

OUTBACK IN AUSTRALIA

CAPTAIN
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D.S.O., M.C., F.R.G.S., F.R.C.I.



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OUTBACK IN AUSTRALIA

PRESS AND OTHER NOTICES ON FIRST EDITION.

From *The Director of the Future Career Association,*
Westminster, London.

“DEAR MR. HARRIS,—I have read your book ‘Outback in Australia’ with interest and pleasure, and it strikes me as admirably suited for School Libraries. Our boys and young men need to know more about the Empire, and this record of your Australian Overland journey, with its first-hand pictures of various phases of Outback life, will not only give them this knowledge, but also cater for their natural love of exploration and adventure.

“Yours very truly, HENRY C. DEVINE.”

Academy : “Mr. Harris describes temptingly—he is a thorough optimist. His method of recording the incidents of his trip is thoroughly entertaining ; he relates his experiences and records his impressions in chatty, unpretentious style.”

Times : “A breezy, interesting book . . . many good stories and ‘much information.’”

Sunday Times : “One of the most delightful travel books I have come across for a very long while. A veritable encyclopædia of information about all sorts of interesting Australian topics. His surroundings were always changing, and his curiosity and zest for knowledge and adventure were equal to every change. All the sights of Nature attract him, and he writes vivaciously of all the fauna. Nor is it merely emigrants who can obtain tips from this volume ; Australian-born readers will learn much.”

United Empire : “Few books on Australia are more likely to interest the reader than this entertaining and well-written account of Outback life in—so far as the Englishman or city-bred Australian is concerned—practically unknown portions of the island-continent. Mr. Harris is to be congratulated not only on the journey, but also on the excellent narrative of his wanderings. . . . Mr. Harris’ book is a notable contribution to Australian literature. It is well written, gives a vivid account of the country and people.”

Standard : " Books about Australia are legion, but those that describe Australia as it really is are painfully few in number. It is with the greater pleasure therefore that ' Outback ' is to be welcomed as a notable addition to the minority. . . . The book is readable from the first page to the last. Mr. Harris can tell a story with that directness and simplicity which make story-telling an art in itself."

Field : " A straightforward, unsophisticated record, which leaves a vivid impression . . . many intimate little touches of phraseology and experience."

Lloyds' Weekly Newspaper : " Mr. Harris describes his tour with remarkable freshness and interest."

Westminster Gazette : " Mr. Harris has much to tell of Bush life, and he is uniformly enthusiastic in praise of the men who live it . . . thoroughly interesting and very remarkably cheap."

Pall Mall Gazette : " As a delineation of life in the West-o'-Sunset lands in Australia this volume may be unrestrainedly commended. . . . All of these chapters are interesting, and some are vivid."

Globe : " We are glad that Mr. Harris has written it. . . . He has produced a book which adds much to our knowledge of Australian existence Outback. He has a keen observation and a power of clear exposition. He is content to tell us what he saw, and he tells it well."

Athenæum : " There is much pleasant matter in these pages. . . . The book is one on which he may be congratulated, and it will appeal to those who are fond of an open-air life and who like ' roughing it.' "

Outlook : " So arduous is cross-country travel that Mr. Harris is entitled to rank with the heroic pioneers whose bones have crumpled on the sands of the Never Never. . . . He tells his story with a Colonial freedom of style, with disarming freshness of Bush slang."

Daily Express : " His adventures are fully and vividly described."

Review of Reviews : " . . . keen humour . . . amusing descriptions . . . very cleverly described. . . . From beginning to end delightful plums of description may be picked out."

The Literary World : " One of the most readable and accurate books on the Outback districts it has been our lot to receive . . . a keen observer . . . many anecdotes and humorous touches . . . simple vividness and accuracy with which it represents Australian life away from the big cities."

The Publishers' Circular : " A fascinating volume which displays the sprightliness and brightness of youth, combined with the sober judgment and knowledge of mature age. . . . He describes everything with admirable clearness. . . . We trust that the success of his first venture will prove so encouraging as to induce him to make other long Overland journeys, as he hopes to do. He can write well, and his zeal and intelligence may tend materially to the opening up of many dark spots."

Shooting Times and British Sportsman : " . . . a strikingly attractive account . . . he depicts life in the most remote parts with fidelity and close detail, and shows much personal enthusiasm for the Bush. . . . A book that can be recommended without hesitation."

Empire Magazine : " . . . adds to his keen powers of observation the ability to describe in a pleasant, breezy style . . . brings the reader at once into the full atmosphere of the Bush . . . a wealth of unique information . . . extremely interesting chapters. . . . The author is to be congratulated on the production of an excellent ' first book,' and we shall expect to hear more of him."

Colonizer : " A most interesting narrative . . . showing the actual state of things, as well as the great potentialities of the Backblocks. The reader will gain a more accurate and intimate knowledge than can be gained in any other way."

Market Mail : " A graphic and interesting account . . . described with remarkable tact . . . observed just the points which enabled him to give a close analysis of the character developed in the Lonely Lands, and the touches of nature and crude art. . . . Scenes are brought before the eye with great skill. Mr. Harris knows how to tell a good yarn, and his chapters bristle with quaint anecdote and characteristic touches which give a rare insight into the mental make-up of the inhabitants of Outback. . . . Grips the reader's attention and holds it until the last page is reached."

Glasgow Herald : " The account of his journey is full of most interesting information, and enlivened by a great number of remarkably good stories which he has a happy way of introducing at the right moment and of telling in the most entertaining manner. Altogether the volume is one that well repays the reading."

Scotsman : " Mr. Harris' entertaining book should prove no less instructive in its native country than among those strangers to whom it is now more immediately addressed. It will be read with a hearty interest."

Sheffield Daily Telegraph : " One of the most entertaining and yet at the same time thoroughly informative books we have recently read. A vivid and racy account . . . written by one who is a keen observer, and possesses a strong sense of humour."

Liverpool Courier : " His narrative is well spiced with good stories, and it is always bright and crowded with the useful fruit of a close and sympathetic observation. The record of this journey should be read by every intending emigrant to Australia ; but it claims also that far wider circle of readers who can enjoy a capital travel story."

Yorkshire Post, Leeds : " An extremely entertaining and valuable account of a novel and remarkable journey. The writer, who has not gone far in his twenties, is probably the youngest Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. In the author's sketches we have the Bush settlers and their surroundings exhibited in lights in which they have never before been seen, not only here, but in Australia itself. Mr. Harris' experiences are described with force and humour."

Newcastle Daily Chronicle : " He describes with a graphic pen . . . pictures for us a phase of life that we only know at home through the uncertain medium of fiction, and his book, written by one who observes closely and with a pleasant humour, is well worth reading."

Western Daily Mercury, Plymouth : " People who want to know something about life in Australia outside the great cities cannot wish for a more pleasant instructor. . . . Mr. Harris has a great deal of interesting miscellaneous information to give us."

Yorkshire Weekly Post, Leeds : " A remarkable book about a remarkable journey . . . calculated to gain great popularity . . . a good eye for effect, and a lively style of description . . . a narrative of exceptional interest. . . . The broad impression one receives of the Bush is very welcome."

The Irish Times : " Mr. Harris' book fulfils well the objects he had in mind when he wrote it. . . ."

Midland Herald, Birmingham : " . . . has admirably succeeded in the design he had in view, and has produced a deeply interesting volume, written in a bright and captivating manner, and adding greatly to one's knowledge of the island-continent. . . . The author has a happy knack of retaining the interest throughout. . . . A very useful and entertaining addition to the literature concerning Australia."



THE AUTHOR.

OUTBACK IN AUSTRALIA

OR THREE AUSTRALIAN OVERLANDERS

Being an account of the longest Overlanding
journey ever attempted in Australia
with a single horse, and
including chapters on
various phases of
Outback Life

BY

CAPTAIN WALTER KILROY HARRIS,
D.S.O., M.C., F.R.G.S., F.R.C.I.

(Australian Command, Legion of Frontiersmen)
(Lieut. R.N.V.R., Drake Battalion, Royal Naval Division)

With Map and 29 Illustrations from Photographs
And an Index

(Third Edition)

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To
MY BUSH MATES
JACK
(more generally known as "THE LONG 'UN")
and
"OPAL,"
this volume is very affectionately
inscribed.

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My thanks are due to the Editors and Proprietors of the *Sydney Mail*, *Field*, *Glasgow Herald*, *British Australasian*, *Empire Magazine*, *Colonial Life*, and *Colonizer* for permission to reproduce such portions of the contents of this volume as have appeared in their respective columns.

W. K. H.

Royal Colonial Institute,
Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C.
February 17th, 1913.

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OUTBACK IN AUSTRALIA

CHAPTER I

THE HOSPITALITY OF OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

THE exceeding great kindness and hospitality which are such innate features in the make-up of the Australian assert themselves in every part of the Commonwealth, but to understand properly what is meant by *real* hospitality, the traveller must leave the cities and go Outback. The hospitality extended to all who peregrinate in the Never Never, Back-o'-Beyond, Lonely Lands, or West-o'-Sunset—call the Big Spaces what you will—irrespective of their station in life, is not prompted by a recollection of past benefits, nor by expectation of favours to come : it originates in a real honest care for the comfort of others, and looks for no other reward than that of giving happiness, and no other thanks than a kindly recollection on the part of those to whom it is extended. One might say that this hospitality is a custom brought about by peculiar circumstances—the long distances, the vast empty spaces, the glorious climate.

In the far interior, and in the sparsely-populated coastal districts, the traveller is made welcome at every hut and camp. The stranger's arrival is a break in the monotony of things, and he is doubly welcome if he brings any news of the great outside world. News is such a precious commodity out in the Australian Bush, that if only for this reason every stranger is welcome.

There is no limit to the hospitality of the far Outback, but entertainment in these parts is somewhat simplified by each man carrying his own "nap" (blankets), and so, when the spare room is already occupied by the first caller, all subsequent visitors merely coil themselves up in their blankets

on the veranda or under the stars. Out in Australia the stars make an excellent roof.

In some parts if the approach of the visitor is heralded by a crack of his whip, or by a bark from his dog, he will find on his arrival that his host has already "hung the pot," no matter what time of the day it happens to be.

No greater insult can be given than to offer payment for hospitality received. I remember on one occasion, when I had just started on my Bush wanderings, I thought myself lost. I was in no way prepared for a night out, and was soon glad to see some lights I took to be shining from windows. They turned out to be smouldering logs. I cooed; back came the answer. Half a mile further on I found myself making the fourteenth at a settler's table, and I shall never forget how offended the other thirteen seemed next morning, when, in my ignorance, I offered payment.

Of course, you get various opinions of Outback hospitality. Take for instance the case of a chap I shall call "K. M." He started out from Wentworth, on the Murray River, to navigate the Darling "per boot" as far as Bourke, having absolutely nothing in the way of "swag" or tucker-bags. He reached Tarcoola Station in company with a lot of "jim-jams" (I use his own words) that were born soon after he finished the last bottle, and were then full grown. Liberal doses of pain-killer, administered by the station storekeeper, restored him to sanity. For three days he was laid up in the "Traveller's Hut" (to be found on almost every sheep-station, for the use of "swaggies"), and while there he was visited daily by the cook on the manager's instructions. When he left he had a complete set of tucker-bags, all full, and the nucleus of a "swag." And he was well treated at every other station along the river. Is it any wonder that he says Outback hospitality "is no empty phrase; it is full to the brim."

Now a totally different story. One day during the heat wave in November, 1898, a messenger rode up to "Government House" (the owner's, or manager's residence) on a big sheep station in the far north-west of New South Wales, with an urgent telegram. He was a kangaroo-shooter, who had obliged the previous manager several times in the same way. The luncheon-gong rang as he came up dead beat, with his horse at its last gasp. "The Boss," a new man from the city, who had been lounging in a hammock on the veranda, took the wire, growled a scarcely audible "Thank you," and added as an afterthought, "If you like, the nigger will take you to the spring" (about half a mile up the creek), "you'll get splendid water there, and a shady

camp." "Thanks, Boss," replied the messenger, "but I'll take my cheque first. I've come eighteen miles out of the way to oblige you—and the allowance is three and sixpence per mile, both ways." With a pained expression the Boss went to write the cheque, and the kangarooer murmured, as he spat vigorously, "You'd have found it a heap cheaper to have offered me and the nag a feed."

Another feature in the character of the Outbacker and the Bush-dweller generally, and closely associated with his hospitality, is his honesty. Camps, permanent and temporary, are deserted for hours and days at a stretch. Riding overland from Sydney to Brisbane, along the beautiful North Coast district of New South Wales, I tied my nedly up on the roadside and investigated a bark-shanty some little distance off in the Bush. I helped myself to a feed. Five miles further on, just getting into Woodburn, a road-maintenance man bailed me up. "The mailman said he saw your roan colt tied up near my shanty. Did you have a feed?" "Yes, thanks," I replied, without hesitation. "Glad to hear it," said the "Cornstalk," "Hope you did not do the same as my last caller. He accidentally left the honey-tap running." The resident knows as soon as he returns whether or not anyone has been there, by looking for tracks. If he finds tracks he looks at once to his larder. If somebody has had a feed he is satisfied, but if the food has not been touched, he goes through his things. But more often than not the unknown visitor has had his fill. And the lonely Bush-dweller calls down blessings upon his head if he has been thoughtful enough to leave a scrap of newspaper, even if it is only a page of advertisements.

The confidence displayed by the inhabitants of the Bush is well shown by the letter-boxes on the roadside. These receptacles are usually wooden boxes or biscuit tins, nailed to the top of a gate-post, or perhaps the side of a tree, where the road is joined by a track leading to the farm or station homestead. Sometimes the name of the place, or that of its owner, is painted, written, scratched, or chalked on. There is very seldom a lock or fastening of any sort, but every coach that passes leaves letters and papers and parcels in this primitive letter-box, there to remain until someone, not always a station "hand," but perhaps a complete stranger, is going in to the homestead.

Three overlanders from Newcastle, New South Wales, have reason to remember their experience of Outback hospitality. The author, his brother Jack, and a pony, who answered to the name of "Opal," recently drove from the Coaly City to Adelaide, South Australia, and back, a total distance of

over two thousand four hundred miles. We spent a most delightful five months passing through dairying, wheat, mixed farming, fruit, pastoral, and mining districts, and from Melbourne to Adelaide, a distance of five hundred miles, our "tucker"-bill ran into exactly one shilling for chaff for "Opal," and sixpence for two loaves of bread for ourselves; while the eleven hundred miles return stage cost exactly one shilling for chaff, and twopence for water for the pony, and not one single halfpenny for ourselves! If that is not Outback hospitality, what is?

We did not leave Newcastle with the intention of breaking all records in the matter of hospitality. As a matter of fact, it was quite by accident that we threw ourselves upon the good nature of the Bush folk. We paid our way as far as Melbourne, but some money we were expecting had not come to hand when we left that city, on Christmas Eve, and the small amount we had in pocket (a mere fifteen shillings) would not carry us to Adelaide. The money eventually caught us up halfway to Adelaide, but by that time we had tasted to the full the unwritten law of the Bush so generously dealt out to all who do not attempt to abuse the hospitality extended. Finding every door open, every Outbacker a courteous host, and receiving so much kindly consideration and generous unstinted hospitality, not for one moment did we dream of returning to the ordinary, everyday conventional method of paying our way.

And here I would express our deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to all those big-hearted Bush folk—of all stations in Outback life, from the highest to the lowest—who vied with one another to make our journey such a pleasant picnic.

Leaving Newcastle on October 30th,* the forward route was over a distance of 1,321 miles, via the South Coast of New South Wales, through Victoria by way of the Gippsland Forests, Melbourne, Ballarat, the Western District and Serviceton, and then across the "Ninety Mile Desert" in South Australia. A month was spent in Adelaide, and the return journey was commenced on February 14th, being via the Renmark, Wentworth, and Mildura Irrigation settlements on the Murray River, and across the western plains of New South Wales. The one horse, a low-bodied, thick-legged, seven-year-old bay pony mare, bred in the Hunter River Valley, was used throughout. On the forward journey the actual number of travelling days was fifty-nine, the average daily distance being twenty-two miles. On the return stage of 1,100 miles the travelling days numbered

* 1911.



Photo by]

A FLOCK OF EMUS.

[W. K. Harris.



AN AUSTRALIAN BUSH LETTER-BOX.

thirty-nine, an average mileage of twenty-eight per day. The longest distance for any one day was fifty-one miles, on the very last day—April 1st—and the shortest, three.

We left Newcastle with the intention of being away for six months, but unfortunately we were obliged to cut our time a little short. On arrival at Wellington one Thursday morning we found awaiting us correspondence which made it necessary for us to be back home at Waratah, near Newcastle, not later than the following Tuesday. I believe the trip is a record so far for any single horse, and we give all the credit for its accomplishment to "Opal." But it says a little for Jack's careful driving of a leg-weary horse ("The Long 'Un" was handling the reins on the return journey), that after a journey of over 2,000 miles, the pony succeeded in getting through the 227 miles from Wellington to Waratah by the Monday afternoon.

Lots of people told us we couldn't possibly do the trip with the one horse, but "Opal" had already put up some very good performances, and thoroughly maintained her reputation. We did not carry a water-bag an inch of the way, nor horse-bell nor hobbles; the pony was a good camper, and was always within call every morning.

This volume deals chiefly with the hospitality extended to us in what are known as "Outback" regions, and in its preparation I have endeavoured to do two things: First, to make it interesting to the general reader, and, second, to be of some service to the man who is thinking of emigrating to Australia. I have not touched on that portion of our journey between Newcastle and Serviceton, on the Victorian-South Australian border, as the intermediate districts are more or less settled, but have given a full account of the return stage from Adelaide to Newcastle, and from Serviceton to Adelaide, these districts being the least known of the country traversed during the course of our trip.

The hospitality extended to us will be of interest to the second class of reader, although perhaps the Outback districts are not those to which the immigrant turns his attention—not until he has been in Australia some little time, at any rate. Rather, he keeps to the districts that allow of more openings for turning his industry to good account, and for his especial benefit I have added supplementary chapters on settlement on the Murray River, South Australia, the North Coast district of New South Wales, and the Mallee district of Victoria. So far as population in Australia goes, these and other fertile areas, when compared with the country traversed on our return journey, are closely settled,

but for very many years to come there will be opportunities for new-comers to join in and "make good."

The ordinary idea of Australia prevalent in England even at the present day is that of a hot, flat, uninteresting plain, producing wool and gold, and sending from time to time cricket teams which are well able to hold their own with the best teams which England can produce. Also there is, or used to be, a prevalent idea for which Australians have partly themselves to blame—that immigrants from the Old Country are not wanted in Australia. The last decade has seen a complete change in the policy of the various States with regard to immigration; one and all are now earnestly endeavouring to attract the best class of settlers, and the great complaint at the present moment is that ships are lacking to transport the large numbers who are willing to go.

In the Australian cities there is just as much ignorance displayed regarding "Outback" as there is in England in regard to Australia as a whole, and if in these chapters some light is thrown on the comparatively little-known districts through which we passed, the object of "Three Australian Overlanders" will have been fully accomplished.

CHAPTER II

ADELAIDE TO THE MURRAY

AFTER a very pleasant month in Adelaide, we turned "Opal's" head towards Home in the late afternoon of Wednesday, February 14th, and camped that night near the Old Spot Hotel, about twelve miles out, in a paddock belonging to a namesake of our Prospect friends, but who was just the reverse in the matter of hospitality. We got some chaff from an orchard and nursery on the banks of the Little Para, near by, where we found the overseer just moving the irrigation pipes from one set of earth channels to another part of the ground.

We were on the road very early the next morning, and rattled through the twenty miles to Roseworthy Agricultural College before 9.30, after journeying across the Gawler Plains and through the town of that name, where the old-fashioned, high-decked, horse tramcars were a source of considerable uneasiness to "Opal," fresh from her month's holiday. The Principal of the College, Professor Perkins, extended a very warm invitation to stay a day or two and have a look round, and handed us over to the farm superintendent, who, having read in the Adelaide papers of our homeward route, had been wondering whether we would call in at Roseworthy. Mr. Richardson (the farm superintendent) first of all had "Opal" hosed down, and then put into a stall with an unlimited supply of College feed. Under his guidance we inspected the outbuildings, and after dinner drove over to see the ploughing and other field work.

The Roseworthy Agricultural College claims the honour of being the first institution of its kind to be established in Australasia. As the crow flies, it is situated about twenty-five miles from Adelaide, being in the centre of the farming areas in the immediate vicinity of the South Australian capital. Established in 1885 for the purpose of teaching young men the principles and practices of scientific agriculture, it has played an important part in bringing about the prosperity which South Australia has enjoyed of late years.

Attached to the College are chemical laboratories and lecture-rooms, while on different parts of the farm are situated a well-equipped wine-making plant and cellars, a butter and cheese factory, incubator house, etc., besides the usual farm buildings. There is accommodation for sixty students, and each one is given full opportunity of making himself thoroughly acquainted with every detail of farm work and relative machinery. A few competent and experienced men are employed to help and instruct the students, but the bulk of the work is done by the latter. The farm lands total about 1,800 acres, and each year from 250 to 500 acres are cropped with cereals and green crops, while the stock comprise about eighty head of dairy cattle, from 1,000 to 1,600 sheep, over 300 pigs, and a large number of poultry.

In addition to the striking influence of the College farm in agricultural practice, much good has resulted through the training of the students, who have gone on to the land equipped with a sense of the value of scientific method in rural industry. The example and tone which these young men have supplied in the districts where they have settled have had a material effect in improving the general character of the State's husbandry.

It was just about examination time, and the students were supposed to be busy with their various papers, but some twenty or thirty gave a sing-song in our honour. "The Long 'Un" and I elected to be mere spectators, and were highly amused at the comical attitude assumed by the boys when a heavy knock resounded on the locked door of the large dining-hall. With one exception they went down on their knees in prayerful posture, fearing one of the masters wanted to get in. The one exception, a long, typical "crow-eater" (as South Australians are called), the son of a farmer who knew nothing about scientific farming, but wanted his son to benefit by the opportunities offered by the State, jumped for the gaspipe, but landed on his back. However, it was a false alarm, and dancing commenced. Dust rose, and settled on the crockery set ready for breakfast next morning.

It was very pleasing to note the friendly spirit existing between the boys and their various masters. The Principal has his own separate residence, of course, but makes a point of having at least one meal a day with his charges.

* * * * *

It is no easy matter to take up the pen and write about Seppeltsfield. Seppeltsfield, situated about forty-five miles

by rail from Adelaide, is the largest winery in the Southern Hemisphere, and probably in the world. A triumph of private enterprise and skilful organisation, the magnitude of the establishment simply paralyses you. But the hospitality of Mr. Seppelt and his family helps you to withstand the shock.

Descending the hill that overlooks the winery—village it might well be called—we two dust-covered strangers pulled up under the pines which tower above and separate the residence from the offices.

“Hello! Travelling? What’ll you have to drink? Teetotallers, eh? Oh, well, we provide for all-comers. It’s cooler down in the cellars. Come along.”

A tall, youngish-looking man stood in the doorway of the office, holding out his hand, which a few seconds later was gripping our fingers with a clasp of iron.

Down in the cellars, sitting on empty cases and with a newly-opened bottle of lime-juice on another case, we got to know one another. Our new friend was Mr. Oscar Seppelt, son of the Managing Director of Messrs. B. Seppelt & Sons.

“Do you mind one of your men showing us round a bit?” I inquired after the second glass.

“How long can you stay?”

In our ignorance we replied we thought we would not take up more than an hour.

“Oh,” laughed our host. “You’ll want more than that. You’ll have to stay overnight at the very least. But first of all we’ll see to your neddy.”

Big oaks from little acorns grow, and from very small beginnings Seppeltsfield has developed into a colossal undertaking. It was in 1851, an eventful year for Australia,* that Mr. Benno Seppelt’s father, the late J. E. Seppelt, settled in this delightful spot at the foot of the Barossa Ranges. He subsequently planted a small vineyard, and erected the first building, beneath which was excavated a small wine-cellar, measuring 24 feet by 36 feet. This old and primitive building has long since been absorbed by the present palatial cellars which to-day, together with the storage accommodation, contain a million gallons of wine.

Mr. J. E. Seppelt was the founder of Seppeltsfield, but it remained for the son to throw his whole heart and soul into the business, and to see it gradually increase year by year, and apparently it has not done growing yet. The place is always being improved. “Standing still is going back,” says Mr. Seppelt, and everyone around the old gentleman

* Gold first discovered.

catches his spirit of progression, and Seppeltsfield literally moves ahead.

Standing on the hill overlooking the winery, you get a grand panoramic view of Seppeltsfield, which is quite a little township. On the summit of the hill is the huge water tank, on the slope of the rise is the great winery, in the valley, as it were, is the distillery and the bond store, and then on the rise on the opposite side are the vinegar works, the cooperage, the cellars, the homestead, and further on again the extensive sheds and stables.

Everything works amazingly smoothly at Seppeltsfield. There is no rush or hurry, but just methodical expedition. Housewives, as a rule, complain about the troubles and worries of managing a home. What would they say if they had to preside over the household duties at Seppeltsfield? During the vintage time about a hundred and twenty men sit down to meals in the big room set apart for them. All the men have their meals at the homestead; the married men return to their homes—on the estate—after tea, while the others have their camps some distance from the main buildings. Open house is always kept at Seppeltsfield, and visitors are as welcome as flowers that bloom in the spring. The hospitality of the place is proverbial. It is no uncommon sight for half a dozen "swaggies" to arrive at the house at the same time, and, to use a slang expression, they are always on a "good wicket." With visitors it is no uncommon thing to see from twenty to thirty seated at the family table. On this particular day the doctor and bank manager from Angaston, and one or two others, had come up to have a look at the vintage operations, which were just starting, and which would be on for six or seven weeks. At the time of our visit eight sheep were being killed every day, and forty-five sheep every week, while sixty loaves of bread were baked every day.

The vineyard at Seppeltsfield consists of about 120 acres, the bulk of the grapes being purchased from the growers within a radius of sixteen miles of the estate. There are 165 of these growers, and as they employ on an average about ten pickers each, the number of hands Seppeltsfield provides work for during vintage times numbers quite 1,700. These figures show the magnitude of the concern, and what it means to the district.

At night the whole place is lit up with acetylene gas, generated on the spot. Up to the time of our visit 500 tons of grapes had been treated. Altogether about 2,700 tons would be put through the crushers, and it was expected that 400,000 gallons of wine, and perhaps more, would be made.

Nothing goes to waste at Seppeltsfield. There are 200 pigs on the place, and these are fed on the grape-skins from the presses, boiled up with chaff and pollard. Green feed is also grown for the grunTERS. Also, there is quite a big flock of sheep, and I must not omit to mention the clever sheep-dog belonging to the man who does the killing. This collie rounds up the "jumbucks,"* drives them into the small roadway, and then jumps all the intermediate fences as he describes a circle and meets the sheep as they pass through into the small yard.

Seppeltsfield is a wonderful establishment in every respect. It has been deservedly styled "the show place of Australia," and Mr. Benno Seppelt is the presiding genius.

* * * * *

Oscar rang up the second winery, adjoining the Seppelt railway siding, about four miles away, saying he was bringing a couple of visitors to see the first crushing in this new property. In the afternoon the horses were put into the four-wheeled "Express," and we drove through undulating country, with vineyards on either side, in the journey getting covered with fine, white dust ("Barossa Snow," Oscar called it), which even the horse-rugs would not keep out. In most of the vineyards the grapes were being picked. Pretty, fresh-looking girls were the principal workers. When their baskets were filled they carried them off and emptied the fruit into the big, unwieldy-looking German waggons. We saw twenty or thirty of these waggons at Seppeltsfield, and there was not a poor-looking horse in a single team. We could not help remarking how splendidly conditioned the animals were. The explanation came that the owners regard their horses as members of their family, and treat them almost as kindly as they would their wives or children.

Dear old Mrs. Seppelt provided supper for us on the veranda, and we indulged in a hot bath to get rid of the "Barossa Snow" prior to retiring—on the lawn. As at Roseworthy, we steadfastly refused to accept indoor accommodation.

In the morning we were awakened early by the weird, piercing cry of a curlew which had been caught as a chick some six years before, and made its home in the garden. Although its wings are perfectly grown, it goes to Mrs. Seppelt when she calls it, and eats out of her hand. Sometimes the bird goes away for weeks at a stretch, but it eventually returns.

Harnessing up, we found that Oscar, remembering we

* Sheep.

were teetotallers, had ordered eight bottles of lime-juice to be packed away in the sulky while we were having breakfast, and in our absence at the second winery, the blacksmith had repaired one of the sulky springs, which had got cracked in the drive from Roseworthy.

It was a hard task to refuse the invitation to stay over the week-end in such hospitable surroundings, but friends we had met in Adelaide were expecting us for the Sunday at Truro. Once more we braved the "Barossa Snow," passing many lumbering red and yellow waggons, loaded with grapes, and driven by men who, though the descendants of some of the best settlers who have ever come into Australia, cannot speak English as well as the tongue of the country of which the names painted on the vehicles are characteristic—Germany. In fact, if it were not for the gum-trees, you could imagine yourself in that country.

Associated with the German element is the name of the gentleman who, more than any other, identified himself with the establishment of the Colony of South Australia. This was the late George Fife Angas, who has been called the Father and Founder of the Central State. It was on March 31st, 1832, that Mr. Angas received the prospectus of the South Australian Land Company. This was proposed in order to prove to the Home Government the *bona fides* of those who desired to found the Colony. He took sufficient shares to qualify him to become a director, and his first steps were to enter a protest against the proposal to send paupers out; to express the hope that the appointment of a Governor would be left in the hands of the company until the population reached 10,000 and secured a Legislative Assembly; and that "Bible truths should be given unfettered and without State aid."

Mr. Angas' passion for religious freedom led him to take up the cause of the Lutherans, who suffered persecution in religious matters in Prussia in the 'thirties, and to promote their desire to settle in the new Colony he, at his own expense, chartered a number of vessels, which conveyed several hundreds of these sturdy people to Australian shores. They were led by Pastor Kavel, and their first settlement was at Klemzig, on some land belonging to Mr. Angas. The latter sent Mr. Charles Flaxman, his chief clerk, to superintend the settlement of these immigrants. Eventually many German families settled in this district, and have proved themselves to be ideal colonists—industrious, frugal, enterprising, and public-spirited. Mr. Angas did not come to Australia until 1851, when he made his home at Lindsay House, near Angaston. Both before and after he exercised

a powerful and beneficial influence upon the development of South Australia, and in the year of his arrival he was elected the first representative for Barossa in the first elected Legislature.

Five or six miles out from Seppeltsfield we passed many loads of apples going into the fruit-preserving works at Angaston, which we found to be one of those places which compel the unstinted admiration of visitors. It has a charm which is irresistible. Nature has done much to produce an attractive panorama; the enterprise, judgment, and industry of its residents have done the rest. Originally called the German Pass, the town soon took its present name in honour of Mr. Angas, the chief land-owner in the district. His agent and forerunner, Mr. Flaxman, was so impressed with the fertility of the soil and the promising general features of the neighbourhood, that he exceeded his instructions and "plunged" to the extent of 25,000 acres. The soil lends itself to pastoral, agricultural, horticultural, and viticultural purposes admirably. The extension of fruit-growing and wine production has caused the town to grow to considerable proportions, and its development has been accompanied by a taste which has produced a harmonious and well-to-do effect. Substantial residences and well-kept gardens, extensive orchards and vineyards tell a tale of comfort allied with industry. The physical features of the locality, ranging from gentle undulations to slopes of lofty eminence, display to best advantage the art and skill of the husbandman and of his florist womenfolk.

Leaving Angaston with a sugar-bag half full of apples given us by a boy engaged in knocking starlings over with a pea-rifle, we journeyed through interesting and pleasing landscape country to Truro, a town of considerable importance and the centre of an agricultural and pastoral district. Here we were most hospitably entertained for a day or two at Blanche Farm by Mr. and Mrs. Treloar, whom we had met in Adelaide, and who, with characteristic heartiness, had invited us to call in at their home.

Notwithstanding it is on the main road from Adelaide to Blanchtown, and that considerable business is done with settlers on the Murray River flats, Truro gave us the impression of being, at ordinary times, a slow, sleepy old place. But at the time of our visit the whole town was agog with excitement, for no less than two travelling circuses had descended with full menageries, the like of which had never before been seen by the juvenile population.

Truro is rather a peculiar looking place. The town itself is built on the slope of a hill, and consists of a row of build-

ings on either side of the one-main-and-only street, while the telegraph wires are a little higher up the hill—running at the back, instead of through the township. The explanation is that the townfolk built their shops and stores one block lower down than intended by the surveyors.

We were told that the town was not always a quiet place, as years ago quite a small fortune was made by the public-house keeper, when the bushmen came in every Saturday night to hold buck-jumping contests in the road, and when all the Darling River stock for the Adelaide market used to pass through. Those were the days when a five-horse coach ran to Blanchtown, thirty-two miles away, on the Murray, but now there is only a one-horse ramshackle vehicle, which on one occasion came a dead second in a race against a man wheeling a barrow! In justice to the coach, it should be mentioned that the wheelbarrow won the drinks merely by reason of the fact that the coach had to call in at a number of places off the road to pick up and set down mails.

Leaving Truro, we immediately came upon a range of fairly high hills, and four miles out obtained an impressive view of the vast Murray flats. As far as the eye could see—north, east, and south—there was a vast expanse of plain, broken here and there by belts of timber, and looking like one immense park. Only a very few houses could be seen, their corrugated iron roofs glistening white in the sun. We descended the hills by a long gradual sloping road, which, running almost due east for mile after mile, stretched across the plain like a thread of silver.

Fifteen miles from Truro we camped for lunch at the big Government Tank near the old Anna Hotel. A sun-tanned girl was pumping water through a hollow log into the trough. Two equally sun-tanned young men were baling it out with buckets and filling a couple of 200-gallon tanks on old-fashioned German waggons. It had been a very dry season; their own supply had given out, and for the first time in seven years they were obliged to cart water. The German name on the waggon caused me to ask one of the men how long he had been in Australia. Speaking in very bad English, he replied, "Twenty-four years." "But," I answered, "Surely you would have forgotten your native language if that were the case." With rather a sorrowful look on his face, he replied that he had never learnt his native language; that he was Australian-born of German parents, but that as the district had been invaded by the Germans, a private German school—the only one within easy distance—provided all the education his father had thought

necessary, and therefore he had difficulty in learning the language of his own native country.

Late in the afternoon we reached Blanchtown, an important trading centre on the River Murray, consisting of half a dozen scattered, greyish, stone houses, and the most substantial post office I have ever seen in a country town of such small size. We found the petrol-driven punt almost completely hidden from view by a couple of immense overhanging willows, which, with some grape vines, shaded the home of the puntsman—the back rooms of what had once been a house built into the side of the cliffs. On the other side of the river we pitched camp for the night alongside an old gum, whose trunk showed a watermark about eight feet higher than the river was at that time, and which, still higher up, had the limb of a tree—brought down by flood waters—securely wedged cross fashion in its branches.

We made tea off tomatoes, cucumbers, and celery, brought down to us by the little daughter of a German farmer, in whose paddock we were camped, and before turning in strolled down to the riverside wharf, where a barge was loading up with wheat. We were to leave the main track along the river-bank the next day, and hit across country to Waikerie, thirty-one miles off. The wheat-buyer, being a "town-ey" up from Adelaide only for the season, did not follow the usual Bush practice of squatting down on his haunches and mapping out our route in the dust, but converted his little six-by-six-foot office into a topographical station, and the roughly drawn map he provided us with saw us safely through to our next stopping-place.

On our way back to our camping-place we noticed "Opal," who, with nosebag on, was feeding near the sulky, suddenly prick up her ears with curiosity, and trot off in the direction of a store a quarter of a mile away. A fence pulled her up, and with a terrific snort she turned round and galloped away in the opposite direction, disappearing from view amongst the gums. It so happened that that store was kept by an Assyrian, and the cause of "Opal's" consternation turned out to be a camel, which had up till then been hidden from view behind a stack of empty cases. There had been no wind, and "Opal" had no knowledge of the animal's presence until its Assyrian owner mounted it and prepared to ride away in the direction of Waikerie. The comparatively small size of the paddock prevented "Opal" going very far, and with nosebag swaying from side to side, she returned to the camp as soon as the camel had disappeared from view.

CHAPTER III

"SHIPS OF THE DESERT"—THE CAMEL IN AUSTRALIA

THE camel or, to be more correct, the Arabian dromedary, is quite an old resident of Outback Australia. He first set "pad" there in the early exploration days—long before any Alien Restriction Law was in force. And with the camel had to come the man who understood him. The climate agreed with him, and it was soon found that camels born and brought up in Australia were far healthier than those members of the family who "happen along" in their native climes. The Afghan and Assyrian drivers, too, seem to prefer Australia, which is not surprising, seeing that they probably earn ten or fifteen times as much as their far-distant brothers do. There is nothing seductive about the camel to attract ordinary human beings to him. He is odorous and bad-tempered, he slobbers as he eats, and when he sleeps he is, according to Kipling, a night-mare. His voice is raucous, and his breath, to say the least, unpleasant. But against all these faults must be placed his virtues, and they are not of the minor order like his vices. Under proper guidance the camel becomes a tractable, steady and tireless servant, and his ability to withstand heat which would "knock up" a horse in a very short time makes him an important factor in developing the interior of Australia.

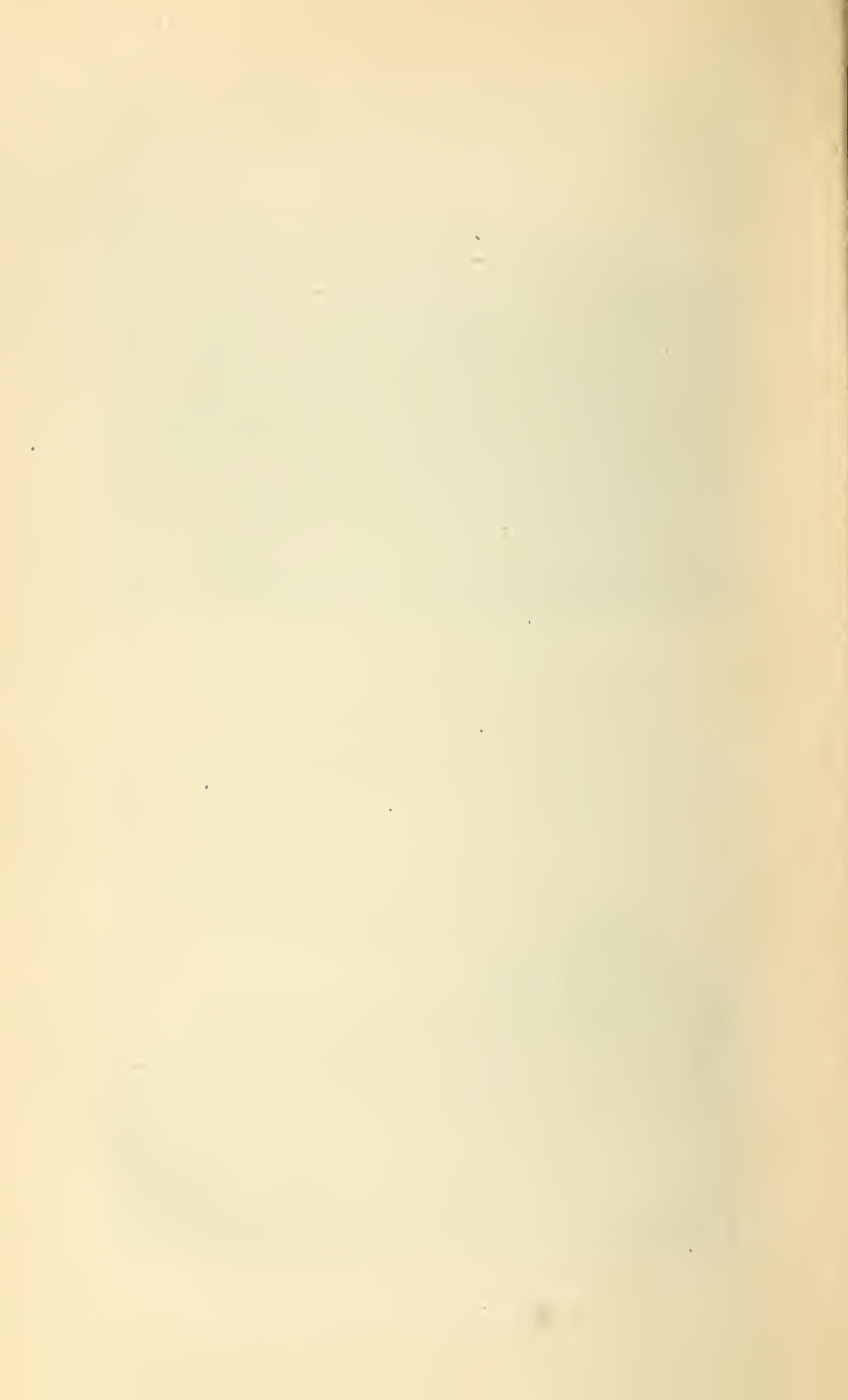
Some of the enterprising station owners and managers in the far Outback have shown what can be done with camels as beasts of burden for ordinary station work. Broken Hill (the famous silver-field in New South Wales) is a great centre for the camels, and in paddocks on the outskirts of the north side of the Silver City the teams may be seen starting off on a long journey, or just returning from one. Not all of them are driven by Afghans; white drivers also take a hand in the business. From "The Hill" teams start out for Milparinka, Tibboo-burra, and White Cliffs in the north-west of New South Wales, as well as South Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory, taking out station supplies and returning with wool. Each camel carries as much as four or five hundredweight for long distances.



A CAMEL SULKY TURN-OUT.



A CAMEL "STRING" BOUND FOR OUTBACK.



Only those who have had experience of camel travelling on a "hack," with a pack train, in a buggy, or on a waggon, can realise the indescribable monotony of a long journey through what some people would call dreary scenery. When the time comes to leave the camels, there is no affectionate farewell, this phase of Outback travelling not being what might be termed a "blissful experience." Buggy teams of from two to six camels are driven in the ordinary way from the seat of the vehicle and form as original-looking teams as could be imagined. Buggy camels do not cover the ground at an alarming rate. They have to be whipped and yelled at continuously to keep up a semblance of a trot for only a few hundred yards.

If riding, when one is accustomed to the movement of the animal, it is possible to read, but the trouble is to get accustomed to it. Assuming that the man on top has had no experience of how to accommodate the swing of his body to the lumbering movement of the beast beneath him, nothing can surpass the rocking, rolling gait of a two-and-a-half-miles per hour pack-camel as a direct inducement to the wholesale raising of blisters on every portion of the human anatomy brought into contact with the usual apology for a saddle. This "accommodation" is not learnt in a single day, and few men give the process more than one trial unless they are compelled to. Riding and pack camels, keeping close together, one behind the other, advance at a slow, steady, plodding pace which very rarely reaches four miles an hour.

Patience is an absolutely indispensable virtue when dealing with camels. Time often means money in the city, but away out in Nature's solitudes those ideas must be "cast out" if one's locomotion depends on such an uncertain beast as a camel. No matter how good the feed may be near your camp, camels will wander miles away during the night, even though they are hobbled. "Tailing" horses, bullocks or mules is mere play compared with the task of "tailing" camels.

Not even a goat could be more sure of foot than a camel, and only the leader of a "string" requires guiding—the others follow on mechanically, sagging along the track, their nose-lines fastened to the tail of the preceding camel, each animal helping to deepen the "pads" of his predecessor.

It has been said that camels can go a month without water. Although, as is well known, camels possess a wonderful endurance, this is a disputed question Outback, but men "West-o'-the-Darling" agree that they can, if

they are trained to it by not being worked during that month. But when they start work again they make up for it, and generally at the expense of somebody else. For by their own peculiar offensive habits camels pollute any water they are allowed to enter while drinking, and they never seem so happy as when standing knee-deep in a little water-hole—perhaps the only water within twenty, fifty, or even a hundred miles in a dry season—stirring up the foul mud as they move about. In the Great Outback you will hear stories of horses that have perished of thirst just because the camels got to a waterhole first and left their taint behind them.

Camels frighten some (though not all) horses to an extraordinary degree. The latter usually evince strong symptoms of starting off for "fresh fields and pastures new" as soon as they set eyes on a camel. Even the sight of a camel's pack lying on the ground is quite sufficient to cause a horse to pull up, and stand quivering in every muscle with ears laid low, ready to bolt at the least sign of a camel. And a horse will shy at even the "pen-and-ink" (the Outbacker's polite way of saying stink) of a camel long before the cause of the awful "pen-and-ink" is in sight, and long before a human being would notice it. And the sight or smell of an Afghan has almost the same effect upon some horses as the camel itself.

I remember a little accident that happened to a coach at the "Nine-Mile Gate," near Wilcannia (on the Darling River, New South Wales). At the eighteen-mile "change" we noticed an Afghan a little distance off the road, rounding up his team. As we journeyed along we saw the tracks of a camel. For nine miles they continued, and the driver prophesied trouble. The tracks went straight to the gate, and there was the camel standing near the fence about twenty yards to the side of the road. Fortunately the wind was not in our direction, nor did the horses see the animal. We got through the gate all right, but while the driver was waiting for me to shut it, the off-side poler turned his head round, and saw the camel calmly watching us. With a snort he reared up on his hind legs, and as he came down his forefeet went over the swingle-bar of the leader in front. He turned a side somersault over the pole, and the other four horses commenced to play up. The two of us (I was the only passenger) had all our work cut out to disentangle the mass, and we had to blindfold that poler before we could put him in the "body-lead"—the safest place under such circumstances.

The camel-driver is not employed on a weekly wage by the

owner of the loads his camels carry, but receives a stipulated sum for delivering the goods "in good order and condition," so naturally he "goes bush" (that is, follows a short cut straight across country without taking any notice of roads) as often as he can. But feed and water (or rather the absence of it) in some parts compels him to keep to the beaten track, and to a new chum who previously was not aware that camels were to be found in Australia, a caravan of, say, fifty or sixty camels in one long "string," or a couple of waggon teams, each of about sixteen camels, together with the attendant Oriental drivers, very often attired in their own national costumes, or perhaps "half and half," imparts a sudden and altogether unexpected touch of the picturesque. The first time I ever saw camels in Australia (outside of the circus tent and Zoo walls) was one bright moonlight night near Sandy Creek Bore, about 150 miles north of Broken Hill. Just as the coach horses were put into the yard at the change-station, the faint "tinkle-tinkle" of camel-bells, easily discernible by the steady, regular sound from horse-bells and bullock-bells, came to our ears. As I gazed on the strange procession of dirty-grey camels wending its way slowly along the dusty track which divided the plain, it seemed as if a page from the Arabian Nights had been blown Outback.

Any man who has ridden or driven a camel knows that the beast has not in him the ability to excite anything like the sympathy a man feels for his horse. The camel is a monument of patience, but the white man never trusts him. The brute's temper is, as one Outbacker put it, "the most unreliable thing on earth." And it is better for a man not to have been born than to receive a bite from a maddened camel, whether it be a cow or a bull. White drivers treat their camels much better than do the Afghans, and instances of them being savaged are very rare. But it is quite a common occurrence for an Afghan to have his arm, shoulder, leg or body terribly mauled before his fellow "'Ghans" can beat off the animal. A camel has to be in a very bad state before he is given a holiday by his swarthy master. When a member of the "string" develops sore ribs from the awful fitting pack-saddles the Afghans use, the animal is thrown, tied down, and then poultices of hot tar are strapped over the wound. But the Afghans are careful not to hit the camel's head too often or too hard. A good blow between the ears with a heavy steel-lined stockwhip will send a camel reeling like a drunken man, and the second or third will floor him completely. Otherwise the camel is the hardiest animal in Australia, not even excepting the Outback goat.

To the uninitiated, the camel as he grazes at the side of the road looking up in surprise as the horses make ready to go, seems a very quiet, inoffensive animal. It will stand quite still while you walk round it, judging its fine points as it were, but you should never comply with your friend's request to look at its teeth. If you do, you will be forcibly reminded of the animal in the Sydney Zoo (the Gnu, or Zebu, or Lama, I forget which) which causes great amusement amongst the juvenile visitors by acting in accordance with the notice displayed on the front fence of its enclosure, namely, "This animal spits!"

The camel will pull a great deal more than he will carry, but the Afghan prefers to work him in a "string" rather than in a team, and the Oriental person will take a load forward once he undertakes delivery of it, even if he has to put twice the proper weight on each camel.

There is a great deal of truth in the statement that "Fat is force—reserve force," in the case of the camel. The outward and visible sign of a camel being in good health is the unnatural-looking, unmistakable hump. This hump, a mass of fatty tissue, is the camel's "reserve force." When he gets into bad condition (and unless he has plenty of feed he soon breaks down) the hump decreases in size until it almost entirely disappears. But it returns as soon as the camel gets on to good feed and has a spell. The camel is not very particular about his food. He will eat practically anything and everything that is of vegetable growth, although he would starve on merely a grass diet. A few years ago some Assyrian hawkers attempted an overland trip from Queensland to Western Australia, but they got only as far as Brunette Station, and then had to retrace their steps. After Brunette there is a 200 mile stretch of open plains with fringes of Coolibah and gum-trees on the water-channels, and some small patches of Gidyea ("Gidgee"), but otherwise there are no edible bushes. Strange as it may appear, the camels would not touch the rich hay-like Mitchell and Flinders grass, so excellent for stock. Green and dead gum leaves, Saltbush, "Porcupine (Spinifex) Tops," and Mulga are delicacies, and the more thorny the boughs are, the more acceptable to the animal. And some of the various species of the Poison Bush of Outback do not affect him in the slightest. But some do. For instance: In one of his reports, Captain Barclay, recently on an exploring trip in the Northern Territory on behalf of the Federal Government, mentioned that the party found quantities of the Poison Bush *gastrolobium*, which was very tempting to the thirsty camel team. But fortunately only one of them ate enough to do



AN AFGHAN CATCHING HIS CAMELS.



Photos by]

[C. F. W. Bean.

SHOWING CAMELS ON RIGHT FEEDING ON
GUM LEAVES.

any harm. It seemed to go suddenly mad. The party bled him copiously by cutting off the end of his tail, gave him an hour's rest, and distributed his loading amongst the others. The treatment proved effective.

Young camels are much darker than their parents. They are more of a chocolate colour for the first few weeks. At birth they are so weak and helpless that they have to be attended to with great care, but they soon gain strength, and in about a week are able to eat. They are weaned at an early age, and although they are ridden at three years old, they do not obtain their full strength and stature until their fifth year. While the "string" is on the move they are carried between the packs, with no soft bedding whatever. Rather uncomfortable when perched between cases of supplies, but not quite so bad when the loading is a couple of bales of wool. The old camel kneels down for the youngster to jump off or on. It is amusing to see one camel stop a whole "string" by kneeling down to let her offspring jump off for the purpose of stretching its legs.

The Afghans are not the most hospitable of people, if a traveller happens to be hard up for tucker. They themselves would not dream of accepting any cooked food from a white person. I heard a story of a gift that was not welcome. It seems that a couple of Afghans at one time regularly camped behind the hotel at Euriowie, a one-time silver town, fifty miles out of Broken Hill. They developed into a nuisance. So the hotel-keeper killed and cut up a pig, and while the 'Ghans were out one morning rounding up the camels, he put a piece of pig in their camp-oven, quart-pots, and other cooking utensils. They have never camped there since, though they have passed through dozens of times.

CHAPTER IV

BLANCHTOWN TO RENMARK

LEAVING Blanchtown very early in the morning, for close on a score of miles our route lay over barren and gravelly, desolate-looking country, almost as flat as a billiard table, and just about as bare. Of grass and herbage there was not a sign, but Mallee Bush spread itself over the land in abundance, and the country seemed to be carrying a good number of sheep, horses, and cattle, all of which looked in splendid condition. At intervals the remains of some of the wooden posts of the old telegraph line from Adelaide to Wentworth kept us company. Twelve miles out we passed through a dog-proof fence, and pulled up for half an hour's spell and a yarn at the hut of a boundary-rider on Glenosland sheep station—the first sign of any habitation—where "Opal" refused the water from the well. Originally it was quite fresh, but the well had to be sunk an extra five feet when additional stock required a better flow, and as the pipes went further down the water seemed to get more brackish.

About midday we had covered twenty-three miles, which the occupier of the first farm we came to considered quite a good day's work for the pony, with the result that "The Long 'Un" spent the afternoon helping to bring in the wheat from the paddocks. I improvised a rake out of a couple of saplings and some six-inch nails, and brought down blessings upon my head by recovering for the selector's wife a gold brooch that had been dropped in the loose sand which surrounded the house. There was a great scarcity of labour in the district, and Jack did his work so well that Farmer Gregory offered him "twenty-five bob a week and found."*

Working "on shares" with another farmer, Gregory had faith in the productiveness of the inhospitable-looking sand which sunk his waggons almost halfway up to the axle, and which needed a team of six horses to pull a load of twenty bags. The previous season his block of 1,200 acres ran

* Board and residence.

twelve bushels to the acre, but this season, the poor rainfall during the growing period and the heavy frost while the wheat was in bloom, brought the average down to six bushels. This class of land appears to have its advantages as well as its disadvantages. The annual rent is only two-pence per acre, and no ploughing is required, except when a bad "burning off" of the scrub results in a springing up of thick undergrowth and weeds; otherwise, drilling is all that is necessary.

