AUSTRALIND

Wanderings in Western Australia and the Malay East

BY

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CHAPTER I

The *Laughing Wave*—Land-O!—First Glimpse of Swan River Settlement—Rottnest Convict Island—On Shore once more—Fremantle—Fenian Convicts—Their Rescue by the *Catalpa*—Champion Bay—Geraldton—Queer Buildings—A House of Kerosene Tins—A Trip Inland—Iguanas—Black Cockatoos—Kangaroo—Mob of Wild Horses—Summer Floods—First Sight of Native Camp—The Huts—Wretched Constructions—Spears—Shields—"Kylis"—The Men—The Women—*Modes et Robes*——Their Faces—Animated Gargoyles—The Wannera—Its many Uses—Cooking Toads—The Children—How to get Cool Water—The vast Wheatfields of the Greenough—Return to Geraldton.

IT was almost a dead calm, on the morning of the fifty-second day out from Singapore, as the grey dawn once more lightened up the blue waters of the Indian Ocean which had surrounded us for so many monotonous days. And, as the daylight gradually increased, a low black line, sharply defined against the eastern sky, became visible, and by experienced eyes was soon made out to be land, the long coast-line of Western Australia.

The *Laughing Wave* seemed determined to prolong the already long passage as much as possible. She sluggishly glided through the water before an almost imperceptible breeze which—though not strong enough to distend the

threadbare sails—permitted the long heave of the ocean swell to sway the old brig unmercifully, causing her canvas at one moment to crash against the masts with sounds resembling a cannonade, and at the next bellying them out with a jerk that set every chain rattling and every block clattering, while it alternately tautened and slackened the shrouds, until one expected the masts to be fairly wrung out of her.

So used were we, however, to this kind of entertainment during a long passage of calms and light winds, that it would have passed unnoticed were it not for my impatience to obtain a clearer view of the great southern land which was to be my home for so many years.

Being disgusted with a seafaring life, I had taken my passage in this colonial craft as the only means of getting from Singapore to Swan River, where I had determined to try my luck, and where a comrade whom I was impatient to meet had emigrated some years previously.

The long dreary passage across had had nothing to relieve its tedium. There were no other passengers except the myriads of cockroaches which infested every nook and cranny of the vessel. These certainly did their best every night to make things lively, for they swarmed all over me, eating finger and toe-nails down to the quick whilst I tried to sleep.

Both the captain and mate had gloomy views regarding the colony of Western Australia, and gave most depressing accounts of the port to which we were bound, so as we drew in to the anchorage I was somewhat prepared for the uninviting appearance of the great southern continent. The most optimistic traveller could hardly be enraptured with the scenery when approaching the port of Fremantle, especially after just leaving the enchanting and fairy-like scene which may be viewed when passing along the straits of Sunda. On

our right, as we headed in for the anchorage, loomed up the sterile and evil-omened coast of Rottnest Island, which is used as a penal settlement for aboriginal native convicts. Right ahead, and as far as one could discern, on either hand stretched out a low range of glistening white sandhills, with hardly a sign of vegetation; whilst, far inland, a long range of hills, apparently thickly wooded, afforded a grateful change from the ineffable dreariness of the coast-line. I must confess that even as the vessel drew close in and anchored in Gages Roads the scenery was not much more interesting than before, when even distance failed "to lend enchantment to the view."

I put up at an hotel which had been recommended by the skipper of the *Laughing Wave*, and the next few days were spent in exploring Fremantle and the vicinity.

Fremantle, at that time, consisted of one principal street, made up of hotels and stores, a few government buildings, including the Imperial convict depôt, a lighthouse, and a number of private dwelling houses, all glaring in whitewash. Each house had its green venetian blinds and encircling verandahs. A few churches made up an apparently sleepy but really flourishing township, which might be described as a city of public-houses, flies, sand, limestone, convicts, and stacks of sandalwood. At least, these were the objects which most impressed a new-comer in those days. The country between Fremantle and Perth, the capital of the colony, improved in appearance the farther one got inland; but the heat and troublesome swarms of flies did not encourage me to walk very far.

Fremantle, and indeed the whole colony, was in an uproar at the time of my arrival, for the celebrated whaling schooner *Catalpa* had just succeeded in bearing away to the Land of Stars and Stripes a number of

Fenian convicts right from under the noses of the authorities.

Having ascertained that my friend had removed to Geraldton, some three hundred miles north, I engaged a passage in the cutter *Gem*, which ill-fated craft, after a forty-eight hours' run, dropped anchor off the jetty in Champion Bay, and landed me once more on *terra firma*.

I call her ill-fated, for the *Gem*, on her return passage to Fremantle, when close in to the anchorage, foundered suddenly in sight of those watching her movements from the shore, and all her crew and passengers were lost.

Frank, warned of my approach by letter, was on the jetty, and soon had me comfortably installed at one of the hotels, whence I paid visits to many kind friends to whom I was introduced. I filled up my time by taking part in excursions over to the Abrolhos group of islands, and fishing on the reef which shelters the anchorage from the westerly winds.

Geraldton was a busy little place, being the seaport for the copper and lead-mining districts around Northampton, for the important agricultural area on the Greenough, and was also the place of shipment for the wool and other products of a vast extent of sparsely settled country. Like Fremantle, Geraldton had not many imposing buildings in those days. The principal buildings were the residency, the custom house, the court house, and the inevitable convict depôt. These, with a score or so of dwelling-houses and stores, made up the extent of the township. The government buildings, and one or two others, were built of stone, but a great number of them were built with all kinds of materials, from weather-boards to corrugated iron sheets. One tenement particularly excited my admiration. The builder of this unique dwelling had collected a number of empty kerosene tins and filled them with fine white

sand from the beach, thus converting the rickety tins into solid bricks, with which the four walls of the shanty were "illigantly" built up to the required height. A roof of sheet-iron and bullock hides and a door of sacking completed this quaint dwelling. It was occupied by a Chinese barber.

The first Sunday after my arrival Frank proposed an excursion into the country. I gladly agreed; and, horses having been procured, a start was made for the "Greenough."

Having struggled through the coast range of ever-moving sandhills, and emerging into a well used road, I was delighted with the novelty of the surroundings. One moment I was amused by the terrible appearance of a quite harmless bob-tailed iguana which sprawled in the cart ruts, sunning itself with its mouth gaping open, evidently expecting that a display of cavernous jaws would suffice to scare us away. Next, amid a crackling of dry twigs in the adjacent wattle bushes, out sprang a bandicoot, which crossed the road at racing speed. Harsh screaming sounds attracted my attention skywards, to the passage of many thousands of black cockatoos, each trying to outshriek its neighbour as the immense flock winged its way towards some distant water-hole. The clattering of hoofs over some rocky ground, which led down to a deep dry gully thickly bordered with Flooded-gums, announced the retreat of a mob of bush horses disturbed from their midday "lay up." A large kangaroo bounded away in the distance as they passed its feeding-place; and, as it swung along at a good thirty miles an hour, I could not help thinking what a different animal it seemed to the caged and melancholy specimen I had seen many years previously in a travelling menagerie.

A turn of the track led us past the borders of a

solitary pool surrounded on all sides by "yanjits" or native bulrushes. This small piece of water was all that remained of a great summer flood which some months previously had swept furiously down the gully, carrying all before it, filling the whole course of the waterway with a surging flood of yellow water, which had subsided into the sea almost as rapidly as it had appeared; but not before it had left traces of its tumultuous passage in the forks of the neighbouring trees, where one might still see branches of drifted grass, twigs, and other floating refuse several feet above the level of the now dry watercourse. All the hollows and holes had of course retained water, but the watering of numerous flocks of sheep, cattle, and wild animals, together with the powerful action of the sun's rays, soon dried up the lesser water-holes, leaving only the deeper and more sheltered pools to withstand the constant evaporation, until a succeeding flood should renew the supply. This will serve as a brief description of nearly all West Australian rivers, there being very few indeed which resemble our own rivers in flowing bank-high most of the year round.

A thin column of blue smoke curling upwards on the far side of the pool near to a thicket of black wattle, and the yelping of some mongrel-bred dogs, proclaimed the vicinity of a native camp, which Frank proposed we should turn aside to visit. I shall here set down a brief description of these aboriginals, not only as I then saw them for the first time, but as I subsequently saw them on many occasions, when I had ample opportunities of noting their ways and habits.

As we rode up to the camp Frank remarked that the site was a well-selected one, being close to both wood and water, the prime consideration when making a camp in the bush.

The huts, if they could be said to be worthy of the name, consisted of some four or five nondescript looking erections made of wattle boughs, dried grass, and rushes, open at the sides, and covered over all with loose earth thrown on the top of the curving sides of these slatternly looking dwellings.

The "miahs" had been constructed by driving several wattle branches into the ground in the form of a rude circle, about six feet in diameter, though in some cases the laziness or the want of skill of the builder had allowed an area to be enclosed, which, being neither round or square, offered the disadvantages of both forms and the comforts of neither. The upper ends of the branches had been gathered together and secured in a slip-slop fashion with roughly twisted bands of dry grass. Rough, untrimmed branches were interlaced here and there in the vertical pieces, and a slovenly thatch of dried grass and rushes—only kept in its place by the loose earth and stones, thrown on the roof for that purpose—completed a dwelling which, as regards neatness, comfort, or indications of intelligence, would certainly gain nothing by comparison with many kinds of birds' nests. I afterwards noticed that over vast tracts of country in the north-west and northern districts the natives seem to have not the slightest idea of making a shelter or dwelling of any kind whatsoever. They live like animals, exposed to the rain and wind, merely cowering under the shelter of some overhanging rock or thickly growing bush.

In front of each "miah" smouldered a log of "jam-wood," the charred and glowing end resting on a mound of white ashes which served as the cooking place. Two or three heavy spears with heads formed from a continuation of the shaft, roughly carved into two formidable rows of barbs, were stuck into the ground near the fires.

These, with some light hunting spears, "wommeras" or throwing-sticks, some narrow wooden shields rudely ornamented by deep flutings scored zig-zag fashion on the face, and coloured with alternate daubings of red and white ochre, together with a goodly supply of "kylis" or boomerangs, made up this aboriginal arsenal. As we neared the camp, and reined up to inspect these interesting specimens of primitive man, we saw, seated round the nearest fire, which enveloped them in pungent smoke from the smouldering logs, several naked and—with the exception of their lower extremities—well built men, with long, bushy, black beards, fierce looking moustaches, and shock heads of hair, who looked up with watery and blinking eyes at their visitors. They greeted us with many grunts and guttural exclamations, without, however, withdrawing their attention from the glowing embers, whence from time to time would be extracted a charred and ash-covered morsel which, on closer inspection, turned out to be an opossum, which was being cooked in the summary method usual with these natives. They would place the unopened opossum or wallabi on the glowing cinders, fur and all, and cover it up with heaps of red-hot wood ashes until sufficiently cooked; then, tearing it open and extracting the intestines in one compact mass, "the noble savage" has before him a succulent morsel containing all its savoury juices. I have practised this method of cooking on many occasions when travelling, and it is certainly the best way in which to cook all kinds of bush game. Usually, after appeasing his appetite with the tit-bits and greater portion, the native throws the rejected parts over his shoulder to the silently expectant wife or wives, who will be squatted down at a respectful distance, closely and anxiously watched by the surrounding curs that finally dispose of the well-polished bones.

The men we saw were quite naked—being some distance from any settlement,—their skins were the colour of an over-roasted coffee berry or a very dark shade of brown, certainly not black; they were further darkened here and there by glistening patches and streaks of grease and dirt. The chest and upper part of the trunk were deeply scored across with parallel rows of artificial scars, which stood up from the surrounding skin in very strong relief. The tops of the arms and, in some instances, the thighs were marked with the same gruesome ornamentation, but in vertical and finer cut rows. Round the head of each savage was twined some ten or twelve yards of what looked like a coarse kind of worsted; but I learnt on inquiry that it was spun from the wearer's own hair by means of a primitive spindle. A swathe of similar material encircled the waist, through which was thrust a carefully fashioned "kyli," or some murderous looking "waddy." A fine set of white teeth gleamed now and again through the black beard and long moustache as the aboriginal either smiled or used them on the food before him. The prominent jaws and overhanging brows marked a race which at the present day is very little, if any, more advanced than that which existed in the Flint Age.

I noticed a peculiarity of these savages which, as far as my later experiences went, was universal amongst West Australian natives, namely, their scowling and treacherous glance when approaching one or when looking around. This results from a habit they have of moving only their eyes in the required direction, and not moving the head as a white man would do. This may possibly arise from habit acquired whilst hunting, when it is often imperative that a rapid *coup d'œil* should be taken without betraying the hunter's presence by the slightest motion as he patiently waits, hours at a time,

for his quarry to come within throw of either spear or "kyli."

The women were rather less clothed than the men, as they did not wear the swathes of homespun thread before-mentioned, though, to be sure, some of them had a greasy, stinking, kangaroo skin knotted round their shoulders, or in one or two cases an old cast-off skirt had been fastened by the waist-band over one shoulder. They were ungainly in form, with limbs which more resembled broom handles than human arms and legs. The bodies were grimed with dirt and grease, until it was difficult to form any idea of the original colour.

Now for the faces. Oh, the faces!—my pen fails me when I attempt to describe those monstrous masks. How shall I describe the repulsive gash which did duty as a mouth, the squat nose spread all over the face, or, as is often the case, eaten entirely away by disease. How tell of the bleary and bloodshot eyes, which looked like two burnt holes in a blanket, and gleamed from beneath a low brow deeply scored with simial wrinkles, or of the overhanging never-combed mass of coarse moppy hair, clogged into ringlets with a mixture of vermin, red ochre, and decaying grease? The best description of the Australian native women appeared in the *Australasian* some years ago, in which the writer summed up his observations by comparing them to a "disfigured Guy Faux." The very young girls are not quite so repulsive as the grown women and the older "Medusæ," but even at ten or twelve years of age they give ominous signs of rapid changes which transform them into itinerant gargoyles.

One of these caricatures of the female "form divine" had been in the "bush" in search of food for her lord and master, who happened to be too lazy to hunt that morning. She returned to the "miah" just after we

rode up to the camp. Over one shoulder she bore a kangaroo hide which contained the result of her quest, and over the other a long heavy staff sharply pointed at one end, called a "wannera." This implement is used by the native women as frequently, and is put to as many strange uses, as is the hairpin of her more civilised sisters. Amongst many other uses, the "wannera" serves as a walking stick, and as a poker or rake for the camp-fire. It is used as a pick for loosening the soil when digging for roots or water, and it is the women's weapon both for offence and defence in the frequent rows which arise, and which are generally fought out to the bitter end, until one or the other of the combatant "furies" be "knocked out" by a well-directed or ill-guarded blow on the head from her opponent's "wannera." Arrived at the camp, the woman knelt down by the fire and with the blunt end of her "wannera" scraped away the hot ashes on all sides, leaving a circular space in the midst of the fire into which she unconcernedly emptied the contents of the kangaroo skin, which turned out to be some forty or fifty living ground frogs or toads. The wretched reptiles squirmed, writhed, and spluttered whilst the hag covered them with hot ashes, and then withdrew, waiting until her man should deign to sit up and devour the disgusting looking meal.

The scarcity of children was remarkable; the one or two playing about being pot-bellied and emaciated. Large families are strongly objected to, on account of the precarious means of existence in the bush; but children seem to be treated with much kindness, and indulged in every way, until they are in consequence wilful and troublesome. The indulgence the men extend to their children is in marked contrast, however, with the treatment accorded to the women. The native of Western Australia seems to dispense his affections in the

following order—first to his children, next to his dogs, and lastly to his women.

I noticed that though the water in the pool was plentiful and easily obtained, yet none of the natives drank from it, but procured all their water for drinking —they have a holy horror of it for any other purpose— out of a hole about a yard in diameter which they had dug some four or five feet from the edge of the pool. This hole was covered over with branches and bunches of grass. Here is a bit of bush-craft. The utility is easily recognised when one remembers the great heat of the sun's rays in these latitudes. The natives cannot shelter the whole pool, but by digging below the level of the water it begins to percolate through the wet soil and soon fills up their miniature well, which they roof over in the manner mentioned, and thus secure a supply of cool water.

These natives had been civilised (?) by many years' contact with the white settlers, and gave convincing proofs of this, among others, by begging for tobacco and money in broken English, such as, "Gib um mine a little bit of pipeful, please"; or, "You gib it um mine little bit white money."

Having satisfied our curiosity and endured as much of the pungent smoke, and the rank odour which emanates from these dusky sons of the soil (a reproach, by the way, which is levelled against the white man by the natives, who complain that a white man has a very rank odour) as would last us for a long time to come, we turned off towards the roadway and, ascending a long incline, reached the crest of the rising ground, which had hitherto obscured the prospect. Here I drew rein as a scene, such as I had never before witnessed, came into view.

For miles, as far as the eye could reach, extended one

vast sea of growing wheat bounded only by the coast range of sandhills on our right and by a well-wooded range of broken hills to the eastward. To the south there appeared to be no limit to the rich alluvial flats, which seemed to be growing enough wheat to supply a nation ; and though there were well-defined boundaries between each farmer's holding, the absence of hedges lent to the enormous stretch of cultivated land an appearance of continuity which was most impressive to one who had never seen other than the small "one horse" fields of England. A ride of three or four miles through the waving corn brought us to the township of Greenough. At the "Greenough Hotel" rest and refreshment were obtained. Towards evening a start was made homeward by a different route, which led past the head station of a squatter who was an acquaintance of Frank's. Here we halted, and found we were in time for the evening meal, which we had hit off with all the nice calculation of the regular "sundowner." Declining the cordial invitation of our host to remain for the night, we once more mounted our jaded nags and returned to Geraldton.

CHAPTER II

A Search for Employment—Jackaroos—M'Snitch and his Fortunes—Start for Nibi-Nibi—A Solitary Ride—The Bush Scenery—Twenty-eights—Bush Songsters—Forest Trees—Eucalyptus—Flooded-Gums—Fluted and other Gum Trees—Black Boys—The Pass through the Range—Open Country—A Flock of Sheep—Nibi-Nibi at last—The Station—'Possum Hunting by Moonlight—The Lambing Season—The Old Man's Goose—The Ten-mile Well—The Sheep Camp—The Collie Dog and the Ewe Flock—The Hands.

I WAS now anxious to get to work, but having neither the desire or aptitude for office work, nor having been taught any trade, I turned my attention to the class of work which offers itself to any one who is not afraid to go out to the "bush" and rough it. In the other colonies numbers of young men were constantly arriving from the "Old Country" anxious to learn the craft and mysteries of sheep and cattle farming, with a view to starting for themselves; and they frequently had to pay a large premium to some station owner for the privilege of being worked hard at all the station drudgery for their keep alone. This is what is called gaining "Colonial experience," and those so engaged are known as "jackaroos." Not having the necessary money for this course, and being advised that my services on any station, whilst learning bush-craft, ought to more than equal the value of my keep, I frequented the hotels and stores where squatters most did congregate and was soon fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of an old

Scotchman, who agreed to take me to his station and give me every chance of learning whatever there was to be learned, provided I was not afraid of hard work.

The station was called after the native name of the country, Nibi-Nibi, and was some twenty or thirty miles distant. Though not a large sheep-run, it was a well-grassed one, with an abundant supply of water, and plenty of timber for fencing and other purposes; so the owner was a well-to-do man, and took good care every one should be aware of it. He said he was one of the earliest settlers in the district, boasted that he had landed in the colony with only two pennies in his pocket —a standing joke amongst the other settlers,—and he would generally wind up his yarn by hauling out of his pocket the first two coppers which might come to hand and solemnly asserting that these were the two identical coppers. The story, however, was true in the main. He had been employed as a shepherd by one of the first settlers in Champion Bay. Being steady and shrewd he had bided his time, taking his wages in sheep, which received free pasture and multiplied as quickly as did Jacob's peculiar "ring-straked and spotted flock," until he felt able to start on his own account, then, securing some new country on pastoral lease from the government, he founded the now flourishing sheep station.

The same man, had he remained in the "Old Country," no matter how steady or persevering he might have been, would probably have had only the workhouse before him when age and infirmity had broken him down to that dismal pass,—the only inheritance, alas! for the poor in Great Britain.

Hiring a horse, no difficult matter in those days, I rode out to "Nibi-Nibi," after bidding adieu to Frank and other friends, who gave me minute directions to prevent my being entangled in the wrong track. This easily

happens when one travels along bush roads seldom used, and only formed by cart tracks, which in some parts, crossing each other in all directions, tend to confuse any one not familiar with the "lay" of the country.

