovered to be able to sit a horse, the men at the station were convinced he was at the point of death.

After a brief rest there, and with the aid of some medical comforts he had not been able to obtain on the march, he recovered sufficiently to be able to enter Adelaide on December 12, 1862, with every man who had set out with him safe and sound, with only a few horses less than he had

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at the start, and with so complete a record of the journey and the character of the country passed over that the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line was made along the route he had marked out.

THE END

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