Leaving Gregory's, we took two hours to cover the eight miles of sandy track to the thriving irrigation settlement of Waikerie. We pulled up near an orchard, and cast our eyes longingly over the fence. "Those grapes look mighty fine," murmured "The Long 'Un." Immediately a voice on the other side, whose owner we could not see, answered: "How about getting some to help you on the road? Pull in at the gate, and you'll find the best on the other side of the irrigation channel."

We did as directed, and after a dozen of the biggest bunches, with some apples and apricots, had been stowed away in the front of the sulky, the owner came down to invite us up to the house for a cup of tea, and here we got to know one another. Our host was Mr. A. E. Ross, son of the late Sir R. D. Ross, a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In reply to a question as to how we were off for bread, I admitted that we had a little flour—enough to carry us over next day. With a smile and a muttered, "Three loaves will keep you from starving," Mr. Ross directed us to the vegetable garden, where one of his "hands" loaded us up with tomatoes, a pumpkin, and other vegetables. Coming back to the house, we ran into Mr. Ross—*returning from the store with the bread!* This was our first experience of such hospitality. It was perhaps a simple matter to supply us from the household larder, but we objected most strongly when we found that he had made a special purchase on our behalf. However, our remonstrances were useless, and we had to allow Mrs. Ross to replenish our ration-bags—sugar, salt, baking powder, etc.—and add a few luxuries not usually associated with Overlanding, namely, jellies and custard powders!

Next, we were sent to the stables, where, while "Opal" was enjoying a bundle of lucerne, we slung a bag of chaff on the back of the sulky. "Now, are you sure you can't stow away anything else?" asked Mr. Ross as he came down with a small bottle of vinegar to help us with the tomatoes. "Absolutely impossible," we answered, shaking hands all round. However, Mr. Ross would have the last

say in the matter, throwing in a bundle of lucerne as we drove off.

Waikerie Irrigation Area (as it is known) is one of the old Communistic Village Settlements formed by the Kingston Government twenty years ago. Some of the original settlers are still there, but each man now works his own block of land; there is none of the plain, rank socialism of the former holders, who at one time shared and shared alike, the loafer with the grafter. At the present time at Waikerie there are signs of progress which cannot be overlooked. The site is an ideal one for irrigation, a low ridge of sandy, loamy hills forming a half circle, with both points on the River. The water is pumped at one end, and by means of gravitation every acre can be brought under the influence of the fertilising agency flowing between the banks.

Mr. Ross, like many others, found the work of fruit-growing on the Murray, under irrigation, exercising a most unexpected and surprising fascination over him. "I was practically born in a garden," he remarked, "in one of the chosen spots in the Adelaide hills, where you could sink a shaft down thirty feet without getting below the rich black mould of the surface, and when I sickened of fruit-growing in a part like that, I never dreamt of taking it up again anywhere else—least of all in the supposedly desert lands of the Murray."

But having by chance taken up an irrigation plantation, Mr. Ross confessed that he was surprised to find himself gradually acquiring an interest in the work of attending to his orchard, such as he had never dreamed of again experiencing. "I think," he remarked, "it arises from the fact that the conditions of cultivation in an irrigated orchard are so essentially different from those of the old-time horticulture. There is so much to learn that the mind is kept constantly on the alert, and on the look-out for fresh discoveries and revelations. And then how things grow! I have seen fruit in many parts of Australia, but never saw vines or trees make growth as they do on the Murray."

One result of Mr. Ross's experience on the River has been that he has developed into an ardent irrigation enthusiast, who dreams visions of an enormous population to be settled in the now desert country back from the river, which shall combine fruit-growing with stock-raising and mixed farming generally by the aid of water lifted from the river on a gigantic scale by modern cheap methods. This is a dream undoubtedly capable of fulfilment; but like a great many other alluring possibilities, its fulfilment depends on the locking of the River.

Probably few people are really aware of the fact that the River Murray, with its tributaries, ranks amongst the largest and most important rivers of the world, and directly we lay hold upon this solid fact, we must of necessity see the vital importance it is to us for navigation and irrigation. The Darling, the longest tributary of the Murray, has its source in Queensland, and together with the Murrumbidgee, gives no less than 3,000 miles of beautiful, rich, flowing water.*

“It is not creditable to the Australian people,” said David Gordon, one of Australia’s ablest writers, some years ago, “that one of the largest streams in the world should have been permitted to empty its priceless contents into the deep year after year without any united effort having been made to utilise the waters as a means of production and carriage, to render permanently navigable three great rivers, and thus give cheap and regular transport to producers for 3,000 miles inland; to provide a plentiful supply of water to vast territories sometimes stricken by drought. To throw open fresh fields for the enterprising trader, and new areas for the landseeker, is surely a policy which must appeal to the patriotism of the people of Australia, and commend itself to their best judgment. The claim for permanently navigable streams is made on behalf, not of one State, but of Australia. The Commonwealth as a whole will be the gainer, because the producers along the River will benefit, and no one State will have a monopoly of the shipping business, neither will it be able to control the whole of the trade.”

Advance Australia! is our boasted cry, yet one of the greatest schemes for the permanent advancement of the Commonwealth has been allowed to lie dormant for years, and even now is only in its very infantile stages of becoming an accomplished fact. The Creator has sent us this vast rich stream of priceless value for some good purpose, yet we are content to stand by and see oceans of this fresh water running to absolute waste by allowing the Murray to pour its contents into the sea near Goolwa, with the natural result that during other periods of the year the water in the river becomes so low as to be unnavigable by ordinary steamers, trade is suspended, and the producers suffer accordingly. By a complete system of locks and storage basins, permanent navigation of the Rivers Murray, Darling, and Murrumbidgee would be accomplished, ample water would be secured for irrigating purposes, and the population on the Murray would be increased five-hundred-fold.

* See supplementary chapter on Settlement on the Murray River.

A short but very dusty track brought us to the crossing place at Waikerie. The river was very low, and the two tall, gaunt, untalkative puntsmen advised us to tie up the wheels of the sulky to get down the steep bank safely. Across the river we got directions from a jovial, bearded old German settler—the one exception who could speak English better than the language of his forefathers. His father had lived to the ripe old age of ninety-two, and he looked as if he was good to do the same.

Later in the afternoon for a couple of miles our course lay along the top of limestone, gravelly cliffs that went down a sheer 150 feet. Below, the river twisted and turned about in snake-like fashion, with low, narrow flats on either side lined by big timber. Making back from the river, we struck the main road at a spot about two miles behind Mortimer's Selection, and about thirteen miles on, this road, which consisted of alternate stages of sand and white metal, brought us to Best's unoccupied homestead.

Here we camped for the night with an Adelaide contractor, who had charge of a big scrub-burning job. In the implement shed, lying on a bed of chaff, was his son, a boy of about twelve, down with dysentery and a painful swelling under the ear and in the throat. He had not been able to take a mouthful of food for more than four days, but Ross's tomatoes and custards, and the last bottle of Seppeltsfield lime-juice gave him an appetite which almost made up for his long fast. A few handfuls of "Opal's" bran made an excellent hot poultice, and as the father had not had much sleep since the boy took ill (his men were all camped out in the scrub), "The Long 'Un" and I took turn and turn about to watch by the bedside through the night. The father was suffering great agony of mind—the nearest doctor was more than twenty miles away.

In the morning the boy was much better, and in return for what little assistance we had been able to render, the father wished to load us up with such provender as split-peas, onions, and rice, but we would not hear of it, especially as we knew that on account of the river being low the Waikerie storekeepers were refusing to serve all but regular customers, and he would have to go further afield—to Morgan, forty miles away—to replenish his stores. Drizzling rain set in as we were leaving, but it had stopped when, some distance on, we pulled up for a chat with a couple of "blackboys"* who were just breaking camp and loading up their two pack-horses.

One of the greatest trials of the Outback traveller is the

* Aboriginal stockmen.

pack-saddle. No genius has yet devised a pack-saddle which, when loaded with about a hundredweight of various articles—tucker, cooking utensils, swag, etc.—is not liable to turn turtle at any moment, and hang under the horse's belly. The straps of the present-day saddles have an extraordinary knack of either breaking or slipping, and also of bringing on bad girth-galls and "roaring" withers, and setting up horrible crupper sores. And the saddles themselves, unless they are packed with the greatest care, so that the weight may be evenly distributed, cause dreadful sores on the backs. Of course, it stands to reason that horses which are "grass fed"—even with the hay-like grass of the western plains—have a softer skin than those that are "hard fed," with corn, chaff, etc. The Outback horse is therefore more liable to a sore back. In addition to this, the coats of the pack-horses are generally dirty, as they are very seldom groomed, and then only with a piece of dried cow-dropping.

Just prior to the Adelaide trip, the droving party of which I was a member, had several playful pack-horses in its "plant." One was a buckler who reared high up on his hind legs as soon as the pack was on. For this horse the boss had prepared a special breastplate—the only one we used. We had a second horse afflicted with a tendency to buck, and this one could be depended upon to "pig-root" for at least half a mile as soon as we made a start. But the worst of all was a one-eyed, bumble-footed animal, who was wont to lie down and roll whenever he got the chance. The roll would cause the pack to sag over on one side, and before we could set things right again it would be under his belly; and the sight of one horse careering round, trying to rid himself of the pack underneath, was quite sufficient to cause the others to stampede in all directions.

Frequently Outback you meet travellers who either won't or can't get even a second-hand saddle. I remember seeing one old chap packing up after his midday siesta. He had improvised a pack-saddle out of an old cornsack by cutting away about a third of one side. There were no flaps, and the bag was just thrown across the horse's back and tied under with a couple of greenhide thongs. Another had four sugar bags crammed with all his earthly possessions slung across an ordinary riding saddle. This chap was waiting an opportunity of making a swap with anyone who had no use for a pack-saddle. But in the meantime, whenever the horse started to trot, or brushed against a tree, a strap or two would break or work loose. One or two kicks would rid the horse of the four sugar bags, and off he would gallop into

the bush or across a plain. Then the old fellow had to catch the horse, and go back—perhaps half a mile, perhaps a couple of miles—to pick up his packs, never knowing whether the performance would be repeated as soon as the horse was loaded up again.

In a few cases I have heard of, the existence of a traveller has depended upon his satisfactorily dealing with the problem, "First catch your horse, and then find your pack." It is recorded that Burke and Wills, the explorers, in their last journey lost a horse and pack on what is now known as "Pack-saddle Station," about 150 miles north of Broken Hill. The saddle overturned, the horse cleared out with it, and when the pack broke away the whole party went after the horse. The horse managed to keep its freedom, and was afterwards seen by the blacks; but not a sign of the saddle and pack was ever discovered.

We camped for an early lunch at Overland Corner, a small settlement consisting of two stone graves, a stone post office, and two other stone buildings. It is situated on the slope of a stony hill, which accounts for the place not being built after the style of the majority of Outback townships of similar size—mostly of galvanised iron. Years ago, when the cattle Overlanding from Queensland to Adelaide camped on the well-grassed flats which stretch out for half a mile down to the water's edge, Overland Corner experienced what some people call "good old times," when the drovers made merry at the solitary public-house. Those days are past now, though the few residents still think the place is quite an important centre—being a change-station for the mail-coach running between Morgan and Renmark, and also a stopping place for the motor which is well patronised by passengers who cannot appreciate the joys of a trip on the box seat of a five-horse coach, driven by an Outbacker who can give you "The Sick Stockrider" and others of Gordon's poems until further orders.

While the Billy was boiling we enjoyed a dip in the river, and were joined in our ablutions by a burly Norwegian, who, cycling from Renmark, had seen our fire, and thought he would save a shilling or two by joining us at lunch and leaving the "pub" to the memories of the old cattlemen. He was a sailor who had deserted his ship at Port Adelaide to try his luck fruit-picking at Renmark, but there being a hotel there he couldn't save any cash, and was making back to port.

During lunch he let his canvas water-bag soak in the river. He had started with it quite full, strapped to the bar of his cycle, but the bag being brand new, the liquid had

all dripped through. He could hardly believe that we were not carrying a bag; evidently he had not been in Australia long enough to dispel the time-honoured idea that it is nothing but suicidal to travel in the Bush without a water-bag forming part of your equipment.

At Overland Corner we received conflicting directions and opinions as to the state of the road, but by keeping well in the tracks of a coach that had changed horses while we were lunching, we managed to reach Renmark safely. For what is known locally as "the twenty-mile dry stage," we traversed undulating sandy country covered by short scrub. We pulled up near Devlin's Pound, a romantic-looking river-flat, shut in by the Murray and high, semi-circular cliffs, and which, I believe, has figured in one or two of "Rolf Boldrewood's" bushranging yarns. At the head of the narrow, rocky track, down which the cattle were wont to pass in single file, we came upon a couple of teamsters having a late lunch. Notwithstanding it was only an hour or two since we had made a meal, we accepted their invitation to join them, and did full justice to a tucker-box, well stocked with "Tinned Dog." The track down to Devlin's Pound was so precipitous that the teamsters were watering their horses from oil drums which they had brought along with them. Working for a Renmark farm, they were carting a load of flour from Overland Corner, beyond which point, on account of the low state of the river, the steamers had not been able to come.

The question of "tucker" for a long Outback journey requires the most careful and mature consideration, if the traveller does not intend to follow the beaten track. Even along the "beaten track," in some parts, the stores and such other places where supplies can be obtained are few and far between, and for days, weeks, and sometimes months, the traveller has to subsist on what he can carry, whether the carriage is by pack-horse or buggy. Naturally, the greater part of the larder is made up of tinned stuff—tinned meat, tinned fish, tinned jam, tinned fruits, plum-puddings, and perhaps tinned vegetables. It is this tinned meat that invariably goes by the name of "Tinned Dog." In many camps, fresh meat and vegetables are luxuries unknown for years. Especially so is it in some of the isolated mining camps, where damper, "dog," and tea is served up meal after meal, day after day, for months at a stretch. The everlasting "tin" diet is to a great extent responsible for the many diseases which descend on the pioneers in the far-distant regions. But the meal is filling enough to satisfy the inner man when the edge of the appetite has been taken off

by a long sojourn in parts where "roughing it" is the order of the day.

The inventor of "tinned dog" was a man named Donkin, who, like a somewhat better-known personage—to wit, William Shakespeare—left very few details for his biographers. But Donkin got something that even William Shakespeare did not get. It came about in this wise. In or about the year 1817, Captain Philip King was entrusted by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty and the then Secretary of State for the Colonies (Lord Bathurst), with the command of an expedition organised to complete the survey of the north and north-west coast of Australia. King was instructed to ascertain, among other things, "whether there be any river on that part of the coast likely to lead to an interior navigation of this great continent." Also, Lord Bathurst wished to be supplied with information concerning the natives—"as to what extent they subsisted by fishing, hunting, and rearing sheep or other stock, by agriculture, or by commerce; together with the state of the arts and the manufactures, and their comparative perfection in different tribes." Captain King did his best. He explored the shores and made surveys, and had agreeable and disagreeable encounters with the blacks. But, from all accounts, the expedition did not gain very much information *re* the "agricultural methods" of the aboriginals, or the "state of the arts." The members suffered from want of fresh meat and fresh vegetables, which brings us back to Donkin. When in the neighbourhood of York Sound, in the far north, on September 12th, 1820, King wrote:—"A steep peaked hill near our landing-place was named Donkin's Hill, after the inventor of the preserved meats, upon a canister of which our party dined. The invention is now so generally known that its merits do not require to be recorded here. We had lately used a case that was preserved in 1814, which was equally good with some that had been packed up in 1818. This was the first time it had been employed upon our boat excursions, and the result fully answered every expectation, as it prevented that excessive and distressing thirst from which, in all other previous expeditions, we had suffered very much." Small fame, indeed, for the inventor of such a useful commodity as "Tinned Dog."

Eight miles before Renmark we hit the river again at Spring Cart Gully, where, some years ago, a bolting horse dashed itself to pieces over the cliffs. We unharnessed, and picking out a suitable place where we could get "Opal" down to the water, allowed the pony, thirsty after the dry stage, to drink to her heart's content.

A mile or so across the river, through the Gums—a pleasant change after so many miles of Mallee—we could see Lyrup, one of the smaller irrigation settlements that have sprung up during the last few years. Here also we renewed acquaintance with the telegraph line, which had left the track at "The Corner" to "go bush."*

The next four miles was the most forlorn-looking stretch of country we had passed through for a very long time. Everything seemed so dry and dead that even the rabbits had been eating the bark off the trunks of the sandalwood trees. . . .

And then a wonderful transformation scene opened up before our vision. The sense of utter dreariness was left in a bend of the road. Passing through the boundary gate of the Renmark Irrigation Trust property, a well-made road ran straight ahead for a couple of miles. Each side of the road was lined with comfortable and prosperous-looking houses, surrounded by beautiful, well-kept gardens and orchards. Most of the houses had tall avenues of palms leading from the front gate—such palms as we had last seen in the Adelaide Botanical Gardens, and in their natural state away back in Gippsland. Blue-flowering lucerne, running wild along the banks of the irrigation channels which occasionally crossed the road, and long green grass, the like of which "Opal" had not feasted on for many score miles, completed the transformation, and did our eyes good after such a long run of sand, Mallee, and scrub.

* In Outback parlance, "go bush" means to leave the road and run straight across country.

CHAPTER V

REMARK IRRIGATION COLONY

THE Renmark Fruit Colony, in South Australia, was wilderness as recently as 1887, and the twenty-six years that have passed since then have witnessed a wonderful evolution. Renmark was the name given by Chaffey Bros. Ltd., to the second irrigation colony which they founded on the Murray; but, however good that company's designs were, it was not their operations that made Renmark what it is to-day. Rather it was the energy and perseverance of the settlers who held on after the Chaffeys retired. Conditions have changed greatly since the agreement between the company and the South Australian Government was signed on February 24th, 1887. The outlying virgin scrub is convincing evidence of what the settlers have done; but the visitor does not learn, either by the prosperity he sees there or by comparisons with other fruit-growing areas, the extent to which Renmark settlers have had to fight in order to subdue the wilderness and overcome financial and trade difficulties.

Renmark is situated practically in an elbow of the River Murray. The plan of the settlement is almost in the shape of a fan, with the township at the handle, and roads and irrigation channels as ribs. Into these channels—known as main channels—is pumped water from the Murray by a fine piece of machinery on the river bank, capable of spouting forth 1,620,000 gallons an hour. This is called No. 1 pump, and is inspected by every visitor who wishes to know anything at all about Renmark. There are four others in the settlement, which distribute the water from the long reservoir that No. 1 pump fills into a series of smaller channels, from which, in turn, the settlers take their supplies. The rich, sandy loam to be found in many parts of the settlement is said to be equal to the best Californian lands where irrigation has been profitably conducted for many years. It is easily cultivated, and retains the moisture for a considerable time. In other parts of the settlement the

soil is heavier, and requires more working, but Muscatel (or Gordo Blanco) vines flourish in it, and bear heavy crops.

No one who sees the succession of plantations brought up to a high state of cultivation, the whole reliance of the settlers on the irrigation system, the Fruit Packing Company's busy shed in the fruit season, and the enormous quantity of dried and fresh fruit that is poured into it, can fail to be impressed with the vital importance of a full river to Renmark. More than once the growers—because of the vast diversions made by the upper States (New South Wales and Victoria) and the natural consequence to South Australia—have been compelled to resort to the expedient of carting their export fruit for seventy-five miles along a rough and sandy track to Morgan—the railway terminus. Before even this gigantic labour the hearts of the Renmark growers have not flinched. Only after such trials does the dry land laugh. Only after such superhuman effort is the valley joyful because of its people, who are yearly becoming more resourceful and prosperous. Increasing production and the danger of low rivers are responsible for the emphatic demands for the locking of the river in order to ensure a permanent waterway. The distance between Renmark and Morgan by water is about 180 miles. The river trip—the shorter one from Morgan, or the longer one from Murray Bridge—is becoming a popular holiday for the tourists, and inspires more appreciation of what Australians can do in Australia, than does the most learned study of blue books or the most enthusiastic flight of the imagination.

Along the Murray, the traveller assures himself, fertility and prosperity are matters of only steady development. When the home-seeker is able to appreciate the fertility of the soil and the fertilising power of water the valley of this great river will represent the addition of another province to South Australia. Astonishing as it may seem, many people have been blind to one of the State's best assets. While men have tried to coax the dry interior to grow wheat and feed stock, these valleys have been left to the rabbits, and the rich Murray water has been allowed to pour its precious contents into the ocean. The foundation of the Village Settlements and their subsequent partial failure, proved in the end a good advertisement for the valley of the Murray. Attention was directed to the problems involved in the artificial application of water to the soil, and from the ashes of the Village Settlements prosperous settlers rose Phoenix-like, and proved that the country was capable of carrying a large population. Renmark suffered severely from the failure of the Chaffey Brothers, and for a time the

place was regarded as little better than a glorified Village Settlement; but the settlers had their backs to the wall, and they fought hard. Renmark turned the corner several years ago; the battle has been won, and the prosperous settlement represents South Australia's greatest vested interest in a share of the waters of the River Murray. The visitor to the Irrigation Colony must know all this before he is able to adequately appreciate what the conquest of the desert means to the individual settler and the State.

The Irrigation Colony to-day represents a conquest and a contrast. The country in its natural state consisted of low Mallee scrub, with a few blades of grass fighting for a miserable existence, and sand shifting from place to place at the caprice of every breeze. The irrigation, the sunshine, and scientific cultivation have shown how fertile that soil really is. Citrus fruits, vines (grape, sultana, currant), apricots, peaches, and pears are the fruits principally grown, though apple, nectarine, and olive trees also bear well. During recent years the apricots and lemons which were planted in the early years have been rooted out—in some instances in favour of the younger trees of the same sort, but in most cases to be displaced by sultana or currant vines.

The reason for this is that from the vines the grower gets his return first. It is not too much to say that the Gordo Blanco raisin has seen Renmark through her troubles. Apricots have grown to a standard market demand and value, as have also peaches, nectarines, and pears. The sultana has of recent years come greatly into favour. The capital cost of planting the sultana exceeds that of the ordinary raisin vine, on account of trellising; but the great demand for this dried fruit, which has all the advantages of the ordinary raisin without the ordinary raisin's stones, fully justifies and returns the additional expenditure incurred. Since science has introduced and constantly improved the process of cincturing, and led to the production of quite wonderful crops, many more acres than formerly have been planted with Zante currants. Oranges, such as navels, Malta bloods, Compudas, and Mandarin and other varieties, are good property, and the market results have always been good. Although in the past the cultivation of the lemon has not, for market reasons, been completely satisfactory, the future is more hopeful.

The lands assessed by the Irrigation Trust, which controls the fruit colony, are valued at over £150,000, and comprise 5,500 acres, and there is an area of about 1,000 acres paying water rates, and classed as unplanted. One boast of which Renmark might well be proud is that there are no fruit

diseases in the settlement. Though vine-growing districts in the other States are more or less infested with phylloxera, South Australia is free; and Renmark (the largest grape-producing area in the State) has never known it. How much the care and industry of Renmark has protected South Australia from ravages of phylloxera can never, of course, be calculated. There is little citrus scale in places, but this, owing to healthy precautions and drastic remedies, has assumed no dangerous proportions. No fruit boxes—whether for export packing or for use in the settlement—are imported.

The local government of Renmark is constituted in what is known as the Irrigation Trust. The members of the body are charged, by Act of Parliament, with the duty of raising and distributing water in the horticultural areas. The expenditure is balanced by a uniform annual rate of 30s. per acre, payable on assessed lands whether watered or not. The Trust has district council powers over the horticultural area. During the last year or two the town, which was for a long time under no organised control, has been governed, as are the majority of towns in South Australia, by a district council—the Hamley District Council.

Renmark settlers have earned a reputation at home and abroad for the quality of their products. Not only have they established a recognised export trade within Australia, but the fame of Renmark oranges and dried fruits has spread to London, and the quality of Renmark table raisins has enhanced the reputation of London dessert tables. In spite of all obstacles—of which the greatest has been, and is, the uncertainty of a navigable river—the production of Renmark has improved year after year, and to-day the consumers of Australia, to a large extent, rely on this irrigation colony for supplies of oranges and dried fruits. The figures showing the value of annual production tell their own tale. In 1895 the value of Renmark produce exported from the settlement, exclusive of the settlers' own consumption, was £6,878; in 1900, £22,086; in 1905, £41,550; in 1907, £78,000; and in 1911, the figures stepped over the £100,000.

Let the reader take into account the history of the first few years after 1887, when the first English pioneer fruit-grower marked out his block on uncleared land in Renmark settlement, and say whether these hardy settlers have not shown courage, and accomplished a monumental task. The hard times were a severe but refining test, and to-day there are over 2,000 happy people living there, rejoicing in the prosperity of their "colony," and all the better for the fight against Nature which they won.

CHAPTER VI

RENMARK TO CAL LAL

DRIVING out from Renmark we did not follow for long the telegraph wires which stretch out across miles and miles of sand, but for fifteen miles ran across sparsely-timbered river-flats. In places the river was more than a mile away, but at flood time these flats have been covered to a depth of many feet. There had been a little rain during the night, just sufficient to make the black soil "sticky" enough for the wheels to throw little lumps of mud up into the sulky. The rabbit burrows at the side of the track necessitated very careful driving. Twelve miles out we passed across the Bush training ground used by the owner of Chowilla Station when exercising his racehorses. Another three miles on, and there burst upon our vision a scene we are not likely to forget for a long time. The track ran along an avenue of fruit trees and lucerne beds, straight up to Chowilla Homestead, parts of which could just be seen peeping out of the Gums and willows and ornamental trees. On the river, immediately below the house, some girls were returning from a shrimping excursion; and as we unharnessed, other town visitors drove up in a motor-car, in which they had been having their first experience of the Bush. "Government House" hospitality was warmly extended, but in our travelling rig-out we felt more at home in the "Men's Kitchen," and bunking out under the stars.

Chowilla was the first sign of habitation after leaving Renmark; the second was Littra, a coach-change fifteen miles further on, and only a quarter of a mile from the New South Wales rabbit-proof border fence. A little before noon the following day we passed through this fence—the same we had previously encountered 120 miles further south, at Bordertown, in the Ninety Mile Desert, on the forward journey—and crossed into New South Wales territory. We found a good shady midday camp at a boggy waterhole, where we disturbed a small flock of emus, the grandest noblest feathered creature of the Australian Bush—doomed to early extinction by settlement and the shot-gun.

In some parts of the very far Outback country, the emu is said to be on the increase, but there are a great many other districts where the stately bird has been practically exterminated. In rare instances emus have been so thick that it has been necessary to kill them off in the interests of sheep, but in the main the birds have been annihilated by people who consider that it is great sport to kill anything that can run or fly, whether it be recognised game or only some harmless ornamental creature emblematical of the traditions of the country.

The true Bushman loves the emu, and when hunting he will at least give the bird fair play, which cannot be said of the invader after the spoils of the chase. The Outbacker gets his enjoyment out of the actual hunt, and the wonderful staying powers of the bird. In the old days well-mounted men bent on emu hunting usually allowed the bird a fair start, and a chance to get into its stride. Dogs were not supposed to be in the chase, the match being between the long-striding bird and game horses with accomplished riders upon their backs. Once a big emu in strong condition dropped into its peculiar, ungainly, slinging gait half a mile ahead, the horse which ran it down deserved praise. Judgment in keeping close enough to the bird to press it without breaking up the horse was demanded of the horseman. If the horseman got to close quarters he could soon conquer the quarry by executing quick turns with the horse, when the bird became dazed and confused. The man who was determined upon slaughter then used his stirrup-iron, but the true sportsman was content to let the victim off. The stirrup-iron plan was unfair and barbarous, and so-called sportsmen, too, made much shorter work of the dispatch by using rifles and guns. A well-aimed charge of large shot lodged in the head of the tallest emu will send it tumbling headlong, its great legs and body describing a grotesque somersault, most entertaining to the shooter.

The simple emu never learned that a wire fence was really an obstacle which it could not go round. It cherished the conviction to the last that those small barriers which it could see at very close quarters did not extend beyond the point at which its foolish eyes lost sight of them. It therefore ran along the wires expecting them to end at every stride, and allow it to go across country. Sometimes when it was in a hurry the poor creature stepped right into the wire, and if it could not break the iron bands it perished of starvation. Emus running up and down a fence were always easily shot, and thousands were disposed of in that way. The fence was

a good trap, because if the shooter posted himself a little way out from the wires the birds would rarely turn back. They would, as a rule, endeavour to run between the man and the fence, still fondly clinging to the idea that the wires terminated a few feet ahead.

The booming noise of the emu at night is a striking example in the effect of some noises in sound waves. The sound at any distance seems to travel a long way, and it is never perceptibly louder whether heard at a short or a long distance. It can be heard miles away from the emu, and yet on several occasions when I have proved that I heard it at short range it was not a loud sound. Like the humming of the grey night owl, the howling of the dingo, and many other sounds heard in the Bush at night, it induces a melancholy turn of mind, and causes the "new chum" to think hard of the lights and comforts of the city. Many Bushmen regard the booming of the emu as a reliable sign that rain is coming. The emu, however, resembles other weather prophets, in that it booms in vain in dry seasons, and is exceedingly reliable in wet years.

In my school days I was always taught that the emu, being such a heavy bird, could not sit on its eggs, but laid them in a hole scratched in the sand, and then covered them over, to return, like the jew lizard, at the very time the chick would make its appearance. But that idea is a myth. The emu like most—though not all—Australian birds, lays its eggs in a nest, and—like all wild birds—sits on them alternately with the male. The laying season commences in July, and the process of incubation occupies about five weeks. The biggest number of eggs I have ever found in any one nest was seven. The eggs are very large, and are greatly used as an article of diet Outback—but half an egg is quite sufficient for any one person to eat. To find the nest is at times rather a difficult matter. The spot chosen is usually on the black soil which surrounds or is intermingled with the western marshes, and occupies an elevated position which the water very seldom reaches. Should the old bird be surprised on its nest it will rise immediately, and with one or two kicks backwards scatter the clutch of eggs all around the nest. Its idea is evidently to break all the eggs, because it will not return again to the nest.

Early morning is the best time to find an emu's nest, when the male bird takes his turn on the eggs. He begins to "drum" or "boom" a little after daylight, and all one has to do is to watch him, when one will be taken straight to the nest. As soon as he arrives at his destination the mother bird rises, and he takes her place, giving her sufficient time

for recreation and feeding. Thus the two birds equally share the process of incubation.

The food of the emu in its wild state is principally herbage but it will eat almost any vegetable matter, and it also swallows a lot of pebbles, presumably to assist digestion. In captivity it will eat anything that it is given, and has a great penchant for nails, thimbles, and anything in the shape of iron.

Although it is a wild bird, it is very easily caught. Being naturally of an inquisitive disposition, all one has to do is to stick up some object on the plains to attract its attention. The bird never comes in a direct line to the object, but always moves in a circular manner, going round and round, making each circle smaller, until it comes close. Once it gets to the spot, the bird appears satisfied, and then walks leisurely away. The big bird was often rendered an easy victim through this insatiable curiosity. If a horseman rushed at it suddenly, it would waste precious seconds in a vain endeavour to ascertain what manner of enemy was swooping down upon it. I have often seen Queensland blacks persuading it to investigate strange unearthly things, which were merely crafty aboriginals squirming under opossum rugs, or walking about covered with pieces of bark. When the bird had drawn close enough to make quite sure it had never seen the like before, it was speared very easily by the black warrior.

* * * * *

After lunch we left the main track to explore the ruins of an old wooden building standing on the banks of Salt Creek. We discovered that it had in its time been a "grog-shanty," and a night or two previous had been visited by sundowners, the embers of a recent fire still remaining in the hearth in one of the rooms. We ran up Salt Creek for a mile, and joined the track again at Tareena, the most south-westerly post and telegraph office in New South Wales. The post office and a selector's house a few hundred yards to the rear were the only buildings in sight. The position of postmaster and telegraph operator also combines the work of a linesman, who, every month—and oftener if the lines are faulty—drives along the route of the telegraph wires on a visit of inspection, his section extending fifteen miles into South Australia, and thirty miles into New South Wales—a trip of ninety miles in all, and most of it over sandhills, as the line takes the shortest cut, and does not follow the road.

A sudden storm set in soon after leaving Tareena, but

although we got wet through in a very few minutes, the heavy rain made the sandy track somewhat firmer for "Opal." We pulled up for a little while to get what shelter we could under a grove of emu apple trees, one of the most peculiar and interesting forms of vegetation to be found Outback. A few of my city friends who have had a short holiday in the Bush have admired the "Gui-ey" (native name, pronounced "Goo-ce") so much that they have endeavoured to transplant it, but always without success. It is not impossible to do this, on account of the roots extending in all directions. It seems to me that Nature brings *one* "Gui-ey" tree into this world, and then the octopus-like roots run helter-skelter under and sometimes over the ground. From these tentacles, fresh trees spring up everywhere, and it is not long before there is a grove which, from a distance, looks remarkably like a real apple orchard. If you dig up the young tree before the roots set to work, you might meet with some success; but if anyone wants a tree in his backyard for household economy, I think he will lose on the undertaking. The fruit, anything between the size of a large grape and a hen's egg, is so sour that many a penny will have to be spent on sugar alone before a decent pie can be made out of the hard stony substance (something like a very hard, unripe quince), covered by the tempting red skin. But perhaps that expense will not be felt if the household uses the fruit instead of ordinary tooth-brush and paste and mouth-wash. The acid has a cleansing effect on the speaking apparatus, and Outback I have met many Bushmen rubbing and cleaning their teeth with little "sticks" of apple, just as Betel sticks are used for the same purpose in India.

We found a comfortable bed that night on sweet-smelling hay at Higgins' "Kulcurna" Homestead, where we arrived just in time to open the gates for two girls who, splendidly mounted, had been out for a gallop. We afterwards learnt that the girls were training the horses for the annual race meeting at Wentworth, about seventy miles up the river. They took us along to the homestead, where, after tea, we had a sing-song, and were much interested in a collection of old aboriginal relics, this particular district having in the early days been a favourite hunting-ground of one of the largest and most powerful tribes of Murray River blacks.

"Kulcurna" is another instance of what can be done when irrigation is applied to the land. The homestead is situated on the bank of the river, with its own private irrigating plant. Some distance back lies a range of red sandhills, fully two hundred feet high, absolutely bare of

everything but a couple of fences which have not had time to follow their predecessors, and become buried in the drifting sand. Between the sandhills and the house (which is surrounded by a beautiful orchard) there is a patch of about two acres of lucerne, as green as the sand is red.

Entertaining us visitors the "Kulcurna" folk missed the mail-coach that passed along the road a quarter of a mile away at midnight, so we left the homestead with several letters for Scaddings' Selection, thirty miles on, where we were advised to stay the night, but the rain the previous day had obliterated many of the tracks, and in the end the mail had to go through the post in the ordinary way.

We got into trouble immediately after leaving "Kulcurna," "The Long 'Un" picking up the tracks of the exercising ground, and going half-way round the racecourse, much to the amusement of the folk who were waving us off from the veranda.

A few minutes later we passed through Cal Lal, a township consisting of a few selectors' houses, an hotel, police station, hall, and a flock of goats. The local representative of law and order was fishing down on the river, occupying the end of a fallen tree. The "Murray Cod" was biting well, and the trooper's wife was kept busy baiting fresh hooks with—goat flesh!

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTBACK GOAT

THE man from "Inside" after he has been Outback for some little time, begins to appreciate the good qualities of that odorous animal the goat for the privilege of keeping which, in the cities and bigger country towns, you must take out a licence. He soon forgets any prejudice he may have felt towards the goat, and reckons its flesh equal to, if not better than, mutton, and goat milk and goat cream and butter better than the product of the cow. More often than not it is common sense that overcomes the prejudice, but it must be admitted that now and again it is the fact of there being no "jumbuck" (sheep) or cow within coo-ee distance.

Wherever you go Outback, from the big town to the township consisting of pub-store-and-post-office combined, you are on the scent of the goat. Out in Charleville, in far west Queensland, I learnt that in 1910 the town had its quota of 729 goats for its population of 1,800 souls. The revenue from goat for the year was £92 5s., the registration fee being 2s. 6d. per nanny, and 5s. per "wether." Each goat on being registered is presented with a broad tin collar, bearing a number and the year. Every six months the goats are mustered by the stock inspector and a few assistants, and if any are found without their collars, they are sold, or in the event of no purchasers being found, they are destroyed. They roam the streets at will, and in wet weather have a habit of crowding on to the Post Office veranda and the verandas of the shops along the main street.

Every Outback "pub" has its goats. At some places, instead of being asked whether you will have roast beef or mutton, you will have "goat or galah"* shouted in your ear. At other places, you will be asked whether you'll have some cold mutton—but it is cold goat all the same. And the new chum (or the "New-come-up" as the new chum is termed Outback) cannot tell the difference.

Again, what does the carrier who has no fixed place of

* "Galah" parrot.



Photo by]

A FLOCK OF OUTBACK GOATS.

[W. K. Harris.



Photo by]

“THE CALVES CAMP WITH THE GOATS, AND SUCK THEM, TOO.”

[W. K. Harris.

abode do for his meat, milk, and butter? Why, take a flock of goats with him. I have seen as many as forty goats following behind and at the side of a wool-carrier's waggon. The carrier's wife was driving a light waggonette (containing all their household goods and chattels) and a little girl of seven, riding a pony, was bringing up the rear. The goats gave no trouble, but if one fed any distance off the road, the Young Australian would turn her pony's head in its direction. That was quite sufficient; the goat would at once make back to the others. And even sheep and cattle stations keep a few—they render good service as garbage-destroyers.

Some little time before starting on the Adelaide trip I spent a very pleasant fortnight at the "Lass-o'-Gowrie" Hotel, on the Ward River, some twelve miles out of Charleville. The genial proprietress (Mrs. M. H. Kennedy), accompanied by her husband, a few years ago overlanded up to this place from Eulo, about 100 miles further south. Their belongings were conveyed in a waggon, driven by the lady, and Mr. Kennedy drove their stock, consisting of a few horses, half a dozen pigs, and 150 goats. Goats are very prolific, giving birth to from one to three kids twice a year, and the stock in this case increased in time to 900, but this number, through selling and killing for meat, has come down to the present strength of 300. The flock is allowed to graze on the small plains in the junction formed by the Ward and Warrego rivers, and give practically no trouble whatever by roaming too far away. Every night they come home on their own account just about sundown, and camp a little distance behind the house until the people of the hotel, the following morning, have got all the milk they want for that day. They then go off in one mob, the "Billys," with bells on necks, taking the lead, and a mile or so away from the house spread out in all directions, grazing. On two or three occasions, just by way of diversion from galah-shooting, fishing, and looking for native tomahawks at an old camping-ground in a bend of the Warrego, I went out on old "Kruger" and mustered the goats for their homeward journey. I found that it was much easier work rounding up goats than cattle, and the driving consisted merely of sitting on my horse. They went home in a solid body; neither whip nor strong language was necessary.

Besides their other stock, the Kennedys have some half-dozen "poddies" (hand-fed calves), all in splendid condition, which, when only a day or two old, were left at the hotel by passing drovers, instead of being knocked over the head and burned immediately after being "dropped." The calves

were put on to goats' milk, drinking out of a basin. Later on, it was found that some of the goats were not averse to mothering the calves, and ever since the latter have obtained their milk in the direct way, one at each side. The "pod-dies" always graze with the goats, and suck them, too. I saw dozens of kids with their hind quarters eaten away by pigs, who allow the kids, separated from their mothers for the time being, to suck for a while and then give a sudden snap, leaving the kids to be put out of their misery by a blow over the head with a sapling. Deadly enmity exists between goat and crow. Out in the scrub and on the plains we found kids, both dead and alive, with their eyes plucked out. The crows hover round until Mrs. Goat's attention is off her children, and then swoop down.

Every Outbacker is emphatic in his statement that the goat is the mainstay and backbone of the country. It lives where other stock would die; it has stuck to the people "further out" in all times of drought—when other meat could not be obtained within hundreds of miles, when you could not see grass for a thousand miles, and when you could track a mosquito across the continent. It thrives as long as there is any bush or scrub, or old boots, hats, or tins in the neighbourhood. They will tell you that almost every Labour Member of Parliament was brought up on goat. And you will learn that very few Bush women ever buy any soap, except for toilet purposes, and this they have to buy because the caustic soda, with which the goat-fat is mixed, is not good for the eyes. Also, you are informed that there should be the same law for the goat as for the sheep. If a "jumbuck" strays into your backyard you must impound it, but if a goat wanders in you are at perfect liberty to destroy it as a nuisance. In one dry season a man shot down 160 of his neighbour's goats which got into his paddock, in which the only feed was a few dead gum-leaves, no good for other stock, but off which the goats would have made a good meal. And then those persons who are fond of mutton will learn that nine out of every ten sheep suffer from "flukey liver," and that "jumbuck" is also subject to cancer. But there is no disease whatever in the goat—it is the healthiest animal alive, although, when the entire attar of a big flock of goats rises on the breeze, the weirdest sounds of the Bush become subdued and insignificant.

A year or two back a syndicate was formed in Brisbane with the intention of raising goats in southern Queensland for their skins. It set out to get from the Lands Department some 15,000 acres of poor land handy to a railway line, and had its eye on a piece on the Ipswich Road, near Bris-



Photo by]

[W. K. Harris.

A GOAT TEAM—A FAMILIAR SIGHT OUTBACK.

bane. This land is little more than a stone's throw from Queen Street, but it is so poor that it has never been selected. Goat ranches are common in northern Queensland, especially about Charters Towers and Ravenswood. The flocks on them have sprung from goats kept by wood-cutters, who used them to draw fuel for the mines. On one ranch a few miles from "The Towers," there are 3,000 goats. One young farmeress recently made between £60 and £70 out of ordinary common or backyard goatskins in a single month—but, of course, goats are not killed off at that rate every month of the year. The skins sell for about 2s. or 2s. 6d. each in Brisbane, and are turned into kid gloves and similar goods. They are usually dried by the simple method of pegging them, hair downwards, to the ground. Sand is sprinkled on, or arsenic is rubbed in, to keep out the weevils.

CHAPTER VIII

PIONEER PASTORALISTS AS PATHFINDERS

WE left the river soon after passing the time of day with the Police Trooper at Cal Lal, and came upon a succession of low ridges, bare of everything but bluebush and a little salt-bush, which presented a strange, weird aspect. The sky was blue and the landscape was blue, and where the ridges and the heavens met the two blues melted into one.

Some miles out we came to a little six-by-six-foot galvanised iron shed, with a bench and a long letter-box inside. The rain the previous day had washed out the track as far as this waiting-room, and we had just barely managed to keep in the fresh tracks made in the mud by the coach the night before. Passing the shed the ground was firm enough to have withstood the rain, and our coach track got lost in the roads leading to and from a three-armed sign-post near by. Having come a roundabout route, we had already passed through two of the places—Tareena and Cal Lal—and did not wish to go to the third, which we afterwards discovered was a selection on Victoria Lake, forty miles away. Rather than risk getting on to the wrong track altogether, we turned off at right angles, and headed for some buildings half hidden by the Gums which lined the river a couple of miles off.

At this place, Warrakoo sheep station, we got directions which enabled us to arrive at Lake Victoria station in good time for lunch. Here we found the Manager was away at his out-station, Nulla, where a gang of rabbiters were at work, but the book-keeper, a young Scotchman, who had not been in Australia long enough to have his face sun-tanned, gave us permission to make ourselves at home in the men's quarters for as long as we cared to stay. The "Batchelors' Hall" was a better structure than is usually found so far Outback, and consisted of eight separate rooms, with two entrances. These rooms were furnished with stretchers and spring mattresses, instead of the usual hard bunks, and opened out on to a bigger room, the centre of

which was occupied by a long table covered with papers. A wide bungalow veranda ran round the four sides of the building.

Making our way over to the Men's Kitchen, a separate building, we immediately made friends with the cook, by persuading that gentleman's tame magpie to hop on to our knees and peck out of our hands, a thing it was not in the habit of doing for every newcomer.

In the long, empty shearing shed, silent since August, we made our first enemies, two sundowners who had arrived the previous night, and were resting for the day. They were indignant when we mentioned what it had cost us for "tucker" from Melbourne to Adelaide, and from Adelaide to the station, whose hospitality they were also enjoying at that moment. "What! Only that much? Why, we couldn't do it cheaper ourselves! And you only amateurs! What'll happen to *us* if you town-ies start on the 'humming' game?" And with a muttered curse the sundowner aimed a kick at the magpie, which was following at Jack's heels. Unfortunately, the cook was watching—and those dissatisfied sundowners took the track again that afternoon—with empty ration-bags.

Lake Victoria is one of the oldest sheep-runs on the Murray, and is typical of those which have assisted in making the rise and progress of the pastoral industry in Australia one of the finest records of expansion to be found in the history of any country. The property comprises 175,000 acres, and at the time of our visit was carrying 60,000 sheep, though in more favourable seasons the stocking capacity is much higher.

* * * * *

The history of pastoral growth in Australia is the political, commercial, and social record of our island continent. They are so closely interwoven that it is difficult to distinguish their respective influences on one another. Australia owes more than it is possible to estimate to her shepherd kings, who were the pioneers of pioneers—the first to turn their backs on the coastline and face the unknown. Theirs was a strenuous life from the first. They went out into the wilderness and did their own exploring work, occupied and proved the country, then moved on to make room for the farmer and other rural producers. But for the flockmasters, the settlement of some portions of Australia would have been greatly delayed. They carried their lives in their hands, lived hard, and worked laboriously. Who shall calculate the influence of their courage and sturdy independence, their patience in the

face of difficulties, their self-reliance and hopefulness, or attempt to measure the results which have directly sprung from their victories over the natural conditions of an unmapped country? The pastoralist was called upon to solve geographical mysteries, and to deal with treacherous natives. The latter were troublesome in the early days, and flocks had to be carefully shepherded during the daytime and yarded at night. One early squatter was so disheartened at the depredations of the aborigines and his inability to stop them, that he sold for £300 property which subsequently was leased for thirty years at an annual rent of £10,000! To appreciate the significance of the pioneer work done by the builders of this important industry is to comprehend at one glance the whole romance of colonisation, as regards the development of Australia. Ever in the van, the pastoralists have been the pathfinders who bridged the ford and cleared the road, and made the country safe and pleasant for exploitation by merchant and mechanic, and all that army of workers whose daily prosperity may be measured by the fluctuating prosperity of rural producers.

Fortune smiled from the first on those who were early in the field, and who, by exchanging cash for lands within easy distance of the seaboard, helped the infant country out of pressing financial difficulties, and laid the foundations of their own fortunes. Sheep-farming within what is termed the "rainfall line" was a profitable business from the outset, and although these producers have at times suffered from low prices and bad seasons, their lot has been cast in pleasant places compared with that of Crown tenants in remote localities. While the "Inside" man has enjoyed almost uninterrupted prosperity, the "Outback" pioneers have had many ups and downs. Although practically monarchs of all they surveyed, living a life of great freedom in one of the healthiest climates in the world, their surroundings at the beginning were comfortless and uninviting.

They were not a feather-bed race, and attached little or no value to the luxuries of cities. They lived a nomadic life, pitching their tents at sunset, and by sunrise extending the circle of colonisation. The outermost station was always the starting point or the city of refuge for the daring explorer. Neither "baronial" nor any other castles were seen on the great sheep and cattle stations in those early days. Two rooms of slab and mud, roofed with ti-tree branches. An old case for a table, smaller ones in place of chairs. For beds, the floor, with a saddle as a pillow, a rug or blue blanket for covering. A rifle or two and some old-fashioned guns hung on the walls, which were well

plastered with cartoons from the comic press, coloured pictures from Christmas numbers of the weekly papers, and representations of racehorses. A few fly-speckled, broken-edged photographs disputed the ownership of the only mantelpiece with short-stemmed clay pipes and jars containing tobacco. Down the hill from "Government House" (as the homestead at the head station is called) would be a blackfellows' camp, and close by were the drafting yards. It was from some such centre as this—typical of the Outback station manager's residence—that runs carrying vast flocks or herds, as the case may be, were controlled, but dwelling-places have undergone more or less changes with time and improved conditions. In the early days the pastoralist paved the way. He did more. He tested the country in a variety of ways, sometimes perishing in his attempt to occupy territory which even his pertinacity could not subdue. It was the pioneer stockman who first proved that the climate and soil were admirably adapted for the raising of live stock, and that certain localities were favourable for growing cereals; while several of our most valuable mineral deposits were discovered by shepherds and boundary riders. He did all this in the face of many dangers and difficulties, for in those days the aboriginals were almost as bad as, if not worse than, the rabbits and the dingoes.

We have only to listen when the "old hands" talk to realise the difference between those far-off days and now, and until we hear the stories those veterans can tell, we can have no conception of the hardships and privations they endured.

The "big" squatter was a despot then, and to his subjects on his vast holdings he meted out provisions of the most primitive kind. Damper, beef, and tea sweetened with coarse brown sugar, was the usual fare, with an occasional "brownie" cake to vary the menu. Potatoes and onions would sometimes be procured from a wandering hawker, but the taste of green vegetables was practically unknown, for, though miles and miles of land stretched away to the horizon, the old-time bushman seldom bothered growing vegetables. Truly the men of the old days were hard workers and hard livers, and it is a matter for wonder that so many hale and hearty veterans survive to relate reminiscences of bygone days.

Life to the working man on the stations was one long round of toil. No unions or rates ever troubled their working hours. They rose with the sun, and often the shades of night found them still hard at it. Mustering, drafting, ring-barking, scrub-cutting, were all part of the day's work.

There was very little specialising in those days, and the champion stockman or shearer would be found at off times building a residence for the Boss, driving a team, or acting as general handy man. The all-round man was very much in evidence, and, as a rule, the old-time worker had the interest of his work at heart, and could be relied upon to do his very best.

We hear them called "the good old days." Well, perhaps they were for the favoured few, but the majority of stockmen, whose hours were "all time and all places," received wages that a mere boy would now scorn. Under a blistering sun, traversing stretches of plain, far from the welcome shade of a tree, were found those stockmen rounding up the cattle. At night a friendly tree would perhaps be found, a fire lit, and the usual meal partaken of preparatory to "turning in." And if the mosquitoes would allow them (for citronella was an unknown quantity in those days, and perhaps the fumes of smoke made from green bushes would keep the pests at bay), they would enjoy an unbroken sleep till the first break of dawn would wake them to another day—the exact replica of the preceding one, and the one preceding that, and many more successive ones, that would stretch away in unbroken monotony.

And the women-folk of those days—what long, lone lives of cheerless monotony they experienced. It's all very well to talk of the joys of Bush life, of the freedom from care and hurry, of the beauties of Nature, and so on, but in those days the railway was many hundred miles from them, the mail came once a fortnight, or perhaps once a month if the streams were swollen. Sometimes eight or ten months would elapse before they would see another white woman, and so, day by day, week by week, and month by month time would crawl along on its monotonous course.

Oft-times they would be left for days at a time, with only the company of their children or a friendly "gin,"* who would sleep on the veranda, to be within call. But with all these drawbacks, those women knew that in their hour of trouble or trial, those Bushmen would ride through fire and flood to bring them relief and help, and there are many instances where a debt of gratitude exists that can never be quite repaid. To my mind, those women pioneers deserve a high place in the honour roll of our country. The majority of them, in their humble stations, will never be publicly recognised. They alone are conscious of what the present generation owes to them, and in that consciousness they must find their reward. But when one hears from the lips of

* Aboriginal women.

a woman who has been through them, the solitude and hardships of those old Bush days, the domestic trials and problems of the present day appear puny and insignificant.

The part played by the women pioneers in the progress and development of the pastoral industry of Australasia is a subject which may yet attract the historian, and sufficient material could be collected to fill several bulky volumes.

To those who have travelled far afield, and can call to mind instances of station management where the grey mare was the better "hoss" of the pair, the subject may not be without humour. The duties which some masterful females discharge behind the counter of the station store, as inspectors and distributors of the component parts of the weekly ration lists, are not among those whose fame I would fain see recorded in print and handed down to posterity. Rather would I exclude them as being mere cog-wheels set in motion by the exacting handle of petty economy. But of those self-reliant, independent spirits who staked their capital, and fought their own brave battle against the forces of nature, or, as widows, took the place of the deceased helpmate until such time as a son was old enough, or wise enough, to take over control, not half enough has been written.

My experience of self-reliant women in connection with both sheep and cattle belongs rather to those far Outback regions where the heat and burden of the day are separately and collectively something more than a mere figure of speech. Some of my Australian readers may themselves have met with instances of sheep, and of sheep stations, being subservient to the will of woman, but have had neither experience of nor information regarding any members of the fair sex figuring in a responsible position where the management and well-being of cattle have been concerned. To them and to others may be quoted the example of two Bush-bred damsels, the Misses Hayes, domiciled on Mount Burrell Station, in the heart of Central Australia, who up till quite recently played as active and as forceful a part in the management of the herd out on the run, or in the yards, as any of their brothers. They could ride "outside tracks" with the best, and when met with at the head of a small troop of pack-horses and camp equipment, miles away from the homestead, and from water, and attended only by a couple of "lubras,"* presented a pleasing picture of that spirit of independence which is such a valuable asset in the Bush. The practical methods of these young women not only robbed them of none of their self-respect, but greatly enhanced the

Gins: Aboriginal women.

respect of all with whom they were brought in contact, either in camp or elsewhere.