For the first mile or so the road led along the sea coast and the track of the first railway in the colony, then in course of construction. About a mile beyond the railway camp the track branched off from the main road and led through a pretty level country, into one which soon began to rise towards the elevated range of hills extending north and south for many miles. The scenery became more wild and the surface more broken up as the "range" was approached. A feeling of lonesomeness came over me. My horse pushed along through a forest of banksias, and I began to experience all the solemn stillness, the placid dreamy solitude of the Australian bush. It was broken only now and again by the chirruping note of the "wattle-bird," or the impertinent whistling of the small, brilliantly coloured paroquets, known as "twenty-eights," or the tinkling of the "bell-bird," and songs of hundreds of other bush birds. Some of them gave forth such melody, and in such sweetly arranged notes, that one might well fancy one was listening to a few bars of music repeated again and again by an invisible flute player. Some writers have it that in Australia the flowers are scentless and the birds songless. As regards the wild flowers, this assertion is partly true, but as regards the winged songsters of the bush it is a calumny, as I felt convinced before I had ridden many yards into the seclusion of the thickets which lined the foot of the "range." Listening to these sweet songsters, offering up their tribute of praise, I was convinced that there was far more melody in the song of some West Australian wild birds than in the meaningless twitterings

and inconsequent gurglings of many of the song birds so much talked of at home.

The well wooded country through which I now passed contained many fine specimens of the timber for which Swan River is celebrated. But the latitude was too low for the jarrah tree, and one would have to travel many miles to the southward before one would see the giant *Eucalyptus marginata*, and several hundreds before one could hope to see forests of this magnificent tree.

The Flooded-gum (*E. rostrata*) flourishes throughout a vast extent of country, and, growing to the best advantage near pools or on the banks of rivers and gullies, is in general an indication of water, or at least of a watercourse. On this journey I encountered some handsome specimens. Though its timber is not equal to that of some other Eucalypts, it is, from its real or imaginary association with water, always a welcome sight to the traveller.

The Raspberry jam (*Acacia acuminata*), locally known as the jam-tree, abounds in the country round Champion Bay, and furnishes the settlers with a supply of valuable timber for fencing purposes. It is practically indestructible, resisting the attacks of the white ant even better than the jarrah wood. It obtains its name from the powerful odour of raspberry jam which it emits when freshly cut, has a fine grain, and, taking a fine polish, can be made into handsome and durable furniture.

The Fluted-gum (*E. salubris*) derives its name from the remarkable spiral grooves which wind round the trunk of the tree. Growing to a vast height without attaining any great girth, it is very suitable and convenient for fencing purposes. The extraordinary way in which the trunk is twisted can only be described by comparing it to the American form of augur. The White-gum (*E. redunca*), the Blue-gum (*E. megacarpa*), the Red-gum

(*E. calophylla*), the York-gum (*E. loxophleba*), the Salmon-gum (*E. salmonophloia*) were other members of the eucalyptus family with which, at that time or later on, I became acquainted.

But the tree which had the most startling appearance in the ever-changing scenery was the "Black boy," a species of *Xanthorrhea*. The "Black boy" can be compared to no other but itself. Imagine a smooth, jet-black, barkless trunk about ten or twelve inches in diameter, though sometimes much thicker, springing up some four or five feet without any indication of a branch, sometimes straight up, at other times twisted into all kinds of fantastic attitudes. I use the word "attitudes" because at a distance, when seen for the first time, it more resembles a living black fellow than a tree. To heighten the resemblance, the top of the tree produces a profuse growth of long, grass-like fimbriæ which, curving downwards, looks like a native's shock head of hair, and, still further to increase the illusion, the flower of this remarkable tree is a long straight stick, which might be fairly likened to the warrior's spear.

On reaching the summit of the range the track led through a pass with steep cliffs on either hand, and curved for some distance round the craggy hillside over a surface of ironstone gravel and white quartz boulders. Here the undergrowth was so entangled with the larger trees as to form on both sides of the track a dense wall of vegetation, invading the cart track in some places, and rendering progress rather difficult unless, to be sure, one was indifferent to a smart slash in the face now and again as the horse pushed aside the rebounding branches. In other places the overhanging branches of the tall wattles and "stringy-barks," meeting overhead and matted together with a tough wiry creeper, formed quite a triumphal arch or tunnel of vegetation. From

side to side hung long ropes of a species of mammoth spider-web, causing an unpleasant sensation when suddenly drawn across my face as I rode along, intent on avoiding the more visible obstacles. Here and there, hanging from the branches, were some flask-shaped insects' nests formed of a brown-paper like substance, which were by no means pleasant to run against, as the contents were very irritating to the skin.

After clearing the pass the country could be seen for a long distance ahead, the land sloping down gradually to a line of Flooded-gums, somewhere in the neighbourhood of which I expected to come upon the Nibi-Nibi Station. The country now consisted of well grassed ridges, interspersed with thickets of jam trees. Small, deep gullies had now to be crossed, all trending towards the larger watercourse indicated by the line of Flooded-gums. To the northward appeared a peculiar steep hill with a triangulation beacon on top, and shortly after passing this I heard the clanking of sheep bells. To avoid heading the flock (a crime which the shepherd looks upon as unpardonable either in this world or the next), I turned on one side until the shepherds, an old nigger and a half-caste girl, came in sight, who informed me they were minding the sheep during the white shepherd's illness, and that the station or "white-fellow miah," as they called it, was "little bit far away." This information not being quite as definite as I could wish, the girl, to make matters clearer, stated that "That one miah close fellow get down," pointing at the same time with protruded lips in the direction I was to take. Despairing of getting any clearer directions, I spurred onwards, descending the banks of a very deep gully, and after climbing the other bank suddenly rode into view of the station.

The dwelling-house was a low built, one-storey,

thatched building, surrounded by a verandah, and white-washed inside and out. It contained a kitchen, parlour, and four bedrooms, all on the ground-floor. The house was a "pug-built" one, that is to say, constructed of square blocks of sun-dried clay. Near to this was a store-house containing a spare bedroom, and down on the sloping bank of the gully was another building of stone work used as a store and dairy, with a "lean-to" erection serving as quarters for the station hands. Some tumble-down stabling, a milking yard, stock-yard, pig-sties, and, most important of all, an old-fashioned and inconveniently arranged shearing shed with an out-of-date screw wool-press completes the list of buildings, etc., which went to make up the Nibi-Nibi Station.

I was gruffly received by the old Boss, and directed to unsaddle and turn the horse loose to shift for itself on the "run." On returning I was introduced to the two sons, with whom I soon became on good terms, and went for a tour of inspection round the station buildings, until called in to tea by a pretty girl, the daughter of old M'Snitch, who was a widower. After tea John and Jerry proposed an opossum hunt by moonlight with gun and dogs. I willingly agreed, and the rest of the evening was passed in this manner. At bedtime we found our evening's sport had resulted in some three or four dozen opossums.

I had not been many hours at Nibi-Nibi before I understood why old M'Snitch had been so ready to secure my inexperienced services. The lambing season was rapidly approaching. Many extra hands are then required on all sheep stations, so the squatters were often put to their wits' ends, and were glad to employ any one they could get hold of. Thus M'Snitch was lucky in securing a hand for one of his flocks just in the nick of time, and at no other cost than bed and board.

Two days after my arrival I was ordered to get ready a supply of clothing, and was furnished with a horse-rug, a tin plate and "billy." I was to hold myself in readiness to ride out with the Boss to the Ten-mile Well, there to take part in the "lambing" of a flock of about eighteen hundred ewes stationed on that portion of the "run." After dinner two horses were brought round to the front. One was for me to ride, whilst leading the other loaded with pack-saddles containing a supply of rations.

M'Snitch soon appeared and, mounting his own horse, we made a start. I was much amused watching an old gander, one of the station flock, which persisted in following us, keeping alongside of the old man's horse and refusing to be driven back until a gateway barred his farther progress. Even then he continued to call after his master until we rode out of hearing. I never came across a similar instance of affection on the part of that usually hostile bird, but this particular gander and one goose were never so happy as when alongside the old man, or walking out with him just like a pair of well broken-in dogs. They would follow him all over the station, and when he went into the house, would wait for hours outside until he reappeared forth. They knew his voice and would come to his call. The gander, in particular, seemed to pine for his company when he was away on any of his journeys from the station, and would keep hanging about the road by which he would return until he came into view; then the whole station would be made aware of the master's approach by the discordant notes of welcome. These geese were vicious enough to every one else on the place. I received many a hard nip from them when crossing their path.

A ride of about an hour and a half brought us to the Ten-mile Well and the hut which was to be my home for the next month or so. The hut was shaped like an

inverted V on low sides. It was built of wattle and jam-wood stakes, neatly thatched both top and side; a curtain formed of sheepskin hung across the doorway. A rude stone-work fireplace, and another cooking shed covered over with a flimsy erection of saplings and rushes for the extra hands, composed the whole of the domestic arrangements.

About fifty yards from the hut was the main sheep-yard or camp, consisting of a large circular area enclosed by freshly cut boughs and bushes piled up to a height of some four feet. The entrance to this species of corral was a gap in the fence, which had to be piled up or pulled away morning and evening. Near by were three similar but smaller yards for keeping the various lots apart during the lambing season.

The well was square, and contained about four feet of water. A line of troughs, extending some distance from the well, filled each other automatically. The apparatus for raising water from the well was of a very primitive description, namely, a stout forked branch fixed in the ground, balanced on which was a long gum sapling forming a lever for working the bucket up and down by means of counter-weights.

Though the watering of his flock every day in the dry season, when no surface water remains, is the only hard work a shepherd has to perform, yet it will easily be understood that it is no easy task, on a broiling hot day, to pull up buckets of water for filling a long line of troughs, which perhaps two thousand thirsty sheep are doing their best to empty.

The winter's sun was getting pretty low when the jingling of sheep bells and a cloud of dust notified the approach of the flock. Presently the leaders of the woolly army came into view, marching straight for the corral, followed by the whole flock, excepting a dozen or so

of ewes which had lambed out during the day. The shepherd had confided to his dog the task of bringing the flock safely to camp, whilst he remained behind with the stragglers. I could not help admiring the cool, business-like way the dog was marshalling his *protegés* and the anxious manner in which he scrutinised them until the rear guard had filed into the yard. Then, being unable to close up the gap, he did the next best thing, by lying down in front of the entrance until his master's return.

A loud and prolonged "coo-ee" aroused me from contemplating the dog's smartness, and, following M'Snitch, I hurried away in the direction of the call, until we fell in with the shepherd, who wanted assistance to get the lambs and ewes into camp. This was a most tedious job, but at length we got them all into the "weak-lot" yard, where they would be safe from the attacks of native dogs. Returning to camp, the shepherd gathered the embers of a smouldering log and, piling on some dead wood, soon had a good blaze, and put a kettle of water on to boil for tea-brewing; meanwhile he informed the Boss that lambing had commenced earlier than had been anticipated, and that it was high time all preparations were completed. M'Snitch, promising to send out a horse and cart for this purpose, mounted his horse and rode off into the darkness.

By the time all hands had mustered round the camp-fire I found our party consisted of the shepherd, a ticket-of-leave man, another ex-convict, an old Irishman, a black fellow, a half-caste girl about ten or twelve years of age named "Yahbagee"—and myself.

Both the ex-convicts were civil, and apparently respectable men, the only objectionable person being the "freeman," the old Irishman, who was bad tempered and crusty to a degree. The native was inoffensive, unless, to be

sure, he was heated and one happened unwittingly to get too close to him. As to "Yahbagee," she was like the wind, she came and went as she listed, always ready with an answer or a laugh; she was good tempered and willing, and seemed to be ever eating. To her other accomplishments—which did not include deportment and the "use of the globes"—must be added the smoking of a dirty black clay pipe whenever she could beg, borrow, or steal the wherewithal to fill it. She seemed omnivorous, and would consume with equal gusto a boiled snake, mutton, a baked opossum, a kind of caterpillar extracted from holes in trees, called by the natives "bardi"—which when roasted on the embers resembled the yoke of a hard-boiled egg both in flavour and appearance,—baked frogs, and various kinds of roots which she amused herself by digging for. All was fish that came to "Yahbagee's" net.

A large freshly cooked damper, which is simply unleavened bread baked in the hot ashes, some excellent corned mutton washed down with strong black tea boiled in a tin "billy," formed a supper to which my keen appetite did full justice. Pipes and yarns were then the order, but before long a roaring fire was made up for the night, and all hands, rolled in their heavy rugs, turned over, feet to the fire, for an *al fresco* night's rest.

CHAPTER III

First Night in the Bush—Chorus of Bull-frogs—Prowling Dingoes—The Break-o'-day Boy—The Morning Pipe—"Yahbagee"—End of Lambing—A Good Increase—A Tramp through the Bush—Wild Flowers—The Shearing Season—A Stroll with the Gun—Only an Ants' Nest—The Reward of Curiosity—Notes on the West Australian Ants—Cockatoos—Adieu to Nibi-Nibi—Farming on the Greenough—Description of the Stripper—The Cockatoo Farmer.

THE novelty of the situation prevented my sleeping until far into the night. Here was I for the first time stretched out on the bare ground, wrapped in a coarse horse-rug, and with no other covering than the brilliantly star-lit southern sky. For hours I was contemplating the thickly spangled sky, which was alight with many splendid constellations common to both hemispheres, but which, here to the southward, seemed to be strangely inverted. The clearness of the atmosphere rendered visible to the naked eye nebulæ which are difficult to distinguish in our foggy and smoky England. The great nebula in Orion shone with a brilliancy I had never before witnessed, except at sea perhaps in mid-ocean, and the Milky-Way gleamed with sharply defined outlines unknown to dwellers in the far north. My reveries were not long undisturbed, however, for a dismal long-drawn-out howl, apparently emanating from a range of iron-stone hills distant about a mile from the camp, broke on the stillness around me, and was taken up and

repeated in various directions, soon becoming an excruciating chorus in all the dreary and woeful notes the canine throat is capable of. This I readily guessed to be the howl of the nocturnal native wild dog, or dingo, the scourge of the sheep farmer.

Then other "voices of the night" broke out near home. A bull-frog in the adjacent "yangit" swamp crooned out his bodeful but never unmusical notes, which were gradually taken up by another and yet another croaker, until a full chorus of notes would swell upwards in measured cadences for a few moments only, and subside as slowly into silence. Then some other ambitious batrachian would take office by a few leading notes which never failed to call forth the united efforts of the well trained and responsive choir. The neighing and whinnying of a mob of bush horses cautiously approaching the water-holes in the swamp was mingled now and again with the blood-curdling shriek of some kind of bittern. The monotonous cry of the mophawk, or "more pork" as it is sometimes called, one of the numerous nocturnal birds of Australia, resounded at intervals. Its mournful minor third reminded me of the monotonous cry of the cuckoo. A rustling of feathers overhead and a slowly dying away sound, as of a rushing wind, announced the invisible flight of some migratory cranes or wild geese. In the midst of these sounds myriads of cricket whistled away in the darkness, as if trying to outdo the numerous cicadas whose chirruping was only to cease with the break of day. An occasional clanging of bells from the sheepyard, and now and again a startled rush of the sheep, told of some prowling dingo, an alarm which would start up the watchful sheep dogs on a rapid circuit of the fence, intent on short-shrift for any native dog who might have permitted his appetite for fresh mutton to have got the better of his discretion.

Sounds still closer, the peaceful snoring of my companions, helped to keep me awake; but

> "From the cool cisterns of the night
> My spirit drank repose,"

until the slight chill of the midnight air made me draw the folds of my rug closer, and turning over I fell asleep.

I slept soundly enough, but towards two or three o'clock, the fire having burned down, I was aroused by the cold, and had to replenish the fire before I could sleep again. I must confess my first experience of sleeping on the hard ground made me unpleasantly conscious of certain portions of my anatomy. Hip-bone and shoulder soon cried out for relief, only to be obtained by turning on to the other side; and the worst was that one had to turn on to ground cold from the night air.

However, I awoke refreshed as the day was just breaking through the thin white mists which rendered the surrounding objects vague and indistinct. The twittering of numberless birds welcoming the coming day sounded as though a morning hymn were being chanted, nor were the full rich notes of organ accompaniment wanting, for I listened with delight for the first time to the notes of the "Break-o'-day boy," a kind of magpie, generally the first amongst bush songsters to announce the birth of day. During the many days I have spent in the "bush" I have never heard the song of the "Break-o'-day boy" except before sunrise, and never without delight in the few but sweet notes which it rolls forth, as though it were some musician playing on a magic flute. My first thought, when I sat up and pushed the smouldering logs together, was for my pipe, a few draws in the morning air being, in my opinion, worth a dozen later in the day. The other men were not long in following my example, and then every one went to work

on the various matters which required attention, so as to allow the flock to "draw off" before sunrise. We then returned to the camp-fire, where a breakfast of hot damper, a camp-oven full of fresh mutton chops, and a pot of strong tea awaited us. Breakfast over, the "weak lot" were confided to my care. I was exhorted not to "blue" (lose) any of them, and was cautioned against letting them feed near certain patches of the poison plant, "Yahbagee" being told off to guide and assist me in the latter respect.

During the time I spent at this monotonous work I managed to learn a good deal from "Yahbagee" in the way of bush-craft. She taught me how to lift a hot "billy" off the fire with two crossed sticks, and how to kindle a light in the open during or just after wet weather. She it was that showed me the "ajigo" plant, and taught me how to dig up its succulent root, which when cooked resembles a cooked yam in size, shape, and flavour. She taught me—though I must admit I never cared much to profit by her teaching in these particulars—where to look for and how to extract "bardis" from dead tree trunks, and frogs from their holes in the ground, a knowledge, however, which might at any time be most useful when travelling over unsettled districts. She showed me how to bail water from rock-holes by means of my felt hat; how to dig for water, and find it too, in most unlikely looking places; how to follow a sheep or other animal by its tracks, though at tracking I never became proficient; how, in the absence of matches, to make fire by twirling a sharpened piece of wood in a groove notched in another piece. In short, to "Yahbagee" I owed my knowledge of most of the minor but indispensable elements of bush-craft, which on many subsequent occasions proved very useful to me. I fear, however, that "Yahbagee" held me in great contempt for my

ignorance of so many matters, which in her opinion were no doubt of primary importance, and more especially because I was constantly losing my bearings, and letting her perceive my utter ignorance of the direction of the camp at any given moment during our day's meandering in the bush.

Such was my life for the two months or so which elapsed before the flock was "lambed down," when we found an increase of about seventy-five per cent. had been secured for old M'Snitch.

The cutting and ear-marking of the lambs wound up the whole affair, when by counting the pile of amputated tails which had been thrown in a heap an accurate tally was obtained. These operations were carried out in a very summary manner, which is, I think, peculiar to Australia and will not bear description, and was a by no means pleasant experience.

After remaining with the flock a week or so longer I received orders to return to the head station; so, packing up and shouldering my swag, I bade adieu to the Ten-mile Well.

As I cheerfully trudged along, a great difference in the aspect of the country was observable compared to the state of affairs when last I had traversed it. Then the ground seemed to be absolutely denuded of herbage, for the last year's grasses had been burnt up by the summer sun and the rainy season had only just set in. But now, at the end of only a few weeks, the whole bush seemed to have been transformed as if by magic. The soil was clothed in a luxuriant growth of green vegetation most pleasing to the eye after the long months during which only the pale or sombre tints of summer had prevailed, alternating between the fierce glare of sun-light and darkness. Innumerable varieties of flowers and blossoms lent a touch of colour here and there and

everywhere, over the entangled undergrowth, in the shadows of the cliffy highlands, round the trunks of trees, along the borders of the deep gullies, on the sides of the steep hills, and spread in dazzling masses like richly coloured rugs on the open plains. There seemed to be flowers everywhere, fleeting and fragile enough in some cases certainly, but others, on the contrary, were of the kind known as immortelles, and these grew in the greatest profusion. An immense patch of white, as if snow had fallen on the extent of an acre or so, on near approach turned out to be a mass of thickly growing immortelles. Farther on I saw similar patches of bright yellow, rich purple, pink, or ultramarine, all due to the luxuriant growth of these everlastings. With the white and yellow variety I was familiar, for who does not know the immortelles of the undertaker's shop? But I could not believe the pink and purple ones were of the same kind until I had closely compared them. Approaching a place where the track wound through a gap in the hills, I found it was now one mass of green vegetation, completely hiding from view the crags and cliffs, and forming a green bower of trellis-work overhead, gleaming with scarlet, white, and yellow convolvulus. Great was the contrast with the stretch of arid, hungry looking, sand-plain I now had to traverse ere reaching the jam and wattle thickets surrounding the station.

Shortly after my return to headquarters the near approach of the shearing season called for the exertions of all hands to prepare for it. Yards were erected and pens formed round the wool shed. The shearers began to arrive, and the first flock, timed to appear from an out-station in the far east on a given date, was reported to be within a few miles of the station.

The scene in the shearing-sheds next day, and for several weeks afterwards, was a busy one. Each shearer

had a pen, which was filled with woolly victims as fast as the ceaseless clip-clip of the shears on the "floor" turned them out to rejoin their shivering mates. The wool-winders were as busily engaged packing up, trimming, rolling up, and binding the fleeces on the "winding-tables," whence they were pitched up to the pressing-loft, where the "pressers" were at work filling, screwing, and branding the bales ready for shipment. I formed one of the "wool-winders," occasionally helping the pressers, and even trying my hand at shearing; but the first unfortunate sheep I tried to shear was so injured by my clumsiness that it had to be killed right off—"to save its life," so to say. I never afterwards tried my hand at shearing or bread-making either; and thereby hangs a tale.