And those old pioneers of the early days, what of them now? Round about Sydney, Melbourne, and the other capitals, there are many beautiful homes, surrounded by beautiful gardens and sloping lawns, and there many of the "old hands"—men and women—spend the evening of their days. There, perchance, they forget the monotonous stretch of plain, the early trials and tribulations of the day when fortunes were made, to make up for all other ills. And if you visit them, you never think it remarkable that they should turn to the past for their fund of story and anecdote. Nor is it wonderful that some of their lost youth comes back to them as they "pitch" yarns of flood and fall, of comrades tried and true, of the difference 'twixt then and now.

CHAPTER IX

LAKE VICTORIA TO WENTWORTH

WE were urged to stay overnight at Lake Victoria, but we wished to push on to Scaddings' Selection, and therefore left shortly after the midday meal. For the first few miles our track lay across ridges covered by bluebush, a species of saltbush, whose good qualities are only appreciated when there is very little other feed available.

The variety of Outback grasses and herbage is not large, but their nutritive properties are astonishing. Stock will fatten on the dry stems and leaves and seeds, and travelling across the plains you see sheep apparently eating the sand and dust, and thriving on it. The most widely diffused vegetation is the saltbush, of which there are seventy or eighty species. Nearly all of these are excellent fodder, and drought, terrible and devastating as it is, could not, of itself, kill the saltbush out. It is the ubiquitous and iniquitous rabbit who is the destroyer. When all the grass and herbage is eaten clean out, Brother Bunny barks the bushes, and kills the stems; but when the rain comes, the shoots usually spring up from the hardy roots. Hunger teaches the rabbits how to climb, and in the far north-west of New South Wales I have seen "Old Man" saltbush seven feet high barked completely.

We rested the pony for a few minutes at the Rufus Creek coach-change, a two-roomed slab and mud hut, where the groom invited us into his "study" while the billy was boiling. The "study" was also his sleeping apartment, and the hessian-bag walls were liberally covered with cartoons from the *Sydney Bulletin*, *Worker*, and other journals which have staunch supporters in the Bush. Whenever the groom read anything to his fancy, he would cut out the page and paste it on the wall, and in course of time would learn it off by heart almost word for word. He was in the middle of one of Brady's jingling Bush ballads when "The Long 'Un" suddenly espied a three-foot gohanna looking up at us from under the bunk. Jack was outside in two seconds, and I

followed him half a second later. The "go." was quite domesticated and harmless, of course, but in the early stages of the trip we had seen one of these ugly-looking creatures run up a six-foot timber-feller who happened to be nearer than a tree, and now every time we see a "go." we remember quite well the anguished look on that poor fellow's face as he tried to unwind it from round his neck. No wonder Jack doesn't like gohannas as well as magpies.

The groom had just come in from a round-up of the coach-horses, and asked us to keep a look-out for a chestnut, whose tracks he had not been able to pick up. We pinned a note on the next boundary-gate, saying where we had seen the animal crossing a "claypan" near some box timber some distance away to the right, two miles from the change.

We crossed Rufus Creek by a substantial white-railed bridge, which is not used enough to warrant a separate passage-way for pedestrians. The creek was lower than it had been for many years, but in flood times the water rises over the banks, which at this particular point are twenty feet high. There are several explanations as to the origin of the name Rufus being applied to this creek. One is that it was christened by Charles Sturt, who discovered the Murray, and named the tributary after the red hair of his companion, Mr. (afterwards Sir) George Macleay. The most generally accepted story is that when South Australia was being stocked with New South Wales sheep, about seventy years ago, some drovers were driven away by the blacks, who afterwards broke the legs of the whole mob of sheep. The drovers rode on to Blanchtown, and a body of police and residents from Adelaide came up post-haste to punish the marauders. A pitched battle took place near the creek, which the blacks eventually attempted to swim, but volley after volley followed them, until the water ran red with their blood.

We kept our eyes open for the track which would take us to Scaddings "Wangumma" Selection, but the rain the previous day had obliterated it, and after a wearisome march across the red-soil plains, we arrived at "Moorna" Station an hour after the men had finished their tea. This was one of the hardest day's work "Opal" had put through. We had come twelve miles further than had been our intention (forty-two miles in all for the day), and in addition the soil had been converted into mud six inches deep. For the last ten miles "The Long 'Un" and I had walked on ahead through the short scrub, picking out the firmest ground for "Opal," who mechanically plodded along in our footsteps.

Manager Murray gave us a right royal welcome at

"Moorna," and after seeing "Opal's" wants attended to, we made our way to the Men's Kitchen and sat down to an excellent repast of cold mutton. Our stay extended over two and a half days, and we could not have received better treatment if we had been the manager's own brothers. And the way the station folk looked after "Opal" caused that animal to get through the first few miles in double quick time when we left on the Wednesday morning.

A big establishment at any time, "Moorna" was a good-sized township at the date of our visit. The homestead was being rebuilt on a magnificent scale by the new owner, and this provided work for over thirty men, who were camped in tents on the river bank. The contractor acted in the capacity of guide on our tour of inspection, and we could well believe him when he said that in twelve months time the homestead would be a veritable palace. The pioneer squatters had to suffer untold hardships in the early days, and many of those "Furthest Back" do so even at the present time, but "Closer In," if the money is available, a station can enjoy almost every luxury that is to be found in the city. "Moorna," when completed, would be provided with every up-to-date convenience which is a feature of the typical Australian gentleman's suburban residence.

Every building was being lighted with acetylene gas, and all the bedrooms in "Government House" and "Bachelors' Hall" were to have hot and cold water basins connected with the Station's own drainage system. Bathrooms were to be plentifully distributed all over the buildings; electric bells were to be installed throughout; the station was already linked up by telephone with Wentworth, twenty-two miles away; the basement was being converted into a spacious billiard hall; a motor garage had already been erected, and a gravelled motor-drive was to be laid down as soon as the contractors had cleared away their building materials.

There were three separate classes of residence at "Moorna." The "Government House" folk, of course, were to occupy the homestead; the bookkeeper, "Government House" cook, and one or two others—though they had long since entered the state of matrimony—had already moved into "Bachelors' Hall." The various station hands, boundary-riders, men's cook, grooms, gardeners, and other employees, were scattered about until such time as the "Men's Quarters" were rebuilt. These buildings, together with the necessary outbuildings, consisting of the store, the bookkeeper's office, stables, implement sheds, feed rooms, men's kitchen, dairy sheds, killing-pens, and the stockyards,

formed a settlement almost as big as an ordinary English village.

The men's cook was one of the oldest and best-known men on the Murray, and it was a pleasure after tea to stretch ourselves on the veranda and listen to his tales of Outback life. He was immensely proud of his meathouse, a ten by six feet wire-gauzed structure standing on four buggy wheels, and surrounded by walls made of bulrushes. It stood just in front of the kitchen, and all the cook had to do to get a piece of fresh meat was to step from one room to another. "Old George," as he was called, was a grey-haired, ruddy-complexioned man of sixty-five, who looked twenty years younger, and seemed no worse for the tea he used to drink in the early days. He was a great believer in tea as a beverage, and, to use his own words, was always "swigging into it." He remembered the time, close on fifty years ago, when he was a ration-carrier and once a fortnight rode out to the shepherds—long before the stations were cut up into paddocks.* "In those days," said George, "we used to boil the tea—generally warehouse sweepings—and then we'd let it stew away beside the fire. We'd keep on warming it up for every meal until it was all gone. We had no milk, and the sugar was rotten black stuff. And yet we never suffered from "nerves," and I'm expecting to follow the example of those shepherds, and pass my four-score years."

"The Long 'Un" spent most of his time in a lignum swamp a few miles back along the road trying to bag a couple of foxes which had lately been causing slight havoc among a flock of stud sheep, but he only succeeded in hitting space. Then he tried to row up to where a wool-barge was stuck on a sandbank, but turned back in a hurry when the swirl of the water tearing round the first bend caused his flat-bottomed craft to perform some acrobatic feats. On his way back he pulled in to pick up a stockman who had left his horse in a stockyard on the opposite bank while he brought letters from Kulanine station, on the other side of the river, to catch the coach that night. However, "The Long 'Un" managed to make a name for himself on the morning of our departure. A young brown snake, which had been haunting the rafters of the hut occupied by the stud-groom, was transferring its quarters to the feed-room, when Jack blew its head off with a well-directed bullet from our pea-rifle, thereby earning the gratitude of the groom in question. The groom had not been having very much sleep

* Outback, the station paddocks are usually five miles by five miles in area.

the last few nights—although he was protected to a certain extent by his mosquito net, there were numerous holes in the canvas ceiling.

Loaded up with a good supply of bread and a cooked leg of mutton, our route from "Moorna" lay along the bank of the river, and two miles out we halted for a few minutes' chat with the groom at an old brick building perched on the top of a low, red sandhill. Like many other coach-changes, it had at one time been a grog-shanty. A little later on we met with a lusty "Ahoy, there," from the skipper of the paddle-steamer Jack had been unsuccessful in making the previous day. The steamer, one of those river traders so well described by my friend Mr. C. E. W. Bean in his "Dreadnoughts of the Darling," with its attendant barge, loaded high with wool, was firm on the bottom of the river. It had been there for a few weeks, and was likely to remain for another two months, until the waters came down from the head of the Murray. Only the skipper and the cook were aboard the "Dreadnought"; the other hands had been paid off, and were filling in time working at Wentworth and on neighbouring stations.

From this on to Anabranche Out-station, the water was alive with ducks, pelicans, and swans. At one point we passed a little island, a few acres in extent, and covered with long, green, luscious grass, in direct contrast to the reddish, sandy soil of the mainland. That same long, green grass which covered the island in such profusion, has a habit in the winter time of creeping up over the banks and spreading itself over the face of the surrounding country, though now there was nothing to be seen but mile after mile of bluebush, with a bit of "stink-weed" showing bright green here and there, and a few tufts of dry, yellow grass to add to the variety of colouring.

We pulled up at "The Anabranche," which had formerly been a head-station, but which is now an out-station, where the "Moorna" shearing takes place. Here we received a hearty invitation to stay over dinner. The place was a rambling old mixture of brick, slabs, weatherboards, and galvanised iron, or "tin," as the latter is designated out in the Bush. It was occupied by a "Jackeroo," another boundary-rider, and a "married couple," who, with we two Overlanders and another visitor, a fisherman from up stream, made a big onslaught upon the excellent dinner provided out of the week's rations which had preceded us from "Moorna" earlier in the morning.

The present-day Jackeroo doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to the real, genuine article of the early days.

Originally, "Jackeroo" was understood to be a label for well-born young fellows with means, who were mostly sent out from the Old Country ostensibly to gain "Colonial experience" on the stations, but really for no other particular purpose than to cool down their high spirits, and unseen, amongst the sheep, and gum-trees, and crows, get rid of their wild oats, superfluous vigour, and rough edges. These young gentlemen received no salaries, but generally paid handsome sums annually to station-owners by way of premiums. Some of the old-time pastoralists charged as much as £300 per annum for allowing these frisky young gents the privilege of galloping the legs off their horses after kangaroos and emus, breaking down their shaky fences, and violently making innocent love to their sisters, cousins, daughters, aunts, governesses, and even servants. Mostly possessed of college educations, gentlemanly, frank, open, and frolicsome dispositions, and full of healthy virility and good-natured fun, these young fellows were the life of the far-back stations. In consequence, they were general favourites, alike of squatters, overseers, and station-hands. Always pleasant, cheerful, courteous, and polite, especially to those beneath them, they were ever a pleasure to meet, and right good company anywhere.

Little did these young gentlemen care for the morrow, or anything else for that matter. Their "experience" consisted mainly of the aforesaid gallops after the Australian coat of arms, pigeon-shooting, pig-sticking, polo-playing, horse-racing, and occasional razzle-dazzles at the adjacent one-horse-bush township or wayside pub. In fact, the little way-back Mulga-towns were being kept alive by these reckless dare-devils, and their few inhabitants, with joyous anticipations, were ever looking forward to the happy, noisy time when "Merino-Downs' Jackeroos were coming in." After a year or two's sojourn in this sunny, hospitable land of tremendous distances, and lots of room, most of them returned to Old England to settle down in their respective spheres of respectability. There were some, of course, who came out with the purpose to seriously study pastoralism, and later on invest their capital in the great industry of the Golden Fleece, and many of the latter are to-day reaping the benefit of their studies on station properties in various parts of Australia.

Such were the Jackeroos of the olden days. To-day the Jackeroos, *i.e.*, "Pastoral Students," or "Station Cadets," are hardworking, sober, serious, earnest young Australians, mostly the sons of station managers, overseers, small graziers, and suchlike, who receive small wages from the

start, and do exactly the same work as the ordinary rouseabouts and station-hands, and only differ from them in that they camp in separate huts, and, on some stations, eat at the squatter's or manager's table. From these are recruited the future station overseers and managers, for they learn, and have no time for wild and flippant horse-play, even were their employers to permit it—which they don't.

The "married couple" were quite new chums, who had only recently driven up from Adelaide, having taken eight days to do the 280 miles, which, considering the gone-in-the-legs appearance of the old crow-bait of a horse, was a splendid performance. The man's duties were to attend to the orchard and vegetable garden, to kill such sheep as were necessary to provide fresh meat for the household, and generally to keep the homestead in order. His wife did the cooking and the inside domestic work. On some outstations the boundary-riders have to forage for themselves, but the owner of "Moorna" evidently has thoughts for the comfort of his men as well as for his own household.

We were surprised to find that the "married couple" possessed an "encumbrance"—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that we were surprised to find a squatter employing a couple with a young child. It is to be regretted that many city papers think more of the monetary value of various sixpenny and shilling advertisements stipulating "no encumbrances," than the value it would be to the country at large if they inserted a small paragraph at the head of their "want" columns to the effect that such advertisements would be refused.

The other visitor, the fisherman from up stream, was a German Pole, who had been camped on the opposite bank of the river for the last twenty-six years, making a precarious living by fishing and rabbiting. Before pushing on in the afternoon, we rowed up to his turn-out—or "out-turn," as he called it—in a little flat-bottomed boat that was hardly big enough to hold the three of us. His "out-turn" consisted of a tent and general camp equipment, with half a dozen baskets, nets, and wire cages. As we strolled round the camp, Gus (for that was his name) mentioned that it was the worst fishing year he had experienced for quite a long time. The water, on account of being so low, was clear as crystal, and he was almost in the ranks of the unemployed, for the fish managed to get plenty of live food, and would not touch the baited hooks until the river rose and the water got dirty. What catches Gus managed to make in the nets were kept under water in the wire cages until such time as he drove in to Mildura, generally once a

week. From Mildura the fish were railed to Melbourne, and the fact that hurt him most was that though his forty-five pound cods realised sevenpence per pound at the Melbourne fish markets, the net returns he received for such monsters usually amounted to two shillings and elevenpence or thereabouts. He was of the firm opinion that the riverside fishermen should form a union of their own, and have an agent in Melbourne to watch the auction sales.

Otherwise, Gus Kakoshke did not regret coming to Australia, and was perfectly happy in his little camp. He was a well-known identity for many miles along the river, and had most of his meals at "The Anabranch," which he called "Home," and which he regarded as having first claim upon whatever fish he caught.

As we were returning, we pulled across to a sandbank to render assistance to another riverside dweller, whose hut we had passed in the morning. Gus recognised him as "German Harry," who, while fruit picking at Mildura, had also picked a mate, and was returning with the lady of his choice. She was reclining on a couple of rugs spread over some household requisites which "German Harry" had been compelled to invest in before the lady would consent to accompany him to the altar, and the extra weight had caused the little craft to sag down at the stern, and stick fast to one of the numerous sandbanks, which latter, as soon as there was a rise in the river, would, like the grass, spread themselves over the surrounding country, or pile up on a jutting headland in the first bend of the stream.

Returning to the homestead, we found our friends the Married Couple busily engaged in boiling down a comb they had commandeered from a small swarm of bees the day before. The honey—some of which we took away with us—had been run off into a jar. The boiling down process reminded us of a boiling-down works at a slaughtering yard, and resulted in a seven-pound ball of good yellow beeswax, which would find a ready sale at a shilling per pound on the first river-boat that came down.

Making our way to the stables we found "Opal" kicking up her heels in the dust of the stockyard, and squealing to get rid of a hornet which was flying about her head, and had already stung her several times. An examination of the stable showed that there was a little nest of red hornets under the feed-bin, and "Opal," backing out after the first sting, had smashed the rails which we had put up to keep the other horses from worrying her. The boundary-rider rubbed some axle grease on the swellings, and this eased the pain somewhat, although it acted as a tonic to keep



Photo by]

[W. K. Harris.

THE GREAT SALT LAKE IN THE FAR NORTH-WEST
OF NEW SOUTH WALES.



Photo by]

[W. K. Harris.

A DROVING "PLANT" CROSSING THE BLACK-SOIL
PLAINS IN QUEENSLAND.

"Opal" at a fast trot in the intervening thirteen miles to Wentworth.

We were pressed to stay overnight, but "The Anabranche" was only nine miles from "Moorna," and as "Opal" had enjoyed such a long rest at the latter place, and was to spend the following day at Wentworth in the same way, we pushed on. A quarter of a mile from the homestead we noticed an old cow standing high on the river bank, moaning piteously for the water which her sightless, pleuro-stricken eyes could not see, but the smell of which had brought her in from the back country as fast as her tottering legs could carry her emaciated body. Pleuro was a disease that had only recently made its appearance, and thanks to the prompt measures taken by the District Stock Inspector, it had not had an opportunity of becoming at all prevalent.

The old cow was frothing at the mouth; her eyes were watery and bulging out, and were a milky white colour. We preferred not to water her out of our bucket. She objected when we grasped hold of her horns, and had sufficient strength left to withstand our attempt to pull her down to the water's edge. We had better success by joining hands behind and digging our unemployed hands into her rib bones. Pulling, shoving, and carrying, we got her front legs over the edge of the bank, and managing to keep her foothold in some extraordinary way, she floundered down until she stood almost knee-deep in the water. After a hearty drink, the like of which apparently she had not had for many a long day, we imagined she would turn round and walk out. But not a bit of it; she just stood there, silent, except for an occasional mournful bellow. Taking his boots off, "The Long 'Un" waded in, and twisting her ear, tried to coax her to follow him. This was unsuccessful, so I hastened back to the homestead and returned with the men-folk and some heavy rope. Fastening one end of the latter round her horns, we tied the other to the axle of the sulky, and the combined pulling of "Opal" and the men eventually landed her once again on the high bank. The Jackeroo rang up "Moorna," and got instructions to shoot and burn the animal, but we did not wait for the closing scene, and shortly after crossed the substantial bridge over one of the numerous anabranches which form little arms of the great waterways of Australia.

The word "anabranche" is often confused with another equally typically Australian word in common use in the Bush, namely, "billabong." Anabranche originated in 1834, when Colonel Jackson, in the Journal of the Royal Geographical

Society, wrote: "Such branches of a river as after separation reunite, I would term *anastomosing-branches*; or, if a word might be coined, *ana-branches*, and the islands they form, *branch-islands*." This Colonel Jackson was for a time Secretary of the Society, and editor of its Journal. In February, 1847, he resigned, and in the Journal of that year ("Condensed account of Sturt's Exploration in the interior of Australia") appears an amusing instance of the new editor's ignorance of the old editor's proposed word: "Captain Sturt proposed sending in advance to ascertain the state of the Ana branch of the Darling, discovered by Mr. Eyre on a recent expedition to the north." No fewer than six times on two pages is the word "anabranh" printed as two separate words, and as if Ana were a proper name. In the index, it appears: "Ana, a branch of the Darling." Leichhardt, in his "Overland Expedition," makes use of the word "Ana": "The river itself divided into anabranhcs, which . . . made the whole valley a maze of channels."

"Billabong" is described by some Australian writers as an affluent from a river, returning to it, or often ending in the sand, in some cases running only in flood time. In the Wiradhuri dialect of the centre of New South Wales, "billa" means a river, and "bong," or "bung," dead. "Billa" is also a river in some Queensland aboriginal dialects. "Billabong" is often regarded as a synonym for anabranh, but there is a distinction. From the original idea the latter implies rejoining the river; whilst the former implies continued separation from it, though what are called "billabongs" often do rejoin.

CHAPTER X

WENTWORTH AND THE DARLING

FOR the first time in its municipal history, the somewhat ancient-looking town of Wentworth, at the junction of the Murray and Darling Rivers, was without a civic head. Every alderman in the council had been nominated and seconded, but, like the guests in the parable, they all with one accord began to make excuses, and finished by formally, firmly, and flatly refusing the distinction. Things had been tending this way for some years. It was usually a matter of extreme difficulty to induce six townspeople to allow themselves to be nominated as aldermen, and it had happened more than once that the Governor had had to nominate certain ratepayers as aldermen, in order to give the council the statutory quota, namely, six. The ratepaying public, generally speaking, took no interest whatever in municipal affairs. During the week previous to the date of our arrival there had been three council meetings. At one meeting there was only one ratepayer; at the second this solitary individual was conspicuous by his absence, and at the third interest had sufficiently revived in the election of Mayor to attract one other member of the public.

Various—and amusing—reasons were given for declining office, but beneath them all was a deep-seated resentment against the action of the Government in regard to the application of the Dairies Supervision Act to the district. Some months before a Government medical officer had been appointed there, and one of his first acts was to recommend the extension of the Dairies Act to the town and district. The recommendation was referred to the local council, the local police magistrate, and the sergeant of police. The council unanimously agreed that it was not necessary, and passed a resolution to that effect, which was duly forwarded to the department making the inquiry. Then there was a pause—the lull which precedes the storm. Then in the *Government Gazette* it was announced that the Act had been extended to Wentworth and district as from January 22nd, 1912, and this without any warning to the council. The retiring Mayor said that their protest was not even acknowledged—and there the matter stood.

We were glad our route took us to Wentworth. It is a straggling old town, possessing many fine brick and stone public buildings, and many private ones just the reverse. A gaol faces a big open, sandy flat, as bare as the court-yards within its walls. Everybody and everything seemed to be enjoying a heavy sleep as we drove through. Even the brewery had long since put up its shutters, and the "cold tea brigade," to add insult to injury, were utilising that establishment's fence to advertise to the residents of Wentworth special reasons why they should use a certain brand of cocoa.

Wentworth's main attraction lies in the fact of its being at the junction of the Murray and the Darling, the two great rivers of Australia. Not that there is any scenic splendour about the meeting of the waters. A long, low tongue of land, with river gums growing on it, divides the waters of the mighty waterways. But follow them in imagination up stream to the far-away head-waters of the Macintyre, on the Queensland border, or the Indi, on the Victorian border, or down stream to where Old Ocean receives their weary out-flow on the South Australian coast. Then you realise that Wentworth stands at the centre of a vast river system that unites four States, and that will be of inestimable value to the Commonwealth some day, when the statesmen of Australia get time to think about it.

No one can see the Darling for the first time—especially if he should see it coming down a good "wool river," comfortably filling its spacious channel—and not marvel that all that water is let go to waste. This could only happen in a country like Australia, so rich in natural resources that some of them have to be left undeveloped until the population and money are available. Meanwhile, the people on the Darling work on with low river or no river in drought time. It is difficult to say what a permanently full river with full billabongs and lakes would mean to the Darling country, but probably the presence of all that water would mean a slightly cooler climate, a slightly greater rainfall, and a much closer settlement of population, not to mention the possibilities of irrigation and a cheaply-carried commerce, even if it did go over the political borders of New South Wales, and eventually find its outlet at Melbourne and Adelaide, instead of Sydney.

We did not have much experience of the Darling on the Adelaide trip, but I had previously spent some time at Wilcannia, a town on the river situated, as the crow flies, about 250 miles north of Wentworth, and about midway between the Queensland and Victorian borders; and between Wilcannia and Wentworth there are some magnificent

stretches of country growing the richest grasses, and being the location of some of the finest sheep-runs in New South Wales. At the present time, in good seasons, the little river-steamers, tugging heavily-laden barges of wool, add to the prosperity of Adelaide and Melbourne. But in some future day this fine watercourse, which is really a bigger and better river than the Murray, will accommodate millions of people. For the expenditure of £50,000—perhaps less—another river, south of the main one, could be made from Louth to Menindie by locking the river where it breaks out in flood time, and where it runs as wide as the Darling itself until it comes in again below Menindie. There are other tributaries like the Tallywalker that could be so filled, and millions of acres could be irrigated, but such work would affect the navigation of the river, and in turn affect Adelaide and Melbourne. For that reason, such projects are not likely to become facts until the whole question of the utilitarian rights of the three States concerned are settled once and for all.

When the railway opens up the four hundred miles of squattages between Condobolin and Broken Hill—and may it be at no distant date—the east will begin to know more of the west. A gentleman we met Outback, whose nationality may be guessed at, said that one-half the world does not know how the other nine-tenths live. He was referring to the little that the dwellers in eastern New South Wales know of their Western Division. The man who lives where there is a forty-eight inch rainfall, as at Sydney, finds it difficult to imagine the effect of an average annual rainfall of eight and a quarter inches, as at Broken Hill and a good deal of the country between the Darling and the South Australian border. He will hardly realise until he goes west how large a portion of New South Wales looks to Melbourne or Adelaide as the natural trade centre, although this portion is coloured on the map, and marked with a good, firm line as belonging politically to his own Mother State. He will find that there are stations on the Darling where Adelaide time is kept. Men interested in land out there may have to come to Sydney, because the State Land Office is in that city, together with the office of the Western Land Commissioners. Incidentally, they will admit that Sydney is a bright, cheery place for a holiday; but otherwise their trade is mainly with Victoria or South Australia.

We crossed the Darling by the fine drawbridge at the back of the town, and four miles from Wentworth passed through the Curlwaa Irrigation Settlement, another bright spot in this region of plain and scrub. This settlement had

been started only a few years previously, and had not had time to take on the aspect of solidarity characteristic of Renmark. The first settler we struck was just clearing his land, and most of the houses had a temporary and very decided "shortly-to-be-the-kitchen" look about them; those that were not roughly constructed of canvas, boards, and tin, were portable structures that had been built in Adelaide and sent up in sections.

We received a warm welcome from irrigationists who had migrated from South Australia, and whose people we had met during our stay at Seppeltsfield. Taking up our quarters in a paddock attached to "Homerton" orchard, "Opal" once more had as much lucerne as she cared to feast on, and "The Long 'Un" and I spent the following day having a look round the Settlement.

We learnt that Curlwaa had never been taken seriously while under the control of the municipality of Wentworth for the first six years, but had gone ahead by leaps and bounds since the New South Wales Government had taken it over in 1908. The Government promptly made the conditions of tenure easier, and progress during the last three years had been remarkable, and presented another instance of how fruit-growing flourishes under irrigation on land that is generally credited with being only fit to carry one sheep to every three or four or five acres.

We left Curlwaa loaded with a sugar-bag half full of the biggest peaches we had ever seen, and owing to the irrigation channels having overflowed on to the roads, made a somewhat boggy run down to the punt which was to take us back into Victorian territory again for a short time, and put us on the track to Mildura. Passing the Pumping-Station, we coo-eed to the puntsmen, who were fishing in a favourite spot on the other side of the river. He did not trouble to row across, but a "sundowner," who had been waiting on our side, took charge of the punt-wheel and "worked his passage" over to Victoria—a distance of not more than fifty yards. But the puntsmen left his fishing to collect our shilling fare as we drove off. In all probability if we had been a fortnight later the river would have been low enough for us to have driven across, and so saved that shilling. There had been rain up in the head of the Murray, but if the waters were not quick in coming down, that puntsmen would soon be regretting that he had been the successful tenderer for the lease of his punt, for as soon as the water was a foot shallower, the vessel would not be able to cross the spit of sand in the middle of the stream.

CHAPTER XI

MILDURA—THE RESCUE OF A HOWLING WILDERNESS

AT a time when so much attention is being given to the question of the conservation of water, and the possibilities of its utilisation to increase the productivity of vast areas of Australia in which the rainfall is insufficient for effective cultural operations, the results achieved by the diversion of water from the River Murray at Mildura, situated about eighteen miles above the junction of the Darling River with the waters of the Murray, are alike interesting and important.

The bare statement that twelve thousand acres of land in the despised Mallee area of North-Western Victoria, which twenty-six years ago was of a capital value of less than five shillings an acre, now produces fruit of the value of considerably over £200,000 per annum, is striking evidence in support of the policy of extending irrigation in the districts of our island-continent in which rainfall is deficient, and through which the main rivers flow, although this extension must necessarily be on lines differing somewhat from those on which Mildura's successes have been secured.

The name of the Chaffey Brothers, who made the first systematic attempt to form a practical irrigation settlement in the Commonwealth, will always be closely associated with Mildura. Previous to the advent of the Messrs. Chaffey, who founded the irrigation colony in 1887 under an agreement with the Victorian Government, the Mildura run was known as one of the oldest cattle stations on the Murray River. It was taken up in 1846, five years before Victoria was declared an independent colony. It had later on the name of being one of the best lambing runs on the river, but there were no rabbits in those days, and the country was not overstocked. According to "Old George" Hamilton, now boss of the Men's Kitchen at "Moorna," some very big profits were made in the 'seventies, when he was cook at Mildura homestead, the returns in some years exceeding £20,000.

Brer Rabbit made his appearance in 1880, and increased rapidly during the years that followed. The pest came through the mallee from the Wimmera country, cleaning up the pastures and eating the bark from off the sandalwood trees. Despite efforts made to destroy them the rabbits took possession, and practically brought ruin to the owners of Mildura run. It was about that time that the Messrs. Chaffey, who had had Californian experience, learned something of the possibilities of securing cheap land suitable for irrigation in Australia. They arrived at an opportune time to make good terms with the Government of the day. The area selected, owing to the destructive effect of the rabbit pest, had been rendered practically valueless for grazing. Therefore a proposal to reclaim what was termed "a howling wilderness of spinifex and mallee," was likely to be favoured by Victorian people.

The then Minister for Water Supply, Mr. Alfred Deakin, was an enthusiastic advocate of irrigation, and the Premier in a manifesto issued on February 20th, 1886, stated that "the question of the greatest magnitude at the present time is irrigation." A complete reorganisation of the Water Supply Department was promised. Liberal grants in aid were to be given in cases where works of local importance could not be completed by loans available. Where works of a strictly national character were required it was promised by the Premier that they would be undertaken by the Government. The popular voice was clamouring for national irrigation, so it is little wonder that when the Messrs. Chaffey expounded their scheme to the Victorian Government it was very favourably received.

Members of the Ministry had at first a comparatively easy task in endeavouring to come to an arrangement with the Messrs. Chaffey, for they were backed up by the press and people generally, and an agreement was soon drafted. On October 21st, 1886, this agreement was laid before the Legislative Assembly by Mr. Deakin. It should be interesting now, when the Governments of the three States—New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia—are engaged in promoting irrigation settlements on a large scale, to briefly present the main provisions of the agreement entered into with the Chaffeys.

It was provided that under certain conditions the Chaffey Brothers should receive a grant of 50,000 acres on the Lower Murray, and the right to purchase the adjoining land to the extent of 20,000 acres additional for the sum of 20s. per acre. The conditions were, shortly, that the Chaffeys were to establish an irrigation settlement on a

portion of the land it was proposed to grant, and to effect useful and permanent improvements upon it in the shape of irrigation canals, pumping machinery, roads, bridges, and other necessary works to the value of £300,000, within twenty years. They were also to erect an agricultural college, which should be endowed with a large area of land (one-fifteenth of the total acreage), and they were to take steps to clear all vermin off the property. In selling the land the purchasing power of any one person was to be limited to eighty acres for fruit-growing, and to 160 acres for other products; and water facilities were to be allowed to all settlers for a fair consideration. The Chaffey Brothers were also to hasten the establishment of fruit drying and canning factories and other kindred industries, and they were not to retain in their own or their agents' possession more than 5,000 acres of cultivated and irrigated land at any time.

And twenty-six years after, what is there to show? To-day Mildura, laid out in streets and avenues on the American plan, has a population of 6,125 souls, supported by about double that number of irrigated areas, and with an annual fruit crop of well over £200,000. On the 30th June last there were 1,416 accounts in the local Savings Bank, the deposits and interest representing £42,731. The National Bank of Australasia and the Bank of Victoria have fine premises and a large clientele. The capital value of rateable property in the Shire is £732,360. Six State schools have been established, besides a Convent School and a private school. The Carnegie Library was built about six years ago, the American millionaire donating £2,000, but stipulating that £200 be spent yearly in providing books for a free circulating library. The town has many fine substantial brick buildings, most of which are shaded by pepper trees and gums which have been planted along the main thoroughfares. It is lighted by electricity, and has over seventy subscribers connected with its telephone exchange, with about forty more at Irymple. These and many other things speak of the prosperity of Mildura, but perhaps one of the most interesting items of information handed out to the visitor is that there are only six policemen in the whole place.

There are no hotels in Mildura, and only one large coffee-palace. The accommodation is altogether inadequate for visitors, and for some time past persistent endeavours have been made to secure a local option poll to determine whether the residents are favourable to the granting of a liquor licence. For some time the Chief Secretary of the day has had the power to say whether licences should be granted in

the mallee districts. Strong opposition has been successful in keeping Mildura a "prohibition area," but recently it has been exempted, and a local option poll on the question will probably be taken within a short period. Even some of those who are bitter opponents of the drink traffic as a whole have modified their views to some extent, and favour the granting of a licence to an hotel, provided it be placed under municipal or State control. It is contended that a State hotel could be run mainly for accommodation purposes, or at least that there would not be the same incentive to push the liquor side of the business as there is under private ownership. Although there are no hotels, three clubs have flourished, at each of which several thousand pounds worth of liquor have been consumed yearly. The working men's club is a strong one, and it is admitted freely on all hands that each club has been well conducted.

As at Renmark, the great stand-by of the Mildura settlers has been the *lexia*, or pudding raisin, commonly known in Mildura as the "gordo," a term contracted from the Spanish name of "gordo blanco," meaning the "fat white" grape. The gordo is the vine, of the muscatel variety, from the fruit of which the Spanish and Californian raisin of commerce is made. The vine is kept low, and spur-pruned in such a way as to provide the fruit with a canopy of shade against the scorching summer sun. The bunches are gathered in the months of February and March, and this is a busy time for all Mildura residents. From the neighbouring States, from along the rivers, and from the Barrier country (round about Broken Hill) the nomads of the Bush gather in to Mildura to assist in the harvest. During recent years farmers and their families from the Victorian Mallee, and even overlanders from Queensland, have been in evidence during the picking season.

The pickers earn from 6s. to 8s. a day of eight hours. It is an enjoyable life for them; they live in tents, in a lovely climate, the work comparatively easy, and any ordinary man can knock out £2 a week easily. The bunches are picked and placed in perforated tins, collected by horse and cart, and taken to the dip. Here two tins are placed on a pole and gently dipped into a large vat containing a boiling hot weak solution of caustic soda, by which means the skin is cracked, evaporation hastened, and a rich golden colour given to the grape. The fruit is then spread on trays and exposed to the sun for five or six days, during which time it is turned to ensure equal exposure, and the drying is completed. Many thousands of trays are to be seen on the drying grounds at the one time. The sultanas and currants

are treated in the same manner as the gordos described above, with the exception that the currants are not dipped, the drying taking only two to four days. The fruit in the trays is then packed into a "sweat box" holding about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. of fruit, and carted to the packing sheds to be stemmed, graded, and packed for export in 56 lb. boxes.

During our visit to one of the vineyards the heavens suddenly became overcast, clouds thickly gathered, and rain seemed imminent. This is the most anxious and exciting time for the grower, for if the fruit gets wet it loses its weight, colour, and grade, and the grower consequently does not get his full price. "All hands on deck" is the immediate call, and everyone rushes out to "stack" the trays. This is simply placing one tray on top of another, with an empty tray on top, and thus the fruit is preserved from harm.

Life in the Bush, as depicted by many Australian writers, and generally conceived by city people, is not of a very inviting nature, nor very well suited for the upbringing of families. It is not the least of the achievements of Mildura to have shown that, by means of irrigation, the arid Mallee—to the extent of the water available—may be settled in such a way as to allow of the combining of the advantages of closer settlement, of the pleasures of frequent and easy social intercourse, of the benefits to be derived from club and concert hall, from Church and school, with those of a free life in the open air. The Mildura climate throughout the autumn and winter months is unsurpassable, and the heat and dust of summer, although unpleasant enough to the dweller in the town, are very greatly modified and rendered endurable to the settler on his "block" by the verdure of tree and vine, and by means of the fruit diet in which he can so easily indulge.

Mr. Hawke, the energetic secretary of the Mildura Co-operative Fruit Company, allowed us the use of his grounds to camp in. Working at express speed, his sheds were turning out forty tons of fruit every day. For the fortnight previous all the employees had been working overtime until ten o'clock at night, and would be doing so for the next four weeks.

We received a hearty invitation to spend the week-end with one of the packers on his "block" at Merbein, some miles back along the road. We had passed through this new settlement on the track from Wentworth, and keeping to our rule of never turning back, we had to decline the invitation with thanks.

We had only a short stay in Mildura, but thanks to the

hospitable treatment we were subjected to, we saw and learnt enough to carry away with us the conviction that it was a good day for Victoria, and Australia as a whole, when two American irrigationists decided to turn to account some of the Murray waters that for years and years had been flowing unheeded through "a howling wilderness of spinifex and mallee."

CHAPTER XII

KNOCKING DOWN A CHEQUE

LEAVING our Mildura camp, we found the crossing-place down by the sawmill, the sawdust from which had accumulated to such an extent that a neighbouring telegraph post was half buried. Our experience of the puntmen on the Murray is that they possess to an extraordinary degree, "that tired feeling." The Curlwaa man preferred fishing; the Mildura chap liked his blankets too much. The Mildura punt was made fast to the Victorian side of the river. Its attendant rowing-boat was moored to New South Wales. In response to our coo-ee, an old gentleman asleep on a bunk outside the hut on the other side sat up and rubbed his eyes. Then he went to sleep again. There's an art in getting a big, heavy, cumbersome, flat-bottomed punt across a swiftly-running stream over three hundred yards wide, and after the twenty minutes of pushing down and pulling up the one solitary handle of the one solitary punt wheel, "The Long 'Un" and I sprawled under a New South Welsh gum to recover our wind.

"Did you bring that there punt across?" a drowsy voice asked from between the blankets as we sprang into the sulky once more. "Aye, aye, Skipper," Jack answered. "Eighteen-pence, please," the drowsy voice demanded. But we were a hundred yards along the dusty track before he was out of the blankets.

The dusty track was the wrong one, and a mile or so on brought us to a slaughter-yard, where we found a Mildura butcher just starting for Victoria with a cartload of New South Wales meat. He put us on to the right track, and three miles on we passed through Gol Gol, a settlement of half a dozen shanties built on a gradual slope, absolutely bare of everything but a little tobacco-bush. A twelve-by-sixteen-foot weatherboard school stood in the centre of the township. Like the majority of the buildings, it was unfenced. The only fences seemed to be those round the cemeteries, of which there were two, and both of which were four acres in extent. Our road lay along the Travelling Stock Route, which divided the cemeteries. There were not more than six graves in one burial-place; in the other

there was not a single headstone—in fact, it had never been used for any other purpose than that of paddocking cattle.

Maybe, in course of time those two four-acre cemeteries will be fully occupied; for Gol Gol is on the list for consideration as an Irrigation Area, and if “Opal” ever takes us back to the place which at present has as its best characteristic a very euphonious Aboriginal name, no doubt she will spend her time devouring lucerne quite as good and as green as that she had at every other irrigation settlement.

The subsidised post office was not considered of sufficient importance to be linked up by telephone with Mildura, though a private line ran to the public-house. The latter was of the usual Outback township description, but it was overshadowed by one redeeming feature standing bravely up out of the brick-red sand—a row of sea-green, red-berried pepper-trees.

* * * * *

“Knocking down a cheque” is not a common occurrence in the Bush nowadays, but there are still some Outback townships which look forward to the periodical visit of hands from some of the “further out” stations, where the few white men have neither the time nor the inclination to look after a vegetable garden, and where the diet is tea, damper, and beef, perhaps more tea than anything else, all the year round—unless, for sake of variety, the menu is changed to beef, damper, and tea.

The constitutions of no two men are alike, and while some Outbackers can subsist on this diet, year in and year out, there are others in whom it creates an uncontrollable longing for a spree, perhaps once in twelve months. They know that their drinking bouts empty their pockets—just as well as the shanty-keeper knows that *his* pockets are filled accordingly, but the majority of them go back to their work well pleased with themselves, with a determination to “knock up” another cheque, and when the time comes, to “knock it down” in precisely the same way as its predecessor. Those that constitute the minority return to their stations sternly resolved that they will never touch the — stuff again.

I remember the story of an old station-hand now well known in commercial circles in Brisbane. His first debauch took place when the manager sent him into the nearest township on some important business. In the four years following, he went into the township five times, and the local hotel-keeper got his money each time. Then he managed to keep his resolution about turning over a new leaf. For three years

he worked hard, and never once during that period got within a hundred and fifty miles of the smell of the mixture that was served up as whisky in that particular "pub." He saved £240, and decided to return to more civilised parts. Buying a couple of horses, he journeyed in to the township. Selling his horses, he took coach to the railway, and arrived in Brisbane without having spent a penny in drink for himself or for anyone else. His savings, properly invested, have made him one of the wealthiest men in Brisbane. But the story does not end there. A young man on the same station, who had saved up about £100, accompanied him, with the intention of going straight through to his people in the capital. But he got only as far as the township. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he got only as far as the "pub." At any rate, every penny of his savings went—and he went—back to the station.

The drinking bouts never seem to do the men any harm. There is a great deal of truth in their argument that a man who gets drunk only occasionally, and never touches it between his periods of absolute drunkenness, does not suffer at all in comparison with the man who, year in and year out, is always having "just a glass," without ever getting really drunk. The Outback incorrigible earns his cheque by downright hard work, and as soon as he has acquired what he considers sufficient for his needs, he takes himself off to the nearest township, where he runs through his savings in the orthodox manner—or, rather, others do it for him. More often than not, the so-called "township" consists of "pub-post-office-and-store" combined, and maybe there is not another house within miles, but it is wonderful how quickly the glad tidings that "Old Mulga Bill has 'come in' with a cheque," travels from place to place. On our way out to Cooper's Creek (in far West Queensland), we met a stockman going "into town." His station was about two hundred miles out. He had been working hard for nearly two years, and having no way to spend his money, had amassed a considerable amount. He was a well-set-up man of thirty-five, and told us that although he had to pass one or two small "townships" on the way in to Charleville, he had always made a point of going straight through to that great stock centre of the "Wild and Woolly West," before taking his cheque out of the little pouch on the inside of his belt. Immediately upon his arrival in Charleville, he would hand over his cheque to his pet grog-seller—who, for obvious reasons, shall be nameless. (Charleville being a very modern town, and the hotel-keepers, of which there are eleven for a population of about 1,600 souls, being very

respectable citizens thereof.) The publican would give him ten pounds cash for incidental expenses, and would be instructed to keep the rest and let him know when it had all gone. He never regretted his curious method of enjoying life. After a few weeks spent in "dissipation and riotous living," as he described it, ably assisted by scores of "friends," whom he had never seen before, and is never likely to see again, he clambers on to his saddle, after seeing that a couple of bottles are stowed away in the baggage carried by the pack-horse. He knows why he is going back to the station with empty pockets, but as he bids "the boys" the twentieth good-bye, he lets them know that he will be back for another "good time" within two years.

In the olden days, it was not an uncommon occurrence for a local magistrate to take his seat on the Bench in a state of intoxication. The old residents of Bowen (Q.), treasure the story of an incident which occurred at a small township not more than a hundred miles from that town. One Justice of the Peace, as not infrequently happened, was sitting in solitary state on the Bench. His features wore that expression of ludicrous solemnity by the adoption of which a man who knows himself to be drunk, endeavours to conceal the fact.

A prisoner was brought in, charged with having removed goods to the value of 1s. 3d. from a store. Before the evidence was half finished, a terrible frown gathered on the magistrate's brow. Jamming his battered cabbage-tree hat well over his eyes, in imitation of the ceremony of putting on the black cap, he rose slowly up, and pointing a shaking finger at the culprit, said, "Take 'imawayan' 'ang 'im!"

"Beg pardon, your Washup," said the constable. "This is only a case of"

"Take 'imawayan' 'ang 'im!" repeated his Worship, more slowly and impressively than before.

"But, your Washup," expostulated the bewildered official, "you have no power"

"No power? Just ain't I, though," roared the now thoroughly infuriated J.P. "'Earwot I say? Take 'imaway an' 'ang 'im,'" and subsiding into his seat, he was heard to add, in a voice of maudlin pathos: "An' Lor' 'a' mercy on his soul."

Seeing that remonstrance was useless, the constable removed the prisoner, and shortly afterwards returned.

"Taken 'imawayan' 'ung 'im?" asked the magistrate, cheerfully.

"Yes, your Washup."

"All right. I 'shmish case."

CHAPTER XIII

OUR STAY AT "BONNIE DOON" SELECTION

OUT of Gol Gol we drove through a small flock of sheep two barefooted Young Australians were taking along to new pastures. Or rather, the dogs were doing so; the two boys were providing the pasture by cutting down the scrub as they walked on ahead.

A splendid firm limestone track ran us through eleven miles of the dense mallee until we came to the next sign of habitation, where it ended at a small sandhill just as suddenly as it had called forth our exclamations of pleasure. Of course, out in these parts, you never see a milepeg, and almost as few sign-posts. We judged we had come the sixteen miles to Mallee Cliffs homestead, where our Mildura friends had advised us to call in for lunch, but there were not enough buildings down near the river, about a quarter of a mile off, to correspond with the description we had received of the place. "The Long 'Un" put the nosebag on "Opal," and made himself comfortable on the sand under a mallee bush, while I strolled across to get further directions.

A loose-limbed girl of about eighteen, with sleeves rolled up showing a pair of arms as brown as her sun-tanned face, almost drowned me with a dish of dirty water and potato peelings as I suddenly appeared round the corner of the kitchen. . . . The absence of mile-pegs had made us keen judges of distance. We had come fifteen miles, and Mallee Cliffs was only another mile further on. I thanked the young lady for the information, raised my hat, and headed back for the sulky.

"Hey, there, just a minute!" The girl's mother and father were standing in the doorway. I retraced my footsteps. The father spoke. "It's only half-past ten. You can have a cup of tea here, and still be in time for lunch at Mallee Cliffs." "Oh, thanks, but really" I stammered, "my mate's over there; I couldn't have one without him, and" A girl's brown face looked out of the door: "The kettle is just on the boil."

That settled it. Three others, young men of from twenty to twenty-six years of age, had appeared on the scene by this time. "The Long 'Un," oblivious to the mosquitoes, was fast asleep under the mallee, and did not hear our combined shouts to pull in at the corner gate. I was halfway through my second cup of tea and slice of home-made cake by the time he had washed out of his ear the last grains of sand that one of the boys had poured down that organ to wake him up.

And when we left the little sitting-room to enjoy a chat in the cool of the veranda we found the sulky by itself under a gum-tree, and "Opal" down in the stable hard at work on a feed of chaff and oats—and the chaff and oats had *not* come out of the bag hitched on over the back springs of the sulky.

I might say at once that we did not have lunch or any other meal at Mallee Cliffs homestead on that or any other day. As a matter of fact, we had lunch with our new friends, whose name we discovered to be Kennedy. After the meal they thought of a few interesting things to be seen in their immediate neighbourhood, and when we got back the hands of the clock were close up against tea-time. That meant staying overnight. The next day was Sunday. "What! travel on the Sabbath, when there's no need to do so?" And Mr. K. and the three big boys and the owner of the sun-tanned arms joined in with Mrs. Kennedy's firm and very emphatic, "The idea!" And so we stayed on at "Bonnie Doon" Selection until late on the Monday morning.

"Bonnie Doon" homestead is situated in one of the worst bends of the four hundred miles of river between Mildura and Swan Hill. The Channel winds round several treacherous sandbanks, and at least one big wool-barge has gone to pieces on a neighbouring rocky promontory. The house is prettily situated a little at the back of the forty-foot cliffs, and has no need for any ornamental trees, as the river gums send their branches high above the cliffs. Between the homestead and the latter stands a little rain gauge, a tin canister nailed to the stump of a tree, which enables Mr. Kennedy to send in a monthly rainfall report to the Government Meteorological Department at Sydney. Similar rain gauges are to be found on almost every Station and Selection Outback.

Our first outing was to "the 800-mile." Stepping into a rowing boat where the water was only a foot deep, we pushed off and the current was soon carrying us along at a great pace through a narrow channel which had been

scoured out to a depth of over twenty feet. Half a mile down the river we ran into the bank opposite a gigantic gnarled red-gum, into whose trunk the following inscription had been burnt very deep in the 'seventies:—

H. R. D. (Harbours and Rivers Department, evidently.)

B.M. 800

Miles from Albury.

A. W., 23/4/7 . . . (last figure missing).

MRS.

The tree had not been ringbarked, and the bark was beginning to cover the letters and figures, but no doubt "Old Man" Kennedy will put an edge to his axe and repeat his performance of seven years ago, when he cut the growth away before the inscription was quite covered. On the opposite bank another tree was similarly inscribed. The full letterpress is to be found only every hundred miles, but the whole length of the river is marked off with these curious mile posts. Sometimes it happens that the numbers are spread over two trees, when a single tree of sufficient width is not available. No. 799, which we saw later in the afternoon, had the 7 on one tree and the 99 on another.

Near "the 800-mile" was a chaff-cutting machine and private irrigation plant, which, pumping the water along three miles of earth channels, was irrigating a paddock of 150 acres of what our "Bonnie Doon" friends had proved to be splendid wheat-growing land, and fifteen acres of which were shortly to be planted with oranges.

On our way down to the piggery we had pot-shots at various trees to discover who was the best qualified to send a bullet between the eyes of a sucking pig which was to grace the table on Sunday. The deed was assigned to "The Long 'Un," most of whose shooting had been done as a cadet against fixed targets; but after a few months' wanderings he was good enough for a running rabbit at 100 yards. As the shot rang out and the pig rolled over with a pitiful little grunt, "The Long 'Un" lost his seat on the rough enclosure and tumbled into the mire, several inches deep. Squealing with rage, and headed by an old sow, the other pigs, about a dozen in all, charged for Jack, who followed up his prowess with the rifle by clambering back over that stockyard fence with more agility than ever I dreamt he was capable of.

The Kennedys usually spent their Saturday evenings in at Mildura, and as they felt certain that a new puntsman would be on duty after dark—or, if the sleepy old gentleman was still there he would not recognise us—we gladly accepted their invitation to accompany them. Leaving Mr. K. at

home, the rest of us journeyed in in the double-seated four-wheeled buggy—all except "The Long 'Un," who jumped at the offer of a ride on one of the stock-horses. He rode on slightly ahead, and rendered good service opening and shutting the gates of the few boundary-fences we had to pass through.

Leaving Jack's horse in the stockyards on the New South Wales side of the river, we crossed on the punt which had caused us so much exertion twelve hours previously (when we little thought we would be back again so soon), and while Mrs. Kennedy was doing some necessary shopping, the rest of us—including the girl with the sun-tanned face and arms—spent a pleasant hour or two at an open-air "picture palace." Then there was supper to follow on the lawn at the rear of one of the numerous refreshment rooms, the gorgeous splendour of which the wildest imagination of even the Chaffey Brothers could not have pictured as being possible in that land of spinifex and mallee.

At the "Settlers' Club," on the recommendation of the "Bonnie Doon" folk we were made honorary members for the evening, but had not the time to avail ourselves of any of the club's privileges. It seemed as if every settler for miles around had come in to town. All the horse-stalls at the back of the club were occupied, and we could hardly move for the vehicles—two-wheelers, four-wheelers, spring-carts, buggies, traps, and sulkies, of all sizes and colours—packed into what is known as the "accommodation paddock," reserved for the use of club members.

We arrived back at "Bonnie Doon" very very late. It was all the fault of that confounded puntsman again. We got to the crossing-place at eleven, just in time to see the punt halfway across the river. We coo-eed, and thinking the punt would return after setting down its one passenger, made ourselves comfortable on the bank. A long, long wait, and there was no sound of the punt having commenced its return journey. In the space of ten minutes more coo-ees floated across that river in angry protest than had ever been heard in all Mildura during its quarter-century existence. Resigning ourselves to the thought that the puntsman had decided it was time to knock off for the night (or did he recognise our voices and remember we had paid for the return journey in advance?) two of the Kennedy boys went up stream to the first house and commandeered a boat. Then there was another long wait while they rowed across and returned with the old-fashioned hand-punt that should have stepped into line with Mildura's progressive ways, and given place to a petrol-driven punt many years ago.



A REPRESENTATION OF TREES, OBTAINED FROM THE
"FLOAT," OR WIND-BAG, OF A MURRAY RIVER COD-FISH.

From the Kennedys we learnt that the punt was the best and surest investment in the town. It was originally built as a speculation, and the licence has been leased and sub-leased over and over again until now things are in a very complicated way, and crying out loudly for intervention on the part of both the Victorian and New South Wales Governments. The returns from the Euston coach and the Victorian butcher, who has his slaughter-yards in New South Wales, alone more than cover the amount paid as licence by the owner to the Victorian authorities. The rates for using the punt range from one shilling to half-a-crown, according to the weight of your vehicle, and to travellers who are accustomed to the free punts under municipal or State control in New South Wales, the whole system amounts to plain robbery.