Whilst at the Ten-mile Well I was asked one day to stay in camp in order to bake a loaf of bread and the two legs of mutton required for the day's consumption. Glad of the change, I agreed, promising to follow the minute instructions given, the most important of which was that, after leavening the dough with a piece of leaven to be found in the flour bag, I was to be sure and replace an equal portion for future requirements.

To work I went then, as soon as my post-prandial smoke was finished. I mixed the dough, and kneaded away for dear life until I reckoned it was ready for baking. Then I clapped it in the camp-oven, which I buried in a mound of hot ashes and embers. I then went into the shade of the hut to read a well thumbed newspaper some months old, until I thought that the loaf should be done. Done it was with a vengeance, when I turned it out of the camp-oven. It was like a grindstone in weight and consistence. Then, and then only, to add to my anguish, it suddenly flashed upon me that I had also forgotten to put by any portion of the leavened dough. However, I consoled myself for this mishap, reflecting that what is

done is done; but I determined to be more careful and make up a hotter fire for the next operation, namely, the baking of the two legs of mutton. Full of zeal, and heedful of my failure in the bread line, which I attributed to my not having a sufficiently hot fire, I heaped a goodly supply of firewood round the camp-oven, after carefully placing the two fine legs of mutton in that ill-starred apparatus. This time I felt sure that my culinary efforts would be crowned with success. Satisfying myself that there was plenty of heat, I started for the well, where, after filling my buckets by means of the lever—I felt like Isaac's servant when filling Rebekah's pitcher, but alas! Rebekah was absent—I sat down for a spell. On my return I noticed an ominous cloud of smoke hanging over the camp. Judge of my despair when I found that a breeze had fanned into a flame the too liberal allowance of fuel piled round the camp-oven, and, soaring upwards, had ignited the dry bush and rushes, thence spreading to the sides and corner posts of the cooking shed, so that on my arrival the whole caboose was roaring and crackling like a furnace. The damage and utter ruin of the cooking shed was a matter of small moment, which half an hour's work with an axe would suffice to set right. But the legs of mutton!—Alas! the heat was so fierce I could not approach to rescue the devoted joints, and when at length I raised the nearly white hot camp-oven lid my tears fell only on two lumps of black cinders. Handy Andy could not have put in a better day's work than this; and long and loud were the reproaches I had to put up with when it was found at night there could be no other supper than one of damper and tea. Strange to relate, from that day to the end of "lambing" I was never again asked to take my share of cooking, and never since that disastrous day have I ever attempted to bake bread.

On Sunday, having obtained the loan of a double-barrel and a supply of cartridges, I strolled out after breakfast on the chance of shooting one of the wild turkeys, which were said to be plentiful on an adjacent sand-plain. Whilst rambling through a dense banksia thicket I came across a red ants' nest, and turned aside to watch the curious spectacle of the busy army of workers radiating in every direction from the nest, but all returning by a minute path which the myriads of tiny but never-ceasing footsteps had worn into a well beaten road over the hard clay surface. The nest, to all outward show, was a patch of well swept clay soil, with a small hole in the centre, which appeared to be the sole means of ingress and egress. This circular patch was kept scrupulously clear of refuse, and was being gradually raised a few inches above the general level by tiny pellets of earth, which the ants seemed in endless procession to bring from the nest.

I stooped to watch the manœuvres of one particular forager returning to camp with something about three times as big as himself. He was steering straight for the nest, and seemed to be in a great taking about getting his booty to the subterranean storehouse. I watched him closely as he first pushed, then dragged his burden along, sometimes finding it more convenient to lift it bodily in his powerful jaws. Though his operations might serve as an admirable example of pluck and determination, I failed to note any of the great intelligence said to be peculiar to the ant, for if he happened to butt up against an obstacle it never seemed to occur to him, even if a detour of half his own length would clear the obstacle, that it would be easier to go round it than to lift or drag his prey clean over it.

So absorbed had I been in the movements of this determined but misguided insect that I had knelt down,

carefully turning the muzzle of the gun away from me, but not noticing that unluckily I had thrust it into the entrance of the nest. Had I looked I would have noticed an eruption of infuriated ants, each about three-eighths of an inch long—the size of the larger species of red ant—welling up from the damaged nest and rushing in all directions seeking revenge. The ground was black with the enraged insects. I had not noticed all this until too late. A host reached my boots, and swarming up my legs commenced operations with such vigour that I started up as though red-hot needles had been thrust into various tender parts of my body. I took in the situation at a glance. The gun was hidden by a moving mass of red demons, and my boots and lower limbs were nearly concealed by a live coating of the same, whilst from the nest regiment after regiment, in one continuous stream, were being vomited forth.

The gun seemed to stand the attacks calmly enough, but it was not so with myself. Nor was it a time to set to and think about it. With a prolonged and most undignified howl I bounded away, running as if the devil were at my heels, tearing off my clothes as I ran, and I did not pull up until I reached a small clearing in the thicket with nothing on but hat, boots, and socks. An ant bath is no joke. Having got clear of my tormentors I retraced my steps, picking up a singlet here, a shirt there, and at last was clothed and clear of my enemies. The next task was to secure the offending gun. This I did by dint of poking and pushing it clear of the nest, having constantly to shift my feet the while. At last I was able to start off, vowing never again to fool about a red ants' nest.

Western Australia is certainly well provided with ants. I have travelled over many parts of it, but I have never been where they are not to be found—unless

below high-water mark. In the arid spinifex deserts, where one looks in vain for any other trace of life, where no drop of water can be found for many miles, where not even a lizard or snake track can be seen; in dismal sandy oceans where even the spinifex cannot grow, and where the carrion crow can find no employment,—in all such places flourishing colonies of the small variety of red ants or black ants are to be found. What they live on is a mystery, unless it be sand, of which, certainly, there is no lack; but there they are from north to south. Even the celebrated explorers who have traversed the continent from end to end have always had the small ant with them. There are many varieties, such as the large and small red ants, the large and small black ants, the sergeant ant, and the termite or white ant. The first four are active and pugnacious, but the sergeant ant, a giant of its kind, a good inch long, is a terror to the unwary; its bite is far more severe than the sting of a wasp, as I know by painful experience of both. The white ant has been so often written about that I can add very little regarding it. It is slow in its movements and is not vicious,—at least, I never heard of any one being bitten by them. I have crossed plains in the North-West covered as far as the eye could reach with countless white ants' nests, resembling at a distance a vast cemetery full of roughly pyramidal monuments standing some six or seven feet in height.

Bidding adieu to the ants, with their sisters and cousins, I stroll on through a grove of wattles and acacias alive with all kinds of small marsupials, boodies, wombats, kangaroo rats; whilst long lizards, short lizards, black, grey, and green lizards are to be seen skipping in all directions as my advancing footsteps sound an alarm to these small saurians that are sunning themselves on the cleared track. A whirring sound, a flash

of brown plumage, and a bronze-wing pigeon whizzes across my path, whilst overhead and on all sides the parti-coloured "twenty-eights" tempt me sorely to let fly at them, were it not that I am determined to reserve my first shot for a turkey if I can come across one. Of this there seems to be little chance now, as every cockatoo in each tree I pass under gives a loud harsh screech enough to rouse the Seven Sleepers, let alone a crafty bush turkey.

As it was, when I reached the verge of the thicket and came on to the open sand-plain beyond, my eyes just caught the last bound or two of a rusty-red-looking animal, a retreating kangaroo, which had evidently been warned by the loquacious cockatoos, and in its turn would surely alarm any turkey within sight of its rapid flight. I strolled far and wide over the sand-plain, but was not lucky enough to get within shot of a turkey, though on my way home I shot half a dozen sulphur-crested cockatoos, and these turned out to be fat and made a very savoury pie.

Western Australia, indeed Australia generally, seems to be a favoured spot as regards cockatoos. They are found in great numbers from one end of the colony to the other, and in very great variety. There are white and yellow, white and rose, grey and rose, black and white, black and red, all black and all white coloured cockatoos; in most cases, the crest and the tail or wing feathers being of a different colour to the rest of the plumage. Then there are many varieties of paroquets, of which the "twenty-eight" has the most brilliant colouring. I have seen patches of ground quite white, as though from a fall of snow, which on nearer approach proved to be an innumerable flock of sulphur-crested cockatoos, which flew off with piercing shrieks to alight a mile or so farther along as my horse again and again carried me up to them.

I did not remain long at Nibi-Nibi after the shearing, for, to tell the truth, I was rather tired of working hard for nothing; so I borrowed a horse, bade farewell to M'Snitch, and rode into Geraldton.

The time I had passed on this sheep station was not altogether thrown away. I now knew how to saddle and ride a horse, could harness up and drive a waggon-team. I could use an axe, sometimes, without breaking the handle or maiming myself, and I had gained some insight into the system of sheep farming, such as it was. In other ways, too, I had become more fitted for a life in the "bush."

The most frequent fault of a "New chum" is to think he knows a lot, whereas a great deal of the experience he may have, especially in farming matters, is not of much use to him in Western Australia, where the conditions of soil, climate, and markets are so different from those obtaining in the Old Country. The harvesting used to be a very different process from that carried on at home, where straw is of value. The farmer on the Greenough flats, or elsewhere in the colony, used only to trouble his head about harvesting the grain, and would let the straw shift for itself. There was used a machine called a "stripper," a curious machine, and a short description of it may be of interest, as I never heard of it being used in England.

The "stripper" is generally drawn by three horses harnessed abreast. Extending from the side of the machine, at right angles to the shafts, is a long steel comb, properly stayed, and capable of being raised or lowered within certain limits, to adapt it to the varying heights of the growing corn. It is supported on broad iron wheels, and when in position to start is placed so that the comb extends for about five feet into the crop, when the inner wheel is revolving just on the border of

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the growing corn. When the "stripper" is started the comb catches the ears within its spread and "strips" them off leaving the straw standing. So well does the machine do its work that only a very few ears are left standing here and there. Meanwhile the horse-power employed to draw the machine round the field has not been all expended in mere stripping, for a system of tooth wheels and revolving bands has been carrying the ears of grain to the interior of the machine, where it is thrashed out and deposited at intervals from a hopper into sacks; and then the corn requires only winnowing and bagging ready for market. This machine, an American invention I believe, has now been superseded by the reaping and binding machines similar to what may be seen in England.

In this country the farmer can trust to natural grasses for his hay crop, but in West Australia he often has to grow a crop of wheat, barley, or oats, cut it down whilst green, and convert it into hay in the usual way.

For the small or "cockatoo farmer" in Western Australia there used to be many ways apart from tillage of augmenting his income and paying his storekeeper's bill when a bad year left him short of cash.

There was the gumming season, when he and his family, the more the merrier, leave their home to take care of itself and camp out, engaged in picking the manna-gum, which exudes in great abundance at certain times of the year from a species of acacia. Later on there is the wattle-bark crop from the *Acacia saligna*, which yields a large percentage of tannin. Both of these bush products find a ready sale at the nearest "store." Then there was the sandalwood for export, though now the supply of this valuable timber has been almost exhausted by indiscriminate cutting. At certain times of the year many "cockatoos" could make a good bit of

money hunting opossum for the valuable fur, the storekeeper usually giving four and sixpence a dozen for the skins; and the shearing season was another resource by which a substantial increase of income could be secured with certainty. When short of meat or tired of salt junk, he needed only to go into the forest with gun or kangaroo hounds, and he would be pretty sure to obtain a good supply of game. In short, any man in the "Great South Land," able and willing to work, may be pretty certain of becoming comfortably off and independent in his declining years. No doubt there were some small farmers in a miserable condition, never able to extricate themselves from the toils of the storekeeper, but in many instances this resulted from unsteady habits and thriftlessness.

CHAPTER IV

The new Squatter—Start for the Murchison River—Nimrod—Northampton—The Poison Lands—Our Camp at the Gum-tree Well—Damper and Tea—The foul Well—Saddle-up—Morning in the Bush—Flies—A deserted City—Red Tape *in excelsis*—The Great Salt Lake—Lynton—The Whaling Station—Mirage and Bogs—The Sand-plain—Kangaroos and Turkeys—Off-saddle—The Ocean—Arrival at the Station—The Buildings—The Garden—The mighty River—Black Swans—Wild Horses and Wild Cattle—I Ride a Buck-jumper—Pride has its Fall—*Finis coronat opus*—Trapping the Wild Horses—A Night at the Trap—The Sleeping Sentinel—The Four-legged Napoleon—Dingoes or Native Dogs—Shamming Death—*Resurgam*—End of the Play—Mooroomba.

NOT for long did I remain in Champion Bay, for I soon made the acquaintance of a squatter who had just purchased a station on the Murchison River, about one hundred miles north from Geraldton, and required another hand as he was on the point of starting to take over his property. He agreed to find a horse for me, and we soon came to terms, as I never required very long to be ready to start anywhere; for, as one might say, when my hat was on my house was thatched.

Turning out early the following morning, I went to the hotel where my new Boss "hung out," and found him making all ready for a start after breakfast. He showed me my mount and supplied me with a saddle. "Nimrod," for thus was named the bright bay who was to carry me to the Murchison, deserves a somewhat lengthy description, as he was a typical stock-horse. He was about six

years, fourteen hands, clean limbed, with a good dash of Arab-blood, and had the low withers so common in the Australian-bred horse. He was not remarkable for speed, but was quite speedy enough for a stock-horse. He could put in thirty miles of journey day after day, under a burning sun, over rough stony ground, or long dreary miles of sand-plain, where he would sink in the loose white sand up to the fetlock at every step, or forcing his way through thickets or shuffling along over hard, sun-baked clay flats. It was all one to Nimrod, so long as at the end of the day's journey he got his drink and such feed as he could crop in the vicinity of the camp. He was as quiet to ride or handle as the most timid rider could desire. One could load the old horse with any kind of rattling paraphernalia without alarming him. There was never any occasion to lead him when he travelled as pack-horse, for he would follow one just like a dog. Now and again he might stray off the track or lag behind to crop some tempting patch of herbage, until happening to look around and finding himself alone he would start off at a gallop, neighing, and occasionally slackening speed with his nose to the ground, making sure his companion was ahead, and then gallop on until one was made aware, by his neighing and the clattering of pots and pans, hobbles and bells, that Nimrod was making up for lost time.

I have, on one or two journeys with Nimrod as my pack-horse, played him a trick in this connection. I would turn my horse short off from the track and hide from view in a thicket or some high bush, whence I could watch Master Nimrod and witness his confusion at being left alone so suddenly. Away he would start full gallop, tail up and his ears pricked forward, with pack-saddles bumping, pots and pannikins clattering, horse-bells and hobbles rattling and jingling. High above this din—

enough to frighten seven years' growth out of every kangaroo within hearing—would ring his loud whinnying and shrill neighing until, having overshot my horse's track on the road, the first time he would put nose to the ground he would find himself at a loss and would halt bewildered, until perhaps an assuring neigh from my horse would betray our presence. He was a rare good one after stock or when "cutting out" from a mob of cattle, and would follow the beast one was after in and out, following every twist and turn, and keep the recalcitrant well within swing of the stock-whip. A steer with tail upstanding might make a dash from the mob and gallop—as a bush-bred steer only can gallop—at a racing pace for the beloved thicket or rough ranges, but Nimrod would wheel round and after it and quickly bring it within reach of the stock-whip's ten feet lash, which, playing unmercifully on its hide with a report like a pistol-shot, would soon make it double in another direction. Nimrod would throw himself on his haunches and wheel round in the same instant, and head the determined beast again and again until it was only too glad, with tail down and protruding tongue, to seek refuge in the mob.

But if riding with shortened stirrups, as in the hunting field at home, when Nimrod was twisting and turning after a rowdy bullock, the rider would soon shoot out of the saddle in one direction whilst the horse would be wheeling in the other. My word, yes!—A good length of stirrup leather and a pliant seat on one's horse is required for "cutting out."

Nimrod had one of the old stock-horse tricks when "tailing a mob" or droving fat cattle overland. In the hottest hours of the day, when cattle are being driven they give great trouble lagging in the shade of every bush or tree. You have constantly to be turning along

the rear from wing to wing to keep them moving, and even then they will stand until the last moment. On such occasions, when nearing some lazy old bull or mouching cow when within a yard or two of the aggravating beast if one were suddenly to ram the spurs into Nimrod's ribs he would make a spring forward and seize the laggard by the buttocks, the tail, or the first part that came handy, and would hang on until the bellowing animal released itself by leaping ahead. A hard mouth and rough paces were Nimrod's defects. He either could not or would not walk when travelling, but kept up a jig-jog pace the whole day, a pace most tiring and wearisome to the rider, but very common with bush-bred horses.

Whilst giving this long description of old Nimrod, his ways and customs, it may be understood that Ogilvie and myself were pegging along towards the Murchison. Crossing the dry bed of the Chapman River, we passed a station bearing the romantic sounding name of Oakabella; and another mile or so brought us to the railway contractor's camp in a wooded valley some distance from the course of the line. Here we decided to have dinner and give the horses a spell during the midday heat. Our menu included kangaroo steak broiled with slices of bacon, the best way of cooking the flesh of this insipid tasting marsupial; and, as I now tasted it for the first time, the after-effects were rather unpleasant, as is generally the case with those new to this kind of meat. *En route* once more, Northampton, the mining district headquarters, was reached the same evening.

After laying in a small supply of flour, bacon, tea, and sugar sufficient for our needs for the remainder of the journey, we made a rather late start, intending to travel until dark and camp at the most convenient stopping-place. The first part of our route extended for some

miles through a lightly timbered country, which in a good season would carry an ample supply of grass, but now it was about as desolate looking and denuded of herbage as it could well be, owing to drought and the numerous flocks depastured on it. Pushing on over a gradually rising territory, we reached a plateau of long stretches of sand-plain. Through the loose white sand our horses struggled laboriously, sinking over the fetlocks at every step. Here and there Ogilvie drew my attention to big patches of the poison plant, which is such a deadly scourge to all ruminants. Horses can eat it with impunity so far as immediately fatal consequences are concerned, but it keeps them in a very sorry condition, and sooner or later renders them too weak to travel to water, and so brings them to an untimely end.

After crossing the highest part of the tableland we began a gradual descent over this desolate region towards a distant clump of Flooded-gum trees, which Ogilvie declared to be the place where we should camp for the night. I was not at all sorry to hear it, as I was not yet accustomed to being in the saddle for long hours at a time. The night was closing in as we drew near to the line of gum trees, and it was with difficulty we could see our way along the track, which led us at length into a clearing, in the centre of which was an old broken-down stock-yard and a bush well with clay flats bordering a deep gully, in its turn fringed by the massive gum trees whose foliage had looked so inviting whilst crossing the treeless plain.

Arrived at the well, we dismounted, unsaddled, and hobbled the horses by the stirrup leathers in a manner well known in the bush, though not easily described. I proceeded to draw water to fill the trough for our thirsty nags, after which they shuffled off into the darkness in search of what they could pick up. Meanwhile Ogilvie had been dragging dead wood, and soon had

a blaze; and a couple of thin dampers, easily and rapidly cooked on the glowing embers, were then made. At a smaller fire I superintended the boiling of our "tin-billys"; and unstrapping the rugs, spread them near the fire, which was all the preparation necessary in the way of bed-making.

By the time the water boiled and I had dumped into each can a small handful of tea and sugar well stirred with a piece of stick, the "devils-on-the-coals" had been cooked, as well as a rasher or two of bacon, so we fell to and enjoyed a hearty meal by the flickering light of the fire. Whether it be the kind of tea used—common enough in all conscience—the method of making it in the bush, or the keen appetite one gains in an open air life, I know not; but this I do maintain, that no tea, Indian or Pekoe, tastes so delicious as the strong-sweet decoction one gets out of a well blackened "billy" alongside a camp-fire. Often enough the water one has to use is thick, yellow, and muddy, and you have to sift the floating tea-leaves when drinking it; but the tea is good all the same, and one cannot be very nice about the water, when there may be none else procurable for many miles.

On one occasion when travelling between Sharks Bay and Champion Bay, after a long day's journey, I arrived at a small "soak" or native well, the only water that I knew of for twenty miles round. It was towards the end of a long dry season, fatal to hundreds of stock on every station in the district, so when I arrived choking with thirst alongside the rude well, scooped in the sand by some long forgotten wandering aboriginals, I was not surprised, though my disgust may be imagined, to find the carcase of a long-dead sheep lying in the water, which was green with the corruption. Anyhow, it was a case of drink or die. After clearing the well

the best way I could I was forced to drink the unsavoury stuff, with what grimaces I liked, but drink it I had to. It did not make me sick, but I can almost imagine I taste it now as I call it to mind. It has given me a dislike to mutton broth ever since.

Supper ended and pipes lit, little time was lost in yarning before we were rolled in our rugs and fast asleep. The night was warm, so neither of us stirred until the keen air of the breaking day roused us for an early start. No sound from our horses' bells could be heard, no other sound than the full, sweet notes of the "Break-o'-day boys," so we concluded our nags had strayed a long distance, or were standing motionless somewhere near by. Leaving me to make up the fire and get ready the morning meal, Ogilvie started off on the tracks with the bridles on his shoulder, and by the time I had got the fire into a good humour and the pots to fizz and bubble he returned with the horses. Hastily despatching our breakfast, we rode from the "Gum-tree Well" a good half hour or more before the sun rose. I know no more pleasant or exhilarating experience than an early ride through the "bush" when the morning is not too chilly and before the sun has risen to commence the broiling process. At this early hour the fresh morning air seems to invigorate one as the smoke from the "pipe of peace" curls up fragrantly amidst the morning mists.

We were once more on the sand-plains, and on all sides the herbage was covered with dew, which glistened and sparkled, as the sun, rising with slow majestic movement, seemed to transform the scene as by magic, so sudden was the change from the calm, soothing glimmer of breaking day to the fierce light and heat poured forth by the Life-giver, the God of Day. The slight morning breeze is laden with balmy odours, far different from

those which salute the nostrils of the early riser in a great city. Soon all is life and movement amongst the denizens of the bush. Wagtails, daringly and gracefully, are circling round our heads, snapping up with unerring precision a victim from the clouds of flies which buzz unceasingly, and will, alas! continue to torment us until nightfall with a pertinacity of which only an Australian fly is capable. Immense flocks of white and black cockatoos wend their noisy flight towards some favoured feeding ground. Bronze-wings whiz past with startling velocity, and here and there some vigilant crow alights on the branches of a straggling banksia and croaks bodefully as he watches our progress.

After some eight miles or so of sand-plain the track bore more to the westward, until we discerned the range of sand dunes bordering the coast, and beyond, the blue waters of the Indian Ocean. Crossing some rich clay flats, well timbered with flooded gums, we rode through a wattle thicket, and suddenly found ourselves passing through what seemed to be an ancient abandoned city of the dead. Numerous well built stone buildings bordered the track, but all empty. The woodwork had been devastated by white ants, and only the walls of these houses, stores, and offices were left standing and given up to the snakes and lizards, which found convenient shelter therein. Ogilvie informed me we were passing through the township of Lynton, which had been built for the government by convict labour, only to be abandoned as soon as completed for want of a sufficient water supply. Only one house, on the brow of a hill, was tenanted by the solitary inhabitants of Lynton, who managed to exist by dragging water from a far distant well. This squatter ran a few sheep on the surrounding country, and seemed to be contented under hardships which most men would not care to undergo. He wel-

comed us to Lynton, and invited us to halt for a meal and rest for our horses.

Towards evening we made another start, traversing a good level road which ran along the border of a great salt lagoon, about twelve miles long, and of an average width of about one mile. At this time of the year the sun had dried up all the moisture and liquid brine, the evaporation leaving the surface of the lagoon one dazzlingly white sheet of salt, many thousand tons of which could be secured without further trouble than merely shovelling it into bags. North and south of the lagoon stretched extensive flats, boggy and treacherous, but as smooth and bare as a billiard table. To the westward it was separated from the ocean by a range of ever-moving sand dunes, and at the south-western edge of the lagoon was the port of Lynton, formed by a low-lying reef, which afforded a secure though very confined anchorage for small vessels. But this, like the township, had been abandoned.

There had been a whaling station here at one time, which on a subsequent occasion I visited out of curiosity. One visit, however, was quite enough, for I nearly got my horse bogged in escaping from the north end of the lagoon, through the bewildering deception of the mirage, which in this neighbourhood is more frequent and delusive than I have experienced elsewhere on shore.

Soon after leaving the lagoon and striking inland the track led up a steep hill, on mounting which we found the country to be greatly improved in appearance. The sand-plain, which now seemed endless, was very different to any I had seen before, the ground being thickly clothed with an abundant and varied vegetation, which our horses greedily ate as they travelled along. Troops of kangaroos could be seen bounding away as we rode along, and bush turkeys were plentiful now, while to the

southward of Lynton they were few and far between, a sure sign we were getting farther and farther away from the settled districts. When darkness and fatigue arrested our farther progress we camped at a spring, which Ogilvie informed me was only some fifteen miles from our destination; and, sure enough, shortly after getting under weigh next morning, we struck the lower reaches of the Murchison River, and could even hear the distant roaring of the breakers beating on the rocky bar. The river was quite a mile in width at this point, full of tidal salt water, and trending to the eastward with many a serpentine curve, along which our path winded through groves of mighty flooded gums, and over extensive riparian flats dotted here and there with white, glistening salt pans. Riding on through the refreshing shade of the big gum trees, which grow in perfection along the course of the great Murchison River, a sudden bend of the track brought us into view and almost up to the doors of the Home Station, where our arrival was announced by the barking of a couple of cattle dogs and the yelping of a crowd of mongrels belonging to some natives camped a few hundred yards from the house.

The main building was a comfortable one-storey thatched cottage, with a storeroom attached, and a verandah in front. A little distance off, well-built stabling, horse-yard, dairy, and a large post and rail stock-yard made up all in the building line. The station was pleasantly situated on the south bank of the river, close to a ford, and between the house and the river extended a once flourishing garden, containing some fine fig, mulberry, and other fruit-bearing trees, but now overgrown with weeds and double-gs. Close to and right in front of the door was a giant flooded gum, throwing a grateful shade around. Away back from the stabling a great swamp overgrown with weeds and

bulrushes was formed by springs of fresh water, which were very numerous about the station. It was full of swamp hens and other aquatic birds. To the northward the view was arrested by a high range of white hills, crowned with a dense thicket which sloped downwards towards the river; but between the range and the river was a stretch of sand-plain and low ironstone hills, whilst to the eastward, and running nearly up to the back of the house, was another sand-plain, extending for forty or fifty miles until arrested by the great southern bend of the Murchison at Coalallia. So this station was a veritable smiling oasis in a sandy desert. Richly grassed alluvial flats on either bank rendered it a valuable run for pastoral purposes, whilst the supply of fresh water was unusually abundant for such a waterless part of the world.

The Murchison, like most Australian rivers, was not an ever-flowing stream, but was broken up into reaches and pools, connected in some places by a tiny thread of flowing water, which disappeared here and there beneath the sandy bed of the river; but in the summer months, sometimes the heavy thunder showers falling hundreds of miles in the interior would suddenly sweep down to the sea, filling the river bank high, rendering all communication with the opposite side impossible for days at a time, when perhaps not a drop of rain had fallen for months past round about the station. The water in the various pools above the house was quite fresh in some, and slightly brackish in others; whilst between the house and the sea the river stretched in one unbroken sheet of salt water. The upper pools were well stocked with wild ducks, swamp hens, and many kinds of gallinules; and here for the first time I saw the black swan, the symbol of Western Australia. These wild swans were plentiful, and when fat were very good

eating. Fish were plentiful, both of the fresh and salt-water varieties. Timber, except that of the Flooded-gums, was rather scarce; but in other respects the property was a very desirable one, and entirely free from poison plants. The run, which was of great extent, with outlying stations reaching as far as Sharks Bay, was stocked with some thousands of horses and cattle; all, with the exception of a few dozen of saddle horses and a small herd of quiet cows and calves, were perfectly wild, and difficult to control owing to the great number of watering places, the impenetrable thickets crowning the high range, and the enormous sand-plains both north and south of the river.

Shortly after my arrival here I made my first acquaintance with an Australian buck-jumper. Whilst at sea I had so often sat astride a topsail yardarm, reefing topsails whilst the vessel was diving and plunging into a heavy sea, that I imagined it would be as easy for me to keep my seat on a bucking horse, and in the course of conversation with Ogilvie and his overseer stated my conviction to this effect. They laughed, and promised I should soon have a chance of trying the experiment.

A few days after this the overseer announced he had trapped, amongst others, a bay horse which had been partly broken in, and that, judging from his former display of talent in the bucking line, he thought that I should find this an admirable opportunity of being initiated into the art and craft of sticking on a buck-jumper. Full of confidence and ignorance, I condescendingly agreed to display my horsemanship. After dinner, followed by some native lads and station hands who had received the tip that some fun was likely, we three made for the stable-yard, where the overseer had already got the horse boxed up in one of the narrow stalls. He was

about five years old, standing some fourteen and a half hands high, very strongly built, with an overgrown mane and forelock hanging over his eyes, giving him a very fierce appearance. His long matted tail swept the ground as he plunged and reared at our approach, giving forth a loud blast from his nostrils as we entered the yard. This sound, which I then heard for the first time, is a note of fear or warning which, I think, is peculiar to wild horses, as I never heard the same from a domesticated one in England.

Well, the saddling of the "fiery untamed steed" did not take long under the deft hands of the overseer, the only symptoms of rebellion being one or two vicious kicks, which took effect on the unoffending stall posts, and an ominous hunching of the back accompanied by a squeal of rage as the girths and surcingle were tightened unmercifully. All being ready, the overseer advised me to have the horse turned in the stall, as it would thus be easier for me to mount and get home in the saddle before he could spring into the stable-yard and commence operations. I saw the truth of this, but did not realise the artfulness of the suggestion until afterwards. Had I elected to mount in the open yard, the kicking and plunging would probably have cooled my courage, so that I would have declined to mount at all, not to mention the danger and trouble to the overseer himself, who would have had to hold the horse whilst I essayed to get astride of him. Whereas, by my mounting inside the stall where the horse would remain quiet for want of room, the spectators were sure of the fun.

All being ready I climbed into the saddle rather dubiously, fixed my feet firmly home in the stirrups, gathered up the reins with one hand as I crammed my hat firmly on with the other, and being exhorted to be sure and stick tight and not let him get his head down,

I gave the signal to drop the rails. With a bound which nearly unseated me, the savage bay sprang into the yard. I felt myself being lifted up and then coming to the ground again, with a jar as if my spine had been driven into my head. I could see nothing in front of me, the horse's head had disappeared, and everything was whirling around. One more furious sideways bound, with a twist, and I seemed to be moving to every point of the compass and heavenward at the same time. I felt I was lost. I wobbled in space for a moment more, and then, instead of being cast heavenwards, I was ignominiously shot head first on to a manure heap in the corner of the yard. The yard was but a small one, there was no exit but by one gate, so I found myself in some danger when I picked myself up, for my late steed was grunting, squealing, and bucking for all he was worth in the effort to get rid of the saddle as well as myself, and found the yard, my corner included, none too large for his frantic movements. The spectators had long since skipped, and stood —such of the unfeeling lot as could stand for laughing —outside in safety.

Anyhow, I found the yard was too small for both of us, even though I only claimed security in the corner where I had been flung, and was quite willing to leave the rest to my late mount. The stable-yard was a good place, but I reckoned outside was good enough for me. Watching my chance, I crawled on hands and knees to the gate, emerging crestfallen but safe amidst the chaff of the onlookers. But they were fortunately too intent on watching the horse's masterly efforts to get rid of the tightly girthed saddle to pay much attention to my discomfiture.

His bucking was certainly a work of art. He threw all his heart into the business, and seemed to be a pastmaster in all the dodges and tricks of the buck-jumper.

At times he seemed to curl up into a ball, so close together were his nose and his four hoofs. Round and round he flew in never-ceasing efforts, the sweat pouring from him, and every muscle of his body straining to the utmost. Such perseverance deserved success, and sure enough a loud snap and a hanging strap sent flying against the wall announced that Bucephalus had been successful in drawing from the saddle the iron D to which the crupper had been fastened. Here was "something accomplished something done," and now, knowing the end was near, he redoubled his efforts until the tightly girthed saddle, surcingle and all, was seen to be gradually slipping over the low withers. One or two supreme efforts, and at last he stood up proud and panting, with the saddle, all buckles fast and standing, lying where it had been sent flying by a vicious stroke of the fore-feet as it slipped over his head. Once rid of the objectionable trappings he became comparatively quiet, and was returned to the stock-yard. Thus ended my first and last attempt knowingly to mount a buck-jumper, though on several occasions since I did so unwittingly, with more or less—mostly less—success. This horse was an incurable buck-jumper, and came to an untimely end some months afterwards when, getting away with saddle and bridle and attempting to swim the river, he got tangled in the reins and was drowned in the lower reaches.

Most of the wild horses and cattle on this run were obtained by "trapping." Wire fences were erected for some eight or nine miles along the north side of the river, to prevent all stock running on that side from having access to water except at such points where "traps" and stock-yards had been fixed. At suitable spots the barrier of fencing was turned in and carried right across the usually shallow bed of the river, and,

gradually converging in V form, led up to the trap stock-yards with a double set of slip rails, so that one yard could always be left open. Most animals in hot climates rest during the heat of the day, coming out of the seclusion and shade of the thickets at night-time for feed and water; anyhow, this was the habit of the wild stock on this run, so all trapping had to be done at night.

The method of trapping is simple enough. We proceeded shortly after sundown to some spot outside the lines of converging fence some fifty yards or so below where the "run-in" crosses the watering-place. The air being rather keen towards morning, and some protection being needed from the bites of mosquitoes, which are not only able but willing to bite or sting right through shirt or moleskins, a good thick rug is a necessary equipment. Care had to be taken to keep the lee side of the fence, so as not to be "winded" by the wild herds or small mobs of cattle and horses tempted by thirst to brave the danger of the trap; for they well knew that their liberty was endangered when once within the lines of fencing. The slightest indication of the presence of the genus homo in the vicinity of the water would scare them away for that night, and some would go night after night without water until they either had to succumb to temptation or travel perhaps ten or twelve miles up the river where the line of fencing terminated. We had to lie silent and motionless for hours at a time, the slightest movement or rustle being enough to stampede the approaching mob. So a night's trapping was a tedious job in itself, and was in no way improved by the tormenting mosquitoes which hung in myriads over the wet sand and mud round the watering-place.

Some few evenings after the buck-jumper incident it

fell to my turn for a night at the trap—I had already been there once or twice with others to "learn the ropes"—and it was the occasion of my having a rather startling adventure. Arrived at my post I spread my rug, and lying down listened for the approach of any thirsty cattle or horses venturing into the trap. The night was closing in after a very hot day. Not a breath of wind was stirring as the smoke from my pipe, curling upwards round my head and the broad brim of my felt hat, effectually protected my face and neck from the hovering and bloodthirsty mosquitoes. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night except the distant barking of the station dogs hurling defiance in answer to the howls of their aboriginal relatives. The shriek of a bittern or some kind of night bird sounded startlingly now and again, or the sentinel of a flock of cockatoos, roosting in a neighbouring Flooded-gum, would ever and anon screech out a harsh "all's well," responded to at intervals from tree to tree.

A distant neigh, or the deep bass of some truculent bull far off to the northward, showed that the wild cattle and horses were beginning to emerge from their fastnesses and were engaged in warfare or refreshment; and in the far distance could be heard the rattle of many hoofs, as mobs of horses came galloping and playing on their way down to the river. Up to about two o'clock a.m. I had trapped two or three small lots of horses and three head of cattle. What they were like I could not tell in the darkness, but they did not appear to be very wild. There were a number of wild stock hanging round the trap most of the night, but too wary or not sufficiently thirsty to enter. Likely enough in the calm night air they could scent my presence. Anyhow, the long watching began to tell on me; I was wearied of keeping the mosquitoes at bay by smoking, so lying

down on the soft sand, still warm from the heat of the day, I drew my rug over, covering myself from head to foot and, making many resolutions not to succumb to temptation, was not long in forgetting them in the oblivion of a sound sleep.

How long I slept, and how many head of cattle and horses may have come in and departed unmolested, I know not, but I was suddenly awakened by feeling the heavy horse-rug being dragged backwards over my face as I lay on the broad of my back. Thinking it was some one from the station catching me asleep on watch, I sat up, feeling much the same as the sentinel on the eve of Austerlitz caught asleep by the Petit Caporal. A glance around, however, showed that no biped was near; yet where was my rug? A glance behind me explained the mystery. About five or six yards off a shadowy form was dragging something over the white sand. Guessing what was toward, I made a dash towards the night prowler, a full-sized native dog. His astonishment when I sprang to my feet must have been as great as mine when I found my rug disappearing in this uncanny manner. My yell and rush forward made him drop his prize and slink off into the gloom of the adjacent tea tree thicket. Securing the rug, I returned to the trap stock-yard and waited until the now rapidly increasing daylight showed me that all the fruits of my first night's trapping were one or two old mares and three tame working bullocks. No wonder they had not seemed very wild.

These wild native dogs are a knowing lot in some ways. They will counterfeit death in a manner which is hardly credible. I never believed the stories I heard on the station regarding their artfulness in this respect until on one occasion I had ocular demonstration of it. Some months after my arrival on the station I was sitting

reading one evening, in company with a young colonial who had ridden over from the Geraldine in search of a strayed horse. About ten o'clock the barking of the station dogs, which had been kept up more or less since darkness had set in, became suddenly more violent in the direction of the swamp, accompanied by the fierce growls heard only when dogs are worrying something. Charlie, my companion, started up, saying, "My word, they've got Master Dingo this time," and we both hastened towards where the dogs were gathered; and sure enough, when we had called the dogs off, there lay a native dog stretched out at the foot of a huge tea tree which overhung the swamp.

"There's a stiff 'un for you," said Charlie. "Yes, it's dead enough," said I, lifting the dog by the hind legs and letting it fall. "Do you think so," said he,—"would you like to bet on it?" I looked at the body once more, and then intimated that I was prepared to back my opinion to the extent of a stick of "negrohead." Surely, when four strong cattle dogs were satisfied that the dingo was not able to give another kick, and showed no desire to worry him any longer, surely I was justified in risking a stick of tobacco in the matter. Anyhow, "Good enough!" said Charlie. "Let's bring him to the front of the verandah where there's some light, and you'll see some fun." Accordingly we retraced our steps, followed by the dogs and dragging along the body, head downwards, limp and motionless, without the slightest sign of life.

At the house, where the light from the sitting-room lit up the space in front of the verandah, Charlie threw the dingo on the ground and set the dogs on it again. They started to worry it, but quickly desisted, evidently quite satisfied that the dingo had got sufficient "gruel," and needed no more. Taking it up again he dragged

it over the steps of the verandah and then threw it on the floor of the sitting-room, which was brilliantly lighted by a couple of kerosene lamps. Here we examined the motionless form at our leisure and found it was a full-grown bitch which had recently pupped, so there were likely to be hungry orphans left in some hollow or crevice of the rocky ranges. I turned the beast over, and kicked it without eliciting a sign of life. So, feeling I was in for a certain thing, I asserted my readiness to double the stake.

"I won't rob you," said Charlie. "Hold on whilst I get a bucket of water." Procuring a large horse bucket full of water from the spring, and setting it in front of the verandah, he once more held up the dingo by the hind legs, and, calling the dogs to keep handy, he asked whether I was still sure she was dead. I said "Yes," rather doubtfully though, for his confidence began to shake mine. "Well, if she's dead," said he, "you'll soon see a resurrection, if you never saw one before," and lowering her head into the water he held it there for a second or two, when, lo and behold! the apparently dead beast began to struggle, and came to life again. On his throwing it to the ground the angry dogs flung themselves on it and worried it until once more it gave up the ghost.

Charlie now said: "Do you think it's dead now?" "No," said I, for I was now as unbelieving as before I had been credulous. "Well, come inside, keep quiet and watch, and you will see the bitch come to life again on her own account, without water this time." "Meanwhile," said Charlie, "I'll have the gun ready for fear she gets off and escapes in good earnest." So we left the sham corpse stretched out and went inside the house, Charlie with gun in hand ready to let drive. The dogs had retreated to their sleeping quarters down by the

stable-yard, and all was once more still. We had not watched for long before she raised her head cautiously, without moving any other part of her body, and peered around with up-pricked ears to see if the coast was clear. Gradually, very gradually, she raised herself on her fore-feet and swayed from side to side with weakness, for she had been well worried. At last she was able to stand up, and pretty groggy she seemed to be on her legs as, with a last look all round, she started to slink off into the friendly darkness. But ere she had cleared the radius of the light the roar of the gun awoke the echoes in the surrounding hills, which re-echoed from range to range. And when the smoke cleared away, there lay Madame Dingo stretched out, never again to howl or prowl-o'-nights. At the short range the charge had nearly taken the head off her.

"She's dead enough this time, ain't she?" said Charlie.

"No, I don't believe it," was my reply.

"Nonsense! her head is all blown to pieces."

"I don't care," said I,—"she's not dead yet."

Seizing an axe, Charlie chopped the head clean off, saying, "Will that do for you?"

"No," said I with a laugh, "she's not dead, she's only shamming"; and so to bed, as Pepys has it.

CHAPTER V

Journey to Mooroomba—The Rocky Gorge—Great Heat—The wild Stallion—Pangs of Thirst—Lost in the Bush—My Despair—The Bush Fire—Still no Water—The Steed—Mooroomba—A long Drink—The one-legged Nigger—The Return—Notes on poisonous Snakes—My Bedroom—The Native and the Snake—The Farmer's Wife—Rapid Effects of the Poison—Roasted Snake—Lizards—My Snake-bite—The Islet—A Dash for Life—An anxious Night—Pioneers and the wild Blacks—Story of the Shepherd and the Flour-bag—Cattle Spearing—Neemya—Capture of Nooliagoowara—The Outlaw—I turn Policeman—Journey to Northampton—My Prisoner.