Perhaps I should have said that we got back to "Bonnie Doon" very early, as it had gone two o'clock Sunday morning when from the sandy ridge where "The Long 'Un" had gone to sleep the previous morning, we came in sight of the homestead showing up grey and ghostly in the bright moonlight.

After a second supper, Jack and I wrapped ourselves in our blankets and spent the night under a gum standing a few yards from the house; and we felt none the worse the next morning when our hosts apologised for not warning us that a five-foot black snake had made its home under the building, and was in the habit of prowling round at most unexpected hours. But on the Sunday night we were careful to spread our blankets out fully a hundred yards away; although the snake was quite used to the Kennedys, we were not quite sure whether it would look upon us as members of the household.

Notwithstanding such late hours, we had an early breakfast, and afterwards, armed with an assortment of fishing tackle, distributed ourselves at various points of the river. As a result, one or two fine, big Murray cod were on the dinner table. While cleaning one of the fish we opened the "float," or wind-bag, and spread out on a sheet of paper a piece of tissue, or "membrane," as the Kennedys called it, in which was extraordinarily well defined a complete representation of a couple of trees. The Kennedys had quite a collection of these natural history specimens, but this was the finest they had seen. The theory advanced is that the eggs are laid in a bend of the river where the shadows of the trees fall on them, resulting in an exact picture of such trees being produced in the wind-bag.

Back at the homestead we found that the table had been

lengthened and set for *nine visitors!* Several sulkies were standing in the shade of the old gum, and a confused babel of voices came from the front veranda. "The Long 'Un" stared at me, and I returned the stare with interest added; and we two Bush wanderers felt just a wee pang of mortification when it dawned upon us that we had allowed ourselves to trespass upon the good nature and hospitality of complete strangers when the latter were already expecting no less than seven other visitors. Then a laugh rippled out from the kitchen, where the owner of the sun-tanned face and equally brown arms was busy getting the meal ready.

"It's all right, you chaps," said the young lady, whose name we had discovered to be Belle, and who, before we had been at "Bonnie Doon" ten minutes, had given us to understand that she disliked the prefix "Miss." "Don't worry about the other visitors. The table's big enough, we have enough crockery, and there's more than enough tucker for the lot. We didn't let on that they were coming, thinking that you might not like to stay amongst such a crowd."

Introductions followed all round, and very soon we two townies were quite at home in that merry company of Outbackers. After dinner, one of the horses was put into the sulky, and for the first quarter of an hour, having been out of harness for some months, endeavoured to get either over or under the shafts. Repairing sundry small breakages in the harness, and the horse having lost some of its friskiness, Ewan and Tom drove us to MacFarlane's Reef, some six miles up stream, calling *en route* at Mallee Cliffs station with a piece of fresh pork.

A certain amount of interest attaches to the Reefs, as here, about ten years ago, the good ship "Shannon," a brand new river paddle-steamer on her maiden trip, struck a snag in mid-channel and sank in low water. She was raised a little later on, but shortly afterwards went down for good on the Tasmanian coast while trading between Hobart and Melbourne. We searched in vain for the wooden tablet which had been nailed to a gum to commemorate the wreck. Apparently it had been washed away in flood time; for, although the surface of the river was then twenty-five feet below the banks, all the trees on top showed watermarks several feet up their trunks. And the water had at times reached almost as high as the sheets of white tin which had been nailed to many of the trees to indicate the channel when the river overstepped its banks. As we walked across the reef it seemed as if the rocks were at last rendering useful service. Forming a natural weir, they were doing their mite to prevent the water escaping to the sea. And as we

watched the thin spray, it seemed to mock us with a cry of :
"Build your locks : build you locks !"

On the Monday we were up betimes, and harnessed "Opal" with a certain amount of reluctance at having to leave such hospitable folk. We were asked to stay a day or two longer, but thought we had already trespassed too long upon the kindness of "Bonnie Doon," and decided to push on as soon as Belle had refilled our ration-bags and made up a parcel of scones baked specially for us the previous day. This self-imposed task brought forth the remark from our cook—"The Long 'Un"—that he was getting out of practice, and would need to have his cooking lessons all over again.

The whole family assembled under the gum-tree at the side of the house to see us off—all except Belle, who sprang on to "Carbine," standing near, and riding bareback and astride, galloped on ahead to open the gate. A clasp of her slim, brown hand, and we were off. Mounting the slight sandy-ridge, we turned in our seats, and with much hat-waving and many farewell coo-ees, disappeared in the mallee and down the other side of the hill.

Leaving Mallee Cliffs homestead on our right, a few miles on we descended a long, gradual track into the "Devil's Racecourse," a natural amphitheatre formed by a terrace of sandy ridges almost completely surrounding a "box flat"—that is, a river-flat covered by box timber. Half-way across the "Racecourse," which was about a square mile in extent, we drove through a flock of Mallee Cliffs sheep which a couple of stockmen were moving into another paddock, and shortly after pulled up between a double row of tents, six in all, the camp of telegraph men engaged in relaying the wires between Mildura and Euston, and putting up new poles where necessary. Not the iron telegraph posts to be found "Closer In," nor even the long, straight wooden ones, but gnarled and knotted sandalwood poles, which sometimes could not easily be found straight enough to be of any use.

One of the things which rather surprises the City Man travelling Outback is the scarcity of telephones. A great number of the stations through which we passed were linked up by this simple time-saving and often life-saving device. But there were many which did not enjoy communication with one another. There is a well-known instance of a South Australian pastoralist to whom cost would have been but a secondary consideration doing away with the telephone system which he found established upon a property prior to his assuming control of it. In order to make sure that it

should not be surreptitiously reinstalled during his absence in town, this otherwise enterprising runholder caused a great number of the posts to be chopped down and carted away.

So many instances have been recorded during the last two or three years of valuable lives being saved by the station telephone, that I am a confirmed advocate of its erection wherever wires can be run along fences, and great distances can be spanned in this cheap manner. The life-saving element of the telephone up-country is the one about which one hears the least said, but it is in reality the most effectual argument of all. Too many of those who have been invited by their neighbours to join in erecting a telephone in their district have frequently weighed up the cost of the initial outlay in pounds, shillings, and pence, and have too often formed the opinion that there was no profit in it for them; yet, as a time-saver in a case of sickness if only such an occurrence takes place once in five years, the telephone can prove itself to be of incalculable value.

Speaking of telephones, the great stations of the interior are no longer a barren ground where the bones of lost travellers whiten the waste. Sometimes men of inexperience still imagine themselves close to the edge of tragedy. On a run above Broken Hill recently two prospectors got off the track, and believing themselves to be far from civilisation, had almost given up the ghost. Like Burke and Wills, the explorers who took the same trail so many years ago, they lay down despairingly under a tree to die, when one of them suddenly sat up with a start. "I must be going mad," he muttered, "I thought I heard a telephone." Then they both realised that it really was a telephone, that someone had fixed it to a wire close by which they hadn't previously noticed, and was conversing with some other person. "Help us, mate; we're lost, and perishing," the prospectors gasped. "Lost be hanged!" said the station overseer, flippantly. "You are not lost in a station paddock—you're only strayed. Anyway, sit down and have a smoke. I'll tell them to send out the waggonette, and you'll be in at the station in time for dinner. I must shift on now; we're getting ready to muster." The two unfortunates who were thus quietly mustered say little of their adventure. The matter-of-fact ending took all the romance out of it.

Seated under the rough structure of saplings and branches which had been erected to serve the purposes of a kitchen, we enjoyed a cup of tea with the Linesmen's cook, and a few minutes later, breasting the rise which took us out of the "Racecourse," we passed Wickett's homestead, and got

directions from a boy about fifteen years of age who was acting as coach-groom at the change-station near by.

We had lunch at a swamp where a couple of teamsters were spelling their bullocks for a few days on the long green couch-grass, which formed a pleasant contrast to the bare red soil we had just been travelling over. The teamsters were bringing a couple of loads of wool into Mildura from a station back from the river, and pressed us to stay the night at their camp. But we had to move on; if all the invitations lavished upon us had been accepted, the trip would not have been finished at this day!

One of the men was fashioning a new bullock whip out of a branch of "whip-stick" scrub. The Bullock Whip! How intensely Australian that always sounds, and what an important part it plays in Australian industry—and in the language of Outback. An article of chastisement and persuasion, it has remained unaltered throughout succeeding generations, and in this respect it differs from the stock-whip. The latter has undergone many alterations of taste and fashion—long whips with short handles, and short whips with long handles, eight strands and upwards, from the redoubtable old "gully raker" to the exaggerated thong affixed to a hunting crop. But the bullock whip still remains the same. The plain, sturdy old whip of greenhide, affixed to a well-chosen whip-stick, picked from whatever is the favourite wood in use in the district. This varies greatly. 'Ti-tree sticks are very popular, and in the north of Queensland a light scrub, locally known as myrtle, is used very often; on the Murray a particular scrub is known as whip-stick scrub. Be it whatever the user chooses, it must be about eight feet in length, tough, and flexible, requiring no trimming, the natural tapering growth of the stick selected meeting all the requirements of shape and form. With a good falling whip bent on, the bullock whip forms an irresistible weapon, and it is fearful to enter upon what a man can do with it. Although on long trips a bullock driver often rides a horse when driving, whenever a ticklish part has to be negotiated he always works on foot. It is all very well along the level Bush road to drive with the voice and the aid of a carelessly flung whip, but when real driving has to be done and the whip used properly, then the luxurious saddle must be discarded.

I do not remember ever hearing anyone speak charitably of the Australian bullock-driver. Perhaps it's because he isn't understood. He is best known by his supposed fluent profanity, but he is no more profane than other people of my acquaintance who have less cause to indulge in choice,

flowery language. And after all, if a well-bred Australian bullock likes to hear all about ancient and sacred celebrities, with whom the drivers seem to be on very familiar terms, does it not indicate that the "bullockies" must possess a certain amount of Biblical knowledge?

I've seen a lot of Australia, and have come much into contact with Nature's nobility in the Bush. Kind they all are, and for pure, unalloyed charity, the rough, good-natured bullock-driver is not one whit behind the others. He never possesses much of anything; still he always has some to spare. On one occasion I camped with a timber-hauler in the Cardiff scrub. He had drawn up for the night, and was preparing a meal when I passed. Would I join him? I would. What did the bill of fare comprise? Black tea and damper and "Tinned Dog?" Not much. Condensed milk, preserved fruit, fresh mutton, pickles, home-made bread, coffee, and a couple of enamel mugs spread lavishly on clean canvas. No ordinary bullock-driver this. A good talker, pleasant conversationalist. He talked poetry: "Henry Lawson still writing?" He talked politics: "George Reid went to England as High Commissioner, didn't he?" And lesser subjects: "Good roads," "bad roads," "the death of his old dog," "the little roan bullock," "first trip," and so on. It's only after you've been yarning two or three hours that you part company, thinking kindly of this misrepresented son of the land, and full of appreciation of the fellow-feeling that dwells so abundantly in that simple, candid character, the Australian bullock-driver.

Big teams and record loads are still features of the methods of getting produce to the railway stations in Australia. Many wool teams are almost as many days on the roads as used to be taken up on journeys from the Riverina to Melbourne in olden times. In all the States thousands of bales of wool are carted by bullock teams over the longest trips, while many horse teams cart both wool and wheat. Teams of ten to twenty horses, driven without reins, are always being met on the road to the railways, and there never was a time when teamsters made better money. Some back-loading is taken, but lighter vehicles with springs, rattled along at mail-coach pace, are becoming popular for taking stores out to townships off the railway line.

The owners and drivers of the biggest teams in the back country are becoming as notable as were the whips of Cobb & Co., when the arrival and departure of the coach was a great event, and the driver was the centre of attraction and the boss of the road. Last season some great loads of wool

were brought in, and almost every week "Bullocky Ned," or "Big Team Joe," called on the local residents to bear witness that he had broken all records. Recently a brass band was hired by a teamster to meet his largest load of wool at the outskirts of Brewarrina. The band was soon on top of the load, and music of the "cock-a-doodle-doo" variety was played up the main street, while the populace turned out to do honour to the occasion. On one occasion the "Hillston Pet" claimed the laurels. Joe Hallam, who is known in Riverina by this affectionate title, drove forty-two bullocks in his team from Hillston, on the Lachlan, to Carrathool railway station, on the line from Junee to Hay, a distance of ninety-two miles. The load was 144 bales of scoured wool, and the weight was seventeen tons. He yoked his fine team four abreast, and kept the bullocks up to their work by cracking a whip loaded with 10 lb. of shot, to give it the proper fall for cracking. The building of such a load was in itself a feat. There were five tiers of bales, ranging from twenty-seven bales on the first tier, to thirty-one bales on the fifth. The height was just sufficient to enable a man on the load to touch the telegraph wires as the team passed through Hillston.

Leaving the bullockies, we got into the coach tracks once more, and followed them up until we came to the "Kulkine" letter-box, where we had been directed to turn off at right angles and run through the horse-paddock of the old "Tarpaulin" station. We found the deserted homestead on the high bank overlooking the river-flat. It would have been an ideal camping-place, as there was plenty of good "dry" feed about, but we had come only a comparatively short distance, and "Opal," fresh after her holiday at "Bonnie Doon," seemed anxious to go on. About seven o'clock, just on sundown, we pulled up at Tarpaulin Farm, which we found being managed by the younger son of the police sergeant at Mildura. The property was a nice little compact one of 520 acres, forty of which, planted with vines, peaches, oranges, and lucerne, were irrigated by a private pumping plant. The farm was all mallee four years ago, and, like the old homestead back along the road, took its name from the fact of an old tarpaulin and hessian store and public-house having stood there in the very early days. By the time "Opal" had been turned into the little stockyard with a big bundle of fresh-cut lucerne to occupy her attention, young Carter had relaid the table for our benefit. And considering that his experience of "batching" had extended over a very few months—until his father had settled him at Tarpaulin Farm he had been on an office stool—the spread he

provided was such as to make us feel glad that we had not camped at the old homestead.

On either side of Carter's little tin shanty, and about a hundred yards away in each case, was another camp; one was occupied by a smiling German who voted Australia "a great country," and the other was the residence of a youthful Australian who was working on Tarpaulin Farm. These two took it turn and turn about to have their meals at the other fellow's camp. As the German explained, this saved a few matches every day, and also the trouble of making a fire. We joined them at supper round a big blazing log fire, and learnt that the German had been doing casual station work, but was then "dogging." In this particular district, owing to the bitter fight put up against the wild dogs (dingoes), their numbers have dwindled perceptibly, but the war of extermination is being maintained with full vigour until such time as the mournful howl of this Outback pest is no longer heard. It was a bright moonlight night, and sitting round the campfire, the German, who had been in Australia only a year or two, but had quickly accustomed himself to his new conditions, entertained us with some of his dingo exploits.

CHAPTER XIV

“ DOGS AND DOGGERS ”—THE AUSTRALIAN DINGO

THE distinguishing characteristic of Australia, the true land of marsupials, is its extreme dryness at times, and it has been supposed by physiologists that the object of the peculiar organ—known as the pouch—of these animals is to enable them to transport their young when they are obliged to traverse great distances in order to obtain the means of quenching their thirst. If no such contrivance as the pouch existed, the young would probably perish while the mother wandered about in search of water.

But no pouch was provided in the make-up of the dingo. He is erroneously called the native dog of Australia, but is merely the descendant of a few domesticated Dutch dogs which were left, in a diseased state, on the shores of Western Australia by the officers of a Dutch vessel cruising about Cape Leeuwin in 1622. The Australian climate agreed with the dogs, and, recovering from the effects of their enforced stay on board ship, they “ multiplied exceeding fast,” and in due course spread all over Australia, so that now there is hardly a pastoral district where they have not made their presence felt at some time or other. (One particular sheep station that I know of lost 180 “ jumbucks ” in one night a few months back. The tracks showed that the dingoes rounded up the flock just as sheep-dogs do, and whenever one broke away pounced upon it. The tongues were torn out, but the bodies were not touched.)

Some Outbackers will argue that the dingo’s ancestors came out with the First Fleet from England in 1788, but all students of Australian history know that when the blacks were first seen they had dogs with them. They were here before any settlement was formed, as the blacks used them for hunting before obtaining any dogs from the first settlers. Quite recently I saw a dingo running with other dogs kept by a tribe of blacks on Cooper’s Creek (South-West Queensland), and this notwithstanding that deadly enmity almost always exists between the domesticated and wild dogs. I believe

some of the coastal tribes in Queensland still keep the dingo for hunting, as also do some Northern Territory blacks.

The name "dingo" was in the early days not used further south than the Shoalhaven (N.S.W.), where the wild dog was called "mirrigang." "Dingo" is derived from the native "teingo," and "warrigal" is another form of spelling "worregal," meaning "wild dog."

Notwithstanding the employment of "doggers," the south-west corner of Queensland and the north-west corner of New South Wales are still over-run by the dogs. On a recent droving peregrination we were serenaded almost every night, and any day we did not see the animals themselves (which was not very often), we saw their fresh tracks, and any number of scalped carcasses.

Sometimes the "dogger" is independent, but in most cases he is the rabbit-poisoner employed by the station. But in either case "big money" is made. His method of working is very simple. A leg of mutton, or some other piece of fresh meat, is tied to a ten-foot rope and dragged behind the poison cart. The trail is laid as the poisoner goes on his rounds laying the rabbit-baits, consisting of pollard and phosphorus, well mixed, cut in lengths of about half an inch, and about the thickness of a cigarette, and automatically dropped into a furrow in the ground made by a piece of iron attached to the axle. At intervals, which vary according to the "thickness" of the dingoes (sometimes half a mile, sometimes a mile), the dogger places a piece of fresh meat with strychnine well rubbed in. The dingo, prowling round at night, will not be long in getting to the scent, and will follow it up until he comes to the first "bait." After devouring the poisoned meat, certain internal sensations will make him set out for the nearest waterhole as fast as his legs can carry him. Very likely he will die before he gets there, as the doggers are careful to lay the baits as far as possible from water. (Mr. Dingo may expire immediately after having a drink, and fall into the water. It does not matter much if the waterhole is a big one—but there are a great many small holes Outback.) Or he may have a fit after drinking, recover, travel until his strength has gone, and then have another fit. I have never known a dog live after the second fit. It is quite easy, when following their tracks, to see where they have had the first.

Each station is represented on the nearest Marsupial Board, usually by the storekeeper. When a station hand exhibits to him the scalp of a dingo, joined to the tail by a strip of skin cut along the animal's back, the sum of 7s. 6d. is placed to his credit, and once a quarter a voucher is sent



AUSTRALIAN BUSH GIANTS.

in to the Secretary of the Board, and in due course the employee receives his cheque. In addition to this, the station owner generally makes each 7s. 6d. up to £1—that is, allows him 12s. 6d. for each dingo scalp. The amounts vary in some districts, but £1 is the usual full-price paid for each dog. It is absolutely necessary to produce the scalp and tail joined together. If a dogger finds a dead dingo in a waterhole which he considers too far gone to handle, it is no use to merely report the find. Some other station-hand may come along afterwards, and not being quite so squeamish obtain the scalp and tail. A man's hands will smell for days after handling a deceased dingo—even if it has been dead only a few minutes—no matter how hard you scrub with soap, hot water and carbolic.

The dingo of North Australia can be distinguished from his brother of the south by his courageous bearing and somewhat smaller size. He always carries his bushy tail over his back, and is every ready to attack anything, whilst the southern dog carries his tail low, slinks along like a fox, and is easily frightened. The colour varies, the black variety, with white breast, though now somewhat scarce, being found in Western Queensland along with the red, yellow, and brindle.

The dingo never barks, but howls like a wolf, snaps like any other angry dog, and snarls. He learns to bark when associated with domestic dogs, but his bark is never perfect. Many of those which roam at large, and are considered to be wild specimens, are the progeny of domestic dogs which have associated with wild ones—hence, in some degree, the variation in the colour. There is abundant proof that dingoes entice away domestics at certain seasons, just as brumbies entice mares from stations. The howl of the dingo is one of the most mournful noises on earth. It is seldom uttered during the daytime, but at nights (and especially on moonlight nights) it may be heard in the distance for the greater part of the hours when the traveller is most anxious for sleep. A peculiar thing about the whine is that the first is apparently miles away, and the answer to it, another quavering note, slightly more shrill, seems close at hand. Is it illusion or actual distance? is a question that is often discussed round the camp fire. If dingoes come near the camp, a shot fired at them will send them scampering away; but if they are a few hundred yards off (quite close enough for six or seven of them to be an intolerable nuisance) they take no notice of the report. I do not know what induces them to set up this howl about a camp. Perhaps the smell of food attracts them. Although they are noisy in their leisure moments, they hunt in silence.

Somewhat resembling the wolf in colour and size, but more cowardly and not so ferocious, the dingo has a fondness apart from sheep's tongues, for the smaller and easily-obtained prey, such as kangaroo rats, bandicoots, and opossums. Dingoes prefer to eat only what they kill themselves, and will not touch a dead body, or attack a full-grown kangaroo, or a human being, unless very hungry and sure of their numbers; although I have heard of two mauling a helpless man who had been thrown from his horse and received a broken arm and leg.

When hunting emus the novice dog always makes for part of the bird's body. If he is lucky enough to survive the tearing, ripping kicks he is sure to get for such an unwise proceeding, he will in future make for the neck. Once he gets a grip of this, all he has to do is to lag behind, which brings the emu over on to its back, and the bird's wonderfully powerful legs and claws can then do no harm. The throttling process does not take long. In a few minutes the bird's legs, which have been cleaving the air at a terrific rate, slow down, and finally stop. The Australian emu will soon be as extinct as the New Zealand moa, but this is a method of extermination not often witnessed by human eyes, and very little known. The actual chase is seen very seldom, but the feathers, the dog tracks, and last, but not least, the bones, picked as clean as only a dingo can pick them (not even excepting the crows), tell the tale.

I have only once seen a big kangaroo killed by dingoes. One afternoon, just before I hobbled my horse and camped for the night, I saw, away in the distance, a pack which had evidently just started their prey. They came straight towards me at a great pace, the 'roo making frantic efforts to escape. It made a perfectly straight run, and never once attempted to double. It had not gone more than three-quarters of a mile before the dingoes were upon it. Two of them seized it by the throat, the others behind—one by the root of the tail. They had it down in an instant, killing it far more quickly and skilfully than I ever saw kangaroo dogs kill one. This happened at a distance of about 150 yards from where I was, and the dingoes proceeded to tear their prey to pieces without noticing my presence. When, however, I approached, they retired to a distance, howling wildly. I have never known one to attack an "old man" kangaroo.

Old doggers will tell you that a pair of dogs, or, at most, a family of six or seven, all arrogate to themselves the sole right of hunting over a certain district, and will resent the intrusion of others of their ilk, except at certain seasons of the year.

They often fight savagely amongst themselves, and I have seen trapped, poisoned, and shot dogs which bore the marks of former frays. One old dogger, who knows more about dingoes than anything else, told me: "At any other time I should have been reluctant to taste such stuff, but once, when there was nothing else between me and Heaven but a dingo, I thoroughly enjoyed the meal I made off it."

To those who have not witnessed the death of a dingo, stories respecting the tenacity of life shown by these animals would appear utterly incredible. Although the following anecdote will very probably cause a smile of incredulity to overspread the face of some readers, they may rest assured that it is perfectly true. My informant hunted and caught a dingo, and, as he thought, killed him. He then skinned the animal, the neck and head being untouched. The carcase was left on the ground. My friend returned to the spot some two or three hours afterwards, and looked about for the body, to see whether the eagle-hawks had commenced their feast. To his utter astonishment, it had disappeared, and he found that the dog had crawled into a hollow log some yards away from the place where it had been skinned. He immediately dragged the animal out and cut its throat. The same man was once out with five dogs, who caught a large dingo. The little pack did their best to kill it, in which occupation they were assisted by their owner, who belaboured the brute with a sapling. When he appeared to be dead, he was deprived of his tail, my friend intending to keep it as a trophy. The operation seemed to revive the animal, for he got up and made off, and it was only after another long chase that he was finally despatched. "Every dog has his day," and some twelve months ago a Brisbane firm discovered that even a dingo has its good qualities. Out of his hide they commenced to manufacture beautiful bags and boxes, wallets, cigarette and cigar boxes, purses, workboxes, jewel-cases, and, most novel of all, a "surfer's companion," a dainty article intended to hold bathing suit and wet towel in a water-proof case. The flexibility and durability of the skin won for the goods instant popularity.

CHAPTER XV

WE LEAVE THE MURRAY AT EUSTON

WE were on the track again very early next morning, bound for Euston, ninety miles away by river, but only eighteen by the coach route, which almost the whole distance from "Bonnie Doon," a distance of about sixty miles, was what is known in Outback coaching parlance as a "cut line," about thirty feet wide, running through the mallee.

A couple of miles from Tarpaulin Farm we called in at the homestead on "Ki Downs," a station of about 50,000 acres. "Old man" McGinty combined the duties of overseer of the sheep-run with those of manager of an extensive eucalyptus oil factory. The two buildings, homestead and factory, represent a large amount of capital. This is the factory that turns out what is perhaps the best-known brand of eucalyptus oil on the market—Bosisto's "Parrot" brand. It is fitted up with four immense iron vats, each capable of holding four and a half tons of mallee leaves. When eighteen months old leaves are used, each vat produces nine gallons of raw oil, and can turn out forty gallons per day. The oil is worth 6s. 9d. per gallon until it gets to the city, where it is refined and eventually sold at one shilling per bottle—quite a small sum to pay to get rid of a bad cold or cough! The factory boiler has a history, for it was in the engine-room of the river-steamer "Rodney" when that vessel was burnt to the water's edge on the Darling twenty years ago.

Leaving "Ki Downs," for a short distance our course lay through dense bushy clumps of beautiful green mallee suckers, just sprouting up after a recent fire; and then the straggling, monotonous "big mallee" took its place. Later on we entered a forest of graceful, sea-green Colonial Pine, and here we left the coach track to call in at "Prill Park," a selection standing some three miles back from the road. The homestead, a rambling, old-fashioned weather-board structure, half hidden by an immense grape vine, and opening out into a pretty garden and orchard, took its name from

Prill Lake, a shallow sheet of water a little distance to the rear. It was a lake merely by courtesy, for according to the blacks—who had at one time been very thick about this part—the first and only time it had ever been full was away back in 1870.

The usual settlement of outbuildings—stables, implement sheds, feed-rooms, shearing-sheds, etc.—were scattered round the homestead, and a gravel tennis court was well shaded by a few rows of pepper trees. At holiday time that tennis court presents a very animated appearance, for then the daughters of the owner are home from college in the city, and after a day with the boys out among the horses and cattle, spend the cool of the early evening in a game which is very popular in the Bush.

Prill Park is famous for its draught horses, and the owner, Mr. Leslie, was very glad of the opportunity of showing off the fine points of one of his stud Clydesdales, a magnificent animal imported from New Zealand at a very high figure.

After lunch we pushed on to Euston, a township consisting of about twenty scattered buildings—two public-houses, two stores, brick police station, post office, and school, with a couple of galvanised iron churches. The importance of Euston, one of the oldest towns in New South Wales, doesn't seem to have grown with its age. It is known chiefly as the place where the ill-fated Burke and Wills crossed the Murray on the exploring trip from whence they never returned, and as the site of some of the biggest aboriginal corroborrees ever known to have taken place on the river. It is said that on several occasions over two thousand blacks gathered at this spot, and while that fact may be of interest when the Australian Aborigine has become as extinct as the Tasmanian black, it has certainly not been the means of developing the town. However, a railway is approaching Euston in sections on the Victorian side, and no doubt the town will also in course of time be connected with the lines that must sooner or later run right across the western half of New South Wales, and link up Condobolin with Broken Hill. And the townfolk are "hanging on" in the hope that Euston will share in the general prosperity which in the natural order of events must follow the opening up of such a vast area of "back country."

From the post office steps we could see the deep fringe of gum-trees down on the river bank. "The last of the dear old Murray," I muttered somewhat sorrowfully to "The Long 'Un." Without a word we sprang into the sulky, and

though it meant extra work for "Opal," we drove down to have a last glimpse of "The Big Trickle," as the river is affectionately called by the big-hearted dwellers on its banks who for the past couple of weeks had dispensed such a big trickle of hospitality to man and beast.

A couple of miles out of Euston we drew in at Euston Downs homestead, and received a warm welcome from "Scotty" Kilpatrick, the owner, who, coming out of the garden as we pulled up, called out, "Give your horse as much feed as she wants, either green or dry, and then go and have a cup of tea." A quarter of an hour later he looked in at the men's kitchen and invited us to stroll along with him to the stockyards, where the men were commencing on the work of branding a mob of calves that had just been mustered.

This operation was of the greatest interest to "The Long 'Un," who had never before been on a station when such work was being done. First of all, the calves were separated from their mothers and drafted into a smaller yard. Here they were lassoed and one after another pulled up to the rails. "Lend a hand there, Jack," sang out "Old Scotty." And Jack lent a hand. As each calf was thrown, "The Long 'Un" sat on a long sapling which rested across the neck of the animal and under the bottom rail. This helped to keep the calf from struggling while the men "earmarked" it by cutting a V-shaped piece of flesh out of the left ear. At the same time another stockman was busy on the animal's rump. First of all, he would dab it over with liquid fat. Then a new-chum—an immigrant only recently arrived from the Old Country—would hand him the branding-irons from the little fire outside. As the smell of burnt flesh and singed hair came to our nostrils, the calf emitted an awful roar which was immediately taken up by the distracted mothers, who were doing their best to clamber through or under the rails which separated them from their offspring. More fat was dabbed on to the branded initials—"W.K."—and the men sprang clear of the infuriated calf, which generally charged the nearest person as soon as it got on to its four legs.

We were up at break of day to see the men start out for another day's mustering. One or two fresh horses were being used, and the fun commenced as soon as they were caught and saddled. Apparently they had not had a strap on them since the previous mustering, and as soon as they were girthed their backs were humped as a warning to their riders. However, the stockmen didn't worry much over such trifles, and after a few solid "roots" the horses settled down to business. It is remarkable, however, how exciting

some horses do make it at times, and expert riders though the men be, the horses are very often too good for them. Even after having been broken for years the same thing happens. The trouble is that their education is only in part, and just when they begin to settle down they are turned out, and when yarded again they are not at all amenable to discipline and hard work.

The actual mustering is most exciting and is often fraught with the greatest danger. This is particularly the case with new chums, and they are well advised to steer clear of such work until they have obtained a good deal of experience in branches attended with much less risk. The greatest danger arises from the thickness of the timber, and with a horse that is inclined to be at all hot-headed the danger is considerably increased. It is the hardest thing in the world for a new chum to accustom himself to let a stock-horse have its head when mustering cattle. A good stock-horse is often a better stockman than its rider. I have taken part in a great many branches of sport, but I have not yet found any that requires more condition than a day's mustering. But with all the strenuous exertion entailed, a day so spent has many redeeming features to be experienced in no other work or sport.

Our host intimated that we could stay as long as we liked, but if we were determined to push on that day, he suggested that we should wait until after lunch. The next decent camp was twenty-four miles off; there was nothing of any particular interest between the two places; and we might just as well travel over this long stage after the sun had lost some of its midday fierceness.

This gave us an opportunity of looking over the station buildings, which, on this particular property, included a wool-scour and boiling-down works. Altogether they formed a settlement almost as big as Euston. With the exception of the homestead, which was comparatively new, all the buildings bore the signs of old age, for the station had been formed as far back as '46.

"Government House" overlooked a billabong, perhaps half a mile long and a few hundred yards wide. "The Bung" was fed by the Murray, some distance away, the water being held back by sand-bags at a narrow part. When the river is "up" the waters submerge this barrier, and moor—one might almost say to the front veranda posts, the homestead is so close. In the middle of "The Bung" was a low-lying miniature island, with a few gums standing up bravely, and with a green marshy growth round the water's edge.

The whole billabong seemed to be alive with pelicans, divers, ducks, blue cranes, white ibis, and hundreds of swans which were sailing majestically along. Never in all my travels have I seen such a collection of waterfowl. There was an unwritten law on Euston Downs that every bird should be allowed to remain unmolested, and there were dire penalties waiting for any unfortunates who fired a shot within hearing distance of "The Bung." Mr. Kilpatrick, an ardent bird-lover, accompanied us on a stroll round his bird sanctuary, and going through the Bush, the chatter of the garrulous honey-eater (sometimes called the minah or soldier-bird), the plaintive cry of the chough, and the noise of the "twelve apostles" was to be heard on every side. The neat little red-capped robin, and that friendliest of all Bush songster—the "Willie Wagtail"—and the singing lark were also fairly common.

In other parts of the country we were much struck with the poverty and often the entire absence of bird-life where it had once been prolific. I suppose the so-called "dreadful Australian boy" and the advance of settlement are in some measure responsible, but I believe the poison cart more than anything else accounts for the rapid diminution of our Australian birds. Farmers and squatters generally attempt to poison the rabbits when bunny's particular food is scarce, but this is usually the time when bird food is also scarce, and consequently some of the poison is eaten by the birds. Poisoning the water for rabbits is also a death-dealing practice to the birds. This also is done in hot, dry weather, when the birds as well as the rabbits have a big thirst. There is no doubt many parts of Australia are rapidly becoming denuded of bird life, and in consequence much of their charm and beauty for the native born. The agriculturists and pastoralists are also making a rod for their own backs in destroying so many of their feathered friends—natural enemies of all insect-pests.

It is only when the native Australian birds are becoming rare that they are appreciated. The slaughter of them in past years is a matter for deep regret, and the best that can be done now is to take care of the survivors, and prevent them from becoming extinct. The mischievous habits of the white cockatoo and of the rest of the parrot tribe inspired a hatred of most birds in the minds of the settlers. The Australian boys were brought up to throw sticks and stones at the birds in a senseless endeavour to kill them. In later years the pea-rifle and other deadly toys gave the birds a poor chance of remaining near settlements. It is only in recent years that the children, and "grown-ups" as well,

have been taught to admire the native birds, and encourage the harmless ones to remain in the neighbourhood of their dwellings. Much has been done in the schools in different parts of Australia to encourage the children to protect the birds, and even to feed them, and it is pleasing to see the good work being done in this connection by the Gould League of Bird Lovers, who have a staunch supporter in the person of "Old Scotty" Kilpatrick, of Euston Downs. At some of the Bush schools the wild birds are fed regularly by the children with crumbs from their midday meal, and it is surprising how tame they have become.

At one time the books used in Australia schools taught the children that the native birds did not sing, the bees did not sting, and the leaves of the native trees turned their edges to the sun. The children were stupefied by the "information," but as some of them did not know what conditions prevailed in other lands they were confused. Fortunately more reliable books are now provided, and the children can understand them, and have more confidence in what they are taught. As a matter of fact, the common Australian magpie is acknowledged to be one of the finest song birds in the world. Its rich, melodious note is one of the joys of the Bush, and few of those who call themselves sportsmen have the heart to raise their guns to such a bird. Those who have opportunities of being in the Bush at dawn cannot fail to be charmed by the variety of notes from the deep cooing of the pigeon to the shrill piping of the multitude of smaller birds.

Loaded up with replenished ration-bags and grapes and other fruits picked from the extensive garden at the side of Euston Downs homestead, we resumed our journey shortly after lunch, and travelling at a very easy pace out of consideration for "Opal," reached Abbott's Tank, twenty-four miles on, by seven o'clock. Here was a small settlement of tents; two were occupied as living apartments by a couple of young selectors, the third was the residence of the groom in charge of the coach-horses, while the fourth was used as a dining room. At the rear of the camp was a Bush feed-house and harness-room, and still further away was a rough stockyard and stable. We were glad of that stockyard. The camp was situated on a block of 200,000 acres, resumed for Closer Settlement purposes out of Canally station. The selectors had not had time to erect any fences on their 20,000 acre portion, and for the time being the road was their front boundary. There was not a vestige of grass to be seen, and as I've had some experience as "horse-tailer" for drovers, I knew better than to turn one horse loose where in

its search for feed it could wander for forty miles without encountering a fence.

The night was a bit chilly, and after supper we stretched ourselves out under the stars in front of a big log fire. In between the yarns we were entertained with various gramophone selections, the groom having quite an enormous range of records to choose from.

The gramophone is perhaps the most popular musical instrument in the Bush. At one time the concertina was most in favour, but the bellows-music nowadays is coming in a very bad second. Even the mouth-organ hangs on better; you see, when you're out riding behind sheep, or trudging along with your swag across your shoulders, you can while away many an hour with the handy "horgan," whereas even a folded concertina can't be slipped into a shirt-pocket. Often the gramophone and mouth-organ meet and divide the honours. They did at a Bush dance I had the good fortune to be invited to. The floor was a bit bumpy, but no one seemed to mind that. Those who preferred the slow movement stuck to the mouth-organ; the gramophone was for those who liked their dancing fast and furious. "Our own correspondent" afterwards described it as "one of the most enjoyable functions ever held in the district, the music deserving especial notice."

But even the old-fashioned concertina has not quite been relegated to the lumber-room, as witness a recent Bush invitation:—

The pleasure of the Misses girl Browns and Mr. Boy Browns is requested at the wedding of.....to..... on February 26th. N.B.—Ask Tim to bring his concertina.

About eleven o'clock the big four-wheeled bi-weekly coach rolled up on its way from Balranald to Euston. There was but one passenger, a slim girl of about twenty—a school teacher on her way to a new appointment. Of a gay, vivacious temperament, she had kept the mailman amused with anecdotes of Bush school children, and along the straight stretches of the road had proved herself an accomplished driver. The selectors provided steaming hot tea to the midnight visitors, while we helped the groom to change horses, the old team, tired and thirsty after their long twenty-six mile stage, making off of their own accord to suck up great draughts of water from the tank near by. A cry of "All aboard," a handshake all round, and once more the passenger was on the box-seat beside the driver. A crack of the whip, a shouted word of endearment to the fresh team and the coach disappeared in a whirl of dust and rumbled away into the night:

CHAPTER XVI

COACHING IN OUTBACK AUSTRALIA

COACHES were first introduced into Australia by a Mr. Hart, of Sydney, who, in November, 1830, commenced to ply English "hackneys" for hire in Sydney and Hobart. But coaching in the sense of inland communication, long before railways were ever thought of in Australia, was first conducted by strong spring carts, drawn by a single horse, or by two horses driven tandem fashion, or with one horse fastened to an outrigger on the right of the shafts. These "coaches" were used until the great gold discoveries in the early 'fifties necessitated something better than spring carts. The English style of coach was too top-heavy for unmade roads, and a long, low coach, built on the model of the Mexican *estafette*, and similar to those employed in California, was introduced by an English gentleman named Twisden Hodges, who had at one time represented Rochester in the House of Commons. His example was followed by an enterprising American named Cobb. The latter (who, by the way, has had all the credit for the establishment of coaches in Australia) started a line of conveyances from Melbourne to Castlemaine shortly after the gold discoveries. He had the spirit to buy good horses, to get first-class vehicles, to employ good Yankee "whips"; and "Cobb's coaches," as they were termed, were soon running on most of the roads then in existence in Australia and New Zealand. In less than ten years Cobb returned to his native land with a fair sized fortune; but the coaching company retains to this day the title of "Cobb & Co.," and though the firm has long ceased operations in the other States, it still runs a perfect network of coaches all over Queensland (having Charleville as their chief centre), and "Cobb" is a household word in Bananaland.

Those persons who do a great deal of travelling "per coach" consider that they have a grievance. Of course, most, if not all, of the "lines" are kept alive by the mail contracts, and seeing that the various coach proprietors

make a big thing out of the Postal Department, and the coaches have to run to a time-table, even though there is not a single passenger—to the Outbacker, the usual fare, 6d. (sixpence) per mile, seems rather extortionate. Of course, on the very long lines some reduction is made, but it is too small for the company to notice it, and not big enough for the passenger to feel the benefit.

The majority of the coaches which run between such places as have not yet been connected by rail are constructed on the American principle. In addition to the mails, they carry ten or twelve passengers, and about two tons of luggage. They are very strongly built, the body being borne on leather "thoroughbraces," which stand any amount of hard usage. No coach with steel springs could carry such a weight over the rough roads and still rougher river-beds. The coaches have no glass windows or doors, canvas blinds being let down in wet weather. To be jolted inside a crowded, unlighted coach, with all the blinds down, on hard seats with low and still harder backs, is almost as unpleasant as to be drenched on the box-seat. The most comfortable seat is to be obtained by sitting well forward in a loose attitude. It is a very risky thing to rest your head on the canvas blinds on some of the older vehicles. A sudden jolt is likely to send your head through the canvas on to the back wheel.

Most of the coaches are drawn by five active, well-bred, strong horses, the reverse of "clothes-horses." Those used as "polers" for the heavy work are somewhat bigger than the small, light, leaders, who "make the pace." The horses do splendid work, considering they are "hard-fed" only in times of drought. They go at a great pace over smooth and level roads, but in consequence of the many unbridged streams and the hilly country and sandy plains, their average, on the majority of the "lines," is only about six or seven miles an hour.

The coach-drivers, for the rough roads provided Outback, are probably the finest in the world. It is simply extraordinary how these men will remember every bad place—hole, "gutter," stump, rock, tree, root, "boggy" patch—for a stretch of perhaps fifty miles, so as to be able to avoid them on a dark night. They know the depth of every drop of water they have to pass through, and know also where a teamster is likely to "go down deep." It is not as if the road always remained the same. Storms and floods are constantly washing out fresh holes, shifting patches of sand, and blowing down fresh trees, so that the drivers always have something fresh to remember. It is possible for the

character of the road to completely change before the driver's return journey, but he runs the chance of this with perfect equanimity.

On a pitch-dark night there is something awesome in the way the drivers slam through the "Great Bush," along what is by courtesy called a road. An occasional log, or a fallen tree across the track, or a rabbit burrow at the side in dangerous proximity to the horses' hoofs and the wheels, break the monotony of the journey. If a passenger has time to do anything but hold on he will be greatly interested. At every bend in the road, the glare of the lamp on either side (or the light of the moon—better than any lamp yet invented—candle, oil, or acetylene) will reveal some obstacle or other which the driver avoids with wonderful dexterity. Naturally, he sometimes comes to grief; but not nearly so often as would seem inevitable to anyone who was unacquainted with the capabilities of his ilk. A spade, an axe, a length of greenhide, make him independent of any catastrophe short of a wheel "crumbling up," or meeting a "banker," and when the latter happens there is nothing to do but sit down and wait patiently for the coach coming the opposite way, or until the stream goes down sufficiently to cross. Barring accidents, and "weather permitting," they keep fairly good time, though they always make a point of being just a little late. The owner thinks that if they get in right to the time-table, the postal authorities will want the contract time cut down. So if there are no cantankerous passengers on board the "Billy" is boiled several times during the journey, and a chat is indulged in at most of the wayside camps.

It is wonderful how and where everything is packed on some of the coaches. Mail-bags, luggage, boxes of butter, sides of bacon, barrels of beer, and a multitude of small parcels from various city firms. They are stowed away in the "boot" (the big covered-in space under the box-seat), in the "cradle" on top, under the seats in the "kennel" (inside), and on the "rack" behind. Anywhere and everywhere. As with the baggage, so with the passengers. Inside and outside, front and behind, they pack themselves as comfortably as they can. And all would share a little additional discomfort between them rather than cause one or two to wait for the next coach—perhaps two days, perhaps two weeks, later, by complaining that the vehicle was carrying more than its licensed number. And if the last-comer decides to admire the scenery sitting on the splash-board, instead of waiting for the next coach, there is no fear of the horses kicking unless they meet a camel team. I have

often had a fine, though somewhat chilly, view of the landscape from the lofty position taken up on the mail-bags on the roof. I remember one journey from Broken Hill to White Cliffs (New South Wales). From "The Hill" to the one-time-famous silver town of Euriowie, a distance of fifty miles, I hung up there, lying at full length, with feet tucked under one rope, and knuckles getting scraped by the bags under the other. And as we passed under the telegraph wires, I had to burrow down into the bags to prevent parting company with the coach. (For out in this timberless district, where firewood is almost as expensive as coal brought from hundreds of miles away, short sixteen or eighteen feet iron poles are used.)

There are three "classes" in coaching. "First class" is helping to lash the horses from the box. Second is walking alongside with the whip while the driver handles the reins, and third is—helping to push the coach from behind! And it is "no class" at all if you do not share the discomforts with a good grace. On boggy or sandy roads each of the three "classes" is a free lesson in the art of cultivating patience.

If you are travelling on an "empty"—that is, a coach returning to town from the outpost of civilisation—you have the choice of riding in the "kennel," on the "rack," up in the "cradle," on the box-seat with the driver, or curled up on the mail-bags in the "boot." The latter is the warmest of the lot, but it is very awkward if you have to leave it every five or six miles to open a gate. On one occasion, our approach to Wilcannia brought forth the remark from a fellow-passenger, a squatter, that on a previous trip to that town, he was curled up asleep in the "boot," when the driver "with malicious aforethought," or having forgotten he was there, bundled in a big, heavy William-goat that he had to convey to the show then being held!

The drivers are fond of getting into town racing at full speed, and in the lead of some other vehicle if possible. I remember one who can tell some good stories anent the days when he used to drive the last stage of the Blank to Blanky "line," while the Western Australian goldfields were still in their infancy. The horses would be just jogging along, and the passengers (of whom there were many in those golden days) were beginning to have enough of it, when all of a sudden those on the roof would notice another conveyance coming along behind, and catching up. This was sufficient to arouse Blankety into activity. The horses were lashed out of their "snail's gallop." As the coach went bumping and bounding along over all sorts of obstacles, the



MUSTERING CATTLE.



THE AUTHOR BOILS THE BILLY WITH THE COACH-DRIVER.

passengers would be too excited by the exhilarating race to take any notice of the risks they ran of being overturned. As Blankety says, it is hard to imagine in these days of up-to-date coaches that such speed could have been got out of such lumbering old vehicles. As soon as the second driver realised that it was a race, he urged his own horses into a gallop, and as the buildings of the town came into sight, the race became more exciting than ever. The dash of both vehicles up the main-and-only street provided a pleasant and novel finale to a tedious journey.

There is no competition amongst the drivers for any particular "line." They do not change very often, but the horses are continually being sent from one stage to another. Some horses suit some stages better than others. The weaker horses are put on to the easy stages, and so on. But wherever they are stationed, they are worked in the one team as much as possible. As soon as any horse shows signs of weakness he is given a spell (on the owners' own station, Bulla, near Cobar, in the case of Morrison Bros., the big mail contractors in the far west of New South Wales.)

The drivers on all the "lines" use practically the same terms to the horses. "Get hold of it, then." "Get up, then." "Keep in the collar, then." And when nearing a town, "Save a bit for a streak, then." It is a habit of theirs to always affix "then" to their urgings and pleadings and commands.

Most of the horses not bred on the coach proprietor's own properties are named after the men or stations they are purchased from. On one of Morrison's "Hill" lines, you will find "Queenslander," "Afghan," "Policeman," "Barclay," "Willis," "Jones," and "Dewson." An original idea, certainly, but no doubt this rule will be departed from if ever a horse has to be called, say, "Younghusband"!

The horses are cunning in the matter of lights and shadows. When the lamps on a dark night throw a strong beam of light ahead, a lazy horse sees the shadow of the driver's arm as he raises his whip. The horse immediately sets out at a faster pace, and the arm is lowered without punishment. When the lamps are not lit, he cannot see the shadow, and gets his deserts.

The "change stations" are from fifteen to thirty miles apart—all according to the feed and water—and five fresh horses await the coach at every one. At most of these "changes" a meal, rough, but wholesome, can be had at a cost of two shillings. The coach passenger is surprised to find that although he may sit down to a meal at an Outback "pub" with a man travelling in any other manner, he has

to pay just double what the latter pays. The two shillings is not for what is eaten (which very likely doesn't cost two-pence), but for the "inconvenience." The hotel-keepers must always be ready to accommodate coach travellers with a fair meal at any hour of the day or night, no matter how the coach is running; but the occasional traveller has to take his chance of getting anything at all. The drivers have their meals free at most of the places along the road. The bugle is always blown as the coach approaches any place. If the coach gets to a "pub" just at meal-time, its passengers are attended to first—for His Majesty's mail must not be delayed. The trains to the great "Inside" world never wait for coaches—though the latter always wait for the trains.

On some "lines" where the coaches are not run right throughout the night, in the absence of hotel accommodation the traveller has to stay a few hours at a groom's place. But you don't always have the good sleep you are expecting. If you are the first to retire, the structural peculiarities of the Bush residence are observed *after* you get to bed, not before. You are awakened by voices and a light shining through the wall. You realise that the "walls" are of bagging. And the groom's family are determined to discuss to the fullest extent all the news brought by the driver. You may have spent several practically sleepless nights on the coach (I once spent six nights on end!), but you can't say anything. Every man's home is his castle, even though it is only a bag one! And anyhow, a grumbling passenger will find that a stationary coach is not as bad as a moving one to sleep in. But sometimes old "pubs," the licences for which have not been renewed, are utilised for the grooms, and sometimes old boundary-riders' huts; while in at least one case I found an unmarried groom whose residence consisted of bushes.

In coaching vernacular, a "cut line" is a cleared space through the Bush, generally about a hundred feet in width, in the middle of which the "cut track" is to be found. A straight "cut line" of just sixty miles runs into Cobar (New South Wales). The coach makes a little deviation once or twice, but the original "cut line" is there, and from the frequent rises one can see "miles ahead and miles behind," as Driver Charlie Matthews would put it. The effect produced by a seemingly endless line, stretching as straight as a die for miles right throughout the day is of a most depressing character. Such monotonous "cut lines" make some men dislike driving in the day-time. They have an objection to looking so far ahead, and reviewing things so far behind, as one driver put it. But no matter how monotonous the track is, most drivers prefer to be without passengers when their

horses are tired. They have a right to be proud of their accomplishments with the "ribbons," and cannot do themselves justice when the horses are "blown." By the way, the driver will tell you that this particular line of sixty miles into Cobar was not cleared solely by the axeman. The latter were greatly assisted by new-chum drivers as they drove in and out between the trees!

If you are so ill-advised as to take a coach journey after a day or two of only moderately heavy rain, you will enjoy the experience of travelling when the ground is in its worst possible condition. This condition might well be described as between dust and wet mud, a sort of paste, into which the vehicle buries itself sometimes to the axle. And if any rocks or tree roots are buried just deep enough for the wheels to touch them, your first quarter of an hour will be quite exciting. I remember one dark, cold night in the middle of winter, when the jolting and bumping was so great at times as to almost shake off the outside passengers. The coach pursued its way across what looked like a vast expanse of plain, but the darkness was so great that it was difficult to distinguish anything. To make matters worse, the clouds which had been gathering all the afternoon burst, and off and on for the next hour and a half the rain pelted in our faces. We experienced no slight feeling of relief when at length the lights of the change-station were seen ahead.

The comfort or discomfort of passengers rests to a certain extent with the driver. If he is careful, he can avoid deep ruts by "quartering"—that is, simply going "astride" of them, as it were. Part of the training of the "body lead" (the middle horse of the three leaders) is to keep always in the rut which is being "quartered." If the "body lead" keeps "side-stepping," it means harder work for the driver, it is harder work for the horses—and it is harder work for the passengers to keep a dignified and comfortable seat.

"Natural roads" are the routes from place to place made by travellers picking out the firmest ground. But fencing is going on to such an extent in the more settled districts that the vehicles are limited to a somewhat narrow space, and the only track is often spoiled by all the traffic going along it, and the impossibility of turning off to new ground when it gets at all worn.

Every traveller, except perhaps the "bullocky" and his slow-moving team, must get out of the "cut track" as the coach approaches. The "cut track" is a track cut by the wheels of the vehicles. By keeping to this, the driver is always sure of finding a good "bottom." In some

"country" there is no good "bottom" on either side of the "natural road," and in wet weather the coach would soon be bogged. When the teamsters' waggons "cut down deep" (to keep to coaching terms), the wheels leave intimation to that effect by turning the soil outwards. Drivers are never frightened of holes full of water, so long as they have good "bottoms." They have a habit of looking back to see the track they are "cutting."

If the coach happens to get bogged where extra horses are available, drivers never put them in. The vehicle would probably be dragged to pieces. But if a "bullocky" is within coo-ee, the ladies are first lifted out and carried across the mud—and the coach is moved by the choicest expressions the "bullocky" can bring into play!

In some of the "closer-in" districts—around the big towns—metalling is supposed to be carried out. But metal is not always laid down. Certainly some stones are, but they are generally so big that the passengers perform a series of gymnastic feats in their efforts to maintain an even balance as the coach bumps over them. Driving on smooth turf is perhaps the most delightful form of coaching. Driving across creeks with "Gentle Annies" (the coach-drivers and "bullocky's" term for a stiff pull up a steep sandy ridge) on the other side is very trying to the nerves of elderly lady passengers, and to their eyes looks very perilous indeed. However, driver and horses are generally equal to the occasion, although at each fresh crossing the ladies think, if they don't always say, that the coach "will get stuck *this* time."