ABOUT twenty-five miles north of the river was a well of fresh water situated in the middle of a vast sand-plain, and it was the last well for eighty miles on the road to Sharks Bay. On some isolated clay flats, several miles from the well, plenty of grass grew for a month or so after the rains, and the herbage of the surrounding sand-plain being remarkably rich in those plants which horses would greedily eat, it was a favourite run for some of our broken-in stock horses, cart horses, and working bullocks. There was an old, one-legged native stationed at the well, who was kept in rations in return for keeping the troughs always full.

The track from the station to "Mooroomba," the native name of the well and the country around it, was but an ill-defined cart track, which in places was difficult for a "new chum" to follow; and where it ran through the alluvial clay flats above-mentioned, the track of cart-wheels was quite obliterated.

I had been out to Mooroomba on a previous occasion with others, who, knowing every inch of the country, as often as not struck across the sand-plain from point to point; thus I had not taken much notice of the lie of the country, a piece of carelessness which I regretted shortly after. About a week after the dingo incident two stock-horses at Mooroomba were wanted, so the Boss told me to ride out and bring them in.

I was quite proud of the commission, being my first journey in the bush alone, and I anticipated no difficulty in finding my way there, being assured I had only to keep to the track, which would lead me right up to the well. Early next morning I saddled an old black cob and started down to the ford, where the water just reached the saddle-girths, and, having crossed over, rode gaily along the track, which, gradually receding from the river, entered a thicket of paper-bark trees, and thence towards the foot of the high range, where the Murchison curved away to the westward towards the Indian Ocean, which could be seen in the distance, ablaze with the slanting rays of the sun, and looking like a sea of molten gold.

Here I found the track made straight for the high table-lands crowning the range, and led through a rocky gorge thickly overgrown with acacias, and in places so strewn with broken ironstone as to render travelling a work of difficulty. The gorge was very steep where the path wound unpleasantly close to the edge of the precipice, and where numerous hawks, disturbed by the ring of my horse's hoofs on the rocky ledges, soared hither and thither, shrieking and swooping around us. At length we climbed to the summit, reaching the table-lands, and before me, as far as I could see to the northward, extended an undulating sand-plain, bounded on the west by the sea cliffs and on the east by a forbidding-

looking and almost impenetrable thicket. The native name of this thicket was Bindarry; and it was in the rock-strewn recesses of the Bindarry Hills that the wild cattle used to lurk all day, only emerging at night to descend by precipitous passes to the rich well watered lowlands.

Riding across the open sand-plain, the heat was terrific. All around the heated and rarefied air quivered again, rendering all objects near the line of sight indistinct and trembling, as if seen through hot smoke. Round my head and that of the horse buzzed clouds of persistent flies, endeavouring to eat the eyes out of us. They swarmed on every scratch and sore place on my hands, climbing over each other in their eagerness to eat me all standing, so that I was forced to treat them to the fumes of some Virginia negrohead, which I cut up as I rode along. The monotony of the journey across the never-ending, undulating country was relieved now and again by mobs of wild horses. It was a pretty sight, as our presence was first noticed, to see the stallion-in-chief, with flowing mane and tail, and coat as gleaming and lustrous as satin, gallop towards us until sufficiently close to distinguish that we were members of that strange, baleful, and ever-to-be-avoided race of centaurs.

A loud blast from his nostrils, as he stood in graceful attitude regarding us, served at once as a note of defiance and of warning to the clustered mob of mares, foals, and yearlings, which immediately started off at a gallop. Wheeling round, he galloped after them for a bit, and then turned again facing us, when, if our motion was still in the direction of his seraglio, he would turn off and, soon catching up to the retreating mob, would urge on the stragglers by biting or menacing them, wheeling and heading his troop in the direction he desired them to take.

By the time we had travelled about ten miles I began to feel excessively thirsty, resulting from the great amount of moisture exuding from every pore, and to my dismay I found that I had neglected to carry any water in the canvas water-bottle attached to the saddle. Under ordinary circumstances this would only have caused more or less discomfort for want of a drink, but now many circumstances combined to aggravate my distress. This was the first time I had ever been thirsty with no immediate hope of being able to obtain water, for I knew, or thought, there was no fresh water within fifteen miles,—as a matter of fact, there was a beautiful spring of cool fresh water down in the sea cliffs about two miles off, but I did not know this at the time; and though many a time before in my life I thought I was thirsty, or imagined myself in want of water with an abundant supply within reach, yet now, in the middle of this sultry sand-plain, with a tropical sun scorching the very back off my shirt, I realised for the first time the terrible meaning of real thirst. The very fact that I had no water seemed to render my tongue more parched and furry each moment. I could not, though I tried hard to do so, refrain from thinking of water and the ecstasy of drinking it. To add to my distraction, I suddenly observed that there was no longer any track under my horse's feet, nor did I know how long I had strayed from the only guidance I had. Which way to turn I knew not. In a moment it flashed on me that I was "bushed." If I turned to the eastward the Bindarry thicket alone confronted me, and to the westward my progress would soon be arrested by the steep rocky cliffs bordering the Indian Ocean. Back south toward the Murchison I dared not turn, for I feared to succumb before reaching water. Truth to tell, I was so confused and bewildered by the sensation of being lost that

I was not even sure which way to turn to reach the river.

Mooroomba Well lay to the northward somewhere, I knew, but how could I hope to find it in this vast sand-plain. I might ride past it and never be a bit the wiser, and once past Mooroomba, I knew by report, there was a long stretch of eighty miles of waterless country. Whilst these reflections were passing through my mind I had reined up, but suddenly spurred my horse into an aimless gallop to and fro as I made some hurried, ill-judged, and not sufficiently extended casts in search of the lost track. Not being successful, I became more confused and miserable, riding on at random in a state of mind easy to imagine, and conjuring up all the tales I had heard of travellers dying of thirst in the bush, and only their dried-up skeletons being found, perhaps years afterwards, to tell their fate. To add to my distress, an immense bush fire seemed to spread out, barring the whole horizon in the direction I was heading, and a light breeze was bringing towards me the heat and pungent smoke from a line of fire fully five miles in extent. I rode despairingly first in one direction and then in another, but whichever way I turned the infernal bush fire seemed to be spreading out.

At last I felt fairly licked, and resigned myself to the guidance of the horse. Letting the reins slacken out, he started off in a leisurely manner, snatching a mouthful from the herbage as he went along, but, as I thought, constantly in the wrong direction. He kept heading straight for the line of fire. Had I only known then where that horse had been foaled, what a deal of despondency I would have been spared. Only one thought haunted me—the thought of clear, cold, fresh water. This one thought, through the many conflicting ones which crowded into my brain, constantly renewed

itself, and stood out in strong relief above all other thoughts. Water, water, water! Time and distance I took no note of as my horse gradually mended his pace. Had I only known then that he had been foaled at Mooroomba, and had travelled between there and Sharks Bay for years carrying the mails! Skirting along the line of fire, he kept on whilst I sat in the saddle nearly overcome with the heat, my head hanging mournfully downwards, when a sudden quickening of the paee caused me to raise my eyes, and lo! there, right in front of me, right under my nose almost, was the well and the stock-yard. I slipped my feet from the stirrups and sprang to the ground, so as to reach the brimming troughs as soon as my steed, and we both got our heads into them at the same moment, and side by side.

I could not wait to drink like a Christian, but plunged my head deeply into the trough, and swallowed the clear, fresh water as fast as it would flow down my throat. How much I drank I cannot even guess, but I must have been dangerously near bursting, for as I staggered upright and turned towards the cool shelter of the hut my stomach rebelled against the excessive load, and rejected every drop I had just swallowed. Meanwhile the old, one-legged native had come up unobserved by me, and had been watching my movements, and now told me in his barbarous English that if I drank any more water I would be dead very quickly, and urged me to lay down in the shade, which I did, whilst his woman kept pouring cold water on the back of my neck until I felt well enough to turn over and sleep, after instructing old Yombooroo to hobble out my horse and secure the others towards evening, when they came in to water. I slept until late in the afternoon, and awoke as well as if I had never known what thirst was. I found the horses were fastened up in the stock-yard and my own saddled

and bridled. After a bit of damper and drink of tea I haltered the two fresh horses, hitched them together, and mounted for a start back to the station. Before leaving I gave the old native a stick of tobacco, and emptied the contents of my sugar bag into his woman's outstretched hands, and rode off, confident that I could not lose the track on the return journey.

The evening air was cooled by the sea-breeze, and I had taken good care—and was ever after heedful in this respect—to fill the water-bag before leaving the well; and the horses leading easily, I rode along cheerfully enough until dark.

How I again got "bushed" soon after darkness had set in, and how this time I got tangled up in the Bindarry thicket and had to tear my way through the closely growing wattle and snakewood trees, over ground thickly strewn with massive boulders of quartz and ironstone, leading two horses and riding a third through the pitchy darkness; how my hat was lost and my shirt torn to ribbons as we struggled onwards; how, if I fell from my horse once on that memorable night I must have fallen twenty times, pulled backwards by the led horses as my own leaped over some obstructive boulder; and how, at length, fatigue compelled me to halt in the midst of the thicket until daylight, are matters too painfully humiliating to dwell upon.

At break of day, and after some more difficult travelling for another hour or so, I found we were descending a deep, thickly wooded gorge, at the foot of which we emerged on to the river flats just a few hundred yards from the proper track. Had I only struck off to the westward for a short distance during the night I would have regained the open sand-plain, whereas I must have been tearing and smashing my way through the dense thicket, parallel with and close to the track all the time.

On arrival at the station my torn and ragged appearance excited curious inquiries, but I evaded explanation the best way I could, and so ended my first journey alone in the bush.

Snakes were too numerous to be pleasant, both in and around the station, and it was long before I overcame my terror at night, listening to their rustling movements as they crossed the bedroom floor in pursuit of mice. The old hands on the station said that the thatched roof was a favourite refuge for the deadly black-snakes, which had been sometimes seen and killed as they hung downwards from the wooden rafters. The storeroom especially was full of them, and one day, when turning over some sacks of flour, I found the cast-off skin of a large snake, which must have selected this retired spot for his annual operation. One evening I was sitting alone in my bedroom reading by the light of a kerosene lamp. An unusually protracted rustling had been going on for some time behind a large chest near the window behind which a lot of old newspapers had fallen, but I did not take much notice, being absorbed in my reading. At last the rustling sounds seemed to be coming nearer. This caused me to close the book and look down. To my horror there was a large black-snake about eight feet long leisurely crossing the floor, right under my bamboo-lounge chair and within a foot or two of my bare legs.

My hair stood on end with terror. It was the first time I had seen a venomous snake at large, and in such unpleasant proximity too. I sprang on to the chest as smartly as a woman jumps for a chair or table at sight of a mouse. My movements startled the sinister-looking reptile, and in a moment it had disappeared down a hole in the wainscot the other side of the room. I was never so startled before or since. After a while, however, I became inured to the risks incurred by living in a

snake-infested dwelling; but it was dangerous to walk about the station after dark or even about the rooms without a light, for these poisonous pests were more given to coming out of their holes at night than in the day-time.

I was informed that if a dwelling-house, in a district where snakes are known to be numerous, is infested with mice, it is a sure sign there are no snakes about, but if the mice should suddenly disappear it may be taken for granted that a snake has taken up his quarters in the house somewhere,—behind the wainscot, between bales or boxes, under the flooring, or in the thatched roofing. Though poisonous snakes are numerous in Western Australia, the casualties are few. This may be attributable to the small population as compared with the enormous extent of territory; but, on the other hand, snakes are very timid, and will always get out of your way if possible. The danger consists in getting inadvertently between them and their holes of retreat, or in unluckily treading on one when basking asleep in the sun, in which case the response is swift; and if the bite be that of the black-snake, the whip-snake, or of some other varieties, the chance of recovery is so small as not to be worth mentioning.

In my own experience I only saw one fatal case of snake-bite. I was one day watching a native of Sharks Bay digging down a boodie-hole in search of the marsupial which he intended for his next meal. After digging for some distance he inserted his hand and arm, expecting to grasp his furry quarry, instead of which he received a sharp bite between the fingers, and at the same moment a snake which had been coiled up inside darted out past his shoulder, only to be killed the next instant by a blow from the ever-ready wannera of a native woman who was standing near by. The man lived for two hours or so longer than the snake, but as he died in great agony, and

his arm was swollen to nearly double its natural size, the snake did not succumb unavenged.

Another instance I remember happened in the neighbourhood of Guildford, a small town near Perth, the capital of the colony. In this case the victim was a white woman, wife of a local farmer. It was harvest time, and the husband and children were in the fields binding up the freshly mown crop. At noon the poor woman was returning to the house to prepare dinner, and whilst walking through the stubble she trod on a small but extremely venomous snake, which was outstretched asleep in the furrows. The snake instantly struck her twice on the fleshy part of the thigh, and though, when attracted by her shrieks, the husband rushed up and resolutely cut out the flesh all round the wounds, and cauterised them by means of gunpowder, whilst one of the sons rode post haste to Guildford for a doctor, all was of no avail. The unfortunate woman died within four hours of the moment she had been bitten.

There are several kinds of non-poisonous snakes in the colony. Notably the carpet-snake, which attains a great size, more especially in the north-west, where I have seen a carpet-snake skin over fourteen feet long hanging as a trophy from the rafters of a bush-bedroom. The aborigines are very partial to snake flesh, and I have eaten it myself, now and again, for want of something better. They cook it in their usual manner, scraping out a hollow in the hot ashes of the camp-fire, and coiling the snake therein. Ashes and embers are then heaped on top and it is left to bake. When withdrawn from the ashes the shrivelled skin is easily removed. The flesh of a snake when cooked in this manner resembles that of a chicken, though whiter and firmer. The meat is very insipid,—at least, all ever I tested was,—so I never experienced any

particular hankering after snake meat, though the natives assert that good fat snake is first-rate eating.

Whilst on the subject of reptiles, I may mention the numerous varieties of lizards throughout the colony—the house lizards, iguanas, bob-tailed iguanas, frilled lizards in the Kimberley district. Also numerous kinds of turtles and crocodiles are found in the tidal creeks or off the coast in the far north. I never saw a crocodile on the coast of North-West Australia, though there are plenty in places. The only time I ever clapped eyes on one was off the mouth of the Kali-mas River, at Soerabaya in Java. It was a hideous grey, slimy, cruel-looking monster, cruising round a large Chinese junk at anchor. The crew were cleaning the sides on bamboo stages, slung over the side close to the water's edge. My boatman—I was returning to my own vessel from the shore—called out to the Chinese, warning them that a crocodile was watching a chance to trip one of them from the stage into its own maw. It disappeared below the surface of the thick yellow tide as they assailed it with bamboo poles and chunks of rock ballast.

Before quitting this subject I will relate how, whilst on the Murchison, I experienced the agonies of fear which follow the bite of a venomous snake.

I had been stationed up the river for some days alone, herding a lot of "weaners," and had to be very vigilant to prevent them returning to the main herd before being thoroughly weaned. To make my task easier, I selected a small peninsula which extended into one of the long deep pools of the upper reaches. This peninsular was thickly bordered by yangits or bulrushes, was well grassed, had plenty of shady Flooded-gum growing on it, and had only one exit, a narrow neck of boggy ground joining the main banks of the river. This was as good as a fenced paddock for my purpose, so driving my herd of

some thirty or forty overgrown calves on to it I stationed myself near the entrance. As they were not likely to escape by swimming the river, I was now at liberty to hobble my horse and let him feed about, instead of having to be in the saddle all day heading back the restless herd. Time hung somewhat heavily on my hands, so when one afternoon the overseer rode out to see how matters were progressing, I was well pleased to have a long yarn with him as we sat smoking, under the shade of the riverside gums. The conversation happened to turn to the subject of snakes and snake bites, and my companion recounted many instances of loss of life in this connection. He told me how, only a few days previously when riding through a thicket, a black-snake, hanging on to some low bushes had struck at him as he rode past, fortunately fixing its teeth in his long riding boots, but so firmly that the snake had been dragged from the bush before it could extract its death-dealing fangs, and he had easily despatched it with the handle of his stock-whip. Many were the stories of narrow escapes I listened to that evening, so that when—having ridden with my friend part of his way home—I turned and rode slowly back to the solitary camp, my mind was full of nothing but snakes. It was now quite dusk as I rode along the track which led through some scrub and bushes, when suddenly I received a sharp sting on the thigh. A thrill of agonising, sickening fear came over me that some snake, coiled on one of the bushes—like the one I had so recently heard about—had bitten me. For a moment I lost all presence of mind. The relaxing effects of fear made me feel faint and sick. Here was certain death, in a most agonising form, staring me grimly in the face. Beads of cold perspiration broke out on my forehead, and I can vividly remember to this day the feeling, as if each hair on my head was bristling

as I realised the terrible consequences of this mishap. Overwhelming terror nearly paralysed me. What could I do? I was miles away from any help, and long before I could reach the station I must succumb to the insidious venom which was soon to be coursing through my veins unless speedily arrested. I could not hack the injured limb off, as might be possible had the sting been delivered on the hand or foot, and the difficulty of stopping the circulation unaided was insuperable. One only chance of safety presented itself to my distracted mind, and that was to cut away the flesh around the bite and cauterise it with the glowing end of a firestick, if only I could be in time, before the venom had been absorbed into my system.

Maddened with fear I drove the spurs into my horse and frantically galloped for the camp. As we dashed up to the fire I found that the logs had smouldered down during my absence. More precious time would have to be wasted in procuring a light. Furiously did I fling myself from the panting horse's back, and rushed around like a madman, flinging brushwood on the fire until a brilliant blaze illuminated the scene. In frantic haste I exposed my still smarting thigh. Sure enough, there was a small puncture from which a minute drop of blood had exuded. No time could be lost, but even in my extremity I had not sufficient nerve to cut deeply into my own flesh. Making two superficial slashes crosswise over the bite, I seized one of the glowing embers and held it into the wound until the torture forced me to desist before I had sufficiently cauterised the fatal spot, and until I felt it would be preferable to submit to my fate than to subject myself to further self-inflicted, and probably useless, pain.

It need hardly be added that I had no appetite for supper. The long night of anxiety can easier be

imagined than described. I was kept awake for hours, not only by the expectation of being seized each moment in the pangs of a horrible death, but by the more substantial suffering from the painful burn on my thigh. How long I tossed about on my rug by the-camp fire I don't know, but day was nearly dawning ere I was delivered from further anxiety in the merciful oblivion of a profound sleep.

When the heat of the sun beating down on my face awoke me from a refreshing sleep I was forced to admit that I felt none the worse for the accident, and gradually the conviction stole over me that I had been merely the victim of my own fears and the prick of some thorny bush. The sore place on my thigh reminded me for many days to come that pricks and punctures are not well served by means of fear and firesticks.

I kept my own counsel regarding this little incident when I returned to the station a week or so afterwards; but on the first opportunity I led the conversation again up to the subject of snake bites, and was informed that in case of a venomous snake bite, the imprint of the poison fangs invariably appears as two, and two only, horizontal marks, thus · ·; whereas the bite of a non-poisonous snake as invariably appears in two vertical rows, thus : :; a fact which I have taken on trust. I have no desire to test the truth of it; but had I known this on the eventful night in question I would not have been quite so ready to apply a glowing firestick to my extremely ill-used limb.

A change of subject from snakes to natives is quite a natural transition, if one is to accept Artemus Ward's dictum that "Injuns is poison wherever met"; and as the Australian aborigine is about as low in the scale of humanity as well can be, and the race is fast disappearing under the influences of settlement and civilisation, a few

particulars about these people may be of interest. Having come in contact with different tribes inhabiting a vast extent of territory extending from the Swan to the Fitzroy Rivers, my opportunities for noting their ways and customs have been more frequent than falls to the lot of most people.

The tribe of natives belonging to the country round this station, after receiving many stern lessons from the early settlers in the district, had become a quiet and harmless lot. Indeed, many of them were useful servants and excellent horsemen; but there remained one or two truculent warriors amongst the eastern tribes who still laboured under the delusion that they could safely defy the white man, and gave frequent proofs of this by spearing cattle and robbing the huts of outlying settlers and their shepherds.

In Australia generally there was never much love lost between the pioneer settlers and wild blacks, and in the early days of Western Australia matters were much the same in this respect, so I have listened to many grim stories of treacherous attacks on the one hand and merciless retaliation on the other.

Shepherds used to be often robbed of provisions and clothing when out on the run with their flocks. One old "lag" had been so often cleaned out by a certain tribe that he at length determined to put a stop to the nuisance. One morning before leaving his hut—so runs the legend—he carefully kneaded and baked his daily damper, leaving it in a prominent position; he also seemed to be busy with the flour bag, and might have been observed sprinkling something in the bag which contained his ration of sugar; after which, whistling for his dog and chuckling gleefully, the solitary old sinner strode away on the tracks of his distant flock. All was quiet round the hut towards evening, when the sun

was just disappearing behind the tops of some distant gum trees, and the tinkling of many bells, a cloud of dust, and an occasional bark announced the return to camp of the flock.