In "gatey country," "gate watches" are arranged between the male passengers. At night-time the man "on watch" will clamber back to his seat, and be just nicely off to sleep again, when the driver will once more sing out, "Gate, gate, oh!" So that, what with gates, stops at "changes" and homesteads, and stops to receive or deliver mails at a biscuit tin or butter box nailed to a tree or some other portion of the landscape, the traveller gets only patchy sleep. It is a sort of "unwritten law" that if a male passenger is on the coach, he must open the gates, and very few men refuse to do so. Many a swagman earns a long "lift" by attending to the gates. Another unwritten law is that all gates be left as found. But when a driver has no male passenger and a team of flighty, restless horses, this cannot be carried out. And if the driver is by himself, he often finds it convenient to consider his horses flighty. For it is a very monotonous proceeding to first of all tie the reins to the brake, get down and open the gate, climb up, drive

through the gate, tie up again, and then clamber down once more and shut the gate behind him. Do this a dozen times in sixty miles within twelve hours, and it tells on the nerves. And the gate opening is monotonous if there be only one passenger. I speak from experience. On one trip, for six consecutive days and nights I opened every gate we passed through. If the gate is left open, the boundary-rider will close it on his next inspection of the fence. In the meantime, no sheep or wild cattle will go through it, but horses and tame cattle will. After a few nights of "gate watch," your eyes will begin to wear a parboiled look. The passenger naturally tries to get what sleep he can, and the continual opening and shutting of his eyes in the keen night air brings on a somewhat beery look.

Some of the gates have histories. Five miles out of White Cliffs is a gate where a passenger was shot in the arm as he opened it, and the coach was robbed of a valuable "parcel" of opal. Then again, between White Cliffs and Wilcannia is "Dead Man's Gate," where three suicides have taken place. One man strangled himself, another took poison, and the third, after closing the gate, cleared off into the scrub and shot himself. Is it any wonder the boundary-rider finds the gate open on every round? Another gate has a burnt post which, in the dark, looks like a man standing up. One night a half-drunk passenger opened this gate. Seeing the post, he said, "It'sh orlright, ole man, I'll (hic) open it." Then, when a nightbird flew off the top—"Orlright, ole chap, I'll pick your 'at up."

But it is not always the passenger who is drunk. One young driver broke all regulations. He "stocked" himself at the wayside grog-shanty, and took a couple of bottles with him. Five miles on he was helpless. A jolt threw him off. The horses went on with the coach—and one solitary male passenger fast asleep in the "kennel." The driver lay stunned for an hour or more. When he regained consciousness the fall and the sleep had somewhat sobered him, though in his still dazed and muddled state he did not know where he or his coach was, or how he got to the unknown place. Off the road, to the right, were two little fires. He staggered over to these—and found himself in the middle of a blacks' camp! Two of the blacks at once set out for the "pub" with him. Arrived there, the publican started in pursuit of the coach. Five miles along the track he came to the coach and horses at a gate. The horses had fortunately kept to the track, and when they pulled up of their own accord the passenger woke up to open the gate. Imagine his surprise when he found no driver! He did the most

sensible thing he could have done—stayed where he was. The pub-keeper drove the coach on to the next “change.” The driver got the sack, of course. There is no knowing what would have happened if the horses and driver had parted company in hilly country, or if the reins had not been tied to the railing at the back of the seat.

Our old friend the laughing jackass is not the only bird that entertains the coach passenger with his delightful mimics. Often you will hear the whip-like crack of the coachman bird; and then sometimes another bird, whose name I have never discovered, answers with the peculiar “gluck, cluck” made by the driver with his tongue in his cheek as he urges on his team. The drivers will tell you that this illusion often causes the city man to look back expecting to see another coach coming along. The illusion is perfection in itself if the bell bird happens to delight the traveller with its beautiful bell-like notes. First, the crack of the whip as the coach starts; immediately followed by the “gluck, cluck”; and last, when approaching the next change-station, the bells are heard jingling as the fresh horses are run into the yards.

The driver's maledictions fall heavily upon the camel, with its awful “pen-and-ink” and its attendant Afghan. As explained in a previous chapter, it is extraordinary how frightened and uncontrollable the majority of horses become as soon as they see or smell a camel (or Afghan, for that matter), and perhaps when a big accident takes place the teams will be compelled to keep further away from the road than they do now. Another pet aversion of the drivers is wire dragged from a broken fence by cattle. It is extremely dangerous at night-time. The drivers manage to keep good friends with the “bullockies,” although no matter how far the coaches go round a bad place, the teamster is always sure to follow. I remember an old aboriginal asking a driver, “What for you say ‘goo'-day’ to big pfeller bullock? You call him ‘Damn-him-cut-up-track.’”

Nearly all the big coach proprietors lease some country from the Government, but very rarely pay any agistment fees to station owners, who allow them to run their horses in their paddocks (which may be five miles by five miles, or even bigger) in return for the free carriage of their parcels to and from the towns. Sometimes the grooms have a selection of their own, and rear a few head of horses, sheep, or cattle. The grooms, in addition to their quarters, get £7 or £8 a month, and the drivers from £8 to £10 a month. A very inadequate wage in both cases, and out of which they have to provide their own rations. When the whole service is

interrupted by wet weather, the drivers and grooms get what sleep they can, and, especially in the case of the drivers, where and how they can. Frequently the drivers are on the box for twenty-four hours at a stretch. Only those who have travelled Outback know how long it takes for a heavily-laden coach to travel one mile in wet weather. I have known a driver to take twelve hours to cover his stage—twenty-eight miles—turn straight back again with an “empty,” have an hour or two in town, and then leave with another heavy coach—and so on until the roads got back to their usual good order. One of the biggest nuisances on a wet trip is the whip “fall,” which, when it gets wet or muddy, will get tangled in the harness, necessitating a pull-up every few minutes while the knot is being untied. And it is almost as bad for the men, and certainly it is worse for the horses, when droughty conditions prevail. The mail contractors are then under very heavy expenses to “hard-feed” their horses (the carriage alone amounts to an enormous sum), and so economise in other ways. For instance, one team does the work of three teams in some places, and the most tiring work on earth is, in the opinion of the Outback coach-driver, that of driving tired horses.

It is interesting to note that South Australia claims what Outbackers call the “Dead Finish” in coach “lines.” This is a little jaunt of 404 miles from Haddon Downs to Farina. The single fare is Eight Pounds Five Shillings. The return fare is not quoted, and as the time-table distinctly says “*Female passengers are not carried,*” it is evidently no place for tourists! On another coach (?) line it is notified, “Passengers must be prepared to travel the latter part on camels.”

CHAPTER XVII

ALONG THE MURRUMBIDGEE

OUR friends the selectors invited us to occupy the vacant bunks in the tents, but we preferred to keep to our usual practice of sleeping in the open. Throwing ourselves on either side of the log fire, and disregarding our friends' advice to cover our eyes from the light of the moon, we were sound asleep two minutes after rolling ourselves in the blankets.

Although one black stockman told me the moon caused him to wake up with "gravy eyes," I have never heard of any instance of drovers, stockmen, or any other of that nomadic class which lives in the open, and sleep so recklessly in the light of the moon, becoming moonstruck. However, there are rare instances of horses being affected in their eyesight. The effect created is a temporary blindness, and woe betide the unfortunate stockman who finds himself astride such a mount on night watch when the cattle in his charge are restless and disposed to break off camp. A horse thus afflicted will blunder over any obstacle in its course, or stumble or fall into any hollow. As the creature has probably as good vision in daylight as the best, this conduct at night may seem unexplainable to its rider, but he can, without inquiring too deeply into how so simple a change of light can affect eyesight, place the blame upon the moon.

The average Bushman puts a good deal of faith in the controlling influences of the moon in relation to the weather. Its method of coming in as a new quantity, flat or well on its side, regulates Outback opinions on the subject of rain or further shine during the coming month. The useful deductions made by scientists upon moon changes and their probable influences on the weather sound as reasonable as they are simple, but the same old moon which gains credit for bringing down rain with a welcome rattle on the roofs of the coastal districts can still continue to gaze with an open countenance on Outback and create no effect.

"The Long 'Un" was the first to stir a few hours later,

as the rays of the rising sun endeavoured to penetrate through the belar trees which surrounded the camp. Reaching out he pushed the ends of the logs on to the ashes—and after turning over to warm his other side, dozed off again.

It was one of those mornings when a man camped in the open draws the blankets over his head after taking a peep at the morning star, and devoutly hopes that nobody will be in too great a hurry to sing out "Daylight!" Some men take a keen pride in being the first afoot in camp at early dawn. While we did not often indulge in this quaint form of conceit, we certainly did follow their example of keeping our boots carefully tucked away from frost and dew. We often derived much comfort by warming our boots before risking our toes in them. We did not hold them over the camp-fire and treat the insides to a few minutes of hot air and smoke, but put a few live coals in each boot in turn, and rattled the coals about. The effect was always satisfactory, and as we were always careful to shake out the last piece of hot ash, no burnt leather or toes ensued.

In camp on these mornings everything strikes cold to the touch, and even the process of lighting a pipe finds the fingers of many Bushmen too cramped for use. If sufficiently expert, the quickest way of getting a few draws is to pick up a hot coal with the fingers and put it in the bowl, an operation which is not very difficult to accomplish. Our thatches on top were not thin, but the process of warming the inside of the hat in the fire smoke brought much comfort. Following on that a stamp around and a little arm exercise warmed the hands, and put sufficient life into the frame to discuss a pannikin of tea and a plate of burgoo (porridge) to follow.

The selectors at Abbot's Tank wanted us to have a drive round their property, but their horses were not run in until close on midday, and it was then too late. Eleven miles away we crossed a big open plain, covered with knee-deep dry yellow grass—the "hay" of Outback—on which were grazing a number of horses belonging to a couple of road-maintenance men, who were just starting the work of ploughing up the only bad patch of the twenty-six miles of Bush road between the Tank and Balranald. We had a late lunch with the men, one of whom, when we were leaving, entrusted us with some money with which to pay some small accounts in Balranald.

Our "Bonnie Doon" friends had extracted from us a solemn promise to call on Mrs. Kennedy's sister at Balranald, where we would also make the acquaintance of Chris, aged fourteen, "Old Man Kennedy's little ewe lamb." Running through the town in the late afternoon, a turn in

the road near the substantial brick hospital brought us in sight of "Inverlochy," the Camerons' house, about a mile from the town. Showers of red berries broke over us as we drove under the drooping branches of the biggest peppertrees I have ever seen, and a few moments later we were in the comfortable, cosy kitchen, being welcomed with as much heartiness as if we had been very old friends, instead of never having been heard of until the previous day, when the "little ewe lamb" had received a note from "Bonnie Doon" saying that two visitors were to call in.

Our hosts would not hear of us travelling next day, and under the guidance of little Chris, we spent a most enjoyable time at the aboriginal settlement just across the river. Making our way down the steep bank, we threw a handful of gravel over a jovial-looking old black who had gone to sleep while fishing in a bark canoe which was not capable of taking more than one passenger at a time across the narrow stream.

How this encampment came to be in this spot makes an interesting story. Twenty years ago, when Old Cameron's beard was not quite so grey nor his hair so silver, a tribe of between twenty and thirty full-blooded aboriginals were living in their mia-mias (huts), roughly put up in one of Cameron's paddocks. It so happened that Earl Jersey, who was Governor of New South Wales at the time, visited Balranald, and, of course, had to be shown round the blacks' camp. "Old Charley," the king of the tribe, had been lying ill in his dark little mia for a few weeks, but dragged himself out to shake hands with "The Great White Chief," who presented him with a big inscribed moon-shaped brass plate, which dangled from his neck for many years after. Lord Jersey asked Charley could he do anything for the blacks. While Cameron pitched a yarn anent the bad times his friends the blacks were suffering by being hounded out of one district to another by the whites, the newspaper reporters who were accompanying the Governor's party wrote a pathetic account of how the tears streamed down the old warrior's cheeks. But they did not know that the watery eyes were brought about by the king's sudden entrance into the sunlight! And the black warrior could not have shed more tears than did our host when, doubling up with laughter, the latter told us how one reporter had been so taken in that he sent along to his paper a brilliant account of how the aboriginal wept all through the "interview" as a sign of allegiance to the "big white pfeller queen." The Governor gave the blacks several pounds worth of tobacco, which thoroughly fumigated their mia-mias while the



Photo by W. K. Harris.
BLACKS WASHING CLOTHES IN THE HOT WATERS
OF TINAROO BORE, N.S.W.



SOME OF OUR BALRANALD ABORIGINAL FRIENDS.

two tin buildings promised by His Excellency were being erected.

Doing away with red-tapeism, Lord Jersey at once set apart 170 acres on the other side of the river as an aboriginal reserve. This is known as "the Island," but is an island only in flood time. Later on, a couple of weather-board huts—thirty feet by twelve feet—were erected, and one or two dilapidated old tents now also form part of the settlement.

Only a very few of the original blacks remained; one was an old gin, so fat that it was much easier to jump over her than to walk round her, and whose smile extended not from ear to ear, but from 'ere to yonder (the description is Cameron's!). But this did not represent the full strength of the settlement; others had come in from various stations, and there was always a "floating population." In all there were about a dozen adults, but the children—well, they certainly took some mustering. One couple, a black father and a half-cast mother, had nine kiddies, and another couple had six. Some of these piccaninnies had very fine features. Out of the whole gathering of thirty souls, there were only three full-blooded men, two full-blooded women, and six full-blooded children. Just plain facts, but illustrative of what has taken place in the few districts where the remaining tribes have not been driven back to look further afield for the hopping kangaroo and the thudding wallaby.

Talking "pidgun" to the black mother of a well-set-up half-cast young man, we asked how they had got on before the advent of the white man. The reply was not quite unexpected: "Plenty tucker, no yellor-fellers" (half-castes). A patronising Government doles out rations and blankets to those who have been in the settlement the longest, but, I believe, makes no ration allowance to the younger generation. The oldsters get weekly supplies of flour, sugar, tea, and salt, but no baking powder. Some of the men do odd jobs in the neighbourhood, and this pays for baking powder and other items. But often, in the absence of that particular commodity, a family makes a meal off something which resembles a "Tasmanian Mud" (a very sodden, badly-baked damper). Only three of the men get tobacco allowance. Their pipe is the most agreeable company they have—and the average Australian aboriginal usually likes tobacco so much that he has none to spare for those who do not get the allowance.

The question of what is being done, and what should be done, for the fast-disappearing Australian black is one I do not care to enter on in this particular chapter; sufficient to

say that while they were no good to the country, the country was good to them—*before the whites came.*

* * * * *

Balranald is still waiting for the impetus to settlement which was promised long ago. In this district there is an area of no less than eight and a half million acres waiting for the stroke of the Government pen to say that it shall be occupied by men who are willing to undertake its development. Why the delay? Is it that the Government are considering the question of railwaying the country, or have they put it on the shelf for the benefit of the moth and the rust?

During our stay in this town of the south-west Riverina, we got talking to landholders who ventilated a genuine grievance. In this great belt of country there is a new province awaiting development by some far-seeing Government. The problem of that territory is on all fours with that of south-western Queensland, which the Kidston Government a couple of years ago tackled in a way that will always stand to their credit. It was a fitting close to the career of a State Premier who appeared to have a better grip of the man inland and his necessities than any predecessor. That policy was to galvanise that part of the country with a bold railway scheme, and for that purpose a Loan Bill was passed for £10,000,000. That is the sort of programme that wants to be adopted for the opening up of Western New South Wales. Quite a number of trunk lines are needed. The proposal to build a few odds and ends here and there is paltering with the work, for very often the whims of politicians are allowed sway, and coming on the scene later, divert some line or another to suit a constituency, no matter how the general interests of the taxpayers are made to suffer.

The Government are making available for Close Settlement some areas along the rivers, but what of the millions of acres further back lying idle, in spite of the fact that there are scores of applicants ready to take them up if they get the chance? It is found that by working this mallee on modern lines it will give splendid yields, so that there can be no excuse that the country is not suitable for settlement. Obviously the right thing is to first of all open it up with a railway line, and then set to work to settle it with the least possible delay. The best proof that these lands are suitable for settlement is that the skilled westerners are ready to occupy them, with all the present disabilities in view of distance from markets. But the Government should not take that to mean that those settlers would be satisfied to

remain isolated, as the belt is at present. They should take the sensible view that to this land would be added considerable acreage values if there ran through them a railway so constructed as to serve the best interests of the majority. The Great West wants development, and systematic development. Supposing it cost £10,000,000, what would that be compared to the added value?

Balranald, like all other towns on the Murrumbidgee, the Darling, and the Murray, wants something else besides railways. It is one of the best river districts of the inland spaces, but through lack of any system of water conservation industrial occupation is precarious during dry spells. Besides a railway system worthy of the name there should be inaugurated a system of weirs and locks that would make the country safe for stock at all seasons of the year. The cost of this form of improvement would not be very great according to the testimony of experts. Such a scheme could not well be a failure, any more than the railways would be. The conserved water would, as a matter of simple fact, help to guarantee the returns of the railway lines. It is extraordinary, to say the least of it, that there has been so little done in the Mother State with regard to the use of the waterways of the Great West. It is no excuse for the laxity in this respect that there is being spent a couple of million pounds at Burrenjack Irrigation Area. That outlay is justifiable, but no more so than would be a million in locking and weiring the western rivers. What is wanted is a well-defined plan to handle that country. The designer should provide for present needs and future requirements. A short railway built here one year, and another a few years later, does not reveal an adequate grip of the possibilities of the land so served. The investment, though it may seem extravagance, would be a perfectly safe one. Wool and stock make the most payable freights that are carried on these lines, and it is certain that there would follow any bold policy enormous development.

* * * * *

Stowing away half a dozen eggs in "Opal's" nose-bag, and with all our ration-bags once more refilled, we bade good-bye to our Balranald friends, and crossed the 'Bidgee by the earliest lift-bridge ever erected in Australia, a structure which has rendered valuable service for over thirty years. A light shower of rain overtook us as we mounted the slight rise on which stands Yanga Homestead, five miles out.

Yanga was the biggest station which we passed through.

The run comprised 280,000 acres, and every year 100,000 sheep faced the shears. This acreage may not look extraordinarily large, but the extent of the station may be better realised when I say that that night we camped at Talpie Out-station, nineteen miles on; next night we stayed at Waugorah Out-station, eighteen miles still further on. The last boundary-fence was passed through several miles from this last-named out-station, and as Yanga Homestead itself stood a few miles back from the Balranald road, a little reckoning shows that for two days we travelled through, over, and across Yanga country for a distance of about fifty miles. The homestead and four out-stations (two of which we did not call at) gave permanent employment to eighty men all the year round, not counting of course the extra men engaged during the shearing season; and in addition, for the past two or three years there had been over one hundred men engaged in "rabbiting"—that is, ridding the land of the rabbit pest.

The homestead, still bearing some of its "slab" characteristics of the early days (it was built sixty years ago) is prettily situated in a big orchard and garden overlooking Yanga Lake, a sheet of water covering three thousand five hundred acres, and fed in good seasons by the overflow from the Murrumbidgee. There was another big sheet of water—Lake Tyler—at Talpie Out-station, and to a new-chum it would seem as if the manager of Yanga was never troubled by the water problem of Outback. But those lakes were not sufficient for all Yanga's "back country," and we were not surprised when Manager Briggs, whom we found hard at work in his little office, told us that even at that moment, in addition to the permanent eighty men, and the almost equally-permanent one hundred rabbiters, he had a small army of contractors at work completing a job of sinking twenty-one bores in various parts of his run.

In a dry season such as we were travelling in landholders were at their wits' end to devise means which would give them water. Consequently, it was not surprising to find attention being given to wells, and a great demand for the services of the well-boring plant. Water in greater or lesser quantities lies under many portions of the Western Division, but in very many cases it is not fit for stock purposes, being so heavily impregnated with salt and other minerals.

The manager of Yanga, seeing that some of his back paddocks would soon be inconveniently situated in regard to water, secured the services of a contractor, who put down twenty-one bores, seven of which yielded good stock water, and five fresh water. So good was the water in the latter

case that it was being used for drinking purposes by the men working in the camps. The problem had been attacked in a systematic manner by first of all putting down a two-inch auger-hole, followed by a pipe of larger dimensions; then, the water having passed the test, there followed a shaft 5ft. by 2ft. 8in., properly slabbed with Murray pine. On one well a windmill, complete with 10,000-gallon supply tank, was already at work, while mills were on the ground for others. Pending the erection of the other mills, water was being raised by windlass and horse-whip. In less than three weeks 20,000 sheep would be watering at those wells. The depths of the shafts range from 25ft. to 36ft., and the supply varies from 850 to 1,500 gallons per hour. On some of the wells supply tanks of 20,000 gallon capacity were being erected. The wells were not all distributed in one paddock, but were distributed over the run where the feed was best, but the water scanty.

In those tracts of country where success or failure of the pastoral industry depends entirely upon the seasons, the flow of water from the artesian depths has, like the celebrated pen, "come as a boon and a blessing to men." It has proved an insurance against drought, and has converted a dry-weather shambles into an area where stock can live and pull through even in the most adverse of conditions. Those who know all that artesian water has done for what is known as drought country are never tired of singing its praises.

There is a superstition that bore water is valueless for raising crops in dry country, owing to the soil being impregnated with alkali after a time. But the manager of Oondoroo station, near Winton, in far west Queensland, says the idea is all wrong. The trouble is not with the water, but with the land, for he has seen the same water a huge success on some soils, and a howling failure on others. He has produced fine crops of hay, maize, sorghum, and lucerne on deep loamy soil irrigated with bore water, but has found that sandy and clayey soils become hard and unworkable. While managing Thurulgoona station, on the Warrego, he took five crops of hay off one paddock in successive years, and in ten years never had a failure. The average crop was three tons per acre. He didn't trouble about the yield of grain, as only hay was wanted, but he made a test once, and got a yield of forty bushels to the acre.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RABBIT IN AUSTRALIA

Who introduced the first pair of rabbits into Australia? No man appears to know more than that they were introduced, and spread so rapidly as to become a pest throughout the continent. But though an evil they have nevertheless, in a measure, been turned to profitable account. Their slaughter for the purpose of money-making by the sale of their carcasses or pelts, or both, has been large, and has helped to keep the cost of destruction down to more reasonable limits than would otherwise have been the case.

It has been wisely said that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and trite though the saying may be, its force has been admirably illustrated in the examples afforded by bunny. The furry little rodents have in the past been very destructive to feed, and have caused an expenditure of thousands of pounds in efforts to secure their eradication.

Trapping rabbits for their skins and carcasses has been a means of considerably reducing the number, and has proved more or less profitable to those engaged in the industry. In fact, it has been the means of developing an export trade of considerable importance, and that it has been effective in keeping a check upon too rapid increases, is indicated clearly by the enhanced price of skins, and by the depreciation in the volume of trade in carcasses. Taking the State of Victoria alone, 957,874 pairs, worth £38,907, were exported in 1909-1910, in comparison with 1,821,030 pairs, valued at £75,826, in 1908-9; and 3,151,744 pairs, worth £131,322, for 1907-8. The number of rabbits exported in 1906 was nine and a half millions, and in 1905 over ten millions, so that there has been a great falling off. The smaller quantity dealt with in 1909-1910 has been attributed to other States having taken up the trade; but there can be no doubt that it is largely on account of the lesser increase due to the heavy destruction in previous years. In South Australia there was a canning factory in the Kapunda district many years ago, but since it closed down the south-

east has been the only portion of that State which could keep one going.

In contrast to the popular view of the rabbit in Australia, since my arrival in England I have heard a curious fear expressed that time is within measurable distance when the trade in rabbits from Australia will dwindle to a minimum, as closer settlement and wire netting extend their boundaries. In some circles the feeling almost amounts to dismay, as there are thousands of people in the Old Country who would scarcely ever see flesh of any sort if they could not buy Australian rabbit. Before we began to export this produce the prices of rabbits per head ran to nearly the price of poultry in this country. The English citizen takes very kindly to rabbit as a food, though it may be pointed out, as showing the difference in tastes, that many Australians will have none of it, and it figures in very few hotel menus, even in Sydney and Melbourne, though those are the two greatest exporting centres. It may be that the Australian remembers that the ordinary cat is a welcome boarder in the rabbit burrows, and there have been found in some parts rabbits which seem to possess more of the cat in their composition than of the reputed sire. Colour is lent to this prejudice by the fact that some years ago the West Australian Government liberated two hundred cats in one of the rabbit districts with the view of their preying upon the sheep-farmers' enemy, but when the inspectors were sent out a year after to investigate, it was discovered that the cat and the rabbit had fraternised, and were living on the most friendly terms in the same burrows. So far as Australian objections and tastes are concerned, however, it matters little if from other sources we can recoup ourselves of some portion of the wealth of which the rabbit has robbed the pastoral industry.

The fact that the rabbit has become scarcer in some districts is a cause for congratulation. He has never quite disappeared anywhere, however, and it is only in the more settled districts, where many hands keep him in check by killing and trapping, and by the destruction of harbours for vermin, that there has been any reason for the abatement of vigilance. Further back in the typical pastoral country rabbits are still a problem, and there the relaxation of efforts at extermination would be a matter of grave concern. This is sufficiently indicated by the present condition. During the great drought, which ended in 1902, rabbits received a severe thinning out, and although latterly the seasons have been good, they did not breed up so rapidly for some years. They seemed to have received a check, possibly from disease. The lesser prominence of bunny was attributed by

some to the beneficent work of the foxes, but many of the erstwhile champions of Reynard are now changing their opinion, especially as they are coming to realise that the wily bunny-eater will probably keep the pot boiling with lambs if ever the rabbits get eaten out. A few pastoralists who, two years ago, would not have thought of killing a fox have now been converted from belief in his virtue, and are once more staunch advocates of poisoning methods.

During our travels we saw many methods of checking increases being worked with more or less success. On Yanga five bullock-teams were ploughing up the burrows, some half a dozen kangaroo-dogs trotting along behind each plough ready to dart off after any rabbits which made their appearance while their homes were being torn up. On other stations gangs of men were digging out the burrows, leaving a network of curious deep trenches in their wake. Other station managers resorted to pumping asphyxiating gases into the burrows. Two methods which find many votaries are the poison cart (which I have already described in the chapter on "Dogs and Doggers"), and the poisoning of water supplies. In the great pastoral areas of the interior, poison is a reliable cure, but such methods unfortunately leave in their trail many of our insect-eating birds. Destruction of such a character presents a problem in itself, for the disturbance of the balance of nature has led to greater plagues of locusts (grasshoppers) and blow-flies. Therefore, where the rabbit can be made use of commercially, it is better that he should be trapped or shot.

The "poisoned water" method consists of netting in the tanks, dams, and water holes, and then putting poisoned water in troughs alongside the tanks. In many instances only small holes are left for bunny to get in to the poisoned water, so that he will die where the carcass can be found and burned—the latter generally after skinning. I have often known as many as two thousand odd rabbits having thus been destroyed every night for several nights in succession, but it is only in very dry seasons that this method is any good. Apart from the destruction of bird-life, it is a dangerous thing to leave the carcasses lying about after poisoning to dry up in the hot sun, as when there is little or no grass about, stock will eat dead bunny for the sake of the saline matter in the carcass, and then it is good-bye to your stock, for the latter invariably die from the effects of the poison permeating bunny's carcass.

It is wonderful how tame (or is it bold?) the wildest of rabbits become during a very dry season, when they are hard pushed for food. I remember the story of a Chinaman who

had a vegetable garden on the Lachlan. It was fenced in with high pine saplings, driven about a foot or more into the ground, and placed very close together to prevent the rabbits getting into the garden, which was the only green patch for miles. "John" certainly kept the place in splendid order, and worked very hard carrying water, etc. So numerous were the rabbits in this particular region, and so thick were they when on the move, that at sundown they looked like the waves of the sea advancing. The Chinaman had his shanty built in the centre of one line of fencing, and except through a large cart gate, his only mode of entering his patch was by going in at his front door and out at the back one. The bunnies discovered this, and several times found both doors open, and it took "John" all he knew to prevent rabbits dodging past him, through the house, and so into the garden to a lovely feed of green lettuce and parsnip leaves. (I got that yarn from the Chinaman direct!)

CHAPTER XIX

YANGA TO HAY

WE had come only five miles in the morning, but the heartiness of the invitation to stay over lunch at "Yanga" caused us to wait until the afternoon ere pushing on for "Talpie." Three miles out we came upon two teams of ten bullocks each ploughing up some rabbit burrows, and from the men got directions to their camp, another hour's journey. Immediately after leaving the men we were subjected to one of those sharp, sudden, heavy downpours of rain which, occasionally descending at most unexpected times and without giving any preliminary warning of their coming, do much to gladden the hearts of all Outbackers.

We were wet through to the skin almost before we got our mackintoshes on. The nearest shelter was back at the homestead, and there was nothing to do but to drive on. We were glad when the rabbiters' camp—some three or four tents—hove in sight. Here, shivering with cold, we dried ourselves in the heat of a typical Outback oven—a 400-gallon square iron tank almost completely sunk into the ground, and with a trench leading down to the "door." The tank held a couple of shelves, and the ashes which gave the necessary heat for baking the bread were inside. The whole constituted one of the neatest ovens I have ever seen.

Another visitor was a mounted police trooper who, also wet through, had arrived shortly before us, and seemed to be enjoying some of the excellent buns the cook had brought out of the oven as he rode up. We enjoyed the trooper's company for a mile or two after leaving the rabbiters, and when he galloped away to get through his twenty-mile ride before dark, we were glad his horse left fresh tracks to lead us within sight of "Talpie," as the original track in the soft sandy soil had been washed out by the rain.

We drew up at "Talpie" just as one of the three boundary-riders was ringing up the manager at "Yanga" to report the number of points recorded in the little rain gauge set up in front of the out-station. The tea-table had

long since been cleared, but the cook had relaid it again for our benefit by the time "Opal" had been attended to.

An interesting feature at this out-station was a fire-lookout—a tall scaffolding erected on a little rise overlooking the billabong which fed Lake Tyler, near by. On the platform there was a plan of the surrounding country, with all fences and buildings accurately marked, and in dry, hot weather, when smoke from Bush or grass fires is seen, one of the men is in constant telephonic communication with not only the "Yanga" homestead and the other three out-stations, but also with other stations in the immediate neighbourhood. Distance is such a small matter in Outback Australia that the "immediate neighbourhood" might be over a hundred miles away, but this is not too great a distance for such distant squatters not to have any interest in a "blaze" which extends five, ten, fifteen, or even twenty miles across country.

Near "Talpie" were several more "Bushman's ovens," though not at all similar to the iron tank at the rabbiters' camp. They were simply yellow mounds raised by white ants. These mounds are always a source of great interest to visitors to those districts where they are to be found. In the Northern Territory of South Australia some rise to a height of seven or eight feet, but in the "Closer In" districts the average is nearer four feet. In chopping into the domiciles of these destructive emmets, one encounters, first of all, a tough outer wall or covering, which in the more settled places is extensively used in making tennis courts, floors, or cricket pitches, a little cement being added to make it perfect. If an incision is made in the mound, the diligent little occupants get to work, and in a very short time have the abrasion filled, damping the material with a cementish secretion that gives the stuff its binding quality. Bush folk use these ant-mounds largely for baking-ovens where they exist in proximity to the home, and they are careful to pitch their camp near one when looking out for a home site. First of all, an opening is made low down in front, a little of the peculiar, perforated woody interior matter is taken out, and then a fire is lighted within. The fire completely burns out all the galleried matter inside and below the mound, leaving only the tough shell. Ant-bed is then filled in, and the floor brought level; a small hole is made in the crown, and into it a cart-wheel box is usually let—though not always—to serve as a flue. The door is then trimmed into a rectangle, and a door-lid made to fit closely. The oven flue is corked after firing, the door shut to, and all is ready for cooking.

The oven at "Talpie" had been used for cooking purposes in the early days by the tribe of blacks in whose particular hunting-ground they were situated, and had rendered other excellent service, inasmuch as when a member of the tribe passed to the happiest of all hunting-grounds, his friends doubled him up into a sitting posture, and buried him—in the oven!

Another reminder of the early days was a collection of aboriginal weapons and curios, including a number of primitive grain mills such as I have seen in use in the far-back parts of Queensland, where the white man's flour has not tempted "black brudder" to depart from his own methods of living. One of the nether millstones at "Talpie" was a piece of freestone from thirteen to fifteen inches across. The upper stone was four or five inches across, and much resembled the Sydney freestone, only it was much closer in the grain and much harder.

The grain ground in these primitive mills is a kind of native barley, an annual plant which in good seasons springs up very thickly in what is called "crab-hole country." Some tribes call this little beardless barley "nardoo," while others know it as "yalcha baaba." The seeds when collected are placed in the saucer-like under millstone, and ground into a rough kind of meal by rubbing the upper stone round and round the groove, the collecting and grinding being equally tedious processes. The meal is then mixed with water on the "skinny" side of its owner's 'possum or wallaby rug, kneaded, and baked in the ashes. The blacks in the settled districts soon came to the conclusion that the husky-looking little damper which resulted did not justify all the trouble entailed in its manufacture, for as soon as they became acquainted with the "white pfeller's" flour the cumbersome stone quern was at once discarded, and the tiresome task of gathering the "yalcha baaba" or "nardoo" discontinued. The aboriginal does not excel as a bread-baker though, even when he has good wheaten flour as a material to work on. Once, when very hungry, I dined upon a damper a black-fellow had baked (or, I should say, half-baked). Being young and strong, I survived to tell the tale; but I can still remember its unleavened solidity, and how much it resembled an ill-used bar of soap that had accidentally fallen into the ashes. To this day, the memory of that black-fellow's damper hangs heavily on my chest.

That most hospitable Outbacker, the station cook, who can make things pleasant or unpleasant just as he wills for the men he provides for, was kept busy at "Talpie" until late in the evening, for after "The Long 'Un" and I had

goⁱ up from a gorgeous feast, a Bush hawker drove up, and, of course, the table had to be laid again for the third time.

Some people imagine that this useful member of the scattered population Outback is fast becoming a mere memory of the pioneering days, but there are still immense stretches of country not served by rail, coach, or river-berge, and he will be a feature of Outback life for many years to come.

The Bush hawker is always a man of substance, generally the owner of one or two well-equipped waggons, each drawn by four or six horses, and both stocked with a miscellaneous assortment of merchandise sufficient to last throughout a trip covering many hundreds of miles—a round which in the very far interior might perhaps occupy the trader for the best part of a year. The hawker, therefore, is an individual of considerable commercial standing. His calling is certainly a lucrative one at all seasons; and no visitor to the remote stations of the Never Never Land ever receives a heartier welcome than he does. Quickly the news is passed from one to another of the "hands" that the hawker has arrived; and, of course, he stops and spells his horses for a day or two before moving on to the next big station. Meanwhile, he and his boy and horses are free to enjoy the hospitality of the station to the full. He is usually a man who can sing a good song and accompany himself upon one of his own musical instruments, the concertina and accordion always being among his specialities. Besides, he can relate the latest happenings at the other stations included in his tour, not to mention city items. Then there are the new goods to display, none of the designs dating back more than two or three years at the very most; whereas the plain and serviceable, sometimes moth-eaten, clothing stocked by the station store is often—not without cause—voted rather out of date by the more fastidious Outbackers. Well does the hawker know how to select the patterns and colours which are most likely to please the eye of the unsophisticated Bush-dweller.

There is a constant demand for patent medicines, particularly pain-killer, which in the early days when mixed with eau-de-cologne was highly esteemed as a tonic, or, should I say, a rather expensive substitute for whisky. In those days methylated spirits were not in vogue as a beverage, and the Outback bon-vivant had to content himself with the fearsome mixture indicated—a conglomeration which I have heard a tough old veteran declare to be "a foine dhrink wid a splendid boite in it." When all purchasers are supplied, and the hawker is ready to proceed on his journey, each buyer usually signs a slip for the amount of his expenditure,

and the hawker, on presenting these to the manager, receives a cheque for the whole amount, the manager deducting each man's account from wages due.

There are long stretches of practically uninhabited country to be traversed, but the Bush hawker's life is anything but monotonous, and one of the largest land and stock owners in the Commonwealth says that the happiest days of his life were spent as a hawker's boy, his duties being to drive the waggon and act as a rouseabout when camping. Certainly, the experience of Bush life thus gained has stood him in good stead.

The morning broke fine after the previous day's rain, and firmly declining the cook's invitation to spend the day duck-shooting on the lake, we followed a winding course through the mallee, and at length reached "Waugorah," the furthest out-station on the "Yanga" run—thirty-two miles from the homestead as the telephone went. "Opal" was dead beat as we drew up at the out-station, pleasantly situated on a backwater of the Murrumbidgee. "The Long 'Un" and I were almost as "done," as for the best part of the morning the track had taken us across black-soil plains, which had been converted into a sticky sort of paste by the rain the day before. Here the going was very heavy, and when, out of consideration for the pony, we decided to walk, our boots promptly took on as heavy a coating of mud as the wheels and "Opal's" hoofs had gathered up. The Married Couple were just sitting down to dinner off roast fowl and plum pudding as we came in sight, and the boundary-rider advanced to meet us and attend to "Opal's" wants while his wife pulled the table out from the veranda wall and bustled about with extra plates, etc., for the benefit of the callers.

The three of us were so played out—we had taken about five hours to come eighteen miles—that it did not take much to persuade us to stay overnight at "Waugorah," and notwithstanding that one of Host Martin's goats would persist in believing our blankets were good eating, we slept the sleep of the weary, while "Opal" enjoyed herself on the long green couch grass which fringed the creek.

During the afternoon a blackboy who, accompanied by his gin, was travelling down to the Murray from a Queensland station, rode up with a couple of pack-horses, and asked permission to camp on the other side of the creek. "Opal" had given an occasional whinny, but we had taken no notice, thinking she was making friends with the boundary-rider's horses, but shortly after the blackboy left to share the remnants of the fowl with his gin, he coo-eed to draw our



Photo by

[W. K. Harris

THE QUEENSLAND BORDER GATE, NEAR MURWILLUMBAH,
NEW SOUTH WALES.

attention to a little scene being enacted a few hundred yards up the creek.

"Opal" was dancing about in a most ludicrous fashion, now taking a step forward, now backwards, and occasionally side-stepping, but always with her neck stretched out and her head near the ground. The black whistled up one of his dogs, and picking up a stick ran forward.

The cause of the excitement turned out to be a harmless porcupine, or "spiny ant-eater," as the Australian hedgehog is called. It kept its ball-like shape while "The Long 'Un" turned it over and over with his foot, which, you may be sure, was protected by a thick boot. The dog snapped at the curiosity, but was careful to keep clear of the spikes. Calling the dog off—"Opal," with a final whinny and a loud snort, went back to the grass when she saw she had been successful in drawing our attention to something she could not understand—we took up a position behind a tree and awaited developments. In a few minutes the ball unrolled itself very slowly, and just as slowly crawled a little nearer to a fallen tree-trunk, as if seeking for a soft spot in which to commence burrowing operations. Apparently satisfied with the soil, the animal brought into use its four powerful legs, which were armed with very strong claws. "Porky" was soon disappearing with such speed that the blackboy pulled it out with a branch. It immediately formed itself into a ball again. At a favourable opportunity the "boy" drove his sheath-knife between the spikes and through the body, rolled the creature up in some long grass, and later on skinned it. This operation was a long and somewhat painful one, and was accompanied by such bad language as only a half-civilised Queensland black can use. He was not quite dependent on what he found in the Bush, and the smell of the flesh was quite sufficient. He did not trouble to cook the curiosity; but at any other time he would have made a delicious meal off the smellful object.

If the man who first discovered the platypus, that other Australian conundrum, had found the hedgehog at the same time, he would not have been able to decide which of the two was the greater puzzle. The hedgehog is about the size of the body of an ordinary common or backyard fowl. The whole of the upper surface of the body is covered with sharp quills, varying in length from two to three inches, which are intermingled with long and very coarse hair. The slippery tongue can be pulled out four or five inches, and when released flies back like a spring into the beak.

We made an early start in the morning, and after a good run of ten miles across the wide-sweeping black-soil plains,

hit the Murrumbidgee once more near the Nap Nap boundary fence. In a bend of the river we came upon a collection of tents. The rabbiters' cook was the only one at home. For something better to do, he was dozing under a river gum, and did not wake until we were halfway through the remains of a leg of mutton, which we found under a length of mosquito net on the rough slab table. He could not do enough for us when we presented him with the eggs our Balranald friends had insisted upon stowing away in "Opal's" nose-bag. It was many a long day since he had tasted such luxuries, and as we were meeting with a hospitality which rendered any cooking on our part absolutely impossible, we thought it best somebody should enjoy the eggs before they were broken or got a bit on the stale side.

In a little enclosure formed by a rough stock-rail running across an angle in the fence, the cook held captive one of the prettiest and most graceful creatures to be found in the Australian Bush. It was a young "Flash Jack" kangaroo which he had caught a few weeks before. It had soon learnt to drink milk, and had acquired a very nice taste in cakes, but notwithstanding it was only about twenty inches in height, its spirit was unconquerable. It objected strongly to being handled, and became a perfect little fury when Jack advanced with a piece of bread.

The "Flash Jack" is very similar in appearance to the kangaroo known as the "Blue Flier," but does not grow so large, and is marked differently about the head and neck. When standing erect, it is a large one that will measure thirty inches. The name, I believe, is derived from the way in which they carry one of their arms almost at right angles to their bodies when travelling at a fair pace. It is a very smart dog that can catch one in timbered country, owing to their speed and dodging capabilities. When travelling at top speed they can turn at right angles without slackening, and always have a harbour to make for, generally a hollow leaning tree or log.

A mile or two from the camp we came upon the rabbiters, eight in all, armed with pick and shovel, digging out burrows. One man had dug his way right under a fence, and was working in a trench almost up to his shoulders. It is only in such cases that these trenches are filled up again; when away from a fence they are left open to the elements, a silent token to the steady, persistent work that is being carried on to rid the land of the furry little curse.

Two hours later we drove past the Nap Nap Homestead, and a quarter of a mile further on pulled up at the men's

quarters. Nap Nap was another large station, being only one thousand acres less than Yanga in extent. On the 279,000 acres some 68,000 sheep were running. As on all the other properties with which we became acquainted, there was no overstocking, and to use the words of old Overseer McCackney, there were "no sheep on a pleasure jaunt."

Nap Nap was soon to come down to the odd 79,000 acres, as the other 200,000 were being resumed under the Closer Settlement Act. We got rather an inhospitable reception from the Chinese cook, who had not drawn a half-penny of his wages in the twelve months he had been there, and was therefore somewhat "cheque proud." He felt so independent that he refused point blank to cook an occasional Murray cod, even when the men cleaned the fish for him. I do not wish to enter upon the "White Australian" controversy, but I cannot refrain from expressing pleasure at finding only a very few Chinese cooks and gardeners doing white men out of a job on these Outback stations. In the particular case of Nap Nap, many white cooks had been employed, but they had been found unreliable—solely on account of the station's proximity to Maude, a township which, of course, had its own little "pub."

In the morning the old gardener, Ted Barlow, would not allow us to leave before we had thoroughly inspected his gardens, and partaken of the fruits of his labours in the orchard. He was immensely proud of the fact that his flowers had year after year swept the boards at the annual Horticultural Show at Hay. He pointed with pride to an apple tree twenty years old which had not borne fruit until five years before, when he had nearly killed it by partly ringbarking it, so stopping the flow of sap and turning into a thing of usefulness a tree which would otherwise have gone to wood.

Loaded up with various fruits, a little distance out we "went Bush" (that is, left the track) to skirt round an immense lignum swamp which the rain three days before had made impassable. Even on the higher ground the black soil had not quite recovered from the effects of the downpour, and our progress once more developed into a walking tour. In the swamp small patches of green showed where the grass and herbage was already shooting up bravely, a good indication of the quick recuperative powers of the land.

Then we followed the telephone wire until it hit the Murrumbidgee again opposite the township of Maude. The river was low, the stretch of water being only twice as wide as the brand new, white-painted, one-man-power, free-passage punt, by which we crossed as soon as our clanging of

the bell brought the puntsman from his own little corner of the "pub" bar. But the state of the river did not seem to be causing the population much anxiety—the residents of the half-dozen cottages were assembled in the school-grounds to watch a cricket match that was in progress.

A little distance out from Maude, "The Long 'Un" had his first experience of what to my mind is the most interesting phenomenon Outback. We appeared to be travelling on a low-lying island surrounded by a tremendous sheet of water. In actual reality we were journeying across an immense plain, level as far as the eye could reach, covered by dry, hay-like grass. The curious effect known as the mirage, produced by the peculiar atmospheric conditions of these wide-spreading plains, took the place of the missing element. Looking like a cool, rippling, refreshing oasis in a sun-baked land, the illusion always kept the same distance away, retreating as we advanced. From a small clump of trees, elongated to three times their natural height, a distorted mass moved towards us at a fast pace, gradually losing its fantastic shape until it became an ordinary Outback traveller, a shearer cycling across country from the Darling.

After lunching at Newmarket, a fairly big selection where crutching was in progress, we picked up the tracks of a horseman who had ridden in from Canoon station the previous night to meet the mail running between Hay and Maude. These tracks guided us across a bare stretch of black-soil plain until the Canoon shearing-shed reared itself up some distance to the right, a white hazy shape enveloped in the shimmering mirage. A little later "Opal" was enjoying a roll in the dusty Canoon stockyard prior to being hosed down with some station horses which had just come in from their day's work.

We arrived at Benduc station in time for lunch the following day, and before continuing our journey to Hay spent a pleasant hour boating on a reach of the 'Bidgee where it ran past Benduc homestead, a building with wide verandas, overshadowed by pepper trees and sad-looking, though beautiful and graceful, willows which drooped down to the water's edge.

Virtually the capital of that vast south-western portion of New South Wales known as the Riverina, Hay is the natural business centre for a large area of rich pastoral country. To the north stretches the One Tree Plain, so called from the conspicuousness of a tree on the road to Booligal, while the Old Man Plain extends southward for eighty monotonous miles. The most westerly railway terminus in direct com-

munication with Sydney, from which it is distant 454 miles, Hay was named after a former Governor of the State, and if all the dismal tales usually associated with the town reach the traveller's ears before going thither, he wonders why any man ever allowed his name to be so misused. But Hay is utterly removed in character from the semblance of these mythical stories, which generally end up with a comparison of "Hay, Hell, and Booligal," the last-named, a township further north, being the accredited rival of "The Other Place," with Hay a good second.

The first accusation against Hay is that of great heat, but a careful study of other temperatures will show Hay at an advantage; and visitors find the dry heat quite a relief after the close, moist, muggy atmosphere of Sydney and the coastal districts, and derive much pleasure from the fact that they do not need more than one shirt a day. After actual personal experience—however short—of this City of the Plains, one concludes that its evil reputation arose when there was no mitigation of climate by proper dwelling-places. More important even than the good quality of housing are the advantages of an excellent water supply and an up-to-date sanitary system. The town lacks architectural beauty, save in the case of the handsome hospital and court-house and one or two of the banks; but the court-house grounds, beautifully kept, remind one of the rivalry of many other charming gardens which overcome the lack of house-elegance.

A bird's-eye view of the town would please the eye—for two reasons. First, the appearance of the streets, many of which are formed of the same red soil as out on the plains, is softened and beautified by the graceful shady trees which line both sides. In the second place, the Murrumbidgee flows around the town in the shape of a great horse-shoe, providing along its tree-clad banks many attractive scenes and pleasant spots for outings. So a view from above would reveal a pleasant riverside panorama, set in mighty plains, much deforested except near the winding water-line, from which the former human inhabitants long ago fled before the oncoming white man, and from which the emu and the kangaroo retreated to other haunts.

We could afford to spend only a few days in Hay, where, to our surprise and pleasure, we found an old friend in the person of the Rev. Charles Lusby, of the local Methodist Church, who made us comfortable in the church grounds when we firmly declined to avail ourselves of the spare room at the Parsonage. Our stay was quite long enough for us to discern in this town of 3,000 souls more kindly familiarity

and mutual interest than is generally found in city life. The various civic and public institutions reflected the democratic spirit. All needs and all tastes were well catered for, even down to the picture shows and various sports and clubs, and these latter are shared by the handful of out-dwellers whose occasional drive to town is their main enjoyment in life. On the pretty public park, the show ground, and the racecourse, the various phases of industry and sport are presented from time to time, and four churches testify that higher claims are not quite forgotten.

The life in Hay and other Outback towns which space will not allow me to deal with fully has its advantages and amenities, and dwellers there do not eat the dust of scorn cast at times by the new-chum city man; they quietly await the latter's conversion from love of the feverish haste and noise of city life to the calmer pleasure of country life. They dream of mountain and seaside as a joyous occasional change, but abide contentedly in their own little town of the interior.

Hay is the Cathedral town of the Anglican Diocese of Riverina, and our friend Mr. Lusby introduced us to Dr. Anderson, the Bishop. His Lordship was from Devonshire, but had spent many years in Mackay, Hughenden, Townsville, and other parts of Queensland. Life on the fringes of civilisation did not, however, extinguish the love for picture-making which had brought him distinction in his Cambridge days, and when appointed Bishop of Riverina he found an opportunity to practise his art. He had just completed a remarkable mural painting in the Cathedral Church at Hay. The subject was taken from Revelations, and the treatment was both original and able. The Bishop with his oils mounted his scaffold morning after morning, and often did not descend until the darkness of evening made work impossible. The painting covers one of the walls of the building, which is the first church in Australia to be thus decorated by its Pastor.

CHAPTER XX

THE OUTBACK PARSON

A GREAT many city folk think that the parson's job is a "soft thing." Perhaps it is, when the parson has only one or two congregations to minister to, as is usual in city churches. But it is a different matter when the case of the Australian country parson—or, better still, the Home Missionary—comes to be considered.

There is a legend about a young Presbyterian who volunteered for service in Australia, and on hearing that he would have to engage in Home Missionary work rejoiced exceedingly. As most people know, Home Mission work in the Old Country is not quite the same thing beneath the Southern Cross, and the young clergyman in question had visions of a compact and manageable little mission district in the mean quarter of some teeming city, with no financial responsibility, and the minister of the wealthy mother-church to run to whenever any kind of difficulty arose. True, the district might be a trifle slummy and depressing, and the people not so well groomed and urbane as one might wish; but there were always compensations in the shape of freedom from worry, and the sympathy and help of young men from the aristocratic churches near by, not to speak of the sundry young ladies who would come periodically to look on, or even to "work," as they called it, and dazzle the slum-folk with their fearfully and wonderfully-made garments. Yes, on the whole he felt he could not make a better start in a new country than by engaging in Home Mission work; later on, when he had grown more accustomed to the new conditions, he could venture upon sterner tasks.

BUR—Have you ever met the Presbyterian "Gospel Car" itinerating in the district between Bourke and Milparinka, and thence to White Cliffs and Wilcannia, in the "Back o' Beyond"? Have you ever been west of Wellington, and travelled the great plains? Have you seen flat, scrubby country stretching for hundreds of miles in every direction,

at times bearing scarcely a green blade of grass? Have you travelled the lonely Bush without seeing a house for thirty miles? Have you ever attempted to travel over black-soil plains in wet weather? Have you cycled over forty miles of rough Bush track, with the sun shining at 100 to 110 in the shade, and been glad to drink water that would stick to the roof of your mouth? Have you ever driven across a ten-mile plain twenty-four hours after a fire has swept over it? Have you lived in a town where there are seven large hotels and three wine-licensed shops to accommodate a mere thousand people? Have you been to Canbelgo and seen half a dozen brutal fights on a Sunday afternoon? If you have seen and done all these things you know something of what the Parsons and Home Missionaries of all denominations have to do "Out West."

A few months ago a new Methodist Missionary was appointed to Nyngan. He found there a nice little church, and this is his headquarters. He batches in the tiny vestry, and stables his horses in the church paddock. In Nyngan itself he preaches twice each Sunday, and conducts Sunday School in the afternoon. He soon learnt the evil wrought by the grog-shops, and no doubt his heart yearns to stay in Nyngan and run some counter-attraction at the church to keep the young people out of the snares that are ruining many of them. But he cannot do this; his circuit is 6,000 (six thousand) square miles in area, and he has fourteen preaching-places to visit every month, and nearly 500 (five hundred) miles to travel to get to them. On Monday morning at sunrise he is up and off, and covers perhaps fifty-eight miles by two o'clock, visiting two homes on the way. At these places he gathers the children, teaches them a little Scripture, sets them their lessons for the month, and hears the lessons learnt during the last month. At the homestead there are gathered a dozen or fifteen people, most of whom have travelled a like number of miles to the service, all eager that their children, at any rate, might receive spiritual teaching. Hastily he lunches, bathes and changes, and at 2.30 the service commences. The service over, tea is partaken of, the congregation hastening off to reach home before darkness covers the rough Bush tracks. Hospitality is lavished on the missionary for the night. In the morning he is on the road early, as a mining town has to be visited before the evening service, and there may be babies to christen and folk to marry. Kerosene-tin huts, bark huts, and bag huts are the common dwelling-houses. The "H.M." batches in a little wooden hut, with some men who work a sawmill, and preaches to any who may turn up at

night. For the next three days he drives hard and fast, visiting squatters' families far removed from all churches, and arrives back in Nyngan late on Saturday afternoon—hot, dusty, and fatigued—after a sixty-mile drive home. Even then there is no rest; he must prepare for Sunday's services, and this will take him far into the morning. Soon he is off in another direction. And so the work goes on. Having given himself over to it, heart and soul, you will hear no complaint of fatigue and overwork. He is not easily discouraged, and works on in loneliness and obscurity, looking not for personal advancement or plaudits of men. But all the time his heart aches, because there on his table lie "calls" from parents a hundred miles away up the creeks pleading for an occasional visit "for the sake of the children." Another man could be stationed at Nyngan and be as fully occupied as the first; but it cannot be done, first, because young men are not quick to volunteer for the work; and second, because the Home Mission Society has to economise.

The Home Missionary's life is full of adventure, and even peril. He must play the man first and the Missioner afterwards. The swagman on the road, the shearer in the hut, the station "hand" on the "run"—all will listen to what you say after they have found out what you are! Many of my Missionary friends have shorn sheep with them, mobbed and drafted cattle and sheep, put up fencing, and so on, all to win their confidence and respect. Once that has been done they will welcome you as you go scouting into gambling den or whisky saloon, or they will sing with you the favourite old Sankey hymns, or hear the Gospel story.

And so much the better for the Missionary if he can give a mother advice on the relative value of patent medicines for childish complaints, and, leaving the workings of theology, talk on every subject under the sun, from farm implements to the machinery of State. And better still if he can get used to the different brews of tea he has to taste. Truly, the Back-blocks Missionary is expected to be a physician for physical ills as well as the care of souls, and to have the constitution of a horse, and the digestion of an ostrich!

The Outback parson has to travel over long distances for congregations sometimes exceedingly small. Incidental to the travelling are many experiences which have a peculiar character all their own. For instance, one red-headed missionary, down in the Riverina of New South Wales, was caught in a red-dust storm. In these storms it becomes dark, and the fowls go to roost! Jumping out of his sulky, he went to the horse's head until the storm passed. He was

covered in red, his clothes were red, and, to use his own expression, he "got his head red." One very hot day the same "H.M." met a friend on the road. They went in search of water. After a while they discovered a hole about three feet deep, "and about as thick!" Another has preached in a place where the larger portion of the congregation were fowls! A cockatoo attacked him during one service, and began to bite his shoe. Soon it got round to his toe, and he vigorously kicked it to the other end of the barn, when the ruffled bird called out, "Holy smoke!" and the congregation indulged in more than one smile. He has preached to a hundred shearers in a "shed." Just as the sermon began a bag of flour was hurled at him. It broke. The shock was so great that he "turned white all over"! At another service, one little child asked for the hymn, "Mary had a little lamb."

The rewards of the Outback preacher are peculiar to his work. A trip of eighty-three miles, after eight shillings and sixpence expenses, and two days' tramping round to "work up" a congregation, resulted in a collection of three shillings. Talking to these missionaries, they sketch incident after incident, with a graphic touch; each contributes its quota to a telling picture of a Bush parson's life and work. Suddenly, in the thick of the fun, one drops into the story of a farmer's daughter, who had never been to church, and never heard of Christ until she was sent on an errand to another farm. There she found no meat on the table, because, as the housewife explained, it was Good Friday. "Good Friday? What is that?" asked the astonished girl. "Why, don't you know, Jesus Christ died on Good Friday." On returning home, the young girl told her parents with some excitement that over at the neighbouring farm, "they ate no meat 'cos a bloke was killed to-day."

Nyngan, a town situated on the banks of the Bogan River, and at the junction of the Cobar and Main Western Railway lines, is the centre of the most extensive Home Mission station in New South Wales. The Missionary is responsible for an area covering over 6,000 square miles. Three public schools are visited for religious instruction. The order of the day is travelling—winter and summer (and summer at Nyngan often means 118 in the shade). Recently, a drought befell the district, making the work harder and the travelling more difficult. The carrying of horse-feed to every part was imperative. Fortunately, the majority of missionaries are good Bushmen, but one Nyngan "H.M.," through no fault of his own, very nearly had a "night out."

Whilst travelling some fifty miles from home, "Topsy," the horse, took sick, and died within a few minutes, leaving the missionary and his wife (who often made the long once-a-quarter "Bogan Trip" with her husband) six miles from a house, which distance had to be tramped under a heavy load in the moonlight. This young man's adventures with horses, difficulties in travel over black-soil plains after heavy rain, strategy used to reach the hearts of shearers and station-hands, etc., would make romantic reading. The travelling at Nyngan amounts to over four thousand miles for the year, and apart from the regular services, the missionary—who never grumbles at his ill-paid lot—preaches wherever opportunity offers.

In the very hilly district of Nundle, another "H.M." thinks nothing of travelling 100 miles or so each week of the year per bike, horse, or "shanks' pony." Once, while cycling, he had to cross a swollen creek. He made a framework of sticks, rested the bicycle on it, and jumped the creek further up, afterwards pulling the machine across. "One night," he told me, "on the way to an 'appointment' I pedalled halfway across a creek. Regretted it, and walked the other half. Congregation waited nearly an hour that night, and I arrived wet and cold and hungry."

Now and again a service is arranged without the assistance of any regular preacher. On one occasion, Judge Blank, while travelling to a country police court, struck a township for out in the "Never, Never country," where there was no church, nor parson, but only a public-house, post office, stores, and a few houses. The Judge was asked to read the Anglican prayers in the afternoon, and on no account to omit the prayer for rain, which was badly needed. Judge Blank promised compliance, and duly officiated, but somehow, instead of reading the prayer *for* rain, he turned over the wrong leaf, and substituted the "thanksgiving for rain." The subject was mentioned to him afterwards. His only rejoinder was, "Look here, boys, it's never a good plan to open a fresh account before you've squared off the old debt; I'll be bound you never thanked Providence for the last batch of rain you got, and you owed for it still, and now I've squared that bill for you, you can ask for more with a clear conscience." He left the crowd cogitating.

On a certain sheep-station, two of the "hands" decided to hold a service. Very little was known about the one who was to preach (he hadn't been there long), but the other young fellow was a real "hard case," and he had to lead the singing. On the Sunday set apart all the men mustered in the "Bachelors' Hall" (the mens' hut on stations). But

the hardened old white sinners gave them such a bad time, and the station blacks kept up such "corroboree" for days afterwards, singing out, "White pfeller him make it one big cobon (great) stupit corr-yallejulah-Amen-praise-Lor'-Amen," that the two men didn't repeat the experiment. The new "hand" left soon after, and it was discovered that drink had kicked him out of the Anglican ministry. Another of the peripatetic wanderers you so frequently meet Outback!

I have enjoyed many a long drive with ministers and Home Missionaries of all denominations in the course of my Outback wanderings. One day I got to . . . just as the "H.M." was starting out for a week. My time was my own, and I very gladly accepted his offer to accompany him. A well-wisher of the Church had allowed the pony to run on the young wheat crops in order to liven him up for the trip. That kindness prolonged the preparations for starting, for "Benny," preferring green wheat to hard work, refused to be caught until he had expended as much labour as would have taken him many miles on the journey. The bag packed for a week away, with corners filled with tracts, text cards, and religious papers, and with a well-filled nose-bag for a foot rest in the sulky, the journey westward began.

The first stage was only twenty miles away, where a farmhouse service had been arranged that night; but measles had been among the young folk, and many of the neighbours were afraid to come. However, notwithstanding the scare, the front room was filled. The singing, led by an accordion, that was quite innocent of accidentals or semi-tones, was more hearty than musical.

On the way there, each house, averaging two miles apart, was called at. At one place, an infidel, blatant with worn-out arguments, became subdued and communicative when approached kindly, and over a cup of tea told how he had vanquished so many parsons that none now cared to come near. In the next home a young lady inquired about marriage laws and conjugal responsibilities. In another, an aged man, who had passed David's allotted threescore years and ten, told how "few and evil" had been the days that were gone, and how he longed to be "with mother," as he called his late wife.

"Be sure and take the track to the left, the other leads to the dam," was our parting admonition next morning, but we saw no track to the left, and coming to the dam, knew we must turn back and look for it. Then we found numerous tracks, one of which brought us to a felled tree, where wood-cutters had been working, and which ended there. Another track had every indication of being right according

to the directions, but there were trees across it that showed it had not been used for many days. So we struck out through the trackless Bush, and coming to a fence, "ran it up" until we found a gateway. Here were the tracks of the horse ridden by one who had been at the service the night before; and these we followed, now through open "box" country, then through dense pine scrub, the trees forming a tunnel rather than a lane, through which we threaded our way, unable to see at any time more than fifty yards ahead. At last, on the edge of the great clump of scrub, there was a little oasis. A farm where there was a right royal welcome, a rest for man and horse, a long stay for lunch, a noon-tide family altar—and away again.

Then for miles there was not a house. The only sign of habitation was a lonely biscuit-tin, nailed to a tree, where the coachman drops the letters intended for some homestead miles back from the road. (They found some tracts and religious literature among their next day's mail.) Evening time found us crossing the black-soil plains towards the homestead of one of the largest and most prosperous sheep-stations in the State, where the little settlement—the size of an English village—was alive with shearing operations. When the Missionary was here last month, they were in full swing, to-day they will be "cut-out." *Then* he had a service in the wool-shed, the wool-press for a pulpit, new-stuffed bales for pews, and the dim, irreligious light of "slush-lamps" to help them read the words. This time everybody was rushing to be paid off and get away; and it was with difficulty that a few were rounded up for service in the "Men's Hut." "'Twill take a good stock-horse to muster these men to-morrow," said the overseer, for they came from widely different parts all over the State. "A wild lot, many of them past redemption," the "boss" thought. Modern rush does not permit them time enough for the old-fashioned fun of dressing up in gay attire the last sheep to be shorn; but when the last timid one—looking appealingly for some way of escape—is grabbed, the signal for the bell is given, up go the hats of the "boys," and half an hour after the busy "shed" is quiet for another year.

We were pressed to stay a day, but even the comfort of this home could not keep the busy "H.M." Over the hills was another station. Then into the township of M——, the stopping-place for coaches, where the roads from Gunnedah branch west and south. One "pub," a blacksmith's shop, two stores, a police station, and half a dozen dwellings that can hardly be called cottages, a small "half-time" school, and a post office in one of the stores, formed

the whole township. The Government tank, a mile off, is the most important part of it, even though the water is fit for stock only. Dusty and dirty after the long drive in the sun, appearances were anything but pleasant, for the hostess said: "Perhaps you'd like a wash before the service?" "Thank you very much, Mrs. ———, I'd positively like a bath." "Oh, you'll not get that here; our tanks are empty, and we have to cart from the Government tank; but I thought you would not like that, so I have caded a little fresh water for you to rinse your hands in."

And so on every day, through the Bush, across wide-sweeping plains, fording a billabong here and an anabranche there, yarning and "boiling the billy" with all classes of Bush workers, until at the end of a week, we drove back along the dusty streets of the township we started from. A week or two's visiting in the immediate neighbourhood, and the "H.M." was off again in another direction—doing much good work for both Church and State.

History does not record what the young Presbyterian said when he arrived at his charge in the Never Never Land, with a parish about the size of Scotland, and a horse which did not compare favourably with the noble and serene steeds he had hitherto met on the various merry-go-rounds which represented his total equestrian experience. At any rate, one may safely imagine his disillusionment to have been sufficiently thorough. In later years, when the talk turned on to work in the Backblocks, he would shake his head in a meditative and slightly sad manner, and give it as his deliberate and well-matured opinion that "Home Mission work was no joke." Missionary work in the Great Outback comprises a stiff climb and rough path to be got over.

CHAPTER XXI

THE AUSTRALIAN SUNDOWNER

BETWEEN Hay and Illiliwa, a distance of not more than nine miles, we met about a dozen sundowners and other swaggies. It was not a difficult matter to pick out the workers from the shirkers. The swaggies, the majority of whom were men with plenty of spare cash in their pockets, belaboured us with questions as to the chances of getting work along the track we had come. They had mostly been doing odd jobs on stations in this and the neighbouring districts, and possessed of restless spirits, which made it impossible to stay in one place for any length of time, were "hoofing it" until the next thing turned up. "Swagging" is an arduous method of travelling, but its disabilities are a good deal softened when you have a good mate or a faithful dog for company.

As for the sundowners, they were silent, morose, dirt-begrimed individuals with whom it was impossible to get into conversation. They were typical representatives of a sort of Bush Brotherhood which numbers amongst its devotees some of the most original and curious wanderers on the face of the earth, not even excepting the American "Weary Willie" and "Dusty Rhodes" type of tramp.

The Sundowner is an indirect result of an abundant overflow of hospitality which the settlers meted out in the early days. Never seeking work, he wanders about from station to station, making a point of arriving just at sundown, when the day's work is done, and when there is no possibility of his being asked to do a job. He "smoodges" round the cook, and if "moved on" without his tucker-bags replenished, he does not scruple to do an injury. Many bush fires have been attributed to sundowners. In some cases it has been proved that when the sundowner did not possess a match, he set fire to the grass by placing a piece of tin or glass in such a position that it would concentrate the sun's rays and act as a burning-glass. But then again it must not be thought that all bush fires first started by glass or tin can be put down to the work of a sundowner. Naturally, such an article might be thrown down by any traveller without any evil intention whatever.

Of course, all "Swaggies" are not necessarily sundowners. In England the working man travels with his bundle slung on a stick. The Australian "swag" is not quite the same as the swag that is known in England. The latter is, in thieves' slang, "booty," but in Australia the "swag" (or "nap") consists of blanket, tent (if one is carried), change of clothing, etc., rolled up in a bundle carried across the shoulders.

But the professional sundowner makes a point of arriving at a station or farm just on sundown, and asks for food. Sometimes he tells the folk that he is making for a station ten miles further on where he expects to get work. But the majority of his species asks straight out for food, and as the hospitality of the Bush does not seem to have been on the down grade since it first promulgated this picturesque class of Outback traveller, the "tucker" is seldom denied him.

Many of these old Bush wanderers are eccentric and soft-brained, even harmlessly mad, due no doubt to their long and dreary lives of solitude, lack of ambition, hope, aim, and society. There was no great amount of sympathy and fellow-feeling attached to one whom we met during our peregrinations. He was a one-eyed old battler, with a one-eyed, old, broken-down horse, and two one-eyed dogs! "I likes ter have one-eyed creatures round me," opined the grim old warrior, "it don't make me feel ther loss o' me own blinker so much."

In Western Victoria we passed another leading a big, half-bred St. Bernard dog, which carried the old chap's billy-can, tucker, and water-bags on a well-fitting, nicely-made pack-saddle. In the same district we met an old sundowner who was wheeling his few antiquated earthly belongings in an old superannuated wheelbarrow. Round his legs this ancient wayfarer wore top and bottomless treacle-tins. "No blooming' snails," he remarked, "'ll ever get er chance ter nip my—something—ankles." On the Murrumbidgee we asked several questions of an old "whaler"* as to roads and grass and water ahead. The only answer we could drag out of him was: "Quoth the raven, never more."

But perhaps the most eccentric nomad I ever met was located on a far Western Queensland station. He was lying under a mulga tree, and his face was absolutely covered with flies. And this in a region where the fly pest is perhaps worse than in any other part of Australia. To travel without fly-nets, corks on strings from round the brim of the hat, or a bush in hand, means torture to the average "Bushie." The old man lay so still, and his face was so covered with the flying abomination, that the manager took it for granted the

* On the Outback rivers sundowners are known as "whalers."



Photo by]

[F. C. Wright.
AN AUSTRALIAN SUNDOWNER.



Photo by]

[W. K. Harris.
FOUR FEET OF "GOHANNA."

poor old chap was a corpse, and rode over to investigate. To his inquiry, "What's up, matey?" he opened his eyes, and sent a cloud of buzzing flies momentarily into the air. Then he stared at the manager savagely, and snarled: "Carn't yer let er feller have er sleep, an' leave 'im alone?" "Beg pardon, old chap," was the reply, "but seeing all those flies on your face, I thought perhaps things weren't well with you." "Garn!" the 'downer snapped viciously, "Why don't yer mind yer own business? Ther flies don't hurt me, and when yer in the Bush as long as I am, yer won't bother ter chase them off yer ugly face any more either. 'Sides, ther poor flies want er feed as well as you do, darn yer." Then he closed his eyes again, and allowed the flies to once more make themselves comfortable on his weather-beaten visage.

"The most interesting sundowner that ever came out as far Outback as Bogadilla," this Queensland manager told me, "was a big, red-whiskered man, carrying a bundle of rags for a swag. He became something of a nuisance after hanging round the place for a week, so I gave him three hours to get out of eyeshot. Then he made his proposition, 'Look here, squatter,' he said, 'give me a good feed, a hot, five-course dinner, with wine, and I'll hang myself.' 'What guarantee have I that you will keep your word?' I asked. 'None,' he replied, 'and I can give you none.' He amused me. I was alone and bored. I had the amiable scamp in, and gave him a five-course dinner, with wine. We discussed the theme jocularly, he insisting that what strengthens the man only strengthens his intentions, good, bad, or indifferent. 'When you feed a thief, you make a better thief, not a better man,' he said. I held that temperament was largely a matter of conditions, and that a good meal, well-placed, was calculated to ruin many resolutions. 'It is an interesting experiment we are trying,' he said, as I turned him out after dinner. Next morning I was awakened early by the yelling of a servant. My guest of the previous evening had broken in and hanged himself to the chandelier over my dinner table. On the table was a note: 'You see, I was right.'"

Family names are of no account, and are soon forgotten amongst the wandering sundowners of Outback, and few are ever known by their right cognomen. Bill Smith or Charley Brown one seldom hears mentioned along the rivers and billabongs and other tracks. "Jimmy the Rambler," "Jimmy the Rooster," "Jacky without a Shirt," "Scotty the Blackguard," "Sydney Bob," "Joe the Whaler," "Long Tom," "The Doctor," "Three Star Dick," "Scotty the Wrinkler,"

"Crooked Mick," "Crutchie Carnie," "Greenhide Jack," "Ginger Joe," "Wingy Mac," and others of the same kind are nom-de-plumes these nomads are mostly known by.

But these aimless wanderers don't always stick to their picturesquely grotesque sobriquets, which generally indicate some striking peculiarity of the man, but are at other times wholly misleading. A Warrego (Queensland) squatter desiring to keep record of who and how many swaggies called at his station for free rations during the year, requested the storekeeper to demand of every swagman to sign his name into a book for that purpose before receiving his gratis food. When the man of wool examined the book after a month or two he received a nervous shock, from which it took him some considerable time to recover. All the greatest acting, sporting, medical, literary, scientific, and political celebrities of the day were "on the wallaby," "humping bluey," and had called at his particular station for the proverbial free pannikin of "dust" (flour), pinch of "shot" (baking powder), and "banjo" (shoulder) of mutton and pinch of tea and sugar. The book showed the names of Rider Haggard, Tommy Burns, Sir Morell M'Kenzie, Mark Twain, Henry Irving, Bland Holt, W. T. Stead, Bertram M'Kennell, Sir George Reid, Joe Chamberlain, Alfred Deakin, William Beach, and so on. That settled it. The registration was abandoned. 'Downer's sense of humour had counter-acted it.

Altogether, the Australian sundowner is an interesting roaming vagrant, often with a life of romance and adventure behind his quiet thoughtful eyes. He is usually a silent, wistful man, with the traditional melancholy of the Bush written all over him—although to some of us who understand her moods, the Bush carols a note of joy and gladness that is entirely the opposite of the weird solitude in which she is usually portrayed. But whether alone or in double harness, the sundowner is a man of few words. He can communicate the fact that he wants "tucker," or a bit of flour or "baccy," or a handful of tea, but he never wastes words in the courtesies of asking.

We were always curious to know whether, when a pair of them were "on the road," they ever talked to one another; but the only information proffered was the curt reply that there was "nothing to talk about." The story is told of two mates who tramped from the Lachlan in New South Wales right across to Mildura, in Victoria, living as only the sundowner knows how to live in this land of magnificent distances. They never exchanged an idea except once, when a solitary bird flew across their path. "Magpie," said one,

without eliciting any remark from his companion. Hours afterwards, when making a fire, the other man, by way of continuing the conversation interrupted by the long silence, said, "It might 'a been a crow." "Too much argying in this camp," said the first speaker, and quietude fell upon the party once more.

One Christmas day a man carrying a swag was walking along the track between Eucla and Eyre's Patch. He was sixty miles from a settlement, coming or going. Suddenly he saw another swaggy walking towards him. When they came together, the first-mentioned said: "Whato." The other remarked, "Whato." "Where'd you come from?" inquired the first man. The other simply jerked his head west, and said, "Where'd you?" The first man jerked his head east, and inquired, "Got any tobacker?" The other produced a plug. The first man filled his pipe, returned the plug, and said, "So long," and left. The other remarked, "Ditto," and left too. Presently the first man turned back, and cried, "Hey, I forgot to wish yer a Merry Christmas." The other man looked back, and said, "Ditto."

CHAPTER XXII

ILLILIWA TO BRINGAGEE

FRESH from her short spell at Hay, "Opal" did not take long to rattle through the eight or nine miles to "Illiliwa" Homestead, where, after a dip in the river, we had lunch with the bookkeeper and the three Jackeroos. On this station we found many points of interest, but the item which impressed itself most upon our minds was the fact that scattered over the 170,000 acres of Illiliwa country were no less than twenty-five children, "and others coming fast," as the Manager put it. At one time there had been as many as thirty-two.

On this station, as on several others we had passed through, the manager was in favour of his "married couples" being blessed with "encumbrances," rightly concluding that having the children to attend to, they would be more likely to stay on and settle down to their work, instead of leaving at the end of their first six months' engagement. A school is on a part of the station convenient to such of the six out-stations as have children of school age, and to this building the young Australians ride or drive to receive their education. Those nearer the railway line are provided with free passes to Hay or Carrathool, where they attend the Government Public Schools.

A few miles out from Illiliwa we caught up a young Englishman, a one-time sailor who had cleared out from his ship at Newcastle some months before. He was tramping to a job at Groongal Station, fifty miles up the river. There was no room for a passenger in the sulky, but we relieved him of his heavy swag, and while "The Long 'Un" drove on to where we could see Illiliwa shearing-shed showing up in the mirage, my companion amused me with an account of his endeavours to become accustomed to the ways of the Bush.

Jack had the billy boiling by the time we walked up, and after an early tea we left the new chum to camp at the woolshed, while we pushed on. An hour's run brought us to the last Illiliwa fence, and we entered Uardry country, where the first thing that took our eyes was a horseman who seemed to

be practising at polo. Getting closer, we found that he was merely cutting down Bathurst burrs and Scotch thistles with a small semi-circular scythe attached to a five foot sapling.

Like many of the noxious things in Australia, the Bathurst burr is an imported article. In the early 'forties two well known residents of the Bathurst (New South Wales) district purchased some of the first draft of Shetland ponies brought out to Australia, and the tails of these animals were literally matted with burrs. Vigorous grooming soon freed the ponies from the seed, and in at least two paddocks on the plains there was a plentiful distribution of seed, from which the whole of Australia was all too liberally supplied in succeeding years. The sheep soon began to pick them up in their wool. Afterwards these flocks were taken farther afield for pastures, chiefly to newly-opened country in the West, the burr being scattered far and wide. But the chief means of wide dissemination in the operation was the great flood of 1884, which swept all debris from the plains about Bathurst into the Macquarie River, and carried it far down along the whole course of that stream. Thus the far western plains on each side of the river received their supply of the weed which has caused more trouble to pastoralists throughout the Commonwealth than any other vegetable growth, natural or imported.

Leaving the pest-destroyer, our course lay along a "T.S.R." (travelling stock route) for a few miles, and then we turned off at right angles to run through an avenue of willows, which eventually brought us to Uardry homestead, about a quarter of a mile from the track.

Pronounced "Ordree," but sometimes called "You-are-dry," Uardry is one of the best known stations on the Murrumbidgee, and is the home of one of the oldest and most famous studs of merino sheep in Australia. Acquired by the present owner, Mr. Charles Mills, in 1876, when the Aborigines called it "Yangungular," the holding now comprises 77,000 acres, practically all freehold. It is situated on the edge of the great Saltbush plains of the Central West of the Riverina district, and has a frontage of twenty-seven miles to the Murrumbidgee River, which forms the southern boundary of the estate. The nearest town of importance is Hay, the telegraph address is Carrathool, but there is a railway siding named after the station, close to the homestead.

The run is best described as flat plains running back from a fringe of magnificent red gum timber along the river bank. For five miles back the country is rather windswept and scalded, but at that point open plains, timbered with box, boree, and cuba, interspersed with nice pine ridges, are met with. In the early days all this back country was very poorly

watered, but the combination of brains, capital, and enterprise has changed all this, and Uardry is now one of the best watered and most improved properties in the Riverina.

The country was practically unimproved when the present owner settled on the property nearly forty years ago. But it is now sub-divided into sixty-eight sheep-proof paddocks by well-constructed fences, mostly of the "post and six-wire" style, whilst the whole of the boundary, together with the Narrandera to Hay railway line, which intersects the property, is fenced with a wire netting rabbit-proof fence. The only natural water is the splendid frontage to the Murrumbidgee, previously referred to, but no less than thirty-eight tanks, twelve wells, and three bores have been put down, all but the first being equipped with mills of from ten to eighteen feet diameter, and necessary troughing, whilst at nine of the wells and bores there are either large earthen or iron storage tanks into which the mills pump the water before it reticulates into troughs.

The comfortable old-fashioned bungalow homestead contains over fifteen rooms, and is picturesquely situated on a high bank overlooking a beautiful stretch of the 'Bidgee. Built of wood, with iron roof, not the least pleasing feature is the twelve-foot verandah which practically encircles the house—a wise provision in such a hot climate.

There was no fear of becoming "Bushed" in this particular district, as for about eighty miles from Hay our course lay between the railway line and the river, and though we might miss the right track, we could not go far wrong. The railway reminded us that we were now getting "closer in," though there were still long stretches of "Outback" to be traversed between the various railway systems before we would eventually get really "inside." Small squattages of between 50,000 and 90,000 acres were gradually taking the place of the immense properties containing anything between 150,000 and 200,000 acres, and between Uardry station and the township of Whitton (where we left the 'Bidgee), several homesteads, such as Howlong, Groongal, Wyvern, and Bringagee, were passed every six or seven miles.

The plains continued after Uardry, but there seemed to be more clumps of timber to break the skyline. At times we had nothing to guide us but just rough tracks which meandered across the open stretches, but for the most part our route lay along a "T.S.R." two hundred links wide, on both sides of which the paddocks were looking like huge green velvet carpets as a result of the rain the previous week.

Shooting up with the new grass was mile after mile of a peculiar growth known as "Chinese Piemelon." Very

similar in appearance to an octopus, this plant sends out its tentacle-like arms in all directions. The "Piemelons" grow on these arms, and in their millions they seemed to cover the whole countryside, ready to send blind the first sheep that ate too many. Covered with short spikes, they were of a greenish yellow colour, and in their first week had grown to the size of a hen's egg. At a later stage of our journey we found them as big as a sheep's head, when the plants were due to die off just as quickly as they had sprung up only a month before.

This curious growth vied with the grass for possession of the red soil right on to Bringagee, another well-known Murrumbidgee station. Bringagee differed somewhat from other properties, inasmuch as there was a military-barracks compactness about the buildings which was altogether absent from other stations. Down on the river bank we found a pumping plant and an electric power-house containing a sixty-six horse-power engine and a twenty-two horse-power dynamo, with a 400 ampères' hour battery. Altogether, the machinery in that big galvanised iron shed represented an outlay of many thousand pounds.

The shearing machines were worked by electricity, every room and shed and stable and hut was supplied with electric light, and the pump poured 180,000 gallons of water per hour—quite a young flood—over an experimental block of 300 acres of sorghum, which stood eight feet high a quarter of a mile away.

Shearing had taken place some five months before—in August—but some of the flocks had been found to be suffering from blowfly, and fourteen shearers were hard at work "crutching" and "wiggling" in the long shearing-shed, as we passed it on our way to make the acquaintance of the cook.

"Wiggling" and "crutching" are terms which might need a little explanation. The former consists of shearing the wool away from between the eyes, an operation sometimes necessary to prevent the sheep being blinded by the seeds which would otherwise be caught up by that portion of the fleece while the animal was feeding. "Crutching" is necessary in some districts, when blowflies are prevalent, and consists of cutting away the wool from the hind-quarters of the affected animal. The main portion of the fleece, of course, is not touched until the actual shearing season comes round again, but the returns for the "locks," as the wool from these parts is termed, goes a long way towards the cost of crutching.

Having partaken of and bestowed merited praise upon the

excellent scones of the cook, we invaded the shearing-shed. The men were having five minutes' "Smoke-oh!" and were overhauling their machines preparatory to beginning on the final batch of ewes for that day.

Suddenly a whistle sounded, and the shafting along each side of the shed began to revolve. Fourteen men (only one-half the number employed during the annual shearing) seized as many sheep, and in a second the "locks" began to unroll from their wearers. It was like cutting butter with a hot knife. So soon as a "jumbuck" was deprived of its affected locks, it was turned into a pen outside, the wool was smartly carried to the skirting table, deftly thrown, skirted, and rolled, and deposited on a long narrow table in front of the wool-classer, who tossed it into one of the several bins, according to its quality and condition. Everybody worked at high pressure, and the scene appeared to be chaotic. In reality, however, there was not the slightest confusion, and each effort dovetailed harmoniously into a skilfully woven whole.

* * * * *

The majority of people in Australia are more or less familiar with the system of shearing in vogue on the farm, but small is the number of those who can say that they are intimately acquainted with the process as conducted on large stations in the far Outback country. It is almost unfair to make a comparison, for the one is a simple undertaking, which requires only a moderate amount of resource and care, while the other involves long experience, special skill, and great organising powers. The small farmer with, say, five hundred or a thousand sheep, employs two or three blade-shearers, or possibly a couple of machine hands. The sharpest thorn in the side of the station-manager—wet sheep—does not trouble him, because, in the first place, his shearers do not belong to the Union, and are so keenly anxious to finish their engagement and enter upon the next, that they do not complain even if the sheep are slightly damp. The entire flock can be kept quite close to the shearing-shed, without suffering any inconvenience, and consequently can be drawn upon at a moment's notice.

Vastly different is the position of the manager or proprietor of the big station carrying 150,000 sheep, with room on the shearing-boards for thirty men. In this case the shearing campaign has to be elaborately planned months ahead. Even when this course is adopted, and nothing apparently has been forgotten, there is justification for agreeing with the poet that "The best laid plans of mice and men gang aft agley." In

Outback shearing uncertainty invariably looms large on the horizon. When the manager has the work in his own hands it is inevitable that he will have an extremely busy and harassing time. Besides complying with the law relating to the provision of specified sleeping and eating quarters for the men, he must ensure a sufficient food supply. He must also engage a wool-classer and assistants, indicate the various duties to be performed by the "rouseabouts," and, above all, see that the shearers are not obliged, when once shearing has begun, to wait for sheep.

This last matter is one of the most difficult of all. Owing to the nature of the country, and for various other reasons, it is impossible to gather all the sheep close at hand, and accordingly it is necessary to evolve a scheme which will enable them to be drafted in gradually but steadily throughout the shearing. If fine weather prevailed uninterruptedly this could be accomplished without serious trouble, but unfortunately rain falls once, twice, and sometimes more often. When the run is sixty miles from end to end, the result can be easily imagined. Shearing has to be stopped for two or three days, and instructions must be promptly forwarded to the men in charge of the sheep on their way to the "shed" to camp temporarily. Were this not done before the shearing was nearly through, the "home" paddocks would be overcrowded with sheep, and possibly losses would ensue. Each additional rain leads to similar manœuvres.

Occasionally the shearers become discontented, and require to be judicially pacified. Disputes arise regarding "wet" sheep, when the men cease work in fear of rheumatism and paralysis. Careless shearers must be watched and reprimanded, and constant vigilance exercised in every department. It will be seen that the successful station-manager must be a man of exceptional parts. He must have grit and determination, possess abundant tact, be a capable organiser, and be familiar with practically every acre of his run, otherwise the odds are ten to one that long before the shearing is over his "shed" will be in a state of chaos, and most of his men will have departed for more congenial localities. In recent years, especially since the advent of the machines, contract shearing has come largely into vogue, and much of the heat and burden which formerly fell upon the shoulders of the manager are now borne by the contractor's representative. There are still men, however, who prefer to supervise the work themselves, and who assert—with some justification, it must be acknowledged—that they can make a better success of it, financially and in every other way.

Shearing in Australia begins in January, and goes on pretty

well up to December in the colder districts. Except on very large stations, the season lasts from a month to six weeks, and the shearers then ride, drive, cycle, or take train, or "motor-bike" to the next "shed." During shearing-time a station has the appearance of a well-regulated machine; the pace is rapid, but every man has his own special work to look after. Everyone is astir early; the actual shearing begins about six o'clock, but before that time the engine-drivers are at work oiling and getting ready. The manager, the shed overseer, his assistants, the "jackeroos," boundary-riders, and "rouseabouts," are all busily engaged in their respective tasks. The manager must be here, there, and everywhere; the overseer must be in the shed keeping order and a keen eye on all that is being done or left undone; the "new chum" must look alive, and learn all he can; the boundary-rider must take heed to his fences and see that his slip-rails and gates are safe, or trouble may result in the straying of sheep or the "boxing" of flocks; the "rouseabout," that nondescript person, must do all and sundry jobs as he is told. There is also extra work for the busy storekeeper in weighing out rations for shearers and parcelling out plugs of tobacco, as well as selling to the men, generally on account, some article of shop-made clothing, or some other article obtainable from the station store. The shearers, as soon as they are engaged, sign their agreement in the presence of the manager or overseer, and the bookkeeper. They are usually paid at the rate of twenty-four shillings per hundred sheep, which is about the number the ordinary man can shear in one day. Bigger "tallies" are frequently made, but care is exercised by the overseer to prevent "scamping" and careless shearing. Musterers are constantly arriving with sheep for the shears, or driving off those already shorn to their paddocks. In the wool-shed the heavy thrum of the machines driving the shears goes on from daylight to dark, with short intervals for dinner and "Smoke-oh!" Long lines of men stoop busily over their work. Each man pauses only to let a shorn sheep go into the pen in front, and to carry another kicking animal from the pen behind him. "Tar-boys" dart hither and thither as the cry of "Tar, tar, here" arises when a sheep has been cut by the shears.

It is particularly interesting to note the attitudes and methods favoured by the different shearers. The "ringer" of the shed (the fastest shearer—the one who runs rings round the rest), often does up to two hundred a day, crouching down almost upon his knees, and careering through the wool like a miniature cyclone. Alongside him may be the best shearer in the shed, who, although handling only fifteen or twenty

fewer sheep per day, never loses a drop of perspiration, nor apparently exerts himself. With steady swinging sweeps he passes the shears swiftly over the body of the sheep, and unlike others who rush more, rarely makes a second cut.

As the fleeces fall from the sheep, the pickers-up quickly carry and throw them on to tables. The wool-rollers then skirt and roll up each fleece, placing it on the sorter's table close at hand. This expert immediately classifies them, and has them confined to their respective bins, each description of wool being stocked in its particular bin. The pressers next remove and press each sort in separate bales, and on each bale is placed a brand denoting the class of sheep and quality of wool, together with the name of the station, and the weight of the bale.

In a few weeks it is all over. The wool of 50,000 or 100,000 or 200,000 sheep is in the bales—most of it is already on its way to port. The sheep are back in their respective paddocks, growing a fresh crop of the golden fleece, and the "shed," lately the scene of so much busy activity, is given over to the cobwebs until the next shearing comes round.

CHAPTER XXIII

WARANGESDA ABORIGINAL MISSION STATION

WE were pressed to stay a day at Bringagee, but wished to spend the Sunday at Warangesda Mission Station. Leaving very early, a good run of twelve miles brought us to Benerembah Homestead in time for breakfast. Ten miles further on we pulled up at the Darlington Point Police Station, to obtain the necessary permission to visit the Mission Reserve. The local trooper, arrayed in his shirt sleeves, sat at the Bench straightening out some matter affecting the boundaries of a couple of selectors who could not get into town on any other day than the Sabbath.

Three miles on the other side of the river we entered the Aboriginal Settlement—the outcome of much privation and hardship on the part of one individual entirely unsupported by any great Missionary Society.

When, in the late 'seventies, an Anglican Outback parson crossed over the Murray from Victoria into New South Wales, little did he think that such was the very first step towards a home and a work amongst the remnants of the once teeming race of "Murri," but so it was. Travelling from station to station across the plains of the Riverina, he unexpectedly came into contact with the blacks. He found them in a condition most shocking to contemplate. He visited their camps; he entered their wretched bark and bough gunyahs, and everywhere he met with the same wretchedness and woe.

Sometimes, in making a first visit to a camp, the children ran away terrified at his presence; whilst the gins cowered down in their humpies like so many wild beasts. In a bundle of dirty rags he found a tiny half-caste infant girl. And that little bundle of dirty rags and chubby life was an index to a ponderous volume of iniquity existing throughout the Colony. . . .

Early in 1880 this Outback Parson resigned his charge, a very comfortable and profitable one, and to the utter amazement of his friends, left Jerilderie for the scene of the labours



Photo by]

[W. K. Harris

AN ABORIGINAL ENCAMPMENT IN THE FAR OUTBACK.

to which he thought he had been called the moment he found that little mixture of black and white. After three days and nights spent on the roads, the two waggonettes conveying his wife and children and their few household belongings pulled up in a little clump of pine trees. Here, on the south bank of the Murrumbidgee, and three miles from Darlington Point, with the help of a few friendly blacks our parson commenced operations on a reserve which had recently been revoked from lease. The log huts and fences were beginning to take on a homelike appearance when the Missionary first felt the effect of the unfriendly attitude taken up by various squatters and others who for reasons of their own did not look favourably upon the establishment of a home for the blacks. Thanks to the unjust influence brought to bear on the Lands Department, the authorities in Sydney thought fit to caution the Missionary to proceed no further with his self-imposed task.

But two months' personal advocacy in the capital resulted in a settlement of the land question; the Missionary returned with authority to continue the work, happy in the knowledge that his efforts would now be assisted by the Government. A Government School for black children was established almost immediately, and the minister received an appointment as teacher.

To-day, the Warangesda Mission Station comprises about 2,000 acres of land, on which have been erected church, school, superintendent's residence, about a score of cottages for the blacks, and also a girl's dormitory. The station carries about 800 sheep, besides a few horses and cattle, and a little wheat-growing is done.

Mr. MacDonald, the acting superintendent, came out of his bungalow as the dogs heralded our approach. Driving past the cottages we pulled up under the same pine tree under which the founder of the Mission had held his first church service over thirty years before.

We were soon sitting down to lunch, but not before Mr. MacDonald had extracted a satisfactory explanation of our presence—regulations are strict, and a heavy penalty may be handed out to any white man who is found anywhere within the station boundary-fences. In the afternoon, under the guidance of our host, we made an inspection of the settlement. The neat little white-washed one and two-roomed cottages were occupied by about seventy or eighty full-blooded blacks and half-castes and quarter-castes, the former being in the minority. These figures represent the usual population, but there have been times when nearly three hundred have been accommodated (though not all in the

cottages of course). The settlement is intended principally as a home for women and children and old men, and if any young able-bodied male descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia ever call in at Warangesda they get a gentle hint that loafing is not encouraged, and are advised to seek outside work.

Even in the permanent population loafing is discouraged, and, I believe, none is indulged in. The men look after the wheat-growing and the stock, keep the fences and buildings in repair, and make themselves generally useful. For this special work they are paid a small wage, and men, women and children, of course, get their weekly allowance of rations. In addition, the men earn good money by trapping rabbits, foxes, and opossums, the skins of which are consigned to Sydney.

There were about thirty children on the school roll, the school-mistress and dormitory matron being a lady employed by the Aborigines Protection Board, but under the supervision of the Education Department. The curriculum is the same as in the public schools of the State, except on Tuesdays, which are devoted to washing. As soon as a girl turns eight, she leaves her parents to enter the dormitory, where, in between school hours, she gets accustomed to domestic duties. At fourteen she may return to the care of her parents, or be sent out "to service" with some white family approved of by the Board.

As attendance at church service was not compulsory, an old half-caste, named Jimmy Turner (who remembered the original service under the pine tree), did his best to explain that the big muster should be regarded as a compliment to the "two white pfeller visitors." The jovial-faced old chap bowed his head as he drew our attention to a little marble tablet which had been erected to the memory of the "Outback Parson" through whose efforts he and his mother's people had been befriended for so many years. The simple inscription ran:

In loving memory of the
Rev. John B. Gribble, F.R.G.S.,
Founder of this Mission,
And the Blackfellows' Friend,
Who died June 3rd, 1893, aged 45 years.

"The Long 'Un" and I will never forget that service. Picture to yourself a little weatherboard building, only fifty feet by thirty feet, dimly lighted by kerosene lamps and candles, and unlined save for some hessian-bagging behind the altar. Even the lining on this one wall was not com-

plete, for though it went the whole width of the room, it extended only halfway up to the ceiling. The drab-brown colour of this lining was relieved somewhat by a red curtain which hung immediately behind the altar, on which stood a bare wooden cross.

The populace waited outside until the superintendent and school-mistress entered, and then trooped in, the children first. The latter were accommodated in the front rows of forms, boys on one side, girls on the other, leaving the rear seats for the older folk. From our place of vantage on the little platform in front, we looked down on a sea of upturned faces, representing every shade of colour from full-blooded black to quadroon and octoroon. In some there was hardly any trace of black, the only sign of aboriginal ancestry being the flat squab nose, jet black hair, piercing black eyes, full thick lips, and perfect white teeth.

The congregation had certainly not dressed in their "Sunday best." All the kiddies were minus boots and stockings, and most of the men and women were also bare-footed. The men, too, had come without their coats, displaying a great variety of coloured shirts with sleeves rolled up. And the ladies also did not seem to be troubled by the latest fashion from Paris.

The childrens' garments were quite out of harmony with their high-sounding names. They were so tattered that they seemed to reveal more of their little persons than they concealed. We became acquainted with their noble names as the service proceeded, particularly during the sermon, for the piccaninnies were well up in the little peculiarities characteristic of infant life. For instance, we heard, "Rose Melinda, stop biting your nails," breathed across the room by one proud mother. Another inquired of her erring offspring, "Where's your handkerchief, Albert Edward," while a third admonished her little girl with, "Stop sucking your fingers, Gwendoline Matilda." All of which came to our ears in the otherwise unbroken silence as the congregation listened to the words of the preacher.

But for these trifling injunctions, the reverent attention displayed during the whole service was a revelation. Particularly was this the case in the subdued singing of the Vesper hymn at the conclusion of the service, "Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me, Bless Thy little Lamb to-night." It would, of course, be too much to say that no eyes were opened till the singing was over. "The Long 'Un" and I felt at liberty to watch. In the great majority of cases, the ritual was duly observed, but here and there, in the children's rows, a pair of big, mischievous, laughing black orbs met ours,

and promptly closed again, though a smile lurked about the moving lips beneath them. Almost within reach of me, in the front row, sat a little girl of five or six years, whose picture acutely impressed itself upon my mind. She wore a green cloth coat and a quaint little bonnet of red material, with a white fringe round the border, and her forehead was overhung with glossy black curls. Her feet dangled some inches from the bare flooring boards. Her little hands were clasped so tightly that the knuckles seemed to stand out white from the dark skin; her face had taken on the infinite calm of a sleeping child, and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" possessed her heart.

* * * * *

The treatment meted out to the Australian Aborigine in the early days forms the only dark chapter in Australian history. Though it is true that many settlers, who understood and appreciated their peculiar characteristics, were generous to the blacks and treated them kindly, on the whole they were given scant consideration. It is only when the race threatens to become extinct that the white population have felt it their duty to be generous to the blacks. Since settlement began to seriously advance in the Commonwealth the career of the natives has been a tragedy. It is well not to recall the deeds of long ago when the pioneers were getting a foothold in the wilderness. It is enough to point to the rapid decay of the tribes in the southern State, to show that the black man has had by far the worst of the contest. He cannot survive the conditions of what the whites call civilisation.

In later years when the ravages of disease, of grog, and of other features of "civilisation" have annihilated tribe after tribe, the hearts of the white invaders of the territory of the natives have been touched. The annual presentation of blankets to the aboriginals is an act of generosity on the part of the State Governments, but the diminishing number of applicants year by year tells a sad tale. To-day the southern States are almost without a representative of the blacks. Tasmania has long since been deprived of her last native, and Victoria and New South Wales have but a few survivors. In the last two mentioned States it is somewhat of a curiosity now to find a blacks' camp in the Bush.

The northern portion of the continent, where the whites are slow in settling, is now the home of nearly all who remain of the once numerous and interesting race. Even the beautiful and euphonious aboriginal names of localities have in many cases been changed (often to such wild

absurdities as Dead Horse Creek, Tin Can Gully, and so on), and there is a danger of the native population disappearing altogether, and all memory of them being wiped off the landscape. Now that the final act in the tragedy is being reached, something is being done to allow the remaining days of the race to be spent in peace. Even the White Australian enthusiast does not grudge the necessary funds to support the settlements for Aborigines to be found in various parts of the Commonwealth.

CHAPTER XXIV

DARLINGTON POINT TO WELLINGTON

LEAVING Warangesda as the kiddies saluted the Union Jack prior to marching into school, we once more crossed the fine drawbridge at Darlington Point, and a couple of hours later made the railway line again at Whitton. For fifteen miles to this township our course lay through paddocks of long, dry brown grass, standing a foot and a half high, looking for all the world like the vast wheatfields which will soon, under the Closer Settlement policy of the Government, take the place of the sheep.

Thanks to being misdirected at Purdon's Tank—or, in justice to "Old Man" Purdon, perhaps I should say thanks to certain irrigation channels having demolished a few fences, we missed the track for Merribee Homestead, and got into a roundabout track which made our journey to Barellan many miles longer than it should have been. We camped for the night on the banks of one of those canals which, stretching out in all directions from the Northern Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, will make fertile the wide-spreading plains lying between Narrandera and Hay.

This irrigation scheme divides itself into three sections. First, there is the dam at Barren Jack, now renamed Burrinjuck, where at least twice as much water as is contained in Sydney Harbour will be stored; secondly, there is the diversion weir at Berembed, two hundred miles from the dam, where the Murrumbidgee waters will be turned into the irrigation canal that will eventually be continued on to Gunbar, sixty miles away; and lastly, there is the main canal, with two thousand miles of distributory channels and ditches for feeding the water on to the thirsty land.

Many people in Australia have an impression that the land to be irrigated by means of the Burrinjuck reservoir lies in the immediate vicinity of the big dam, close to the town of Yass. But, as will be seen, such is not the case. The land to be made fertile by the waters stored in the Murrumbidgee River is situated something like three hundred miles from

Barren Jack. The water will be taken from the big dam along the bed of the river until the Berembed Weir is encountered. From there it will pass into the main canal, which stretches away over the plains, the length being considerably over a hundred miles. Thus, from the point where the water is stored until it reaches the off-take at Berembed, no expense has been incurred by building canals, for the natural bed of the river will be utilised up to that point.

The magnitude of the work in progress at Burrinjuck appeals strongly to the imagination. It means the creation of an inland sea with a surface area of twenty square miles, and this is done by throwing a cyclopean wall, 170 feet high, across the valley of the Murrumbidgee. Works of such magnitude proceed slowly, and it will be quite two years yet before the final block of stone has been placed in position.

Seeing something—if only a little—of what is being done to irrigate this huge tract of country, one is convinced that the scheme (which involves an expenditure of between two and three million pounds) will be a magnificent success. It has all the attributes necessary to constitute a prosperous community, and a centre of industrial welfare. The products of the areas when everything is in full working order will be enormous, and may easily be computed at several million pounds sterling per annum. The rich land is there, there will shortly be an abundance of water, a supply of which will meet the needs for a colony of about 200,000 people. Much more valuable and attractive than any gold-field the Burrinjuck scheme stands practically unrivalled. In the future visitors to Australia will be referred to these areas as the beauty spots and the industrial centre of this southern nation. It will be a second land of Canaan, and the centre of the most productive country in the whole world.

From the canal our course took us through several well-grassed paddocks which had originally belonged to the old Barellan sheep-run. But a change had come over the countryside. Barellan station had given way to the onward march of "Closer Settlement," and out of a total squattage of thirty-five thousand acres twenty-seven thousand had been resumed by the Crown. On every side were to be found men engaged in sinking huge earthen tanks,* putting up fences, burning off scrub, erecting temporary domiciles, carting out

* In Australia it is the exception to find wheat farms which have a natural permanent water supply. In some instances water is obtained by sinking shallow wells, but in the majority of cases the much-needed provision is made by excavating tanks or dams in suitable low-lying sites, where the water from the catchment area can be led into them by means of drains or gutters. The general size of these tanks ranges from 1,000 to 2,500 cubic yards, costing from 7d. to 1s. per cubic yard to excavate.

farm supplies, and taking the other steps necessary for transforming a one-time sleepy pastoral district into a busy scene of agricultural activity.

These conditions continued for perhaps twenty miles on to the township of Barellan, where we hit the railway again. Along the railway from Barellan to Erin, Ardlethan, Beckom, and Mirrool, the country took on a much older appearance; the boundary-rider had given way to the agriculturist a few years previously, and while there were still big patches of Bush and scrub, the many prosperous-looking homes proclaimed the fact that the newcomers had reaped more than one good crop.

At the railway sidings at Beckom and Mirrool many thousand bags of wheat, awaiting rolling stock, were stacked under the long iron "roofs" (they could not be called sheds, being unenclosed by walls to permit of easy handling). Other huge stacks were covered by canvas, and it was very apparent that in future seasons the railway authorities would have to allow for a considerable margin in their estimated wheat returns for this particular district, and provide transport facilities accordingly.

From Mirrool we headed almost due north for about thirty miles to Wyalong, still another railway terminus, where, thanks to being misinformed as to the state of the track, we arrived just on the stroke of midnight. The last twelve or fifteen miles seemed to be almost uninhabited, consisting chiefly of mallee scrub, and we had some difficulty in keeping to the sandy track, into which we sank ankle deep at every step. In accordance with our usual practice in such country, we eased "Opal" as much as possible by taking turn and turn about to do a little pushing at the back of the sulky, while the other walked on a few paces ahead to pick out the track.

We had intended calling on another Outback parson friend, but arriving so late, and tired after our long tramp through the mallee, we decided to postpone our call until more respectable hours. However, there was no lock on the gates of the horse-paddock, standing well back from the Parsonage grounds, and it was not long before we were snug in our blankets, with the paling fence as a breakwind.

We were awake at sunrise as usual, but neither of us seemed in any hurry to get up, and we promptly dozed off again, a fact which we afterwards discovered was the cause of much excitement in the Parsonage. Mrs. Theobald first caught sight of the pony, and coming down to investigate, discovered the sulky and we two sleeping beauties. Now it so happened that under the mining laws in force in Wyalong,

it was possible for any *bona fide* miner to take over any land not actually occupied by anyone else, and after a consultation together, the Parsonage household decided that "The Long 'Un" and I were "claim-jumpers." Mr. Theobald had a careful look at the contents of the sulky, and finding nothing but a tomahawk with which we could commence sinking a shaft, determined that the best way to clear away the mystery was by waking us up. Jerking from under our heads the seat-cushion which acted as a pillow, he demanded an explanation. But as we scrambled up, he recognised me, and burst into hearty laughter—and it was Jack who got the explanation—for "The Long 'Un" was vigorously rubbing his head where it had come into sudden conflict with Mother Earth. A few minutes later we were quite at home at the breakfast table.

There is a strong element of romance about many of the country towns of Australia, especially those that owe their origin to the discovery of gold. Wyalong, Forbes, Parkes, Wellington, and Gulgong, in New South Wales, are typical examples. The finding of the precious metal at these places many years ago opened up a page of progress in the history of the districts, and incidentally, of the State. Thousands of pounds worth of gold was won by the more fortunate of the thousands of men, who, filled with the spirit of adventure and with dreams of easily-gained wealth, were lured away into those then unknown parts. A few fortunes were made, but the bulk of the men left no richer than they came—except, perhaps, in experience.

There is enough evidence of the "old days" left to give the towns the appearance of a mining camp and to suggest the stirring scenes of the early diggings, but the towns themselves have grown from the primitive huts and buildings peculiar to all pioneering settlements, and have assumed an air of importance and prosperity.

Wyalong, the youngest of the towns named, is just now in the transition stage. This term may be applied in two ways, for the population, which for many years has been entirely dependent on the mining industry, is becoming more intensely interested in, and dependent on, the cultivation of wheat; while the old buildings are being gradually demolished, and slowly, but nevertheless steadily, a new town is being erected. Wyalong has not the solid appearance of Wellington and the other older towns, but the hand of progress is touching it, and will eventually transform it into one worthy of what is proving a splendid agricultural district. The original township surveyed by the Government is incorporated, and here all the principal Government and

municipal buildings are located, but the commerce of the town is divided between Wyalong and West Wyalong, the last-named having by far the larger share. The municipal boundary of Wyalong does not reach West Wyalong, which is governed by the Bland Shire. This is the result of mismanagement in the early days of the field, when one well-built, compact town could have been made. But one centre was surveyed and taken up, and subsequently a larger town grew up close to the mines. The result is that there are two towns straggling over two miles of country.

Another legitimate cause of complaint is the ridiculous position of the local railway station—the terminus of the branch line from Temora. Instead of the railway running through Wyalong to West Wyalong, the line skirts the outside borders of the former town, and the trains pull up dead in a dense clump of mallee two miles from West Wyalong. Someone has remarked that country railway stations have been built in such positions as to ensure 'bus proprietors a profitable calling. Whoever was responsible for placing the railway station two miles from the town has indeed a living monument to his lack of foresight. Local residents and travellers are thereby subjected to a tax of a shilling for each trip made to the station, and strangers essaying to walk have frequently been bushed in the mallee.