No sooner had the sheep settled down in the bush-yard for the night than the old shepherd, followed by his canine and sole companion, made tracks for the hut, only to find that once more he had been "cleared out." The damper was gone, the flour bag was nearly empty, and not a particle of sugar was left. Numerous straight-toed tracks, both within and without, showed that the delicacies would be shared amongst a goodly number. His vexation was great at being thus despoiled and at the prospect of no supper, and it is not to be wondered at. But why was it he continued chuckling to himself for the rest of the night? Why was it he would eat none of the flour left in the bag, but emptied it into the fire and burned all his ration bags? And why did he not report his loss to the ration-carrier on his next visit? The bush legend is silent on these interesting points; but perhaps the reason was that which prevented his hut ever being rifled again, and made not only the local tribe, but all natives within many miles radius, shun the neighbourhood as if it had been stricken with the pest. All that is certain is that at several places not far from the sheep-camp clouds of carrion crows, eagle hawks, and other obscene birds were gathered together for many days to come. Another fact may help to throw a little light on the matter, and that is, all shepherds used to be amply provided from the head station with small phials of strychnine for poisoning the wild native dogs and like vermin. Further, legend telleth not.

Far inland, away above the Geraldine bend of the river, a black rascal named Neemya had made himself notorious by his exploits in the cattle and sheep-spearing

line. The number of unexecuted warrants for his arrest was an ever-increasing one.

The mounted police had made special expeditions into the back country after this daring outlaw, but never managed to bring him in. He had been arrested once, but had managed to break away before reaching the settled districts.

Several months after my arrival at the station, reports of cattle having been speared in the upper lands were brought in from time to time by the local natives. At length it became certain that the redoubtable Neemya had turned his attention and the point of his spear towards the fat cattle of the station. The owner offered a reward of tobacco to any native giving information which might lead to his arrest. They were willing enough to earn it, for the outlawed savage belonged to another tribe, and, being a smart hand with the spear and a bully into the bargain, had made himself obnoxious to most of them; though some of the older natives, either from fear or friendship, used to keep up intercourse with him.

He well knew that every police trooper's or white man's hand was against him, so he was known to be very cunning and wary in his movements. Our surprise, then, may be imagined when one evening a native lad came up to the verandah and informed the Boss that Neemya and two of his pals had paid a nocturnal visit to some of the station natives, and was at that moment seated at their camp-fire. After a hurried consultation it was decided to surround the camp and secure Master Neemya by means of a "rush in." The Boss and three others, having armed themselves with handcuffs, etc., started off for the swamp, near which the native camp was temporarily situated; the aborigines very seldom camp in the same place for many days at a time. Cautiously

feeling their way through the darkness and the thick undergrowth, dreading each moment that the snapping of some dried stick or that the mongrel curs belonging to the native camp might give the alarm, they glided on until the fitful glimmer of the camp-fires warned them to redouble their precautions. At length the camp was fairly surrounded, and a rush was made for the dusky group round the fire, each man grasping the first native he could tumble on to. There was a short tussle ere the four prisoners were secured, amidst the shrieking of the startled women and children and a chorus of yelping from the dogs. Some dried reed and brushwood being flung on the fire, it was discovered that three out of the four were station natives, and the fourth, though a stranger, was certainly not Neemya. It turned out that this wary customer had been restless and uneasy, and had seized his spears and flitted into the sheltering darkness of the swamp just about five minutes previous to the raid. The stranger was Nooliagoowarra, who was also an outlaw and much wanted by the police, being a kind of lieutenant and spy for Neemya, and a notorious cattle-spearer, so the raid had not been wholly without results. A trace-chain and padlock having been procured, he was secured to a gum tree for the night, and next morning I was told off to conduct the prisoner to the nearest police station.

I did not much care for the task, but as no one else could be conveniently spared, the boss, who was also a J.P. for the district, swore me in as a special constable, and I made a start with the dusky skinned wrong-doer. I was warned against letting the prisoner escape, and to be on my guard against any attempt at rescue; so I had to arm myself for defence during the pilgrimage. We made a short cut across the sand-plain instead of following the main track round the sinuous course of the river, thus saving several miles by the time we descended from the

plateau near to a fine spring of fresh water about eleven miles from the station. Here we halted for a minute or two, as Nooliagoowarra wanted a drink—a native seldom passes a water-hole without drinking, whether thirsty or not—and then we proceeded on at a pace which was regulated by the walking powers of the prisoner. Passing across some clayey ground called Yandagie, famous for kangaroos, we saw some forty or fifty of them feeding on either side of the road. Travelling so slowly as we were, they did not seem much scared. Some old "boomers" reared themselves up and regarded us curiously at a distance of about one hundred yards, a distance which they took good care, however, should not be diminished. A few young does took fright, and bounded away full speed in the long swinging leaps peculiar to these marsupials, but most of the troop kept their ground, simply leaving off feeding to sit up in quaint attitudes until we had passed out of sight. When we got dead to leeward I noticed the disagreeable smell which emanates from them, an odour which is very strong when these animals are being pursued on a hot day.

Nooliagoowarra's hunting instincts were aroused at the sight of game, and he earnestly begged me to shoot one, but as I had only a Colt's six-shooter, and was not very confident that I could hit a haystack with it at one hundred yards, let alone a kangaroo, I declined, to his great disgust, and proceeded on our journey. We camped that night not very far from the sea-coast near a native well, and after a good supper we both felt in a better humour than when slowly toiling along on our wearisome march. This was manifested on my part by chaffing Nooliagoowarra as to his chance of escaping from custody, and as to his probably prolonged residence in one of Her Majesty's Convict Depôts on Rottnest Island. He seemed more interested than concerned in the matter,

and retorted by dim hints that I would never reach the settlement alive, being certain that his ally Neemya would be on our tracks, and would surely drive a spear through me as we journeyed on next day. In such friendly and pleasant converse the evening passed away, until sleep put an end to it. Next morning I saddled up before sunrise, and we continued our journey without any incident worth recording, and about noon on the third day out I had the satisfaction of delivering the prisoner to the sergeant of police at the settlement, and returned to the station alone. Some months afterwards we had the mortification of hearing that Nooliagoowarra had been released for want of evidence. This is frequently the case with native prisoners where the witnesses are of the same race, for the unwilling witnesses have to be arrested and brought in with as much trouble as has to be used in securing the culprits.

CHAPTER VI

Notes on the Aboriginal Natives of the Lower Murchison—Spear Making—Spear Throwing—Native Duels—Boojarri's Treachery—The "Kyli" or Boomerang—Feats of skilled Throwers—The Women and the Dogs—Husbands and Wives—Story of Boboowah and his Women—The Camp at Nungagee Spring — A Warm Bed — Boboowah's mild Rebuke — Marriage — Slavery of the Women—Customs.

THE natives about the Murchison and Sharks Bay are a poor lot physically in comparison with the northern tribes, but in many respects are superior to the latter in intelligence; and, having more resources in the way of game, they are not so given to cannibalism as their northern brethren. They are renowned amongst other natives for their skill in fashioning the light fighting or hunting spears used throughout the southern parts of the colony; and I have heard that they do a considerable trade bartering their surplus spears for other weapons,—for "willgie" or red ochre, feathers, and other savage appliances or ornaments.

I once came across a native camp in the back country in which an old man was engaged making these spears. The shafts are almost eight feet long, and about half an inch or more in diameter. The spear head and shaft are all one piece, one end being scraped down to a fine point and fitted with one or more barbs, either of wood or broken glass, according to the purpose for which the spear is intended, either for hunting or fighting. The

other end has a small concavity bored in it to fit on the peg of the wommera or throwing-stick.

The wood selected is that of a kind of tea tree which grows fairly straight; but the spear, in the rough, is far from possessing the straightness of the finished weapon. The rough sticks are first cleaned of twigs and peeled down to the heart wood, all knots being removed, and the whole scraped down to the required thickness with a piece of sharp flint. The old nigger I saw was seated by a smouldering fire, into which he kept thrusting one of the twisted ill-shaped sticks; and, by bending them this way and that over a water-worn boulder whilst hot, he was converting them into fine straight spears. The hardening and shaping of the points was done by charring the end and scraping away the charred portion until the remaining heart wood was almost as hard as iron, and could be scraped down to a needle-like point. The butt end was then whipped round with fine kangaroo sinews; this again was covered with a coating of hot Black-boy gum, and the spear was ready for use.

Some of the natives were smart hands with the spear, and could hit a very small mark at about thirty yards distance. On one occasion I stuck a ramrod in the ground and, balancing a stick of negrohead tobacco on top, promised Jackathi—the laziest nigger on the "run"—that it should be his if he speared it at twenty-five yards, which I measured off with ample strides. I warned him that the mere knocking down of the prize would not count. He lounged up and apparently without any careful aiming let fly. The ramrod was not touched, but the slim stick of tobacco was fairly transfixed and carried off on the spear's point. I have seen plenty of spear throwing since, but have never seen this beaten.

In throwing a spear, whether by hand or throwing-stick, an Australian native never holds it in the manner

seen in pictures of javelin, dart, or assegai throwers, namely, grasped about the centre of the shaft. He invariably holds the long spear by the extreme butt end. Next in importance to the art of throwing the spear with unerring accuracy is the as difficult, and more exciting one, of dodging the adversary's spear point. To become proficient in these two exercises requires incessant practice from a very early age. It is most interesting to watch a couple of accomplished warriors alternately receiving or delivering spears, whether in earnest duel or in mimic warfare with pointless light darts.

At Sharks Bay I once happened to see a sudden quarrel decided by appeal to arms. The two combatants each seized up a bundle of spears and, turning up the beard into the mouth and holding it there by the teeth —a sure sign that mischief is meant, rushed forth from the camp amidst the shrieks of the women, the shouting protests of the old men, and the inevitable howling of the camp dogs. The first one ready, launched a spear with all his force; his adversary seemed to be quite prepared, as if standing on springs, and watching every movement of his opponent. He diverted the flying weapon by a slight motion of his long narrow shield at an angle which seemed a very slight one, but which was just enough. Hardly had the spear glanced off, indeed before one would think he had time to perceive it, another spear came whizzing towards him; this time an upward movement of the arm was all that was necessary, his practised eye watching the approaching spear as it hissed past between his elbow and ribs. Again came the menacing point of a third spear, seemingly direct for the pelvis. The direction was again beautifully judged, a mere swerving of the hips in the nick of time without any other motion evaded the barbed missile. But the next spear followed so closely and so straightly that only

a bound upwards was sufficient to escape the blow. But now his adversary's spears were exhausted, and quick as thought one of his own was fixed and hurled viciously towards the other, and then the duel continued until one of them, miscalculating either time or direction, was speared through the thigh, and the fight came to an end at once.

It is a point of honour with these naked duellists not to move off the ground when dodging a spear, and to avoid the menacing point by the slightest possible movement. Any jumping about or leaping from side to side is looked upon as bad form, though of course it has to be resorted to at times. The more imperceptible the motion of the body the more skilful the warrior. A slight movement which allows the spear to pass between the legs, or to whiz past within an inch of the hip, never fails to elicit the applause of the onlookers.

Little importance seems to be attached to a spear wound in the legs or arms, and the natives seldom seem much the worse for one; unless, indeed, some unlucky shaft cuts an artery, in which case the injured native may as well begin to sing his Swan-song; for these primitive folk have no notion how to stanch this kind of wound. However near the surface the spear may have penetrated, the shaft is drawn through the wound before the spear is extracted, as the natives are reluctant to break the spear. Moreover, it is invariably barbed for some distance from the point, and is sometimes encrusted with cruel looking rows of broken glass embedded in a coating of Black-boy gum. Whether it be that they have stronger constitutions than white men, or whether their simple diet and open-air life gives nature more scope to exercise her healing powers, I cannot tell; but they often get over a severe wound in a truly marvellous manner, without any medical or surgical aid at all.

In Sharks Bay, near Tarmalla, on one occasion the Boss sent a station native on a message to the pearling grounds some thirty miles distant, and provided him with a horse for the journey, telling him to lose no time in returning with an answer. Boojarri, however, had some fish to fry of his own, and seized the opportunity to pay off a grudge of long standing he had against one of the local tribe, who, being a better spearsman than himself, had deprived him of the services of some dusky female by summarily carrying her off almost from under his nose. This affront had rankled in Boojarri's mind for many months, so before starting he provided himself with one of the long heavy spears used by the Sharks Bay aborigines, a spear which is altogether too heavy for throwing, so is used only for "jobbing" at close quarters. It usually has three rows of barbs extending about eight inches from the point downwards, carved out of the solid wood. On leaving the out-station, as we subsequently heard, he rode straight away to his destination and delivered his letter; but, having learned from the natives around the Pearling Camp that his hated rival was camped alone with his women a long way inland, he could not see his way to return to Tarmalla unavenged.

Riding swiftly inland, the locality indicated was reached towards sundown, and, having hitched the tired horse to a tree, he prowled round searching for the tracks, or the smoke from the camp-fire of his foe. Fortune favoured him. Ere the sun had set he managed to hit off the tracks, and followed them towards a secluded valley near a native well. Here he decided to conceal himself until, favoured by darkness, he could approach the camp, effect his purpose, and retreat to the place where he had left his horse.

When the brief Austral twilight had succeeded the setting sun, Boojarri had the pleasure of observing a

gleam of light from the direction of the water-hole, which assured him that his enemy Woondooroo was not far off. Waiting patiently until it was quite dark, he at last decided that the moment for his long-postponed vengeance had arrived. Grasping the heavy spear and creeping stealthily along he approaches the fire from the lee side, so as not to give the alarm to any watchful dogs in the solitary camp, and at last arrives close to the circle of light from the fitful gleams of the camp-fire. He sees the hated co-respondent and the two women peacefully eating their supper, all unconscious of danger. Silently, swiftly he glides round. He is right behind old Woondooroo. Slowly he rises. He grasps the spear in both hands. Bounding forwards, he drives the spear into the shoulders of his victim. He struck with such force that the point emerged a good twelve inches from under the right breast. Leaving the spear where it was, and regardless of the shrieking women, he darted off into the darkness again, and, regaining his horse, rode away at a headlong pace.

Many months elapsed ere we again saw Boojarri, but we soon got news of his treacherous action; and ten days or so afterwards, whilst tracking some strayed cattle, the Boss, another white man and myself, called at the water-hole where old Woondooroo had been attacked. To our surprise we found the old nigger sitting up, little the worse for having had eight or nine feet of an inch-thick spear-shaft driven through his thorax. There, sure enough, were the two fresh wounds, one just below the left shoulder blade and the other a little below the right nipple. How he escaped without injury to some vital organ only an anatomist can explain. One of his women said the spear was too tough to break, so she had to draw the whole shaft through his chest. The old sinner seemed comfortable enough, bar a hacking cough, and was

more concerned about tobacco and sugar than his wounded condition, promising, with many a wag of the head, that if he could only get the same chance at Boojarri, he, the said Boojarri, would not be wanting anything in the way of refreshment. Many months afterwards old Woondooroo was well and hearty, and, for all I know to the contrary, may be alive to this day. This story savours somewhat of the marvellous, but I can only assert it is a fact.[1]

The "kyli" (or boomerang) is a weapon which the Murchison natives are not so proficient in using as those of the southern districts. I have seen a Toodyay native throw a kyli so as to make it strike the ground about ten yards off and then soar upwards, describing three complete revolutions in mid-air before finally falling only a few yards from whence it had been thrown. The motion of the kyli when thrown is very complicated: it revolves on its own axis whilst revolving in a wide circle, having the thrower for a centre. The wonderful part of it is, that this peculiar weapon seems to gain impetus in the first portion of its flight (an impetus which appears to be considerably in excess of that with which it leaves the hand of the thrower), until a maximum point is reached, when its speed, and the speed with which at the same time it is revolving on its own axis, diminishes gradually, until it falls to the ground.

The native women about the Murchison, and throughout the colony as far as my travels and experiences have

[1] In this connection it may be interesting to quote the following from the *London Daily Mail* of 18th May 1897, extracted from the *British Medical Journal*:—

"The vitality of the Mussulman Cretans is remarkable. A man at Spinalonga had been transfixed by a bayonet at the level of the seventh rib, right side, and also received a bullet clean through the neck, from one sterno-mastoid to the other; in three weeks he was well, having had no surgical treatment beyond a first dressing."

extended, are treated merely as conveniences, and are looked upon as inferior in importance to either the children or dogs. The women themselves think a lot of their dogs; for should one of them die they wail and weep for weeks after, and mourn as seriously as they would for one of their own kind. I have seen a native woman nursing a young puppy which was quite old enough to be weaned; but I cannot say whether this was done out of especial regard for the dog, or for the same reason which induces these women to suckle their children until they are sometimes ten or twelve years of age.

Generally speaking, the native woman of Australia may be compared to an animated gargoyle as regards looks. The man's authority is absolute, he seldom brooks any questioning, and maintains a most strict discipline, as the following incident will prove.

I was once ordered away to Mooroomba with a draft of cattle, and one of the station natives, "Boboowah," with his two women, wanting to go to the same place, volunteered his services, as he would thus be sure of a horse for the journey. His offer was accepted. He sent his women ahead carrying all his traps, telling them to prepare a camp at a place called Nungagee, an out-of-the-way spot half-way down the cliffs bordering the Indian Ocean. The approach to it was difficult to find, and still more difficult to penetrate, winding as it did zig-zag fashion down the steep precipitous hillside, and through an almost impassable barrier of stringy-bark thicket. At the foot of the pass one issued on to a kind of terrace. A long narrow tract of rich soil, thickly clothed with a species of tufty grass, extended north and south about half a mile, surrounded by beetling cliffs from which there was no exit except by the one and only winding passage above mentioned. On the west side this natural

paddock was bounded by perpendicular cliffs, at the foot of which one could hear the distant roaring of the incessant breakers ever beating against the iron-bound coast.

There was a fine spring of clear fresh water welling up from the side of a hillock, down which the water trickled to a natural platform, where a row of ever-full troughs had been fixed, so that any cattle or horses turned out here needed no minding. It was for this reason Boboowah had fixed on Nungagee as our first camping-place. Late in the evening we arrived at the brink of the precipitous descent, and by dint of driving, whipping, and yelling we got our unwilling herd to venture into the almost invisible pass, through which they had to string themselves out in single file and slowly wind their way down the spiral descent. Their reluctance to enter the forbidding rock-strewn passage contrasted strongly with their evident delight when they emerged on to the fertile terrace. They kicked and capered with delight, lowing and bellowing to each other as they crowded round the troughs full of cool fresh water, and then spread out to enjoy themselves for the rest of the night.

We unsaddled and proceeded where the camp-fire announced the presence of Boboowah's women. The only drawback to Nungagee as a camping-place was the scarcity of firewood; but the women had employed their time in collecting fuel of any kind, and the fire was kept alive with dried cow-dung, so that we managed to cook a damper and boil some tea without much trouble.

On this occasion I learned a "bush-wrinkle," in observing the tactics of one of the women to ensure a warm night's rest for herself. Boboowah had elected to share his frowsy rug with the younger of the two called "Noolya," so the other had to lay her account with keeping herself warm the best way she could. I saw her start another fire a few yards away from the camp.

Here she crouched huddled up in the scanty covering afforded by a greasy old kangaroo-skin rug, which had perhaps formed part of her trousseau, until her fire burned down to a heap of smouldering embers. She now spread the fire out as much as possible on the light sandy soil, and carefully brushed away the live embers, whisking some sand over the hot ground until the heat was just about bearable; she spread out her skins on the warm place and, grunting with satisfaction, was soon sound asleep. I envied her warm berth as I lay shivering under my rug, for the night air was keen. I determined to follow her example in future.

Early next morning we saddled-up, mustered the cattle, and drove them up the winding pass on to the open sand-plain above. The women had loaded themselves with their gear, the less favoured one of the two being obliged to carry more than her share of the garbage they looked upon as valuables. Boboowah had mounted his horse, and had taken it into his head that he would be less incommoded if he carried nothing in his hand, so, threw down in front of the woman who had by far the biggest load the bundle of spears he had intended to carry. He was about to ride on after the cattle, when the woman was unwise enough to object, complaining that the younger and more favoured woman was better able to carry the extra load. He reined up his horse, dismounted, walked up to the bundle of spears, and drawing one from the bundle, quietly but firmly drove it right through the thigh of the mutinous female before I had time to interfere. He did not speak a word, but remounted to ride on after the cattle. The woman did not even shriek, but sat down and had drawn the long barbed shaft through her leg before many seconds had elapsed, and with the assistance of her mate once more resumed her load, this time including the bundle of

spears. She trudged away after the cattle with a small stream of blood trickling down her naked legs. I called Boboowah back, made him dismount, and told the wounded woman to mount in his place; but she was too afraid of the consequences to do this, so I had to ride on, and saw neither of the women until our twenty mile journey was finished towards sundown, when the two women came into camp and sat silently by the fire. The injured one seemed none the worse for this sharp lesson; and, comparing her treatment with that which brutal husbands at home often mete out to their wives, I was forced to admit that the savage woman was no worse off than many of her civilised sisters.

Marriage, as understood amongst civilised nations, is a state of which the Australian nigger has no conception. He looks upon a woman as a chattel, which he obtains and holds by force alone. He values her merely as a convenience, and a machine for procuring a supply of edible roots and other kinds of food when he has either had bad luck or has been too lazy to hunt.