Wyalong as a wheat district is only just coming into prominence, and one cannot be convicted of speculation in saying that the district has a great and immediate future. The rainfall averages $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches yearly over a long period, which is only an inch less than that of the famous Temora wheat district. Land values round Wyalong have until quite recently been extraordinarily low, and it was not until wheat-farming became fairly general that any movement was noted. Nowadays, "good wheat land and cheap prices" make fine headlines for the land agents' advertisements.

We accepted the Parsonage invitation to partake of their hospitality while "Opal" had a short rest, and the following day took the pony very easily on to Lake Cowal Homestead, a distance of about twenty-seven miles. Lake Cowal, though now only a small station of less than 30,000 acres, is one of the best known properties in New South Wales, for the vast extent of good country it originally contained was discovered by a man well known in Australian exploration, Hovell, who, upon his return from a long trip into the interior, settled down there to the easier life of a squatter.

A day's run of forty miles from Lake Cowal brought us to still another railway terminus, that of the branch line from Parkes to Forbes. The only rise in our track in the whole

forty miles was a little red sandhill a quarter of an hour's journey from the homestead, but fifteen miles away to the west one or two high hills rose up out of the plains, and here Lieutenant Donkin, son of Squatter Donkin, and a member of the Signalling Corps of the 1st Australian Light Horse, was wont to flash heliographic messages to one of the station "hands" installed on the tower set up over the meat house at the homestead.

We camped for lunch at a tank midway between Lake Cowal and Forbes, and spent a couple of the most interesting and enjoyable hours of the whole trip watching the antics of some fifty young lambs, only a few days old. They had not yet suffered the tortures of tailing, and seemed the happiest and most frolicsome little creatures imaginable. Apparently unaware of our presence (we were hidden in some timber) the little flock chose the bank of the tank as the terminating point of their gambols, and towards this they scampered, led by the biggest and youngest, clearing logs and such obstructions in their course in true steeplechase fashion. Having reached their objective, they would pause for an instant, and then scurry back to make ready for a further attack on the citadel. Others raced for a log, which, however, had but a limited amount of footspace, and frequently the early arrivals found themselves forced from their proud position by the weight of numbers behind. Their appetite for such amusement seemed almost unlimited, but after a time the less robust found the pace a little trying, and the number of players gradually became less, until at last not more than half of the original flock was left. At length their stomachs reminded them of their needs, and then such a bleating! Both mother and offspring gave voice at once, and the din continued until they had sorted themselves out, when quietness reigned once more, and the wagging of long, woolly tails bore ample evidence of the most perfect enjoyment of the midday meal. To the man of jaded nerves or to the man of heavy business cares, I would recommend an afternoon in the ewe paddock, and he who could not laugh heartily at the antics of these playful little creatures must have the heart of a sphinx.

It was in 1861 that gold was first discovered at Forbes, then known as The Lachlan, and a mild rush set in from Lambing Flat (famous in early-day Australian gold-mining) and the southward. The first mad rush in Victoria was over, the fever on the Turon had abated, and the diggers quickly spread over the eastern portion of the continent in search of new fields. The wild rush to Port Curtis, in Queensland, took place in 1857, and proved a rank duffer,

the Victorian Government having to assist the unfortunates to return. In New South Wales Lambing Flat had called, and The Lachlan, Currajong (Parkes), Peak Hill, and Grenfell followed. The surfacing at The Lachlan had proved a failure, and an exodus of diggers followed, but when "German Harry"* fluked it by discovering the lead in his shaft in Rankin Street, near where Fogarty's Hotel now stands, a new rush set in, and, in the summer of 1862, there were anything from 30,000 to 50,000 diggers under canvas. German Harry was very lucky, for the prospecting claim proved one of the best on the lead. The diggers clustered round the prospectors, and the business men followed suit. That was the birth of Forbes—and where is German Harry, or who was he? Men's names were not always known in those days, and a digger acquired a sobriquet very easily.

Soon the place was riddled with holes, and the shores of the lagoon were lined with cradles and puddling machines. The claims were only ten feet square per man, but double that area where water was met with. The windlass gave way to the whim where the deep ground was reached, and the North Lead was traced across the lagoon, where it became known as the South Lead, and was finally followed across The Lachlan. Mr. Twaddel, the owner of Daroobalgie sheep-station—it was cattle breeding then—lost part of his holding by this invasion of the diggers. Water for domestic purposes was pumped from the Lachlan for the water carters, and the old pump still does duty on the same spot. The blacks gave no trouble, but the bushrangers levied toll on all the roads of the mining fields, and Forbes can contribute its quota of stirring incidents to the sensational history of the 'sixties.

Forbes, half a century after the day when German Harry threw up his pick and sank where it stuck, still bears evidence of the early camp in the crooked thoroughfare of Rankin Street, but otherwise it is well laid out. Its diminutive park is in the centre of the town, and its streets are lined with trees. There are many fine buildings, such as the palatial Albion Hotel, the Town Hall, the Post Office, and the five banks, which lend architectural beauty to the town, and if there is a district in the State which is capable of supplying all its own requirements it is this.

But the prosperity of Forbes is due mostly to the rich country which surrounds it. Following on the gold rush, the land was entirely given over to pastoral pursuits, but of recent years there has been a change in the direction of wheat-growing. This has been largely the result of men of capital

* No relation to the gentleman of the same name whom we saw floating down stream on the Murray.

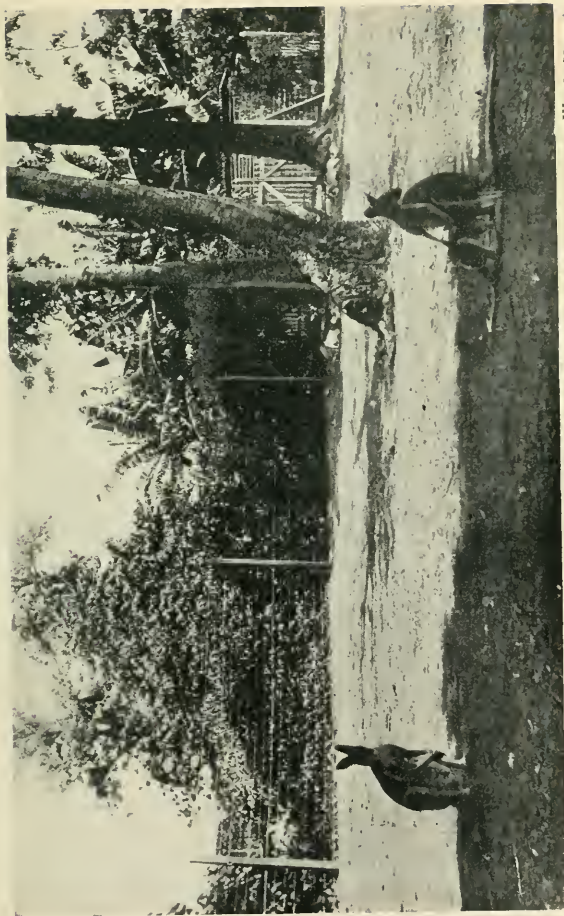


Photo by]

"GOOD AUSTRALIANS."

W. K. Harris.

and energy coming into the district and opening up the land, after the subdivision of big stations under the "Closer Settlement" policy of the Government. However, it is not in wheat alone that the farmer is interested. The district is an ideal one for "mixed farming" (wheat and sheep), and the breeding of crossbred sheep has helped the farmer to add to his income. Five miles out the Stockowners' Meat Preserving Works reminded us that the establishment of freezing works had also had its effect on the breeding of fat lambs to help swell Australia's big frozen-meat trade. Altogether, Forbes, as with other districts, has derived and is deriving immense benefit from the combination of wheat and sheep.

It was getting late as we crossed the lagoon on the outskirts of the town, but we were sure of a good camping place, as at Wyalong we learnt that the Methodist Minister at Forbes was the Revd. Arthur Parton, another personal friend whom I had not seen for many a long day. Once more we made use of the Parsonage horse-paddock, but there was no need for us to do any "claim-jumping"; Mr. Parton was still at work in his study, and very soon we were sitting down to supper.

At Forbes we found waiting for us letters from home which made it necessary to push on as fast as ever we possibly could. Mr. Parton, like other Outback parsons who have big circuits to work, was something of an Overlander himself, and rendered great assistance in finding out the shortest tracks and estimating the mileage, a task which involved a certain amount of labour. The official map of the New South Wales Government Railways and Pearson's Road Map were both consulted. The former was particularly useful as showing the coach routes, but the latter covered a lot of roads that saw no coaches, and also enabled us to steer clear of tracks that were "V.H." (very hilly), "V.S." (very sandy), and so on.

After a lot of careful calculation, we decided that our best route would be via Parkes, Wellington, Gulgong, Singleton, and Maitland. This would skirt round the famous Blue Mountains, and would not cause us to go over any "old ground" by calling in at Sydney. Almost three hundred and fifty miles to go, and "Opal"—well, it must be admitted, just a little leg-weary after a journey of over two thousand miles.

Between Forbes and Parkes we passed over fairly level country. Much of it was cleared, but occasionally our course ran through tracts of thick bush, and in some places the dark pine-scrub still grew densely to within a few yards of the roadside. With cordial good-byes from the Partons, we left

Forbes immediately after lunch on Monday, having rested there on Sunday, and a little distance out passed a great number of old mining shafts, which now come in useful as rubbish-tips. Then a run of thirteen very dusty miles brought us to Tichborne, a one-time mining field which, discovered in 1871,* is a typical example of the many absurd, silly, senseless, meaningless names which disfigure the map of Australia. Nowadays, gold at Tichborne is just about played out, and sturdy gums have long since reared their trunks out of the little dumps of mullock which are practically all that remain of the once busy mining-camp.

Amongst these abandoned prospecting claims we saw an old fossicker moving about in what, from a little distance off, appeared to be a furtive stealthy manner. "The Long 'Un" suggested that he had made a new find, but on getting closer we found the old chap calmly setting rabbit-traps.

Other reminders of the early golden days along this particular road were three old wine-shops, two of which we passed in the first seven miles from Forbes. Thanks to the dusty state of the road, this was the first time we had really felt the need of a waterbag, and if it had not been for the fact of our both being strict teetotallers, we would have entered each of those three grog-shanties accompanied by just as big a "thirst" as ever assailed any of the early diggers.

Taking "Opal" very easily over the twenty miles from Forbes to Parkes, we drove into the latter town a little before dark and found a good camping place in the backyard of a hospitable householder. Parkes was originally known as "Currajong"—when the "rush" broke out in 1872—but was renamed when that fine old Australian Statesman, Sir Henry Parkes, paid the town a visit, and one of the thoroughfares is called Carinda Street, after a young lady to whom he was much attached.

The town is a very busy centre on the eastern border of an extensive plain, and starting at the railway station spreads itself over the bottom half of a range of fairly high but gradual hills. As we descended the little rise, a couple of miles out, from which we obtained our first view, it seemed to lose itself completely in the green pepper trees which had been planted on all sides, leaving nothing but the high shaft of a mine silhouetted against the sky on the top of the central hill. Parkes is another of the towns which are becoming closer settled, but though the area of land under wheat is

* One of the "leads" at Tichborne was dubbed "Woppin Butcher," in mistake for "Wagga Butcher." Orton, the fraudulent claimant, was at one time a butcher at Wagga, N.S.W.

increasing year after year, there are still valuable station properties in the district and the output of wool is very large.

A good day's run of thirty-three miles along a dusty, and in places very hilly, track brought us to Balderodgery, where we camped in front of a deserted homestead standing ghostly and silent on the banks of a beautifully clear stream. Here our tucker-bags joined forces with those of a travelling saddler who had been spelling his horses for a couple of days on the long, green grass which over-ran the banks.

The next day we ran through Yeoval, a township consisting of store, "pub," galvanised-iron church, and half a dozen houses, and seventeen miles from camp pulled up for lunch at Goonoo Homestead. Smothered in dust, we asked the cook whether the road was any better on to Wellington.

"Well," he replied, "I went into town on the coach a month ago. In places I couldn't see the driver alongside me, but I could hear him swearing, and we both arrived covered with a thick paste of sweat and dust—and there's been no rain since my coach trip."

A little distance out from the homestead we met a teamster's waggon still further cutting the track to pieces. The individual in charge volunteered the cheerful information: "Oh, this is nothing. You can see your horses here, but you can't a few miles back." The dust enveloped us the whole twenty miles from Goonoo to Wellington, our worst experience of it commencing at a little settlement, consisting chiefly of a store with the high-sounding title of "The Emporium of the West," near the sixth mile peg from Wellington. From this store our track followed the course of a dry creek which meandered along at the foot of a range of high and well-timbered hills. I am not exaggerating when I say that in places the dust—you could not call it earth or soil or sand—was fully a foot deep. "Opal" threw up enough to completely block our view of the track ahead, and owing to the sharp bends, there was danger of driving over the bank into the creek.

Darkness had fallen when at last we drove into Wellington, and as at that hour conditions were not favourable for finding a suitable camp, we once again decided to throw ourselves upon the hospitality of a Methodist Minister friend, in the person of Rev. Herbert Bellhouse, another Outback parson whom my wanderings had caused me to lose sight of for many months. As at Forbes we refused inside accommodation, preferring our blankets out in the horse-paddock. A good hosing down was the best means of ridding ourselves and our clothes of the dust, and arrayed in our second suits, we were hardly the same travellers when we sat down to do

justice to the excellent supper prepared for our benefit by Mrs. Bellhouse.

We shall not forget Wellington and its dust for a long time. No wonder Mr. Bellhouse dons a white linen suit when, once a week, he starts out to visit his people. But, on the other hand, it should be said that when rain *does* come, it does not make as muddy conditions as the depth of the dust would lead one to imagine. As a matter of fact, we were asked to believe that Wellington dust is so fine that it dissolves in water!

Of all the inland districts of New South Wales there is none more famed for its productiveness than that of which Wellington is the centre. The town itself represents the progress that has been made in the cultivation of wheat, and on all sides can be found wheat farms on which up-to-date methods of cultivation are applied. The name of the town is a memorial to the great national hero, the victor of Waterloo. It was in 1815 that the settlement was established at the junction of the Bell and Macquarie Rivers. Shortly after the news of the great event of Waterloo reached Sydney the question of naming the proposed new settlement, ninety-eight miles from Bathurst, came under consideration, and naturally the name of the hero of the hour, the man then most talked of throughout the British world, Arthur, Duke of Wellington, was chosen. Apsley, the name of a little railway siding a mile or so east of Wellington, was the name of the great duke's London house, while Mount Arthur, at Montefiore, immortalises his Christian name.

Originally a stockade was erected at Wellington, and convicts were sent there. Probably the penal authorities were responsible for the planning of the town—it has been hardly in conformity with modern ideas, and the main street (Nanima Crescent) follows to some extent the course of the river, so that it has a few turns and twists that somewhat mystify the visitor.

Afterwards the buildings which were erected for the accommodation of the convicts were devoted to the purposes of a missionary establishment for the blacks. Even in those early days the value of the country for wheat was demonstrated. Since then much progress has been made, and the town has passed from the pioneering days to a greater permanency. At the time of our visit it was hardly at its best. The continuous dry weather had caused its streets to become powdered in dust, and some of the townspeople were becoming pessimistic with regard to the future.

Wellington also had its era of gold-mining. Gold-digging

operations have been conducted on the Macquarie with more or less satisfactory results, and the Mitchell Creek mine is still being worked. But the future of the town is bound up in the extension of wheat-growing. While proportionately there is not the amount of uncultivated land in the district that is to be found elsewhere, there is still a good area awaiting sub-division. Prettily situated, and surrounded by the hills at the foot of which it nestles, Wellington is already one of the most important railway centres in the State, and must go on increasing in importance as the capital of the great western wheat belt.

CHAPTER XXV

WELLINGTON TO NEWCASTLE

At Wellington, still further letters awaited us, and private affairs requiring our presence in Newcastle the following Tuesday necessitated a long and careful study of the maps, seeing that the last part of the journey was to be practically a race against time. Two hundred and twenty-seven miles to go, five days to cover them in, and a pony just a little more leg-weary than when we left Forbes. Bush roads and Bush tracks, the character of which we knew practically nothing, and an average of over forty miles a day to be kept up!

We did not manage to leave Wellington until late in the morning, but made up for the delay by travelling until close on midnight, by which time poor old "Opal" had put through her longest journey for any one day. It was also perhaps the hilliest day's work, but firm roads—in some places well-made—took the place of the previous day's dust. "Opal" stuck to us like a brick; but for a little leg-weariness, only to be expected, she gave no sign whatever of fatigue, and it was a delight to hear her whinny of pleasure when, at the foot of every hill—no matter how slight—she felt the "give" of the sulky springs as we jumped out of the vehicle to make her task as light as possible.

During the day we made one short stay of an hour for early tea at Spicer's Creek, twenty miles from Wellington, but the next thirty miles, uphill and down dale, were rattled through with only an occasional "breather" for "Opal." Under any other circumstances it would have been pleasant enough driving along in the bright moonlight, but our thoughts were all with "Opal," and it was almost on the stroke of midnight when at last we turned the pony into a convenient paddock on the outskirts of the town of Gulgong. As for ourselves, we felt more inclined to sleep than to eat, but just as we rolled ourselves in our blankets, a lusty voice hailed us from a house near by. Wishing to know something of the intruders, the owner of the voice came across, and about three minutes later "The Long 'Un" and I were being helped to biscuits and

cocoa by four young bachelors, who passed under the cognomen of "The Gulgong Bungalow Quartette." They had just returned from a social evening, and appearing on the scene at the moment of our arrival, had watched our movements with curiosity, until it dawned on them—good fellows!—that travellers at such an hour might be glad of a bite of supper.

The "rush" to Gulgong something like forty-two years ago was a big one, and nothing like it had been known since the Forbes rush, which had taken place some years previously. Like Forbes, it attracted all classes of the community of Australia to the new Eldorado, and the different roads leading to the town from all parts of the compass were alive with a motly and disorderly crowd, all feverish with excitement and the anticipation of making a big "pile." They journeyed in all kinds of vehicles, some quaint methods of moving from one field to another being met with, and in a month or two a couple of thousand men were delving into Mother Earth. Probably no town in Australia sprung into such mushroom-like growth, and though the bright flame of hope which once bound the miner to this gold-bearing locality has gone out, the fire has smouldered for years. Even some of the newer "mixed-farming" population feel certain that again there will be some sensational find of the precious metal in the vicinity of Black Lead, or near some of the other leads which exist there.

Leaving Gulgong, a run of sixteen miles along a good firm track brought us to Ulan, a small township consisting of an hotel and one or two houses, prettily situated in the heart of the Bush at the head of the Goulburn River. A spell here for lunch, and we immediately entered upon the fifteen miles of sand and dust which, by courtesy marked on maps as a road, brought us to Wollar, a township ever so slightly bigger than Ulan, and situated at the foot of a high and peculiar cone-shaped hill. With "Opal" still going strong, just on dusk we forded the stony-bottomed creek, and two miles out came to "The Gap," a good track winding in and out as it took us over and across a fairly steep hill. Through "The Gap" we came to a vast well-grassed natural amphitheatre shut in on all sides by high towering hills. The moon was in its third quarter, and gave the scene a weird aspect. There was just the least perceptible slope from "The Gap" to the eighth mile peg from Wollar, and the running was simply delightful, the crisp cold air causing our ears to tingle. Half way across the open space a mob of wild horses dashed across our path, snorting in real "brumby" fashion, as led by an upstanding black stallion, they galloped back to

the hills. A few small herds of rolling fat, half-tame cattle evinced no slight surprise as we disturbed them in their grazing, and wheeled about to bellow defiance at our invasion of their domains.

The storm clouds that had caught us up and passed us some miles back had burst here, but instead of "bogging" the track had merely laid the dust and made the going a bit slippery for "Opal." Looking back, we could not see "The Gap," and there was no break in the hills in front to show where our exit would be. At the eighth mile peg the track turned at right angles, and ran the Goulburn down for a mile or so. Here the river took on a big sweeping bend, and passing through the first fence since leaving Wollar, we pitched camp. That fence made us a little easy in our minds. "Opal," such a splendid camper, really did not need it, as there was plenty of grass about, but we decided it would be safer to have a barrier between her and the brumbies, thus giving the latter no opportunity of enticing her away to join them in their free life in the ranges. It was a very "hungry" place in the matter of firewood, and the ground was soaking wet, but we turned into our blankets happy in the knowledge that if "Opal" could repeat her performance of the two days from Wellington—fifty and forty miles respectively—our arrival at Waratah would be in good time for the business which, very much against our will, was cutting a pleasant rambling picnic a month shorter than we had anticipated being away.

The weird howl of the dingo, and the plaintive mournful cry of the curlew, awakened us at daylight, when we found that "Opal" had deserted her "hard" feed in favour of the young green shoots at the roots of the dry, seeding, knee-deep grass growing in abundance round our camp. Making an early start, a narrow winding track led us out of the amphitheatre we had passed across the previous night, and shortly brought us to Bylong Creek. Pulling up to ask for directions about the road on ahead, we allowed "Opal" to graze for a few minutes while the good wife of a Bush saddler boiled the billy for our benefit. Her husband was busy erecting a small shop which would bring the total number of buildings in the township of Bylong up to four. In the meantime the family were living under canvas, and as we drove up a couple of energetic youngsters were busily engaged setting things straight after having been nearly flooded out by the rain the night before.

A little distance out from Bylong we entered one of the most beautiful and charming valleys it has ever been my good fortune to see. For about ten miles we wound in and out among rugged, majestic hills, which at times narrowed the bed of

the valley down to a pass of less than a hundred yards, and at others widened it out until there were acres of rich, fertile, well-timbered land between the walls.

The tiny little creek was nothing more than a string of water-holes, but luxurious belly-deep grass ran riot, and spread to within a few inches of the track, which, just wide enough for one vehicle, twisted about to such an extent that never at any time could we see it more than twenty yards ahead.

Our journey through this valley was one of the most pleasurable experiences of the whole trip. Driving at a walking pace to drink in the full beauty of the Bush, we learnt the lesson of peace from Mother Nature in her kindest habitat. Feathered songsters flitted from bough to bough, filling the air with a delicious hint of melody. Flowers and trees exuded their fragrance to minister to our delight, and far overhead, seen through the labyrinth of intertwining branches, was the glorious blue canopy of heaven.

Save for the song of the birds, the rattle of an occasional gohanna as it scuttled up a tree, or a wallaby as it thumped across the track, and our expressions of admiration, utter solitude reigned, and even the solitude, in such surroundings, possessed a charm of its own. The only sign of man's handiwork was the track, and we could almost imagine that the clock had been set back a hundred years, and that at any moment a burly aboriginal might step from behind a gum, and with the aid of his waddy proceed to give a practical demonstration of Australian hospitality in the early days.

Leaving the level valley track, a mile and a half of gradual up-hill brought us to the top of one of the innumerable spurs, from which we had an impressive panoramic view of an immense extent of silent, rugged mountain scenery, which, where the ranges met the skyline, was enveloped in the blue haze so characteristic of Australian mountains. A low, white homestead, looking very diminutive from such a height, nestled at the head of another valley, more open in appearance and not so heavily timbered as the one we had just left.

Descending the pass, we left the homestead to the right, and a few miles on came to Kerrabee Post Office, a rambling, whitewashed, historic building mentioned very frequently in Bushranging yarns. From this on to Denman we were reminded that this valley was "Thunderbolt's Country," our attention being drawn to many peculiar features of the mountains, such as "Thunderbolt's Caves" and "Thunderbolt's Spur."

But the days of "Thunderbolt" and his picturesque fraternity have long since passed, and nowadays the valley

flats are held by a handful of sturdy yeomanry engaged in the peaceful pursuits of dairying and agriculture, the most exciting event from one year's end to another being an occasional "round-up" of the cattle and horses which have run wild back in the ranges.

For twenty miles through "Thunderbolt's Country" a good firm Bush road followed the course of the river, and half that distance from Kerrabee the mountains which hemmed in the valley so closely began to recede, the country became more open, and settlement more extensive. The great towering sandstone cliffs which had been such striking features were replaced by undulating foothills; but though the mountain grandeur was missing, the scenery was still picturesque and entrancing.

Finishing a splendid run of forty-five miles for the day, we pitched camp near the fine bridge outside a township rejoicing in the name of Sandy Hollow. "Opal" was soon enjoying a roll in the sand in a bend of the creek, and her wants having been attended to, "The Long 'Un" and I were free to partake of a hearty supper. Jack baked the last remaining onions and potatoes in the embers, and the relish with which we devoured these and some "Johnny cakes" proved that although he had been out of practice for quite a long time, "The Long 'Un" was still fully qualified to act as camp cook.

We made rather a late start next morning, but felt in good heart at the prospect of arriving at Waratah to time. With less than 100 miles to go—ninety-two, to be exact—"Opal" was still in good condition, though naturally her leg-weariness had increased with every mile. But we had seen the end of the Bush tracks, and the last two days' travelling was over well-made gravel roads.

We split the day's journey into four easy stages, the first, ten miles, being to Denman, a busy town in a fertile dairying district. Here we forded the river, and while "Opal" rested an hour, we had an early lunch with some roadmenders camped on the banks. We pulled up for another spell at a little country school-house seven miles further on, where we were subjected to the hospitality of more Bush-workers, a couple of fencers this time. Nearing Jerry's Plains, we had to ford the river again. There had been a "fresh" higher up stream, and the water was swirling down fairly rapid. "The Long 'Un," being the taller of the two, stripped off and waded in, unencumbered by anything but a shirt. Finding the river only waist deep, he returned to help weight the sulky and keep it from being carried downstream. Half-way across, the britching broke, and we had to camp in mid-stream for a

few minutes while "The Long 'Un" made the necessary repairs.

The water swilled into the bottom of the sulky and carried away an empty nose-bag, but otherwise the passage was accomplished without mishap. Shortly after, we drove through Jerry's Plains, a sleepy old township situated on a flat extending along the river for a couple of miles, never at any point more than half a mile wide. Named after some early-day settler, the place might have deserved the affix "Plains" when it was first settled; in those days no one had penetrated far enough inland to meet the wide-spreading Plains of the Outback o' Beyond.

We had by this time crossed the Great Dividing Range, and were now well into the huge fertile district embraced by the Hunter River Valley, the most closely settled and highly productive portion of New South Wales. The foundation of Maitland (the capital town of the Hunter) dates back about a century, and the settlement was due, in the first place, to the richness of the soil and the generous climate it enjoys, and these factors in the main have been responsible for its elevation to the position of one of the largest towns in the State.

To the south of Maitland, and connected by private railway lines, are great coalfields and a chain of townships carrying a population of about twenty thousand inhabitants. Until recent years Maitland's interests were mostly agricultural and pastoral, but the industrial element has now an immense hold on the district, and enormous quantities of coal are brought through Maitland to the city and port of Newcastle for shipment to the great markets of the overseas world.

About eight o'clock we unharnessed for another hour's spell on the river bank near the township of Warkworth, and close on midnight finished the day's run of forty-one miles at a roadside school eight miles from the town of Singleton.

* * * * *

Up in the branches of a dead gum-tree sat a sedate-looking laughing jackass, gazing critically at us as we rolled out of our Bush blankets for the last time, on Monday, April 1st. Kookooburra was no minstrel, but he was a wise, alert bird, a kingfisher of the forest, whose melody of chuckling, gurgling notes were pleasant to hear. He woke early, our "Settler's Clock,"* and with the magpie ushered in the dawn and called us forth to our last day's journey.

*The Laughing Jackass, or Kookooburra, is the first bird to indicate the approach of day, and received its other name, "The Settler's Clock," from the settlers in the early-settlement days.

The scents of the gums were strong and sweet, the air was laden with them, as we made preparations to desert our last night-camp. It really need not have been the last, as our presence in Waratah was not required until the following day; but calculations showed that there were only fifty-one miles to go, and notwithstanding the innumerable charms and allurements of the Bush, when a wanderer is nearing the end of the homeward track, he feels all impatient to get there.

Our chum "Opal" trotted up as soon as we threw aside our blankets, to receive her usual early morning caresses. She seemed to understand what was required of her, and whinnied with evident pride that she should be the holder of the record for the longest overlanding journey ever attempted in Australia by a single horse.

And notwithstanding the boisterous, mocking, defiant laugh of that sedate-looking jackass, "Opal" came through the ordeal splendidly, and at five o'clock in the afternoon, eleven hours from the time of leaving camp, our staunch, four-legged friend and companion finished the longest day's journey of the whole trip and was once more turned out into her own spacious paddock at Waratah.

We were both sorry for the five months' trip to come to an end. To us it had been one long picnic, although, unlike a certain English writer who used that expression after a short experience of "humping his bluey" (but who was met near each homestead by the station buggy), we never availed ourselves of the invitation to make use of the visitor's room at "Government House."

Sombre, weird, depressing, gloomy—the Bush! Only a city dweller who, like Johnson, finds no interest save in the haunts of men, amid the tumult and discord of streets and the drab monotony of bricks and mortar, would harbour such a thought. To us the Bush spoke a language of its own, caressing, appealing, tender, and communing with her eloquent solitude we tasted the purest joy. Australians are the heritors of a beautiful country, where Nature's gift have been dowered with generous abundance, and in the words of Richardson's ballad—

Let them praise as they please

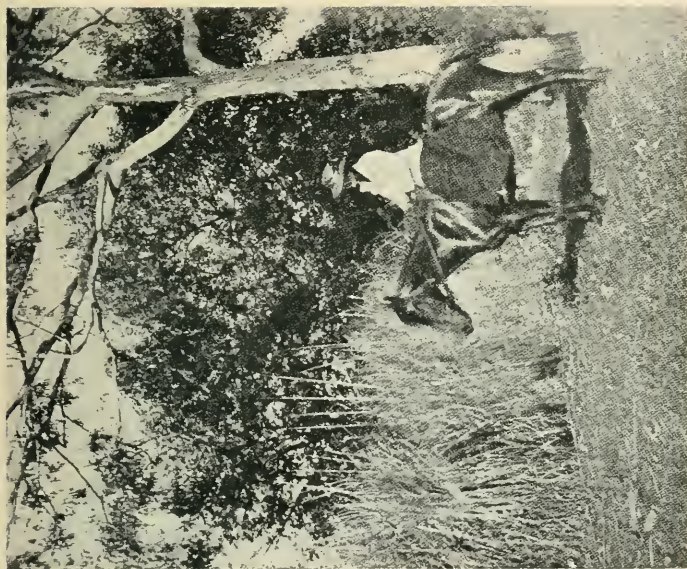
Other lands, but we know which is best—

Where the wattle-bloom waves in the breeze

And the bell-bird builds her nest.



JACK, MORE GENERALLY KNOWN AS "THE
LONG 'UN."



"OPAL" RETURNS TO HER OWNER.

CHAPTER XXVI

ACROSS THE "NINETY-MILE DESERT" IN A SULKY

BEFORE we reached Serviceton, on the Victorian-South Australian border, we had received such a variety of opinions about the "awful desert" that we were not sure whether we could get across without engaging a water-cart to accompany us, or whether we should have to put the whole turnout on the train. At Horsham, an old-sheep-drover had exclaimed, when informed that we intended to traverse the "Ninety-Mile Desert": "Good God, you'll kill your horse, and bleach your own bones!" In actual experience, however, the so-called desert gave us a pleasant surprise. Instead of being the desolate waste of fine, white, glittering, shifting sand we had been led to expect, it turned out to be a great rolling expanse of "downs" country, somewhat resembling, in places, the famous Darling Downs in Queensland, and no more deserving of the name of "desert" than a great deal of the country I journeyed over the previous year during the course of a seventeen-hundred mile ride on horseback in the far-western parts of that State and New South Wales. Certainly, the "desert" is sandy, but when we came to a stretch where the mallee and other scrub was low and thin enough for us to leave the beaten track, we found that the sand was quite firm, and if it had not been for the tussocks of "yacka," it would have been good travelling. The land is being gradually settled, and the settlers are confident of its possibilities. They are rightly indignant if you refer to the "desert." You are reminded that one part is now known as "The Border Downs," another as "Coonalpyn Downs," and so on. Between Bordertown and Pinaroo there is room for five thousand families, but there must be spur railways.

Serviceton is the last place you pass through in Victoria before entering South Australian territory. It is a "one-horse town," where people won't expend very much money on their properties, owing to a dispute between South

Australia and Victoria over the ownership of the strip of land between the town and the present border. The railway gauge is the same, so Victorian men take charge of the trains as they arrive from Adelaide, and vice versa. The men have a square nicely laid out with substantial brick cottages, and as far as they are concerned, there is nothing to find fault with, but the other houses, half a dozen or so, are of the usual Outback township description.

We left Serviceton on Wednesday, January 4th, in the teeth of one of the worst dust-storms the district had ever experienced. I had just finished some writing in one of the railway cottages, and was gathering up my papers, when a terrific gust of wind struck the house. I jammed everything in my bag, and rushed over to where Jack was camped—in a small paddock near the railway station. "The Long 'Un" was hanging on to the tent with one hand, the nose-bag with the other, the while he held a blanket fast with his foot. The dust did not come until I was on my way down the one-main-and-only street to the combined school and post office. A "Darling shower" or Broken Hill dust-storm was not in it! And when I tried to cleave my way through the flying earth, it seemed to get everywhere—eyes and mouth, down the back—and front—of my neck, and even up my trouser legs, so that I thought there would be no need to have the usual "three by six" allotted to me. I struggled back to the sulky, and found Jack chasing sundry articles of clothing, and "Opal" trying to win a race between herself and the dust. After the dust, the wind was accompanied by the smell of burning mallee, and looking round, we saw great volumes of smoke rising at all points. At least, it seemed so; of course we could not be blamed if our sight was a bit amiss—our eyes hadn't quite got rid of all the dust, for the waterhole alongside which we were camped had almost been converted into mud.

We recovered everything but a couple of ration-bags we had washed out that morning, and made a start, intending to rest "Opal" a day or two in Bordertown before commencing the desert. The wind was dead against us all the way to Wolseley, four miles from Serviceton, very heavy and big drops of rain falling in the few brief intervals in the hurricane. One minute we'd be holding our hats under our arms with our locks creeping to the back of our heads, and the writer struggling to keep the reins taut (they were blown clean out of my hands several times). Then there would be a lull—and in two seconds down would come the rain. We got wet through, as notwithstanding the rain and the black clouds, the heat was terrific, and it was agony to have our

waterproofs on. It was absolutely impossible for us to walk, and, as a matter of fact, it was a mercy to “ Opal ” to keep in the sulky—as while we were out there was danger of the vehicle taking on an aeroplaning expedition! We passed through the border—a mere three-railed fence—and shortly came to Wolseley, the first South Australian “ port of call,” and here we were advised to keep on as fast as we could, as there was sure to be very heavy rain before long, and if that were the case, the road would be impassable once mud had taken command. So on we pushed, and about half a mile from Bordertown (thirteen miles from Serviceton), the last of the wind flew past us, and we arrived at the misnamed border town about five hours after leaving Serviceton.

Just as we got into Bordertown we met the local Methodist Minister, the Rev. Fred Rooney, who, as it still looked like heavy rain, kindly gave us the use of his shed until the following afternoon, to put our things in. On the Thursday, Mr. Rooney having run out of horse-feed, I had to expend a shilling for chaff. This shilling assumes quite an important aspect, as it was the only amount spent on horse-feed during the whole journey from Melbourne to Adelaide. We fed the pony, and left the rest in the bag in the shed. We converted the local post office into a temporary study, and when we got back found that our first impression of Mr. Rooney’s horse—that it was a bit of a rogue—was quite correct. When we took up our quarters the neddy had seemed very fond of us—and when we went to give “ Opal ” a second feed we found that Friend Rooney’s horse was just finishing all that had been left. In our absence it had poked its head under the rail, dragged forth the feed, and tucked in. (“ Opal ” was in another yard, so perforce couldn’t assert her ownership).

To begin in the geography-book style, Bordertown is situated on the main-trunk railway between Adelaide and Melbourne, about ten miles from the border. In the days when the country was young and covered with scrub, and surveyors measured the mile by guess-work, the spot where Scott’s wool-shed, a police-station, and a Bush hotel stood, was called “ Border ”-town, because the surveyors had a hazy notion that the border was somewhere near by. Though the situation of Bordertown remains the same, the boundary line itself has moved ten miles to the east, and now Wolseley is nearer the border by nine miles. That does not trouble Bordertown people, who are too busy making money to worry over trifles, but to strangers it is a little surprising to find that Bordertown is not a “ border-town ” at all.

It is in a sense a regular Bush township, for the scrub surrounds it on all sides, and up to a year or two ago even invaded the streets. It is a rising place, with many good buildings (notably the stone post office and school), and has to be reckoned with in the future as an agricultural centre. The appearance of Bordertown is distinctly pleasing, the presence of so many fine gum trees imparting a rustic beauty most graceful to the eye. There is a brisk air of prosperity, and business, too, about the town, which, added to the inhabitants' optimistic belief as to the future, is quite exhilarating. From what I could gather, this hopeful spirit is fully justified by the progress of the district during the last few years.

As I said before, Mr. Rooney had run out of chaff (he gets it from a farm at Wolseley), and so could not replenish "Opal's" nose-bag. But half an hour after leaving Bordertown (Friday afternoon) we called in at a Mr. Saxons', who "hitched on" a well-filled "but"* to the back of the sulky. We journeyed only four miles that day. Just as I banged over a rabbit a man drove up in a sulky. He turned out to be the owner of the well we were intending to camp at. "It's too late to reach my place to-night. Go back to that farm and tell Frank Watson that Dave Trew says you're to camp there to-night. It'll be all right. No, I don't own the place, but we're good friends. I'll see you to-morrow," and with that he drove off. Now, to tell the story properly, I must confess that just before Mr. Trew drove up, I'd taken advantage of the unwritten law of the road, and helped myself to a cabbage and a few onions out of that Frank Watson's big garden. I'd found no one about, and knew that such a few would not be missed out of that lot, or that if they were, the owners would only feel sorry that we hadn't taken more. We saw some harvesters at work in a field half a mile off, so while Jack cooked the rabbit and onions I went over. But Mr. Watson was not amongst them. They directed me to a house some distance across another wheat-field. 'Twas his brother's place. He wasn't there. As a matter of fact, he was miles away, at his mother's place, down with the mumps. But the brother, as he gave me some chops from a sheep he had just killed, said he had no objection to us camping at Frank's place, nor did he offer any objection to us having whatever eggs we could find, so long as we didn't set fire to the hay or stables.

On Saturday (January 6th) we travelled an even shorter distance—only three miles. Leaving the track near Canniwigra Siding, we plodded a mile through the sand to

* Opened bag.

Mr. Trew's place; a very fine property, only a year or two old. Mr. Trew was formerly manager of the Bordertown branch of the big pastoral firm of Elder, Smith, & Co. The contractors were at work on a stone house, the stone—limestone—being obtained from certain parts of the “desert.” Mr. Trew would not let us use our chaff, but kept “Opal” well supplied with his own feed. But on account of the other horses—some of them vicious towards a stranger—the pony had to remain in the stable the whole time we were there. Not the city stable, mind you, but a great, long structure of saplings, with bushes for a roof, and any amount of space to move about in. We received great hospitality from Mr. and Mrs. Trew, and also the contractors, who were always glad to see strangers during their long job, and with whom we exchanged our “library.” On both sides the papers were a wee bit ancient, and mostly consisted of advertisements—but it was still reading matter. At “Meramie” (Mr. Trew's place) we made the acquaintance of a seventeen-year-old Swede, who had been at sea since he was fourteen. He had cleared out at Adelaide a few months previous. The Government sent him to work at Keith, on the railway construction. After a few weeks of ballasting work, he threw it up, and “humped his bluey” for twenty miles, and got a job at “Meramie,” looking after the horses at twenty-five shillings a week and “all found.”*

Early Sunday morning (January 7th) we bade good-bye to “Meramie,” and travelled on to Wirriga Siding, where, at Taunton Vale, we met Mr. A. L. Fry, the pioneer settler of the “desert.” We had heard that we could, if necessary, replenish our chaff there, and that there was some green “picking” to be had in the paddocks. Mr. Fry was sorry he couldn't offer us any sleeping accommodation—but, of course, we did not want that. However, he replenished our larder for us. On Monday, after a sluice-down in the woolshed (Mr. Fry is a sheep-farmer besides a wheat-grower) our host and I rode round the property and to a couple of his neighbours, while “The Long 'Un” helped the two new-chums with the winnowing. On our round I was introduced to a young Mr. Fairweather. Then his father drove up in a dray in which he was bringing out farm supplies from the railway. I mention Mr. Fairweather, senior, because to my surprise, when I called at the Currie Street Observation School in Adelaide (where the young pupil teachers are trained) a few weeks later, to arrange a lecture, the headmaster turned out to be this gentleman. His scholastic duties necessitated him being dressed just a little

* Board and lodging.

different to when I saw him in the old dray ploughing through the sand in the "desert"! We enjoyed our stay at Taunton Vale very much—and so did "Opal," who found a paddock where there was fair green "picking."

The following day we left Taunton Vale, and after passing the time of day with a few settlers along the track, came to "Atholwood," a property being managed by Mr. H. A. Gmeiner (five and half miles from Taunton Vale). This place is owned by an Adelaide firm, who seem to be spending money like water to improve it. Mr. Gmeiner was out "burning off" some scrub with his men, but the blacksmith told us we had better wait for dinner. So we unharnessed and put "Opal" into a lucerne paddock, eaten down short, but still good picking. Later on Manager Gmeiner and his men trooped in, and we had a hearty meal off "tinned dog," damper, and tea. After dinner we were shown over the experimental plots, where we were soon convinced that the name "desert" was not deserved at "Atholwood," at any rate. In the afternoon we journeyed on another ten miles, over sandy and, in places, rocky ground (though even here there were a few farms), until we came to Keith, twenty-eight miles from Bordertown, and just outside where we saw the first natural grass (but very dry) worth the attention of "Opal" during the past few hundred miles. Just before Keith Jack shot our first black rabbit, and here, also, we got talking to a horse dealer. We asked what he would give us for "Opal." "Not much." "What do you mean by that?" I asked. "Oh, eight pounds." "If that's the case," I replied, "I could be certain of getting at least what I gave for her (eleven pounds) if I sold her to a private buyer." But, of course, our staunch four-legged friend was not for sale.

On Wednesday (January 10th) we passed through Keith, a place which, four years ago, consisted of a few rough shanties, but now boasts stone buildings, hotels, churches, hall, etc. We were mightily surprised to see each house had an ordinary common or backyard hand-pump. In the middle of this so-called dreary "desert" the residents were drawing water at a depth of less than eight feet! At Keith is the biggest timber we saw coming through. Of course there was plenty of mallee, and short "dwarf gums," but here at Keith there were gums standing as high as a hundred feet. After passing through the township, black clouds loomed up, and we had a few drops of rain. For the first few miles the "going" was very heavy, as the track had been cut up terribly by the wheat waggons. We hoped that the rain would simply pour down for a few hours to "firm"

the sand—sand that is never converted into mud, and which provides good travelling after rain. On the road out we met a young farmer, named Packer. He was not back in time, but we accepted his invitation to make lunch off the “tucker” at his camp, where we found plenty of good hay for the pony.

Leaving Packer’s we crossed a mile or two of rather heavy sand, with a few sandhills. But they were not quite as bad as we had been led to expect. They had told us, away back in Victoria, “You’ll have to push the sulky over hills so steep and sandy that the sand displaced by the horse will bury you and the vehicle.” The track kept close to the railway line, and just at the foot of one of the rises (I would not call them hills) we pulled up to have a yarn to some gangers. Walking across to lean over the railway fence I was sent flying by a dog that had burrowed into the sand to get a cool bed! It had almost covered itself over. I jokingly asked the gangers were there any electric lifts handy to get us over the rise. Now it so happened that away in the distance a train was advancing in our direction. “Opal” has very sharp ears. We didn’t, but she did, hear the train whistle. That was quite enough—she bolted, almost taking with her one or two of the fence posts. “Hey, matey,” shouted the ganger as we started to run after her, “ye don’t want any helectricity for that there pony.” We didn’t. Jack was the first to catch up to the runaway. We were glad that the track *was* sandy, and that there was a bit of a rise. The reins were hanging in the saddle-rings, so Jack hopped on behind the sulky and clambered over. He couldn’t reach the reins (the ornamental ironwork on the splashboard had a bit off one side, and “The Long ’Un” nearly disembowelled himself when he reached over), so grabbed the pony’s tail. The train came out of a cutting just as the tail-pulling operation commenced, and can you wonder that the passengers stared? This method of sobering a runaway was so effective that Jack made use of it on a second occasion.

Soon after this little incident we came to a few miles of rather flat country, and here we escaped some of the sand by taking short cuts where the mallee and scrub was thin and low enough for us to travel through. But the “yacka” tussocks (of which there were plenty) were very bumpy, and we were glad to get back to the sandy track. I might here say that we walked almost every yard of the “Ninety Mile.” We would hang the reins in the saddle-rings, and both walk on some twenty paces in front of the turnout, “Opal” following on and giving us no trouble whatever and never

attempting to go off the track, except when we went into the mallee just to see what she would do. If the mallee was not too thick, "Opal" would turn off also, but if thick she would stand patiently there and look round at us with an imploring look in her eyes, as much as to say, "Why are you teasing me so." The pony never seemed to want a rest, but we often did. We would sit down at the side of the track, and "Opal" would keep on going until we sang out to her. Then when we got up a mere "Come on, Cubby," was quite sufficient.

Just at dusk on Wednesday (January 10th), after passing through one or two big wheat fields ready for "stripping," we came to Mr. Walter Dall's place at "the 137-mile cottages." Mrs. Dall boiled us some eggs and tea, and "Opal" spent the night in a little enclosure, the only other occupant being a stack of hay, off which she feasted to her heart's content.

The next day Mr. Dall advised us to go only a short distance, as our heaviest day's work would be on the Friday. There is a little yarn connected with the few sandy ridges immediately after leaving the "137 mile." It seems that a short time previous a couple—man and woman—came along in a light waggonette drawn by a pair of the sort of horses usually designated "crow-baits," owing to their emaciated appearance. The horses were not in as good a condition as "Opal," and jibbed. After a lot of ineffective persuasion, the couple carried their belongings up to the top of one of the rises. But even when minus so much weight the horses would not go until some chaff was emptied into a tub and held in front of their noses! Later on, when the horses broke down completely, one of Mr. Dall's neighbours (he lived two and a half miles away) harnessed his powerful farm team in, and with the "crow-baits" hitched on behind (as a teamster's riding-horse is "roped" behind a wool waggon), dragged the whole turnout into Keith. "Opal" never required that treatment, although I must confess that on one occasion she did pull up of her own accord while negotiating a rise: a little heap of chaff had been spilt in the middle of the track by a previous traveller, and "Opal" thought it a pity that it should go to waste. We often helped the pony by each grasping the rear end of the springs (so taking a little of the weight off the wheels), and at the same time pushing. On one occasion the track up a rise was so slanting that to prevent the sulky overturning we both had to attend to the one side. Out of all these pushing experiences we came liberally covered with sand brought up by the wheels.

Shortly before getting to Tintinarra we had a yarn with an old settler who was busy fallowing his land. As we pulled up, we had a drop of the nineteen-inch average rainfall the “ desert ” is blessed with, which caused the old gentleman to say something about his lucerne. He had a patch, half an acre in extent, sown in August, 1910. It had been cut down twice since October, 1911. At the first cutting it was two feet high, and at the second, eighteen inches. Besides the two cuttings it had twice been “ fed down ” (that is, the horses had been turned out loose on to it) when not high enough for cutting. He had traced the lucerne roots four feet down. The lucerne was not sown on any picked spot, but on land most convenient to the buildings. This old settler intends putting lucerne in the whole of his six hundred acre block, and his neighbours reckon that if he has as much luck with that lot as with the half acre, his fortune will be made in a very few years. He reckons that it is some of the finest land he has ever seen for vegetables, fruit, and other root crops. There is a big orchard a few miles out of Tintinarra, but it was off our track, and we could not spare the time to have a look over it.

At Tintinarra we saw several horses with red ribbon round their necks. They didn't look like prize-winners, but acting the new-chum, I asked one man did the “ desert ” boast a show-ring? He tried to hide a laugh, and replied that that was the cure for the bot fly, which was rather prevalent. Professing ignorance, I said I had no red stuff, but would any other colour do? “ No,” he replied. As I gazed into the depths of the billy-can, in which some onions were stewing, I told him to call a meeting of his neighbours, and impart the information that a person who had travelled right along the New South Wales Coast, from the Queensland border to the Victorian border—those districts where the bot fly is most in evidence—while peregrinating in the North Coast heard a little story about a Hindoo hawker who drove up to a farmer's place with red ribbon round his horse's neck. Naturally, the farmer was curious. To make a long story short, on the strength of what the hawker said about red ribbon being a preventative for the bot, he was rushed, and sold out in quick time every inch of a very old length of very old red rubbishy stuff, which he would never have sold if he had not invented the cure! I assured the settler the story was quite true. He took off a green neck-tie, tied it on in place of the red ribbon, gave a grunt, emitted a “ Well, here's green for old Ireland,” and rode off in disgust.

While on the subject of hawkers, there's an old Hindoo identity who calls on the settlers once a quarter. He reaps a

rich harvest; in the "desert" there's not a store in every wheat-field.

We used the railway workers' fire at Tintinarra for cooking our dinner. There we found quite an army of men, completing a three-hundred-and-fifty feet platform, one of the longest in South Australia. They were also busy erecting overhead tanks, laying new lines, and doing other railway work. About here we learned that the "Ninety Mile Desert," instead of being the awful place it is painted (give a place a bad name and it will stick), is a favourite track for sundowners—the real sort. Not mere unemployed looking for work, but those who live on the game. It started a few years ago. A couple of swaggies came along. They received splendid treatment at the various gangers' cottages. These two told others, coming in the opposite direction, which was the best out of the three cottages to call at for "tucker," and so on, until they are now developing into a nuisance. The swaggies think they are certain of food, so why leave such a milk and honey track. We passed several, and not one had a bad word to say about the "desert"!

These "railway cottages," as they are called, are really small brick terraces, the three houses (always three gangers to every length of line) being all joined together. They are supplied, when necessary, with fresh water from the Murray River, brought up by trains, and emptied into three or four iron tanks sunk into the ground, or sometimes into a huge well. Then of course the cottages have the rain water, and while perhaps they would not like to water a team of bullocks, we always had as much as we wanted. We had been given to understand that as the "desert" was such an awful place, the gangers all lived in one township in the centre, but we found their homes were anything between six and ten miles apart.

But to get back to the sundowners. The "desert" species are of all ages and sizes, of a great many nationalities, and of both sexes. We heard the story of the family that walked along the railway line. The "lady" did the begging while the children—a couple of boys and the same number of girls—stopped on the railway in full view of the houses. The husband (?) slid over the embankment so that he wouldn't be asked whether he was looking for work. Some ill-assorted couples travel this route. Some are married, but other ladies tell the householders, with perfect composure, that they are travelling with a male person "just for company." In such cases the womenfolk do the cadging—the men carry the results! (Just the reverse of my Queensland aboriginal friends. The man is always the mighty warrior and hunter,

while his gin is his beast of burden.) One lady is well remembered at “ Tinty ” (as Tintinarra is called locally). She had two little girls with her. She would not accept any “ tucker ” until they allowed her to chop some wood. Some tramps we passed were real new-chums. Even if the roll of their swags and the absence of billies did not proclaim the fact, their features and speech and rolling gait told us they were sailors—probably deserters from Port Adelaide.

Leaving Tintinarra, firm red soil took the place of the loose sand for a few miles, and after passing a big encampment of navvies relaying the line, we turned off to call on the Pritchards, where we had been advised by Mr. Dall to end our day’s journey. While having a cup of tea, and after we had given “ Opal ” a big feed from our host’s chaff, we learned that Mr. Pritchard was formerly a blacksmith, and knew absolutely nothing about farming two years ago. His average this crop was six bushels to the acre—very small when compared with other wheat districts, but not bad for a “ desert.” A sister of Mrs. Pritchard’s was staying there, and the two city-reared ladies were quite enthusiastic over farm life. Their residence is a plain unpretentious galvanised iron building—for the present—but already Mr. Pritchard had put down the foundations of a stone building. The longer established settlers have neat stone residences—lime and stone are ready to hand on the spot—but the younger generation have either tin houses, tents, or bush “ humpies.”

The Pritchards were believers in “ early to bed,” etc., but Mrs. Pritchard had some of her paintings and photos to show us, and I had a collection of Outback photos with me, and so, altogether, we spent a very pleasant evening. Jack and I retired to our bunks near the chaff-house about eleven, and slept like tops until 8.30 next morning. Mr. P. and his “ man ” had been out harvesting for about three hours.

The night was pleasantly cool, and we found every evening in the “ desert ” the same—no matter how hot the days were, we were always glad of our blankets at night.

Loaded up with a fresh supply of chaff, flour, sugar, etc., we left “ Culburra ” (the Pritchards’ place at Dewson) at about 10.30 on Friday, January 12th. “ Dewson ” is not the name of any city, town, township, or even village, but only of a mere platform—the nearest house is a quarter of a mile away, and the platform is usually occupied by just a few seats, a little iron waiting-room, and the notice board. Mrs. Pritchard imparted the information that it would take us at least three hours to get to the next “ cottages,” where

we intended to boil the billy. It took us a little more if anything to do the four miles! Another six miles on we came to Coonalpyn, consisting of a fairly big railway station, "cottages," hall, store, and station-master's residence. A drink of ice-cold water from the station water-bag, and we pushed on towards Ki-Ki. Between Coonalpyn and Ki-Ki there is a stretch of nine miles of "sand, sand, and nothing but sand." We were informed at Coonalpyn that we wouldn't be able to get water until we got to Ki-Ki; that although there was a deserted farm a mile before getting to that settlement there was no water there, and no paddock to put the horse in. I think that day was the hardest of our whole journey. No wonder the Pritchards had told us we hadn't seen any sand, and wouldn't see any, until we got to "Coonalpyn Downs." That afternoon we very nearly came to the conclusion that after all there was some truth in what the chap had said about the sand displaced by the horse nearly burying the sulky, although none of the rises were quite "as steep as the side of a house." It was nothing but ridge after ridge of sand. They became so monotonous that we didn't even console ourselves with the thought that "what you go up you must come down," because we could always be sure of seeing other rises ahead of us when we got to the top of each one. As far as the eye could reach there was nothing but these "rises," no matter in which direction we looked.

And yet there was no justification for calling the place a desert. Certainly we could see sand glistening on one or two of the ridges, but for the most part the "desert" was covered by low mallee and other scrub, with here and there a gum tree or two. We had to use "Opal's" strength very sparingly. The travelling was so heavy that it was absolutely necessary to rest the pony—and ourselves—every few hundred yards. We pushed most of the way. Once or twice we left the beaten track, when we saw a bend in the railway, and tried to take a short cut, but found that ploughing through the sandy track was easier "travelling," as though the ground was quite firm, the "yacka" tufts made riding impossible, and the sharp-edged grass cut our legs badly.

We were late in reaching camp, and the last few miles were struggled over long after the sun had gone down. We had decided to camp at the deserted farm, even if the pony—and therefore ourselves, as on the whole journey we never carried a water-bag—had to go without water. But imagine our joy when on reaching the house—a galvanised iron building some little distance to the right of the road—we found that

the four-hundred-gallon tank was half-full of water, and not only that, but the deserters had left a little enclosure in front of the house, where “Opal” was quite safe. We boiled the billy about 9.30 p.m., and threw ourselves down on some bags of “cocky-chaff” (wheat husks) which happened to be there, and reached dreamland quicker than ever we had before. Only nineteen miles for the day, but the most trying the three of us had had.

In the morning (Saturday, January 13th) we had a look round what we afterwards found was “Denton’s Mistake.” We learned later on that a mechanic named Denton a few years ago took up this block of land, and at once set to work. He erected a little galvanised iron residence, brought his wife and children up, and the wife was in hopes that her husband had at last “settled down” for good. Then he went down to Adelaide, where he evidently heard of “something better.” He wrote to Mrs. Denton, she left the place by the first down train, and twelve months ago they were heard of from Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. Denton didn’t even trouble to come up to settle his affairs, and his wife left everything just as it was. A peep through the window revealed the furniture and everything else thickly covered with dust, but otherwise just as it had been left when Mrs. Denton followed her husband. One of Denton’s neighbours had a few days before harvested the wheat he had sown, so that in case Denton should return, he would not find he had forfeited the land back to the Crown.

A mile or so of fairly heavy travelling brought us to Ki-Ki, the siding we had tried to reach the previous night. A huge army of navvies was at work on the line. One or two farms could be seen, but the terrace of gangers’ cottages, and an “Institute” (as all halls in South Australia are called) constituted the “siding.” Here we made the acquaintance of dear old Mrs. Scriven, who turned out to be a relative of the Pritchards. We enjoyed a cup of tea with the old lady, who hadn’t a word to say against the “awful desert.” “At the ’21,” she said (meaning the cottages at the 121-mile peg from Adelaide, where her ganger son-in-law had been stationed), “we grew vegetables as good and as big as grown anywhere else in South Australia. And the flocks of white cockatoos—wherever they came from!—used to serenade us every day from the branches of those gum trees you remember seeing.”

The good lady loaded us up with a couple of loaves of bread, and we resumed our march onwards. About a quarter of a mile on, half-way down a sandy ridge, we came to a cart with one wheel “buckled in.” We hoped that ours

would not serve us that sort of trick so far from a coach-builder's shop. The day was very hot, and smoke from scrub fires not very far off made our eyes smart.

Just before we got to Ki-Ki we found that our cushion had disappeared. The wind had evidently blown it off the seat and over the back. "The Long 'Un" walked back and found it not far from the previous night's camp. After that, at least one of us made a point of walking behind the sulky.

Just about here we saw the first "Dead Marine"* in the "desert." Then we kept our eyes open for more, but that was the only bottle we discovered. Evidently travellers found that water was better than liquor on such a track.

A ganger advised us to "keep out of the swamps." Our informant told us they meandered across the track in a few places, and it might be dangerous to attempt to cross them. But we safely negotiated the only one we saw—between Coomandook and Cook's Plains.

Four miles before Coomandook, and six from Ki-Ki, we called in at a farm for a few minutes' chat with the owner. From his house, perched on a sandy ridge, and aided by a pair of binoculars, we had a splendid panoramic view of miles upon miles of rolling "downs" country, with here and there a big yellow patch, denoting a wheat-field, showing up out of the mallee. And they call this a "desert"? But that was one of the views not to be had from the railway. Not even our friend's house could be seen by the passengers of the train we could hear speeding on its way, and who very likely would only occasionally lift their eyes from their books and papers, and seeing a few sandy ridges would at once condemn the whole Ninety Mile stretch, and think it something to boast about that they had travelled across a "desert"—even if it was only in a train! And beyond, further than the glasses could reach, there are waiting thousands of acres of the "Hundred of Kilpatrick" (as this portion of the country is called)—waiting to be converted into those big yellow patches.

Two miles further on we came to more "cottages," where we had a yarn to one of the gangers, who, when we expressed disappointment in the "desert" (we had not thus far killed "Opal"—nor bleached our fortnight's growth of whiskers, let alone our bones) said that the "desert" was now looking even worse than twenty years ago. "Then you could see nothing except 'big mallee,' but continual fires, year after year, have cleared out the 'big stuff,' and the small 'scrub mallee' comes up thicker after every fire."

* Empty beer or whisky bottle,



AN OUTBACK SHEEP-RUN.



A TYPICAL OUTBACK SHEARING-SHED.

Still another couple of miles further on, and we came to Coomandook, which is considered the most important place in the Ninety Mile. The residents, and also the railway guards, will tell you that “Coo’dook” has double the imports and exports of any other place—not even excepting Keith, although the latter place is a dozen times as big as its rival, “Coo’dook” being a township consisting of one store and a siding! The railway siding could not even have a “staff” (a porter or stationmaster) until the end of January! With plenty of rolling stock, great things are predicted for Coomandook.

We were very late pitching camp on this Saturday. We kept hearing of better camping spots “a bit further on,” and it was fully nine o’clock before we at last unharnessed in what we found next morning to be a beautiful park-like paddock with a bit of grass (we were now getting out of the “desert”), and little clumps of pretty sea-green pine trees dotted here and there. We knocked up the folk at a farm half a mile across the line, and though they were rather short of water themselves, they could not let a traveller or his horse die of thirst! They were dairy farmers, named Denber, or Denver. The only place in Australia where I have known the cows to be hand-fed. How different to the North Coast of New South Wales!!

On Sunday (January 14th) we travelled a very short stage—only four miles. We were on the move rather late, and knew at once that it would be better to camp at the first decent place we came to. The heat was terrific. We watered the horse (and ourselves) from the tank at the old church at Cook’s Plains, where we found an American negro had taken up his quarters until his wheat-lumping job finished. He was one of a small army of men employed in putting a huge stack of thousands of bags of wheat on to the trucks. We called in at a boundary-rider’s house (the country on one side of the line is part of an immense sheep-station), and later on got our nose-bag full of chaff from a Mr. Jack Anderson, who gave us permission to camp in his brother’s paddock, a mile further on. Fairly decent track, with not much sand. This was the hottest day we had experienced. We took shelter under a few scraggy mallee trees, and tried to sleep the day through. But it was too hot for that even, and the flies were there in millions. In the afternoon a bit of wind happened along, but instead of cooling the air, it brought along dust to add to our misery. The sun penetrated through the trees, and we couldn’t even pass the time away by reading. It was just one of those days on which you can do absolutely nothing but laze about,

However, the paddock had a well in it, right alongside the railway line, and after plucking up courage enough to cross the open space (about a quarter of a mile), we left the ants and mosquitoes and flies, hunted the cattle from around the eighteen-foot long semi-circular iron trough, filled the trough with clean water, stripped off, and plunged in—or rather, I should say stepped gently in. The trough, when almost full, was just deep enough to receive our bodies, and every four feet there was an iron stay on top. These stays were very useful as head rests, and while one of us tried to go to sleep in the brackish water, the other would draw his legs up and make waves! After our bath we had a shower—by drawing a bucket of water, and turning it upside down over our heads. Just as well no passenger trains came along; of course we did not carry bathing costumes in a desert. This particular place was well supplied with water. A well in the paddock, another just over the fence, and a third just across the railway line. This third (which was railway property), was ever so much fresher than the one we had bathed in, but even that was not fresh enough to use soap. Still, when we emerged from our “bath” rather greasy (the trough hadn’t been washed out for ages) we used sand instead, before having our shower. The salty, brackish water spoiled our tea. Boiling seems to make the water worse than when not boiled. The bath somewhat refreshed us—it certainly eased our blistered feet, but the hot evening prevented us getting much sleep. We heard later on that Adelaide had shared the heat with us, and driving through the hills of the beautiful Mount Lofty district, we saw where bush fires had swept over a great expanse of country.

On Monday (January 15th), eleven days from Bordertown, we saw practically the last of the “desert.” Leaving Sunday’s camp we passed through more pine country, over red soil, and along a very rocky track, until we came to Tailem Bend, where we saw still further evidence of South Australia’s policy of railway expansion. From “Tailem” a new line is being laid to Browns Wells, further north, in the one-time “desert” but now famous wheat-growing district of Pinaroo, and the main construction camp is at “The Bend.” Just after passing through Tailem Bend, a fair-sized township, we had our first glimpse of the Murray River—likewise of running water since Glenorchy, several hundred miles back in Victoria. A mile or so from the township our left wheel commenced to creak. Box hot! Thanks to yesterday’s heat, all the grease had run off. We were on a bit of plain at the time, bare of anything that we could rest the axle on, so while Jack knelt down on all fours,

with the cushion across his shoulders, I took the wheel off, and there was the “box” stuck to the axle. For the first time on the whole trip, our spirits sank. But with Jack still doing the “strong man act,” I made good use of the tomahawk, and the “box” being still hot, I succeeded in hammering it off. The inside of the wheel was a bit worn, but we filled up the space with a couple of wooden plugs, and after making an onslaught upon our supply of axle-grease, we drove on. But from this on to Adelaide we had to go very steady, as the heat the day before, combined with this day’s rocky track, had loosened every spoke in both wheels, and snapped off a few of the tyre-screws. We camped for lunch down at the Murray, after getting some buttered sandwiches and scones from the wife of a German farmer, and some chaff from Mr. Obst himself.

While camped for lunch, “The Long ‘Un,” using two wooden matches as forceps, pulled out of the root of my tongue a little splinter of dry brown grass that had got embedded there about a week before while I was contemplatively chewing at a tuft. It turned out to be about a quarter of an inch in length, and I had to hold the looking-glass while I tried to get my tongue screwed round to a suitable position to enable Jack to perform the operation.

Between Tailm Bend and Murray Bridge we had alternate stages of heavy sand and made road. Just before getting to Monteith, the pony pulled up suddenly at the end of a piece of made road, so that we could walk while going over the sand. Jack was glad of the sand; “Opal” pulled up so suddenly that he went flying, and landed on his head.

The “desert” portion of our long journey came to an end on Monday, January 15th, at Monteith, a rising settlement on reclaimed swamp lands, some seven or eight miles before Murray Bridge. Two days later we arrived in Adelaide, some sixty miles away, and finding a good “camp” in the grounds of the hospitable Harrington family, in Prospect, “Opal” had a month’s rest before starting on the homeward journey.

* * * * *

I fear this article has already considerably overstepped its allotted space, but a few words about the early settlement of the “desert” will not be out of place.

In the early days, Bordertown consisted only of Scott’s wool-shed, the centre of the once vast Canniwigra sheep-run. Presently the Woolshed Hotel arose, with its corollary—the police station. When the Victorian goldfields

were in full swing this police station was made the halting-place for the gold escort journeying to Adelaide with the precious nuggets consigned by lucky South Australians. Many years later, when the Government resumed the leased blocks of the Canniwigra "run," and put them up for sale, the district received its first real start. Where once a manager and two station "hands" tried to spread themselves over the land, about twenty farmers settled with their families. Gradually other farmers came along, until now Bordertown is the centre of about three hundred square miles of splendid farming country. In addition to its annual rainfall of close on twenty inches, it is the healthiest district in South Australia for stock. Perhaps this is what decided Mr. Fry, the pioneer settler, to combine sheep with wheat. He was the Bordertown chemist, and did not sell any sheep physic for sixteen years.

The opening of the railway to Melbourne was, of course, beneficial to the district, but the most substantial impetus to its prosperity was undoubtedly the introduction of superphosphates (artificial manures), and the manure drill. A typical instance of the truth of this is the case of a farmer with a grown family of sons and daughters, whose finances had been going from bad to worse. Fifteen years ago constant cropping and grazing had so impoverished his land that the harvest returns did not keep the family exchequer up to requirements. Another bad year meant bankruptcy. The farmer in desperation thought another fifty or a hundred pounds might as well go on the slate with the rest, and determined to try a manure drill. With it he sowed some played-out ground, and reaped a splendid crop. He went on. With his drill and manures, backed up by the district's unfailing rain, he continued to prosper. Some six years ago he sold the goodwill of his lease of four thousand acres for four thousand pounds. With that added to the proceeds of his stock and implements, and eight years' accumulated profits, he retired.

The success of those who tried the new style of farming induced others to follow suit, and now farmers who previously owned only a mortgage and a worn-out hack, have a big balance at the bank, and drive a stylish buggy and a handsome pair of horses. The district around Bordertown has never had a harvest failure. (I am keeping to this particular district, it being the oldest settled in the "desert.") In 1902, when the drought was general, the crop average here was higher than in the previous year. Farmers in the western Wimmera district of Victoria, who were forced to abandon their farms, came over here with their flocks and

herds for grass. Local farmers grazed their less fortunate neighbours' stock to their mutual benefit. This occurrence led farmers to look abroad for additional grazing country, and they turned their attention to the miscalled "desert" between Bordertown and Murray Bridge. All the sections along the railway line had been taken up by farmers, and used as auxiliary grazing grounds. But no attempt was made to improve the lands until, with the continued success of artificial manures and suitable machinery on the fringe of the "desert," the idea gained ground that they could be turned into wheat-growing areas. As I have pointed out, Mr. A. L. Fry may be considered the pioneer of the "interior portion" (if it may be so termed) of this once-despised "desert." So convinced was he of the possibilities of the land in conjunction with the manures, that in 1904, although no farmer himself, he took up ten thousand acres near Wirriga Siding, about fifteen miles from Bordertown. Employing labour he broke up two patches of ground in different parts of the block. The mallee on these experimental plots was rolled down, burnt off, and the blocks were wire-netted. Rye, wheat, oats, barley, and lucerne were sown. Mr. Fry was unable to obtain labour and teams until the farmers in the more settled "fringe" had finished their own sowing, so his crops had a late start. In spite of this, they brought forth abundantly. They were sown for experimental purposes only, and it was not attempted to harvest them, but farmers who went to see the wonderful transformation estimated that had the seed been sown early the wheat would have returned from twelve to fourteen bushels per acre, and oats forty bushels. In every case the straw was long, the ears were well filled, and the grain was large. The lucerne, in particular, was a veritable triumph, growing to a height of three and a half feet, and "stooling out" prolifically. Seeing that there was and could be no attempt at irrigation, this result was very encouraging. In the following spring Mr. Fry could not arrange with anyone to work his land, no one having time at his disposal, so nothing was done, the crops being allowed to re-sow themselves. Even after standing all the winter exposed to the depredations of the entire bird population of the scrub, the self-sown crops came up as strong and vigorous as ever, and furnished an additional incentive to farming in the libelled "desert." A couple of years ago Mr. Fry built a fine eleven-roomed stone house, gave up handing out pills over the counter in Bordertown, and settled down to farming.

Right through the "desert" we found the settlers quite enthusiastic over the possibilities of the land. It is my fervent hope that they may soon realise their prophecy that

the "Ninety Mile" will yet be converted into one of the chief wheat-growing districts of South Australia.

The thought here occurs that the Government might do worse than utilise some "unemployed" labour to break up this scrub country. The first season's crop would doubtless recoup them for the expenses, while the enhanced value of the cleared land would be an added asset to the State. When one block was cleared and sold another could be proceeded with.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CONQUEST OF THE VICTORIAN MALLEE

THE north-west corner of Victoria—a country that is bounded on the south by an irregular line drawn about midway between the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh parallels of latitude, on the north by the River Murray, on the west by South Australia, and on the east by a line which might run ten miles easterly still of longitude 143. It is not a patch of country, nor a corner, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but an area of 150 miles by 160 miles at the very least, containing not less than 25,000 square miles.

The rescue of this huge area from its degradation of sun-parched scrub and sand is one of the romances of Australian settlement. It is a country that up to a few years ago people generally knew very little about, that nobody did very much good with, that broke the banks of many men, the hearts of not a few. It contains the ugly ghosts of many a bright dream, and before its redemption it was endurable only to those who loved the wilderness, or who dauntlessly laboured for its redemption. In 1879, only thirty-four years ago, the country was thus described by a Royal Commission: "Traveling down through the centre of the mallee from the Murray to the southern border of the region the aspect it presents is that of a wilderness in the strictest sense of the term—sand, scrub, and mallee below, the scorching sun and bright blue sky above, and not a sound of life to break the solemn silence. In a journey of 100 miles from north to south not one solitary bird or living creature was to be seen. The only evidence of animal life was the barked stems of stunted scrub and bushes where the rabbits had been feeding, and the dead carcasses of a few dingoes which the trapper had snared or poisoned. Some native wells, a small lagoon or two, and a few muddy waterholes are to be met with scattered far apart over an area extending some thousands of square miles, but they are more frequently found dried up than otherwise. All through this parched country there is no grass." It was through many years an absolute terra incognita—an unapproachable

country to people of the metropolis and the tame lands of the coast.

But now, the railways penetrate into a portion of the wilderness, and any man who desires to know what the mallee is like can train to Chillingolah, Sea Lake, Hopetoun, Dimboola, or Rainbow, or go northwards right through from Donald to Mildura, on the Murray. From any of the little inland hills, he can look out and behold the monotonous leaf-sea, which rolls away to the limits of vision, and only breaks into the alluvial plains by the Murray, or about the lakes, great and small, fresh and salt, which receive the northern flowing rivers, or mark their mysterious courses to the Murray, towards which they all trend. There is not much to be learned by such a look at the mallee,* the wilderness of dull green leaves, or ragged brown stalks, seeming to afford nothing more nutritious or useful than the arid soil which produces them. They are too stiff to move wave-like to any wind that may pass over and through them, nor under any circumstances do they yield any music or pleasant forest sounds. There is a dry sort of rustle, like the inarticulate murmur of many parched tongues, from the leaves, and the innumerable strips and shreds of dead bark beat against the stems like the wasting garments against the bones of a gibbet. The broad wing of an eagle is frequently seen against the dismal earth garment or the glorious blue of the sky, and black crows are frequent, their "squawk, squawk" mingling well with the eerie rustle of bark shreds.

Even on a first look it is easy to understand and to realise the many old stories of demented belated Bushmen lost in this one-time horrid waste, the gradual increase of the fever of thirst, the madness of fear, the feeble attempts to steer a straight course for the first day or two, the wild rushes which followed, and then the invariable casting away of every shred of clothing, and the headlong fall in utter exhaustion, which left the bared body for the dingo's tooth and the beak of the crow; and by and by a skeleton or a few scattered bones, with nothing to give the faintest clue to identity. Many and many a tragedy of that sort has occurred between any of those hilltops and the distant waters of the Murray.

And yet there are evidences that the aborigines have from time immemorial ranged over the mallee. For sixty miles north from the edge of what was once known as the Great

* The Mallee is an evergreen shrub, which grows as a short-stemmed bush in five or six shoots from one stump, and reaches an average height of from 12 to 20 ft. The trunks are seldom much thicker than a man's arm, and it can hardly be dignified by the name of tree, but it spreads with the closeness of an ordinary English hazel copse.



"THE CONQUEST OF THE MALLEE."

Victorian Desert on the overland journey to Adelaide their wells and the signs of their old encampments are seen. Thence they seem always to have struck north-east, making to the Murray, probably by the course of the underground channel of the Wimmera River—whose course can sometimes be traced by shallow surface lakes, and always by those indications of water near to the surface which the blacks knew so well. They had pleasant camping grounds in their winter pilgrimages, for here and there throughout the mallee there are sand-ridges with groves of beautiful sea-green pines and little grassy plains about them. The numerous dead pine boughs made the best of fuel, and the easily-broken pine foliage good beds or thatch for gunyahs; wallaby and kangaroo, or emu, would be taken easily enough, and the sand hills are in all weathers dry and warm.

The blacks would never approach Lake Tyrrell, which, shallow and salt and dreary, lies near the eastern boundary of the Mallee, the whole body of water moving with the wind, spreading sometimes on a rough night over miles of apparent desert floor, right up to the fires and tents of travellers, who had encamped far enough away on the previous evening; at others receding as if drawn by tidal influence, and leaving other dreary miles. But often the blacks would encamp about other fairer lakes, Boort and Lalbert still further east, and Hindmarsh in the southern centre, which, in rainy years, teem with fish and swarm with wild-fowl. To the whizz of their boomerangs then, as to the crack of a gun or the hoof-beat of a horse now, tens of thousands of swans, of native companions, of ibis, crane, pelican, geese, ducks of all sorts would rise with sounding flight. At times, on a frosty night, the sound seemed louder than the beat of ten thousand hoofs on the plain, thunderous and long continued, and breaking ultimately into many diverse sounds; greater and lesser splashes far out in the water, swift passing whistles of air-cutting wings, and clamorous flight far aloft of marshalled flocks making to other parts.

There were, and there are, many perfect beauty spots about the Mallee lakes, or the lakes on the Mallee's edge, filled by the occasional overflow of the rivers. Boort is well worth a journey any time of spring or autumn, and offers all the charms of a perfect winter holiday, square miles of crystal water, fresh and well stocked with fish, wild-fowl by millions, miles of silver beach, and a climate which is divine.

The first pioneer, perhaps, was old Major Mitchell, one time Surveyor-General of Australia, whose track is seen along the southern edge of the Mallee, though before him

gallant Captain Sturt had seen a little probably in his memorable voyage down the Murray. Then came the squatters, penetrating from the north and the south, taking up vast areas, and in good seasons making a little use of them. They held sway of the flat lands and the poor, the plains and the scrub, from the date of their occupation, to the enactment of that legislation which let the whole of the rural population loose on the land, to plough and sow in suitable localities, to "duff" cattle (that is, steal them by altering the brands), and levy blackmail on others. The selectors harassed the squatters, and in many instances destroyed them financially. They in turn felt the terrible invasion of the rabbits, and were themselves in many instances impoverished or destroyed. The rabbits entered into possession of the Mallee. Thirty years ago they were in possession, and twenty-five years ago they had so far destroyed the country that nobody cared to take up and hold it under the tenure then obtainable. The rabbits made food for the dingoes, the eagle-hawks, and the crows. These ghouls of the wilderness were never so pinched by famine as to take the poisoned rabbit-bait, however seductively spread. In drought years they increased therefore, and sad was the havoc amongst the flocks. In some few instances the old process of shepherding by day and yarding by night was resorted to; in others the stations were deserted, the whole of the stock having wasted away. Drovers then saw dozens of the red eye-balls of the dingoes gleaming within gunshot of their fires, and no man in the camp got much sleep till the open country was reached. It was very evident that a new order had become necessary, and that the Mallee, if it was to be conquered, must be attacked to other ways.

Gradually, and in many ways, that new attack has been proceeding. Some thoroughly enterprising people have taken advantage of every opportunity reasonable legislation and invention of new means have afforded. A fair rental and tenure were the first essentials, and these have long since been granted. Then came the cheap supply of wire netting and barbed wire. The one rendered it possible to fence out the rabbits, the other the dogs. And when once a man had only his own ground to deal with, he went to work with a will. Many mistakes were made, and much money wasted. The ordinary rabbiters became in some instances capitalists, in others thieves and spreaders of the plague they were engaged to subdue. More than £200,000 was expended in the conquest of the rabbits, and not to much purpose till the new sort of squatters began to fence in, and poison, and dig out their burrows.

Pioneers of another sort were the laborious selectors—the farmers who took up the rich Mallee land, and discovered that under proper management it could be easily cleared, and would grow magnificent wheat. Another, in his own peculiar way, was a good friend to Australia, Mr. Bosisto, inventor and manufacturer of the world-renowned eucalypti extract; and yet another was the first exporter of mallee roots as fuel. These, with the managers of the great irrigation experiment at Mildura, were soon engaged in subduing that north-western province of the Colony, and the Government, coming to understand them and their work a little better, began to afford them a little more sympathy, and to help them in their work in every reasonable and practical manner.

Of course, the true great terminus of the Victorian Mallee lines is Mildura, on the Murray. Here the greatest experiment Victoria—and Australia as a whole—has ever seen is being carried on with extraordinary success. Here already full six thousand people are settled, making competency, and, in many cases, fortunes out of land that was once—only a quarter of a century ago—desert, mallee, sand, spinifex, and rabbits, but land which is now, thanks to irrigation, growing some of the most delicious fruit it is possible to find in the whole wide world.

To-day, that Royal Commission of thirty-four years ago would not recognise the repulsive country through which it journeyed. The triumphs of mechanical invention and the teachings of experimental science, have shown that the despised haunt of the wild dog contains latent wealth which is destined to make the Mallee the richest province in Victoria. Where once were only withered scrub and brown verdureless sand, there were last year over 550,000 acres under crop, and the strippers took off 5,760,000 bushels of wheat, worth on the ground probably over £1,000,000. What hope must there be for the rest of the State when a territory at one time “fenced with the bleached white bones” should yield such glorious tribute.

In marking the gradations of settlement in Victoria, it is interesting to note how the various forms of production have succeeded one another. The early pioneers devoted most of their attention to raising cattle, but the introduction of the Merino into New South Wales, and the creation of a wool export trade, caused most of the first squatters to abandon the risk and uncertainty of cattle-breeding for the less exciting pursuits of growing flocks, whose fleecy coats were in great demand in the mills of Yorkshire. Many an old-time jingle has expressed the grim doubts of neighbours and the station hands at the temerity of “the boss” in forsaking the

herds, because they could not stand the droughts, for sheep which had a tenacity of life that often defied the grim spectre.

What happened when the sheep came is well told in some little-known verses by that wayward, lovable scamp, Harry Morant, who, for stringing up a few of the enemy whom his men caught firing on the ambulance, was court-martialled and shot while serving in the Bushveldt Carabineers in South Africa. He speaks of Queensland, but the same tale could be told all over Australia :—

“ Camped out beneath the starlit skies—the tree-tops overhead,

A saddle for a pillow, and a blanket for a bed ;

’Twas pleasant, mate, to listen to the sougning of the breeze,

And hear the lilting lullabies that stirred the Mulgatrees.

“ Our sleep was sound in those days, for the mustering days were hard—

The morrows might be harder with the brandings in the yard !

But did you see the station now—the men the mokes they keep !

You’d own the place was beggared since the country carried sheep.”

Many a station property was saved by sheep ; wool made and sustained the fortunes of numerous families in the Western District. Since then there has been a variety of experience. The breaking up of big estates, and the demands of the export trade in mutton and lamb, have compelled the small farmer to abandon the Merino, the flesh of which does not make the best of meat, for the crossbred, which, if its wool is of a coarser texture than the Merino, has much finer cooking qualities. The farmer of to-day carries a few hundred sheep ; he may do a little dairying, and combine both with a general crop rotation, which makes him independent of any one department of his industry. The Mallee has made a striking success in recent years by alternating wheat with sheep, and although the endless plains might be depressing to the everyday tourist, no one who wished to know all about the characteristics of Victorian agriculture, and some of its romance in the ups and downs that many of the settlers have gone through, should miss the opportunity of spending a few days amid the hospitable farmers who have turned, and are still turning, the plain country of the north-west to such great account.

With the march of civilisation, the telephone, the motor car, and the old age pension scheme, many of the ancient identities of Australian country life are gradually disappearing—more so in Victoria than in the other States, for in Victoria the comparative closeness to one another makes the people more adaptable to modern conditions and more disposed to throw off the trammels of tradition for newer if not always better things. The stockrider who lived in the saddle, and who was always mustering or cutting out, and generally leading a wild, adventurous life, has been made a back number, in Victoria at any rate, by closer settlement and the more peaceful pursuits of dairying and sheep-farming. Progress is a very fine thing, but it is destructive of romance; and some of the old "hands," when they see a man who farms a bit of a patch of 500 acres, going into the township in his motor car, see the steam separator beating the cream out of the milk, or that uncanny machine the combined harvester mowing down a hundred-acre paddock that once could hardly carry a sheep to two acres—some of them, when they see these things, sigh for the primitive times when they thought nothing of eighty miles a day on horseback, when they were always rounding up cattle or mending fences, and the nearest neighbour was five, or ten, or twenty miles off.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SETTLEMENT ON THE MURRAY RIVER

FOR the tourist who wishes to see many aspects of life in South Australia perhaps the most pleasurable excursion is the water route which leads inland—the great river system of Australia—providing for several months of the year three thousand miles of navigable streams. A steamer may be boarded at several points a few hours after leaving Adelaide by train, and a new and ever-changing world is at once presented to the sightseer. The snorting paddle-boat plugs its way up stream, battling against a slow moving current, passing by sheep-stations, wheatfields, orchards, and vineyards. Bird life is plentiful in the forest of giant gum trees, whose roots twist about in fantastic fashion, and which come down to the water's edge and form an avenue through which the vessel glides. At every bend of the river there is a change of scene, now a cliff towers high over the bows of the steamer, but the boat is skilfully turned around a right angle, which opens out a long stretch of shimmering water, at the end of which there is another sharp bend. And so the traveller is taken forward, following a serpentine course inland, heading northwards, then face on to a fresh east wind, back again half round the compass; only there are no compasses on these river boats. A steamer does a "cakewalk" and forms every letter of the alphabet (except "I") when going up the Murray, or its tributaries, the Darling and Murrumbidgee. There is plenty of scope for the sportsman on the "Nile of Australia." The river teems with Murray cod, and wild ducks are there by the thousand; teal, waterfowl, ibis, shag, pelicans, magpies, parrots, and screeching cockatoos in countless numbers. The opportunities of first-class sport upon the billabongs and lagoons never fail to entice numerous sportsmen during the season.

A scheme is in hand to construct locks and weirs, by which means these highways will be made navigable all the year round for three thousand miles—a distance equal to that from Adelaide to Port Darwin across the continent and halfway

back again. To give a better idea of what these three thousand miles mean, it may be stated that the basin of the Murray and its tributaries comprises 414,253 square miles (265,121,920 acres)—an area double that of France—out of a total of three million square miles in the whole of the Australian continent. The river basin includes within its limits nearly one-seventh of the entire mainland, subject to the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, being five-sixths of New South Wales, considerably more than half of Victoria, over 100,000 square miles of Queensland, and 24,000 square miles of South Australia. If to this vast catchment there be added the strip of coastland lying between it and the sea—from the Condamine River, Queensland, in the north-east, to Lake Alexandrina, South Australia, in the south-west, the total would become one-fifth of the Australian continent, containing at least three-fourths of its entire present population, and much more than half of its agricultural and pastoral possibilities.

One of the most important problems of the great national schemes that the South Australian, Victorian, and New South Wales Governments are undertaking is the establishment of irrigation settlements on the River Murray and its tributaries. Some years ago the South Australian Government set to work to test the fertility of the vast area of undeveloped, unsettled, and thickly-timbered Mallee country adjacent to and extending for miles back on both sides of the river. The country has responded to the tests in a most encouraging manner. The quality of the land is well maintained on both sides of the river. It is a red and in many places a deep rich sandy loam, admirable for "dry farming," as it retains the moisture, and, when the scrub is cleared, for wheat-growing, dairying, and stock raising. After a long peregrination through the "river country," I am of the opinion that to people with limited capital, it offers inducement that cannot be enjoyed in other lands that the Government is opening in various parts of the State. The country is thickly covered with mallee, but it can be easily rolled. When the lands were first taken up men were employed who cut it down with axes; then the scrub roller was introduced, but we found that the one that suited best was a large boiler, about 12ft. long by 3ft. in diameter, mounted with heavy timbering, and drawn by sixteen or eighteen bullocks. This roller brings the mallee down like grass goes before the mower. All along the way we saw "burning off" operations, and a great many of the settlers will not do any ploughing for the first few years. The wheat is put in straight away with a disc drill, and good results always

follow. We met a settler on the north of the river whose block of 300 acres, with a rainfall of less than 10in., without ploughing or manure drilled in, realised fifteen bushels per acre, which is a fair average for crops similarly treated. The custom of wheat-growing without ploughing is not generally followed in Australia, firstly because it is not applicable to certain soils; and secondly, it is not accompanied by the best results, but in a good year it gives a good start to a person with limited capital.

Travelling along the banks or on the water you get an idea of what the people think of the River Country. We found scores of young fellows who had taken up land in the newly-opened up "Hundreds" of Waikerie, Holder, Moorok, Gordon, and Bookpurnong, living in tents on their holdings. Many thousands of acres in excess of previous years' cultivation were to be sown, and much more land was being cleared for future use. The development of the little township of Loxton has been remarkable. A few years ago this place was hardly known, and depended entirely on the navigable condition of the river to receive its goods and despatch its products; the only telegraphic communication being at Overland Corner, about thirty miles distant, with mails only twice a week. But now Loxton, although proclaimed a town only three years ago, is an important centre, boasting many fine buildings and a Government experimental farm. In the district last year some 45,000 acres were under cultivation, and returned 630,000 bushels of wheat.

We met several farmers who had had yields of as much as thirty bushels to the acre. Everywhere we found evidence of the fertility of the district and the prosperity of its settlers in the comfortable stone dwellings which were replacing the structures of a few years back (and which, in their turn, were being used as stables and outhouses), and in the plants of up-to-date machinery and well-kept stock on most of the farms. One old bearded settler told us that less than ten years ago the pioneers of Loxton were for the most part men without capital, many of them having been "starved out" of less hospitable areas. To-day it would be hard to find a man among them who is not firmly established.

The average rainfall for about thirty miles south of the river is from 10in. to 12in. per annum, sufficient for cultivation, but not enough for storage purposes. We saw several bores being put down from six to ten miles back from the river, and found that good stock water had been obtained at a depth of 106ft. about four miles from Boggy Flat, and at 160ft. eight miles from the river in the Hundred of Holder. Water has also been struck in other places.



THE RIVER MURRAY NEAR NEW ERA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Bores are put down at from 6s. to 10s. a foot, including "casing."

The opening up of the country back from the river would have been put off for some considerable time had it not been for the camel. This animal has proved most valuable in pioneering work, and in clearing the way to Browns Wells, the terminus of the railway that is being laid from Tailern Bend through the famous Pinnaroo wheat district. Our pony got a big scare from a team of eight camels attached to an English waggon, which had for several months past been carrying loads from Loxton to various places.

Anyone taking up land in the River Country has much hard work to do, such as scrub clearing, making fences, boring for water, building his homestead, etc., before he gets any income from his farm, but as improvements are affected it increases the value of the land, and the Government renders assistance under the Advance to Settlers on Crown Lands Act. Advances are made for improvements, such as ring-barking, clearing scrub, fencing, draining, erecting, or making permanent water improvements, such as dams, wells, tanks, water courses, windmills, buildings, and the like, or for the purchase of stock. The liberal terms under which these advances are made have caused many new settlers to take advantage of them.

Until recently the mallee scrub and other timber was regarded as useless unless close enough to the railway to send to town for domestic purposes, and as soon as it was rolled it was burnt to make way for the crop. But now it is found to be a valuable revenue-earning asset. Owing to the installation of so many suction gas engines on the river banks to raise water for irrigation purposes a considerable amount of charcoal is needed. The charcoal retort was tried, and charged with mallee gave satisfactory results. The process of production is extremely simple. The retort can be started on Monday morning and run without intermission till mid-day Saturday, during which time it can be filled with wood and emptied three times if the wood is dry. It takes four tons of green or two and a half of dry timber to produce one ton of charcoal. As the cost of production, inclusive of a man's help, is 30s. or a little less per ton, and the price of good charcoal is about £2 10s., there is a fair profit made. The retort is portable, and it is cheaper to take it to the timber than to bring the timber to the retort.

The first question asked by the man who contemplates making a home on the land in any part of the State is "What is the rainfall?" But the drawback in developing the fruit-growing settlements in the Murray districts has not

been the lightness of the rainfall, but the "communistic basis," under which settlers were placed on the land and given a block each. As might have been expected under a system which meant that the shirker would get just as much as the grafter, this system ended in disaster. No traveller if he knows anything about agriculture but soon finds himself agreeing with the settler that when under irrigation no land is better adapted than this for the cultivation of all classes of fruits, as indicated by the healthy condition of Renmark, Wentworth, and that wonderful place Mildura. I have no doubt that this system of farming will soon occupy a vitally important place in the agricultural operations of the State. Fruit-growing for drying purposes has been the staple industry of the Murray, but talking to an official of the packing company at Renmark he told me that Navel oranges to the value of £100,000 had been sent out of that town in the one season. The cost of irrigating with the required number of waterings for the season is about 25s. per acre.

The system of allotting an irrigable area, together with what is termed a "high block," non-irrigable land, was introduced a few years ago. The non-irrigable land, on which the homestead is built, is available for agriculture and winter pasture, and all irrigation schemes now being effected on the river are allotted on that basis. Following on the success that rewarded the early Waikerie settlers, the areas of irrigation at that place have been considerably extended. Fifty additional blocks have been surveyed, averaging from twenty-two to two hundred non-irrigable acres each. We were very much interested in the power-house at Waikerie. There is a 236 h.p. suction gas engine installed, and two large main channels irrigate the lands. These channels start from the cliff and run in a zig-zag fashion, aggregating with the sub-channels thirteen miles. The engine lifts water to the cliff, a height of 126ft.; the channels have a drop of 2ft. to the mile, and sluices have been fixed in them at about quarter mile intervals, so that waterings can be effected in rotation. The township of Waikerie consists of about seventy allotments of one-quarter acre each. It occupies a fine site, not 500 yards from the river bank. The blocks start about halfway up, and go back to the crest of the hill. From almost every block an enchanting view can be obtained, and each block is supplied with water.

From the steamer it seemed as if a big military encampment was being held at Berri Berri, one of the newer settlements. Tents, single and in clusters, were to be seen everywhere—the temporary residences of the pioneers. An

area of about 19,000 acres had been resumed for closer settlement, embracing all land from the river frontage to near the Renmark and Lake Bonney mail road. The area is to be surveyed into thirty-acre irrigable blocks, and the other non-irrigable land into 100 to 150 acres each, to go with the irrigable land. I think rents vary from 6d. an acre for non-irrigable, and to 6s. per acre for irrigable. It seemed to me that Berri Berri, about twelve miles below, and on the same side of the river as Renmark, was the most favoured of the newly opened up places. It is accessible to Morgan, within five hours, by the motor passenger car from Renmark to Morgan; it has a mail coach twice a week, and also the steamers except during the few months of the year when the river is not navigable. I thought it one of the most picturesque and typical of Australian landscapes, and, having been leased for a long term for pasturing, it comprises some of the best land for irrigation purposes in South Australia. It is certainly capable of supporting many more people than it formerly did sheep. The whole of the Cobdogla "Run," of which Berri Berri is a portion, can be resumed at any time for irrigation purposes. A township site has been selected on high gradually declining land towards and near the river bank, a fine situation.

Although fruit-growing is the only industry at present the settlers expect a great future for dairying. The land, even with the cost of watering, is ever so much cheaper than the high-priced land elsewhere, and is independent of rainfall. An abundance of good feed can be produced at a minimum of cost, and with the greatest possible certainty of result.

I have mentioned the irrigation system on the high land where water has to be lifted and then distributed over lands by means of concrete channels, which is a totally different system from that necessary to be adopted on the reclaimed peaty soil swamps below Mannum and near Murray Bridge. Several large swamps have been reclaimed by constructing embankments to keep back flood waters from submerging cultivated land. These apparently useless swamps, at one time thickly covered with reeds, rushes, and tussocks, and only available for cattle feeding for a few months of the year, have been transformed into probably the best fodder-producing areas in South Australia. Mobilong, Burdett, Long Flat, and Monteith are now giving very encouraging returns. At Monteith, famous for its potatoes, one settler told us his lucerne gives him six cuttings a year. A Monteith settler, with a holding of irrigable, together with non-irrigable, land to the extent of fifty acres, paid £8 for the first year's rent, fenced his property and erected a small

house, and immediately got £400 for his lease. A visit will convince even the most sceptical that a prosperous future is in store for these reclaimed swamps.

No one who has travelled over any part of the River Country can doubt that thriving communities and prosperous towns will emerge from these now sparsely populated places. Many of the privately owned farms have been planted with fruit trees, and many acres graded for the production of fodder plants by irrigation. The river steamers, with many times a full list of passengers, with barges in tow, heavily laden with all kinds and classes of cargo, have been kept continually busy when the river would permit, carrying stores, building materials, pumping plants, machinery, and so on, up stream, and bringing down wool, wheat, dried fruits, and general cargo.

The country has passed the experimental stage. The class of soil and the advantageous terms under which a settler can make a start on his holding, stamp it as one of the most promising and permanent fruit and fodder-growing districts of the State. Hundreds and hundreds of miles of river frontage and vast areas of "back" land await development.

CHAPTER XXIX

“ THE NORTH COAST ”

AN ARTICLE DEALING WITH THE GREAT DAIRYING INDUSTRY ON
THE NORTH COAST OF NEW SOUTH WALES

ONLY a very few years ago “ the North Coast ” was a *terra incognita* to most people, and to the man in the street was little more than a vague topographical designation, carrying very little meaning. In fact, the average man knew it only as a place where the rainfall was measured in feet and yards, instead of in points and inches. To-day the condition is very different. Few people who take any interest at all in the progress of Australia are entirely ignorant of the “ lay of the land ” in that vastly wealthy portion of New South Wales bounded by the Hunter River on the south, the MacPherson Ranges and the Queensland border on the north, the New England Tableland on the west, and the rugged coast-line on the east.

Within the last four or five years, so much publicity has been given to the rivers which serve “ the North Coast,” that it is no wonder the growth of settlement has been rapid. Hundreds and thousands of acres of Crown lands are being surveyed as fast as surveyors can get through the work, and many of the old pioneers have amassed fortunes while bearing the heat and burden of the early settlement days, and are now subdividing their estates to meet the demands of the new-comers—the pioneers of the new era of smaller holdings.

From the adjoining States of Queensland and Victoria, from the “ South Coast ” (that strip of country between Sydney and the Victorian border), farmers continue in increasing numbers to reach out for North Coast farms; immigrants from the Old World turn thither, attracted by the prodigious productiveness of the soil; and commercial men, impressed with the potentialities of this great belt of country, are eagerly seeking holdings and saying to their sons, “ Go on the land, young man.”

Each year the scene is changing. The dense jungle of the “ Don Dorrigo ” is giving place to prosperous farms, in

the same way as, during the last decade, the "Big Scrub" and the canefields of the Richmond and the Tweed were superseded by dairy farms and butter factories. Places that a few years ago were tiny settlements are now thriving townships; the country towns of the 'nineties are now fair-sized wealthy cities; where there were scant bridle-tracks there are now splendid roads. Where at one time nothing but coaches traversed the hundreds of miles between the Hunter and the Tweed (the most northerly river) railways are projecting; the trunk line, connecting Newcastle and Sydney with the stretch of country served by the present Grafton-Tweed railway, is already under construction, and has gone on as far as Dungog on the Williams River; and spur lines are being surveyed.

There is room in the North Coast district for the present population of the whole State of New South Wales. Notwithstanding the remarkable rapidity of development there during recent years, dairy-farming, which has already reached gigantic proportions, must still further expand. The birth of butter-making on the Northern Rivers was practically concurrent with the reduction of the sugar duties. Dairy factories were established, and the herds rapidly increased in numbers. Perhaps the most remarkable development in connection with the butter-making industry was the rapid rise in the value of land: country for many years regarded as practically valueless proved splendid dairying land. The introduction of artificial grasses put a new aspect on the slopes and back land, and areas formerly worth nothing immediately assumed a value previously undreamt of. The prosperity of the rural districts was soon reflected on the local centres of business, and town property rapidly rose in value.

The advent of the district creameries, followed by the co-operative butter factories and bacon-curing establishments, which at once bounded into successful concerns, made the old-time farmers look with approval upon modern methods; the more so as the dairy herds gave their products twice a day every day of the week, and the despatch of cream to the factories twice a week was acknowledged regularly by the return of a substantial cheque once a month. Many of the farmers, too, owned land portions of which were in severe contrast with the rich flats, and which had been barren for such crops as they had been accustomed to sow. But artificial grasses were made known to them, "paspalum" became a household word, and by the introduction of such modern aids to agriculture thousands of acres were turned into rich grazing paddocks.



RING-BARKED TIMBER ON THE NORTH COAST OF
NEW SOUTH WALES.

To-day dairying flourishes all along the five hundred miles of North Coast. The dairy-farmer dreams of butter; he thinks in butter; he appraises the value of his land by the number of cows it will "carry," and cuts out his working hours to make them fit in with the distance he has to carry his cream to the little platform erected at the side of the road, or on the river-bank—sheltered from the sun by a few branches—there to await carriage to the butter factory by the factory's own big four or five-horsed waggons.

If a map of the dairying districts of New South Wales were compiled, it would show that they are mostly dotted all over the coastline—in the south, in the middle, and in the north; save that in the North the dots would become splashes.

Every few miles along the river-banks—and oftener at shorter intervals—the little steamers stop at tiny jetties, or moor to a friendly tree for a few minutes, or run their nose into the bank, to pick up the cans of cream from the surrounding farmers. At the larger wharves each steamer always finds two or three big consignments awaiting transport to the butter factories. Similarly, where the railway is, trains stop at little platforms; and elsewhere, along each coach road and "back" road, the cans are brought to the roadside—sometimes by cart, sometimes on a sledge, and often on a pack-horse—and taken by the passing vans to the factory, there to be dealt with under the co-operative arrangements of the many companies which have come into existence during the past fifteen years.

These co-operative butter factories are scattered right along the coast. The introduction of the "co-operative system" to dairy-farming in the whole of Australia had its origin in the "North Coast Co-operative Company," with its headquarters at Byron Bay, and a word or two about that wonderful organisation will not be out of place.

When this great concern was in its infancy, the "Big Scrub" was indeed the "Big Scrub." There were mile after mile of dense jungle, only broken by occasional areas under sugar cane, and a few dairy-farms, where the virgin forest had given up its magnificence under the assault of the hardy pioneers' axes and fires. Now only comparatively small patches of that famous "Scrub" remain in this particular district, and as the trees and undergrowth have gone down, the butter factory at Byron Bay has gone up in the scale of commercial importance. In this factory I have seen deep tanks of smooth cream where whole picnic parties could drown themselves quite comfortably; Brobdingnagian churns worked by tireless engines, and arctic chambers con-

taining rows of gigantic pats of butter. Pigs that were once noisy and greedy hung cool and quiet and clean rank upon rank; and all appliances, from bolts to packing-cases, are manufactured upon the premises.

To get down to figures, I might say that in 1895 the company made 615,480 pounds of butter, and the turnover was £7,500; next year the output was 1,165,260 pounds of butter, and the turnover increased by £30,000; while at the end of ten years (1905) the annual output had reached 7,029,794 pounds of butter, and nearly 19,000 pigs were killed, the turnover amounting to the enormous total of £340,389. In those ten years the sum of £1,150,000 was paid to suppliers of cream, and £150,464 to pig suppliers.

But with all this expansion of the dairying industry it must not be thought that other forms of farming have been altogether abandoned. Quite the contrary. The new settlers have to some extent confined their operations to dairying, and its contingent, and very paying, business of pig-breeding, but there are still, however, large areas under crops of different kinds, for on all the rivers practically anything and everything can be grown. Experimental farms have been established by the Government; the systematic teaching of the younger generation of the application of science to farming, and the general conditions of the age, have made the young farmers realise that there is something more in farming than was to be got out of it by the hard, slogging work, from daylight till dark, for every day of the year, which was the lot of their fathers and their grandfathers. The natural consequence is that this land that once grew only maize and sugar cane, potatoes and pumpkins, and such-like crops, is now being found suitable for other things, and experiments prove that before long the exports may include tapioca, coffee, and similar products. And the timber and banana, fishing, and mining industries are also "big things."

While it is true that all Crown lands near townships are eagerly sought after by prospective farmers, it is equally true that in various districts comprising the North Coast there are enormous areas always open for selection under various forms of tenure, at prices ranging from £1 or less to £2 5s., or slightly more, per acre. And it is to this "back" land that the phenomenally rapid growth of dairying is now forcing settlement. So that while little of the rich alluvial flats remain open for new settlers, there is still good land to be had. It may be outside means of communication, but this is only a matter for the present, and it will not be long before the "back" country, which is destined to carry a large

population, will be provided with transit facilities equal to those in existence in any part of the State.

Naturally, in a district possessing such wide physical and climatic conditions as the North Coast, the soils vary considerably. In the valleys there is usually an alluvial deposit of a very rich and fertile character. Beyond the valleys there is generally a fringe, with a width of from half a mile to two miles, along each bank, and here the soil is a fairly good loam. This class of “ country ” is excellent for dairy-ing purposes when sown with artificial grasses. The country rises from the lower lands in a series of gradual slopes, and sometimes breaks into undulating hills, which are intersected by frequent watercourses affording splendid natural drainage. The uplands are basaltic, and to a large extent the red and black soils associated therewith pre-dominate.

In the whole of the Land Board Districts into which the North Coast is divided, there are literally millions of acres awaiting the settler. Although the figures are, of course, only approximate, the following table will be of interest as an indication where the prospective settler may obtain Crown land :

Land Board District.	Area available.
Raymond Terrace (Hunter River)	20,000 acres
Stroud (Karuah River)... ..	350,000 „
Taree (Manning River)	50,000 „
Murwillumbah (Tweed River)... ..	100,000 „
Lismore (Richmond River)	180,000 „
Casino (Richmond River)	750,000 „
Grafton (Clarence River)	800,000 „
Bellingen (Bellinger River)	450,000 „
Kempsey (Macleay River)	290,000 „
Port MacQuarie (Hastings River)	500,000 „

It is not very long since I completed an overland journey of eight hundred miles on horseback, from Sydney to Brisbane, passing through the whole length of this “ North Coast.” I took nearly six months to do the trip, and no matter where I was, there was always a great scarcity of labour. In order better to study the district and the industry, I myself worked on several farms. The wage for the inexperienced man is from ten to fifteen shillings per week, and “ all found,” but a really competent man has no difficulty whatever in getting a good berth (usually signing on for six months) at anything from twenty to thirty shillings a week and board and residence. I met several young fellows from the Old Country, happy in their new surround-

ings, and saving up to make a start for themselves. I could instance dozens of cases where young immigrants, both married and unmarried, have been very successful, but as I am concluding with a few words about the share system of dairy-farming, I will just give the experiences of a young couple whom I met in the course of my travels.

W. J. C. and his wife started with no capital at all. They milk fifty cows, and W. J. C. cultivates sufficient green fodder to be used, if necessary, during winter. He gets one-third of the returns from cream, half from pigs, and five shillings for every heifer-calf weaned. His receipts for the sixteen months totalled £197. What do these figures mean? Why, absolute independence! In other words, in three or four years at this rate W. J. C. and his wife, who landed in Australia penniless, will be the sole owners of a property quite as good as the one they are at present working on the "share system."

This dairy-farming on the shares is extensively carried on along the northern rivers. In the neighbourhood of Casino, especially, there are abundant opportunities for good experienced dairymen. The best results, are, of course, achieved by men with families, who thoroughly understand milking and the management of cattle. Practical experience is essential, as no proprietor would dream of entrusting a valuable herd to a tenant unless he were first assured of that tenant's experience. There is no uniformity in the terms and conditions offered to a shares-farmer. But as a general thing it may be said that the landlord provides the land, cleared and fenced, with requisite paddocks, the dairy herd, cowbails and piggeries, all necessary utensils and implements, and dwelling-house. The tenant usually supplies all the labour, milks the cows, separates the cream and carts it to the nearest platform or siding, feeds the "poddy" (hand-fed) calves and the pigs on the "skim" milk, and cultivates sufficient land to grow green fodder in case of a bad winter season.

The sharing of the profits depends largely upon the character of the farm. But as a general rule, the tenant receives from one-third to one-half of all profit on the cream sold to the factory, and the same proportion of the value of the pigs sold. Also, from three shillings to ten shillings per head for each calf reared to the age of six months.

In the Hunter River district an estate of 7,000 acres has thirteen tenant farmers, two of whom are Englishmen; and even after paying outside "hands" for labour, the majority of them make a clear profit of from fifteen to twenty pounds per month.

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