The woman is his slave, and would be surprised to find herself regarded in any other light. She waits on him hand and foot, and is fortunate if the only recompense she receives is no worse than an occasional blow with a club. Of course, this state of things does not exist between husband and wife in Merry England; and the papers must be wrong when they record like things amongst us.

CHAPTER VII

Life on the Murchison Station—Hunting wild Cattle—The Stock-horse—Work in the Stock-yards—Exciting Moments—Stand Clear—Wild Horses—The golden Bay—A long Gallop after Horses—I come to Grief—Yarding the golden Bay—"The Great Ride"—The Down-river Flats—The Forty-mile Sand-plain—The dark bay Colt—"Daydream's" Habits—The Plan of Campaign—Approach of the wild Horse—Headed off—Marvellous Endurance—A futile Chase—Diving Horses—Night Alarm—Baron von Mueller—The gloomy Policeman—Adieu to Murchison River.

LIFE on the Murchison was varied and healthy. The work was not too hard, and I managed to pick up a good deal of bush-craft before I left this station. The pleasantest and most exciting part of my duties was that of taking part in wild cattle and horse-hunting expeditions. In the case of wild-cattle, the long waiting and watching for the wild herds to come out of their fastnesses, attracted by our quiet herd, often seemed tedious work; but the exciting part came in when we suddenly darted from our hiding-places with loud yells and cracking of stock-whips to gallop round between the wild mob and the edge of the thicket to force them to take refuge in the midst of our tame "Push." This they generally did; but often enough they turned rowdy and refused to be headed away from their beloved thicket on the sides of the ranges, where they knew their freedom lay. Then pursuers became pursued, and you had to ride smartly to save a capsize or a horse from being gored. An old stock-horse, however, generally knows a thing or two in

connection with wild cattle; and if, perchance, he has at any time had the bad luck to have been horned, he takes particularly good care, without any need for guidance from his rider, that the same mishap does not occur again. Once a wild mob has been driven into the tame herd, little difficulty is experienced in driving them to the nearest stock-yard with active horsemen in front, behind, and on each wing of the mob. A week or two of herding with the others renders them amenable to discipline, until enough cattle are collected for drafting from the station for sale.

The work in the stock-yards was rough and dangerous. Each bull, heifer, or calf had to be roped by means of a catching-stick. Whilst the surging mass of infuriated cattle huddled together and struggled round and round the enclosure, endeavouring to escape the dreaded rope, thick clouds of pungent dust rendered the operator's task more difficult, and at the same time often hid the mad charge of some furious beast until it was nearly on top of him. My word, yes! one had to keep eyes lifting when drafting or catching any of these wild "warraguls." Once the rope was round the neck or horns of the selected beast, the end was seized by the assistants, a turn taken round one of the corner posts, and the slack hauled in as the terror-stricken animal reared, kicked, writhed, and bellowed round the yard until at length it was hauled chock up. Near by, just outside the rails, burned a fire in which the branding irons were heated; a leg rope deftly fixed and hauled taut reduced the victim to helplessness during the few moments required by a skilful cattleman to do all necessary, and complete the operation by the application of the red-hot branding iron to rump or shoulder, as the case might be. "Stand clear" or "mind your eye" was the cry when the ropes were slackened, and the terrified beast was once

more free, for it invariably charged, dashing itself against the massive posts and rails in the endeavour to avenge the indignities it had undergone, and not until it had exhausted all hope of revenge would it be safe to venture into the yard again. The work was rough and exhausting, but the many hair's-breadth escapes from the sharp horns of some rowdy bullock, and the laughs which greeted some special display of agility in climbing or tumbling hastily over the rails with a pair of horns unpleasantly close, served to enliven the work. The heat, the thick clouds of cow-dung dust overhanging the stock-yard, where some fifty or sixty head of cattle were trampling about, the sickening smell of burning flesh when the branding iron sank deeply in, the toil, the sweat, and the numerous falls were all forgotten in the wild excitement.

Our work amongst the wild horses was hard enough, and entailed perils to life and limb peculiar to this kind of work, which, though neither so unpleasant nor arduous, was, on the other hand, not so profitable to the owner as a good day's cattle hunt. If, owing to recent rains or other causes, we were unable to trap wild horses, we would have to take a turn at hunting them in, which was always a welcome change from other station work, so I will now attempt to describe a typical day's hunting on the Murchison River.

Several days previously four or five of the swiftest saddle horses were stabled up, so as to be in condition for a long gallop. On the appointed day each rider saddled-up before an early breakfast, and carefully examined girths, surcingles, and stirrup leathers. After a hasty meal, off we started, pipes alight, and gaily discussing the mobs we should fall in with, the places where particular horses were known to run, the probable course the "gallopers" would take to evade the stock-yards, the best points where to head them, and such other topics as

were suggested by the work in hand. Quietly jogging along up river, we forded the pools above Toolonga and climbed the southern sand-plain gradually rising up from the river valley, until we reached the plateau extending as far as the eye could reach to the eastward, and richly overgrown with varied and bushy herbage, where the ground was cut up with countless horse tracks and horse roads, all converging towards the pools where these sand-plain mobs were wont to drink. And now we had to keep our eyes open, for bush-bred horses are quick to notice any moving object. So we halted whilst saddles were again firmly fixed ready for a long gallop. The horses on this part of the run had been so frequently chased that when they sighted a mounted horse they would lose no time in watching its movements, but would put their tails up at once and stretch out away from the river.

As we rode along we saw several small mobs of mares and foals, but none resembling the lot we were after this particular day, a mob consisting of several fine three-year-olds, some mares and yearlings, and a bright bay stallion with a remarkable golden tinge to his glossy coat. This golden bay was the object of the day's ride. The Boss had been offered a price for him by a neighbouring squatter. Kangaroos and wild turkeys were numerous on the open sand-plain, the latter allowing us to ride close up before they reluctantly, and with much preparatory wing flapping, rose into flight as if aware that we had neither guns nor desire for shooting.

When we reached the place where the golden bay usually ran, no horses were visible, but some fresh tracks trending towards a gap in the sandstone ridge crowning the rising ground convinced the overseer that they would be found not far off in a hollow the other side of the ridge. A hasty consultation was held as to the part each

rider was to take, whether on either wing or in the rear, towards which yard they were to be driven, and what action was to be taken when, if hard pressed, the mob should split out, etc. It was settled that one hand and myself should take the rear, the overseer and another hand the outside wing, whilst the Boss himself was to ride on the side next the river to keep them from crossing except at the most favourable point. Now we rode on towards the crest of the ridge, whence we got a good view of the undulating ground beyond; and there, sure enough, in the hollow, clustered round an old dead banksia tree, were the horses we were seeking. They were peacefully enjoying what siesta they could, though swarms of flies kept their long unkempt tails in constant motion, and their heads shaking from side to side to escape the buzzing pests.

One or two foals were lying down, and others were cropping the low bushes in the vicinity of the horse-camp. The golden bay was there, and very wide awake too, for as we rode down the pass he at once saw us and let out a warning blast from his nostrils which startled the whole troop into activity. The outlying foals and yearlings galloped quickly into the rest of the mob, whilst the leader, the golden bay, trotted towards us for about a hundred yards to reconnoitre. With his flowing mane and tail, his long forelock almost concealing his eyes, his golden-hued coat, his graceful movements and fine form, he looked a perfect picture. But he did not take many seconds to form an unfavourable opinion of us. With a shrill piercing neigh of defiance he wheeled on his haunches and galloped after his harem already in motion. To note all these particulars, which take so long to describe, was only the work of a moment, ere tightening the reins and clapping in spurs we started after the fast receding mob.

Away we galloped over the rough uneven ground, our horses crushing through the coarse undergrowth, now and again floundering in some cluster of boodie holes, but cleverly avoiding a fall. They pulled hard, seeming to enjoy the sport, but we only allowed a pace which enabled us to hold our own. As we galloped onwards the pace became steadier, for we were now passing over a stretch of loose sand through which the horses had to struggle, sinking deeply in at every stride. Here the riders on the outer wing had to show the "warraguls" that a mounted horse, in spite of the weight, can best them. They were heading for a gap in the hills through which we did not want them to pass, so by cutting off corners and riding cleverly our comrades just managed to reach the dangerous point in time to head them.

Wheeling off, the mob then steered away down the incline towards a favourite crossing between two of the deep pools, but before they could reach this—and they strained every muscle to do so—the Boss had galloped round the base of the incline and headed the golden bay, who was leading, away from the river. Baffled once more, the gallant leader with a neigh of encouragement to his followers galloped on in the direction we wanted, but which he didn't want to take. We were now in for a long steady run. The services of our rear guard, my mate and self, here came into play by keeping the flying troop together. For the weaklings and the faint-hearted began to show signs of distress; they no longer carried their tails up, but trailed them forlornly, whilst whinnyings of expostulation and distress were ever and anon exchanged between mares and their younglings. But the master of the mob would not allow any falling out from the ranks as yet. He was not so hard pushed himself as to give the signal for *sauve qui peut.* Now and again he shortened his stride and took the rear,

galloping from wing to wing, with a bite for one and a menacing display of teeth for another, striving to keep his followers together, and going hard in the only direction open to them.

We were now nearing the crossing towards which it was imperative that the hard-pushed horses should be headed; and as the overseer's gallant chestnut shot ahead to turn them towards the rocky pass overhanging the river flats, the golden bay seemed to guess our purpose, for henceforth he gave no attention to his followers, but galloped for all he was worth to avoid being forced down the pass. Consequently the whole of the mob suddenly adopted the last resource of a hunted herd, a general "split out." Though this manœuvre forced us to let one or two mares and foals, and even one or two fine colts, slip past and gallop off unmolested, yet by closing in and riding hard we succeeded in heading the remainder—including the coveted bay—down the pass. The pace was terrific as we raced down the boulder-strewn ravine, over ground which no other than sure-footed bush horses could tackle without coming to grief. We had no time to heed the dangers. The hunted mob emerged on to the river flats, startling into shrieking activity a cloud of cockatoos perched among the Flooded-gums lining the course of the stream. As we crossed the river bed the clattering hoofs of the wild mob dashing over the pebbly ridges were deadened for a moment or two by the splashing of water, which they sent flying upwards in sparkling sprays that hardly had time to fall back into the shallow stream ere another shower was dashed upwards by the hoofs of our own gallant steeds. One of these, ridden by the Boss, began to show signs of distress, for he was a heavy-weight, and now had to pull up, leaving the light brigade to carry on the chase. My own horse, a half-bred Arab, was still going well. I rode under nine

stone, and had had no occasion, so far, to put on any extra spurt, so I felt pretty sure of galloping this long and exciting run to a successful finish. Little did I know that before we reached the "run in" I would receive a sharp lesson in bush riding which would once more take the conceit out of me.

Half a mile farther on, the sharp rise of the high ranges forced both pursuers and pursued to slacken speed; and here the chase more resembled a game of skill than a matter of hard galloping. The wild mob—now reduced to five including the bay—made strenuous efforts to "split out" and seek each one a separate escape in the many deep ravines which ran in great boulder-strewn fissures down the sides of the range. It was well our horses were as sure-footed as cats amongst the loose rocks and dead timber, and on the verge of the deep gullies, as we cantered, walked, or trotted through a complete network of obstacles, or there would have been more than one broken neck that day. However, by good luck, we managed to clear the ticklish places, and by this time had the wild horses well in hand. They were so far beaten that though they still struggled for freedom, the pace was not so severe; and it was now easier to head them in any direction without an attempt to "split out."

The line of fencing near the station was close at hand, when our course led us into a dense forest of banksia trees, the low outstanding limbs forming a formidable obstacle to gallop through, at least to an inexperienced bush rider like myself. My companions seemed to think nothing of it; they were flying along at top speed, in and out between the solid trunks and low outstretched branches; and far from slackening speed, as I did, they had to put on a spurt, for the horses made a final effort to "split out" in the comparative shelter of the forest.

For a moment I could see them turning in all directions, could hear the yells of my comrades above the crashing of timber, smashed down *en passant* by the flying mob. I drew rein on the verge of the wood, but the desire to take part in the "run in" and the fear of ridicule proved stronger than my discretion, so I rammed the spurs into my eager horse, and determined to take my chance of a spill. I had not far to ride before I came to grief. I had just ducked my head to avoid one overhanging limb under which we dashed scatheless, but had no time to raise it again ere my horse darted under another branch, and the next instant my head was crashed against it with a force which sent me flying backwards to the ground, where I lay stunned for some time. Fortunately, my feet cleared the stirrups as I was flung backwards, otherwise, instead of writing this account of the mishap, I would probably be floundering down the slopes of Avernus, or maybe "climbing up the golden stairs." The folds of my felt hat must have broken the force of the blow, for when I came to my senses and began to ascertain damages I was not much the worse for the fall. On arrival at the station I found that the mob had been successfully yarded, including the golden bay, and that my horse had followed right on up to the stock-yard. So ended a day's ride. The incidents are fixed in my memory by the blow on the head I got through bad horsemanship.

Nearly all the horses on this station were bred from Arab stallions, imported by the original owner of the run; hence many of the bush horses were fine animals, suitable as remounts for the Indian army, a good price being obtainable for all that came up to the standard of the remount agents in Calcutta. Having become so wild and unmanageable, however, they were more of a nuisance than anything else, so the Boss determined to get rid of them by shipping those of any value and destroying the

remainder. Trapping and horse-hunting were therefore carried on at every opportunity, so I had a good deal of this kind of work before I left the Murchison, and took part in one celebrated run which was talked of for many a day afterwards.

Some four or five miles down the river, on the southern bank, was a large alluvial flat, richly grassed and well watered by several fresh springs. The flat was surrounded by a very dense thicket of acacias and black wattles, so dense that it was impossible to walk or ride through it except by a well-worn horse-path. After threading this narrow road for about a quarter of a mile, one emerged on a stretch of sterile, loose sand-plain, very heavy going for any living thing, and which sloped upwards for a good four miles to a range of sandstone hills, forming a barrier against farther progress, except through three passes on to the open plain beyond. All wild horses running on the Forty-mile sand-plain used these passes when descending from the plateau to the river flats.

On the sand plain ran a certain dark bay colt, a nearly pure-bred Arab. He was remarkable for beauty of form and great speed; he had a beautiful head, with a black muzzle to match his other black points, the only patches of white being a small star on his forehead and two peculiar bands of silvery grey crossing his long black tail a little above the level of his hocks. This splendid horse was solitary in his habits, seldom being found in company with others; he seemed to prefer the sweets of solitude to the gregarious life of other horses. There was not a rider on the run, myself included, who had not, some time or another, chased him in the vain hope of "yarding" up. He was so regular in his habits when left to himself that they were well known to all on the run. Every evening about dusk he would travel down

to the flat, slake his thirst, and browse about for the remainder of the night, leaving the flat about nine o'clock in the morning by the path through the thicket, up the long slope of loose white sand, and through the westernmost pass on to the Forty-mile plain, where he was on his own run, and surrounded by miles of rich and varied herbage.

Many were the yarns told at the station and round the camp-fires of swift stock-horses being completely outpaced as this wonderful colt sailed away quite at his ease, with head and tail erect, making for the open sand-plain, and snorting in contempt and defiance. The gallant bay had been named "Daydream" by the overseer, who had longed to possess him as a saddle-horse. He was so swift that no ordinary stock-horse could head him, nor even keep his streaming tail in sight for long; and there was no chance of trapping him, as he ran on the south side of the river, where there was no fencing.

Shortly before I left the Murchison the Boss had entered into an arrangement with another squatter for shipping horses to India, and in pursuance of this plan two experienced and well-mounted horsemen arrived from Champion Bay to take away a mob of some thirty or forty horses we had been collecting. In the evening the conversation as usual was all about horses, and it was not long before the dark-bay-down-the-river colt was mentioned. He would be sure to fetch a long price in Calcutta, where the rich baboos love to loll in their carriages behind a handsome pair of "Walers." It was suggested that now—reinforced by the new arrivals—an organised attempt should be made to yard the celebrated "Daydream." The suggestion was no sooner made than it was accepted. The overseer proceeded to arrange a plan of campaign for the morrow. The forces consisted of the Boss, the overseer, the two riders from "The Bay,"

two nigger lads, and myself. As our plan was to run the dark bay out of breath and exhaust his staying powers by skilfully directing and economising those of our own horses, we considered we had a good chance of securing him.

It was decided to ride early next morning to various points which the dark bay would certainly make for when disturbed from the river flat. The two native lads were to ride down the river until they had found and started the horse; they were then to press him up the steep four-mile slope at top speed, galloping until their horses were blown. Then their part of the play ceased. The wild horse would be heading straight for the western-most of the three passes already mentioned, and ought to be a bit blown. Here a concealed horseman would suddenly start out from the pass, head him off, and, being close on his heels and mounted on a fresh horse, he would be able to press him again at top speed through the heavy sand to the next pass. This would be repeated from pass to pass, until he would be headed down towards the river and be taken in hand by the last fresh horseman at a point where the lot of us would rendezvous by means of short cuts. It was expected that "Daydream" would be so blown and exhausted by this time as to be easily yarded a mile or two up the river at Billiarri.

Full of confidence that at last we would circumvent the dark bay, gaily did we ride forth after breakfast next morning. The Boss was mounted on his favourite grey mare, the overseer on "Chilba," a powerful cream-colour, not very speedy but one that could gallop over any kind of country for miles without slackening his speed; one of the men from "The Bay" was mounted on a brown thoroughbred, very speedy and powerful; the other rode a sorrel-coloured mare, in tip-top condition for a hard

gallop; whilst the two native lads were mounted on serviceable stock-horses, both of which could do all that was expected from them, and were well adapted for the light weights of their black riders. My own mount was my favourite "The Guikowar," a reddish grey half-bred Arab, a fine horse, not too heavy for this kind of work, well up to my light weight, and, having been bred on the Forty-mile sand-plain, was as well accustomed to galloping over its loose yieldy surface as "Daydream" himself.

The native lads soon struck off down the river, whilst we five white men rode on towards our respective positions. The first cavalier to part company was the overseer, who started for his post down the river bend. "The finger" was the next to bear off towards his place at the end of the rocky range, and he was followed, after we had travelled another mile or so, by the rider of the big brown horse, who was to post himself in the last pass through the range. Our cavalcade had dwindled down to the rider of the sorrel mare and myself, and it was soon his turn to branch off and take up his post in the second pass, leaving me to ride on alone for the westernmost one. Being anxious to arrive at my post in time, I tightened the reins, and patting "The Guikowar" on the neck, he broke into a slow, steady canter, which soon landed us where I was to take my place, concealed from view in the pass.

From this elevated position I obtained a view of the Murchison valley for many miles around, and could see clearly over the long stretch of treeless sand-plain, sloping down to the dense black-wattle thicket surrounding the clay flat from view. For miles I could trace the winding course of the river, right down to the sand dunes and the coral-reef bar, where in ever-varying flashes of silvery whiteness gleamed the line of breakers

against the background of the Indian Ocean, which itself seemed as though only a continuation of the blue cloudless sky, so imperceptibly were the two azure shades blended by distance and the clearness of the atmosphere.

For about half an hour I had been patiently waiting, when at last, near the foot of the slope, I saw some moving objects, but at first could only discern that they were in rapid motion. Soon, however, I could see the motion was towards me, and could distinguish two mounted and one unmounted horse, the latter a long way ahead. Now I knew that the wild horse was before me, and my heart began to thump from excitement and nervous anticipation as I knocked the half-consumed tobacco from my pipe, settled my feet in the stirrups, and, gathering up the reins, awaited the moment to take part in the chase. On and upwards came the hunted horse; nearer and nearer he approached, going at a hand-gallop over the loose heavy sand and up the steep incline, as though he was going at his ease on hard level ground. The native lads, though able to keep near enough to make him "shift" himself, were rapidly dropping behind as their horses became blown. Anyhow, they had done their part well, so I determined it should be no fault of "The Guikowar" or myself if we did not do ours.

Now I could distinguish every point of the beautiful horse as he galloped fearlessly forward for the pass, once through which he knew he could shake off his pursuers as he had so often done before. Nearer he came, until I could see the sunlight glance on his shining coat as he gracefully rose and fell in the cadence of the gallop, turning his head from side to side, with a long, unkempt forelock tossing over his bright flashing eyes. His mane was rising and falling in unison with his movements, whilst a rhythmical snort from his red wide nostrils

accompanied each stride, which told plainly he was going well at his ease, and this after a four-mile gallop through heavy sand and uphill every inch of the way. His long, matted tail streaming behind was cocked up in a way which showed that "Daydream" had no misgivings as to gaining the plateau; and his fine ears were in incessant movement, now pointing forwards and now backwards as he galloped bravely upwards, until I was fain to admit I had never before, and certainly have never since seen such a picture of equine beauty. He did not leave me much time, however, to admire, for he quickly arrived within twenty yards of the place where I was concealed behind a jutting rock in the pass. Digging the spurs into "The Guikowar," I dashed from the hiding-place with a loud yell and rode straight towards the startled bay, who, outwitted for once in his life, threw himself back on his haunches. But it was only for an instant. As he stopped dead he swung round, half rearing, and started off at a racing pace, with "The Guikowar" close at his heels, in the direction of the next pass.

My word! we did make the sand fly behind us. So close to his silver-barred tail did my horse carry me that for some distance I could have reached him with a stock-whip, but not for long was I able to keep thus close to his heels. Gradually his marvellous speed and staying powers were developed as my horse slowly fell behind, and when the second pass was reached I was fully three hundred yards in the rear. But I had the satisfaction of seeing the wild horse once more headed off, and again pressed to his utmost by the rider of the sorrel mare, in the direction of the last pass, as I reined up my panting horse and allowed him a few moments to recover himself. I was satisfied that our part of the programme had been carried out, but I could only marvel at the dark bay colt, who seemed able to go faster and farther the more he was pressed.

Of the rest of this celebrated chase there is not much to relate. On arrival at the rendezvous I met the others, who asserted that the arrangements had been carried out in each instance, and that each time the wonderful bay was checked he seemed to be endowed with fresh resources in the way of speed and endurance. This was all I could learn as we cantered along the tracks left by the flying steed and his final pursuer, the overseer. Our hopes and fears were at an end when on meeting the disconsolate overseer he had to admit defeat. The gallant "Daydream" had managed to outpace him, and, slipping past, had crossed the river again on to the open sand-plain. Then, indeed, did we lift up our voices and cried, "To your tents, O Israel."

Whilst on this station I had an opportunity of seeing a remarkable instance of how animals can adapt themselves to their surroundings. On the upper reaches of the river there was a large pool just fordable at most times, but in a dry season the level would fall considerably. Amongst the wild mobs making their run in the vicinity of this pool, an old mare with a bevy of foals and yearlings used to come down every day (in the long dry summers, when the herbage was scant and scorched into dryness) and wade into the pool until the water nearly reached their heads, standing there for hours, diving to the bottom for a mouthful of succulent weeds, which they chewed at leisure when their dripping heads were raised above the water.

The first time I witnessed this strange sight was during a dry season when riding with the overseer in search of some strayed stock. As we approached the pool my companion urged me to keep quiet if I desired to see something well worth looking at. Sure enough, as we rode quietly up to the pool I saw a lot of horses standing in the water and disappearing from time to

time as they ducked their heads below the surface. My wonder was soon at an end when I saw one of their heads suddenly come out with a mouthful of dripping weeds. No sooner was this mouthful disposed of than the head disappeared in search of another. There were four or five of them in the water, whilst several older colts and the head stallion lingered about on the bank, unwilling either to join their aquatic friends or to leave the river without them.

The overseer told me that during a long drought some five or six years previously, when hardly a vestige of feed was left on the run and bush fires had laid bare the sand-plains, the old mare had managed somehow or other to discover that there was plenty of luscious feed at the bottom of the pools, which could be procured by diving for it; and, having once put her discovery into practice, she continued out of preference what she had been driven to by necessity. As various generations of foals had been reared by her they had all followed her example, though none of the full-grown horses in her mob had ever been able to overcome their reluctance to join the amphibious group. Here, then, seemed to be a new variety of horse in process of evolution which, if left undisturbed, might breed and separate from all others on the run, perhaps to survive through droughts long and severe enough to exterminate all others on the Murchison.

One more incident and I must bring my account of the life I led on this station to a close. One evening, at the end of a hot summer's day, we were in bed and had been some time asleep when the furious barking of the dogs awakened us. The trampling of horses on the hard clay soil leading to the front of the verandah announced the approach of some belated travellers, so we hastily clad ourselves in the darkness. Having procured a light we hastened on to the verandah, and were rather

staggered on being accosted, with foreign accent, by some one attired in a tall silk hat and full evening dress, accompanied by a mounted police trooper.

The shirt front and swallow tails had a most excruciating effect in this out-of-the-way bush station.—And at this weird hour of the night, too! Anyhow, wonder soon ceased, on the person in question politely handing in a letter addressed to the owner of the station, endorsed "Introducing Baron Ferdinand von Mueller," and expressing his regret at the untimely hour of his arrival. The Boss hastened to welcome him, and the horses and pack saddles being disposed of a meal was spread. A brief conversation was terminated by our guest making shift on my bed for the remainder of the night. Next day the Baron explained his desire to examine the vegetation of the Geraldine district more minutely than he had been able to do on previous journeys. He said the government had appointed a police trooper to assist and escort him, and then he asked for a relay of horses for his journey of scientific research towards Sharks Bay and back. This, of course, the Boss willingly promised, and placed the resources of his storeroom at the disposal of the great botanist, for anything he might require in the way of rations. The Baron did not think he would require much in this connection, saying he did not think he would be more than three days on the journey. At this point I was much amused hearing a gloomy stage aside from the police trooper, ruefully remarking: "They would be more like three weeks, at the rate they had been travelling." I subsequently learned that this dismal forecast arose from the fact, so he said, that Baron von Mueller would persist in reining up every few yards of the journey across the sand-plains to fling himself on hands and knees to examine any strange shrub which might catch

his ever-watchful eyes. This kind of bush travelling the trooper looked upon with ineffable disgust, and consequently seemed to hold science in detestation. During his stay, and again on his return from Sharks Bay, when owing to the Boss's absence I had to do the honours, Baron von Mueller proved himself to be a very pleasant and entertaining guest. He was never tired of recounting, nor we of listening, to stories of his early explorations in the north and north-west, in company with Gregory and others. His labours in the field of botany are remarkable for the abundance of discoveries which have resulted from them, his researches in the matter of the eucalyptus alone filling many volumes which are considered standard works throughout the world of science.

And now I must bring my description of life on the Murchison to a close, and describe a journey overland, as I had made up my mind to leave the colony and return home in the first suitable vessel I could find.

CHAPTER VIII

Good-bye to Murchison—Journey Overland—Irwin District—The Arrino—Victoria Plains—A Day's Routine—Flies—Wood and Water—Forest Scenes—Giant Trees—Wet Weather—Guildford—Arrival at Fremantle—Cattle Droving—A long Ride—The old Mare — Glentromie — The Spanish Mission — New Norcia—Brave Black Monks—Hard Times—Prosperity—The Mission To-day—Dinner with the Bishop—Mission Wine — Corn Thrashing—Remarks on the Object of the Mission—Shipping Horses to India—A Shipment to Java—Life on a Horse Ship—Calms—Mortality in the Hold—Anjer the Doomed—Batavia—A mutinous Welshman—The Pan-shoal—Singapore—Sail for Fremantle—The Schooner and the Skipper—Wrecked at Anjer—Anjer—A Stroll on the Beach—Sensitive Plant—"Der Mongkez und der Teeger"—Tigers—Sport in Java—An open Boat—The coast Scenes—Mountains—Volcanoes—Batavia—Night in the Canal—Java Fever—Life in Batavia—Javanese Ladies—Europeans—School Girls—Natives—An Earthquake—The French Mail Steamer—Friends at Sea—Singapore—Java Fever again—The *Laughing Wave*—The great Eruption—Adieu to Anjer—Arrival at Fremantle.

FOR the sake of company I joined a traveller from Sharks Bay who was also bound overland to Fremantle. There was no difficulty in finding one's way. The telegraph line from Champion Bay to Perth runs alongside of the mail road for nearly the whole of the distance. We passed through Northampton, and then struck across country to the Irwin River. Avoiding as much as possible any stay at the various stations *en route*, we preferred to camp out, and were thus able to start or finish our day's journey just as it suited us.

After leaving the fertile country round the Irwin and Arrino Rivers, a great part of our way led across stretches of barren sand-plain, very different from the rich plains we had left behind us at the Murchison. For miles ahead one could trace the seemingly interminable line of telegraph posts, the only elevated objects in these dreary stretches. Large numbers of these stout jarrah posts were splintered and shattered to pieces by lightning during the electric storms so common hereabouts in the hot summer months. We passed several flourishing sheep stations, the owners of which seemed well-to-do, especially about the Victoria Plains, where there were some really fine station buildings, and where the squatters seemed to have paid great attention to developing their runs, combining agriculture with the pastoral resources of this fine district. The routine of our journey was much the same each day. At dawn, when as yet the "Break-o-day boys" were the only birds awake, and were sounding their sweet organ-like notes, we would stir uneasily in our rugs until the chill morning air forced us to sit up, draw together the still smouldering logs, and coax the fire into a blaze whilst we listened eagerly for a clang of the bell which would assure us that our horses were at no great distance from the camp. If the horses were near at hand we would both cower over the blazing logs, enjoying an early morning's smoke whilst the water in our "tin-billies" made up its mind to boil.

Pleasant it was to watch the awakening of nature in the bush as the daylight grew clearer and brighter. The thick mists hanging around the camp—for it was the wet season and rain was plentiful—might obscure the view; but we could listen to the voices of night giving place by degrees to those of the day. The howls of the wild dogs, the chirruping of the cicadas, the shrieking

notes of some of the night birds, and the chorus of bull-frogs from the neighbouring water-holes slowly died away, and were succeeded by a chorus of twittering small birds, the tinkling of the bell-birds, and the solemn cawing of the crows following the "Break-o'-day boys," which here perform the office of chanticleer. Stronger and fuller became the light of approaching day, until the sun's first rays flashed through the surrounding trees, lighting up the deepest recesses of the sombre forest and dispersing the lingering fogs and morning mists. By the time the sun was well above the horizon our morning meal would be finished, and the horses got into camp, when a few minutes would suffice to saddle-up and make an early start.

A steady five or six hours' travelling, now walking, now trotting or cantering, carried us over a good portion of the day's journey, and brought us to our midday halt. As we gradually made our way south into the great forest lands we had not much trouble as regards firewood or water, but farther north on the sand-plains and the sparsely timbered lands it was often a difficult matter to select a camping-place where these essentials could be found. On a long journey like this, our horses being the first consideration, we often had to camp where there was no fuel or water, in order that the horses might obtain feed.

A couple of hours' rest at noon each day, and then onwards again, sometimes over sand-plains or along the borders of deep ravines, through wooded valleys cut up here and there by the bed of some dry gullies, or through the vast primeval forests where the towering eucalyptus formed vast arcades on either side of the road, showing here and there a glimpse of salmon colour, the smooth trunks of the Salmon-gum; farther on, a colonnade of white marble columns, somewhat bent and twisted to be sure,

but smooth and shiny enough to warrant the similitude: these were the large and more numerous trunks of the *Eucalyptus redunca*, or White-gum, mixed up here and there with patches of *E. loxophleba*, or York-gum. Farther on, the arcade would change to one which might be compared to a colonnade of bluish grey granite, the trunks of the Blue-gum (*E. megacarpa*).

This was my first experience of the West Australian forests, and now I saw those giants of the woodlands, some of which, such as the Blackbutt or the Karri (*E. diversicolor*), are said to exceed in height the giant trees of California.

The quaint, twisted trunks of the Fluted-gums and the rough dark massive ones of the huge Red-gums helped to diversify the scene as we travelled on until sundown, when we would begin to look out for a camping-place.

Day after day we travelled in this manner through the seemingly interminable forest. The latter portion of our journey was traversed under a steady downpour of rain, which certainly added little to the pleasures of the road, unless indeed when, now and again, we were forced to laugh at each other's dismal, woe-begone appearance, as we rode on, vainly trying to keep some part of our persons dry by covering our heads and shoulders in the heavy horse-rugs, which were already wet through by the previous night's exposure.

Down the back of my neck, down to the saddle, a steady stream of cold water slowly dribbled; thence downwards to my boots, till they, refusing to hold any more, squelched the water out at every movement of my dripping horse. The midday halt, instead of being a time of rest, was now only one long struggle to obtain a reluctant flame from damp firewood. The great difficulty was to obtain anything to kindle a flame, so penetrating had been the rain for the last four or five days. We

had to break down dead "Black boys" to obtain the core, tear off great sheets of bark in search of the dry shreds within, or search about for some sheltered tufts of dead grass until we had a pile of more or less dry fuel ready for lighting under the shelter of an outstretched horse-rug. Even then our troubles were only beginning. The tandstickors would be surely damp, and adhering together in a sticky mass. Our hopes of obtaining a light would be very feeble, as feeble as the sickly flame which at last sprang up. We would kneel over it anxiously, nursing it into life and vigour in spite of dense columns of pungent smoke which stifled both ourselves and the flickering flame. However, by dint of coaxing or swearing, which uses a great deal of breath, we generally managed to raise a fire; but our troubles in this connection, and the discomfort of sleeping wrapped in a wet rug on the wet ground, made us now willing enough to seek shelter in wayside farmhouses, shingling camps, empty bark huts, or such like, until, having wound our way down the steep descent of the Bindoon Hills, we came out of the forest to the low lands bordering the upper reaches of the Swan River, whence we passed on to Guildford, through Perth, to our destination, Fremantle.

During the whole ten days I spent in Fremantle a violent gale was raging, in the course of which the only vessel in port, except a few coasters—and these were all driven high and dry ashore—was wrecked on Rottnest Island. So my chance of getting away to Singapore, as I had intended, was a very poor one. My outlook was becoming rather dismal when I received a letter from a friend offering me temporary employment on his station on the Victoria Plains, an offer I was glad to accept, and which resulted in my remaining in the colony for many years afterwards.

For several months after my return to the Victoria

Plains I was engaged in droving fat cattle to Fremantle and Perth, in lots of thirty and forty at a time, so that I became well acquainted with the road and the various station owners on it.

On one of these occasions, when returning from a trip to Fremantle, I rode the longest measured distance I ever did in one day. I say measured distance, for distances travelled in the bush are apt to be overestimated; but the road on this occasion was the overland road, which had been surveyed and marked by mile posts all the way from Perth to Geraldton.

I had left Fremantle late in the evening and had put up at an hotel in Perth, determined to make an early start, so as to do at least half of the one hundred and fourteen miles to the station. I was riding an old mare, one of the horses bred on the run, not much of a mount, but a steady old goer and a good one for droving purposes. She was not in the best of condition and was slightly saddle-galled, so, though I was anxious to get back, I had no intention of performing a long journey, but meant to rest the old mare at a shingle-splitter's camp, at a place called the A-Flats, then ride on a few miles farther, and camp for the night about forty miles or so from Perth.

I was aroused at daybreak to find the mare ready saddled, and, procuring some bread and meat to eat on the way, I made a start about half-past five in the morning. I noticed, after we had passed through Guildford and headed up towards the Darling Range, that the mare seemed very lively, evidently pleased at returning towards her beloved run. She was ever ready to break into a trot or canter. We went along steadily, alternately walking, trotting, or cantering, at a pace which covered a good deal of ground in a short time, without seeming to distress the apparently worn-out old mare. She was going so freshly when we reached the place where I had

intended to rest for noon that I thought it a pity to break the journey so early in the day, so we kept on and passed the A-Flats long before resting time; and when we did pull up for a spell the mare had covered over fifty miles of the distance, and still seemed anxious to push on.

We halted then, but it was only for a quarter of an hour, for she did not seem to care for the rank grass growing hereabouts; and for my part, I did not much relish the bread and meat, which had become stale and dry in my valise. So I mounted again, and away we went, the mare as fresh as ever, through the undulatory forest country and over level flats, startling many a kangaroo and many flocks of cockatoos as her clattering hoofs awoke the echoes in the surrounding hills.

It was early in the afternoon as I rode at a walk past the mission buildings, past the church on the left of the road and the monastery on the right of it, past the stables—where the door-post was the eighty-second mile-post from Perth, and on up the rise leading to the court house and telegraph station, where the clock showed me that it had just turned half-past four. So I made up my mind to ride on as far as Glentromie Station, where I expected the mare would be pretty well done up, and where I could enjoy the hospitality and pleasant company of friends living there. We were now only some twenty odd miles from our destination; and the nearer we approached to her run the less inclined the old mare seemed to stop. So again, instead of stopping at Glentromie, I pushed on, now determined to do the whole distance. To make a long story short, about half-past seven that evening, riding on in the moonlight, we crossed the brook and reached the home paddock fence, and upon my word, as we cantered along into the station, the old mare was going as freshly as when we left Perth that

morning, after covering the one hundred and fourteen miles to Berkshire Valley Station.

I did not feel very much fatigued myself. Whether the mare did or not—and she had all the hard work to do—I could not ascertain, for the old sinner, on being turned into the paddock that night after a good feed, managed to break through the fence and get away into the bush.

This long journey may be taken as a fair instance of the endurance of the Australian bush-bred horse. The mare was weak and in poor condition, and was some nine or ten years old. If she was able thus to cover such a distance with a light heart in her old age, what might she have done in her prime? She was an ugly, ewe-necked, cross-bred mare, in no way differing from the ordinary bush horse as regards breeding, yet, under a broiling sun, over rough roads, with here and there some miles of heavy sand to traverse, she had carried me bravely and willingly from early morn until late at night, with only one short spell of rest.

I have just mentioned the "Monastery" and "Mission Buildings." The largest and most important station on the Victoria Plains was the New Norcia Mission, belonging to Benedictine monks of the Spanish branch of that Order. Their lands, held either on "fee simple" or lease from the government, were very wide-spreading, and their command of capital enabled them to purchase choice runs in various parts of the district, apart from the many thousand acres composing the New Norcia run. They counted their sheep by the thousand, had great numbers of cattle, and their herd of horses bearing the well-known mission brand were to be met with in the bush for many miles around the head station.

Many years ago, in the early days of the colony, two monks, Dom Salvado and Dom Serra, arrived in Fre-

mantle, to devote themselves to missionary work amongst the aborigines. By the assistance of friends they managed to supply themselves with a small store of coarse provisions, and started on their—at that time—perilous journey across the ranges and into the depths of the vast forests which extended for many miles north along the table lands.

Dom Salvado, the guiding spirit, had wisely determined that if he looked for any measure of success amongst the blacks he would have to carry on his operations in the depths of the unsettled bush, far away from the sphere of the white man's influence. He determined to make his mission a self-supporting one, and to isolate it as much as possible. He pushed on, therefore, he and his companion camping at night on the bare ground with no other covering than their well-worn habits, until at last, footsore and weary, they arrived at the junction of some creeks, where the land around gave promise of fertility. Here water was easily obtainable, game plentiful, and, above all, here several tribes of natives were assembled, holding one of their heathenish corroborees. A friendship was soon struck up with the natives, and Dom Salvado, nothing daunted by the dangers and hardships confronting him, determined to establish his mission, which, from the small beginnings of a little bark hut, was destined to expand into the huge New Norcia Mission of the present day, with its ranges of massive buildings, stabling, and offices, not to mention the twenty or so neat cottages for the use of the native converts, the abbey church, the court house, vineyards, kitchen gardens, brickfields, and the workshops for blacksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, masons, saddlers, and tailors. In all these places the work is performed by the brothers of the community and their native converts.

At first Dom Salvado almost despaired, so many were the difficulties surrounding him and his companion. They had cut themselves off from all communication with the few settlers who then inhabited the country round the lower reaches of the Swan River, and were surrounded by fierce savages who, if not openly hostile, were distrustful, and were well known to be most treacherous. Provisions began to fail, and though they managed to subsist on the scanty and uncertain donations of the native hunters, yet health broke down under the strain of unwonted hardship. Clothing they had none beyond the black Benedictine habits, which now hung in tatters on their backs. Their boots were worn out, and they were reduced to emulate the customs of a barefooted fraternity.

These brave missionaries were not concerned for themselves. They cheerfully would, and did, endure these trials for many weary years to come. But when chills and feverish attacks, brought on by exposure and insufficient nourishment, were added to their already heavy burden, they began to fear that the mission would be a failure. At length Dom Salvado, who was a fine musician, hit upon the plan of walking down to Perth, some eighty miles distant, and there giving a pianoforte recital to raise enough money to buy provisions and clothing, not only for himself and brother, but for the converts they had already made. With many misgivings the brothers parted; Serra remaining to "face the music" alone with the savages, whilst Salvado started on his lonely and perilous tramp to the settlement to make some more for the inhabitants of the capital. A toilsome journey brought him to Perth in safety, and after experiencing innumerable difficulties he at length secured a room and a piano, both of which were few and far between in Perth in those days. To be brief, the

concert room was crowded, and he realised four or five times more than he had dared to hope for. He received many promises from those who appreciated his unselfish work; and then the good monk returned to the Victoria Plains, well satisfied with the result of his journey.

From small beginnings their property gradually grew. Their small flock of twenty or thirty ewes, their two or three head of cattle, and the few mares increased and flourished. The seasons were good, and, though for many years it was an uphill fight, they were at last able to place the mission on a firm footing.

On one occasion, when I was taking a lot of horses down to Fremantle, I stayed at the mission for the night, and dined with Abbot Salvado, who had been recently made a bishop *in partibus.* At his hospitable table I tasted colonial wine for the first time, and, being unused to drinking it colonial fashion, I just poured out about a wineglassful into my tumbler. My host said, "Ah, no! that is not the way to drink mission wine; this way, see," and, suiting the action to the word, he filled my tumbler to the brim. When I suggested the probability of my having to subside under the table, he laughingly replied, "No fear; this is not your English brandy-wine. This is real wine. Drink it up, and take some more." I did so, nothing loth, for it was a delicious wine, and would compare favourably with many expensive burgundies.

Every year numbers of horses used to be mustered, broken in, and driven down to Fremantle for shipment to India; the mission wool clip required quite a procession of drays to cart it to the port of shipment, whilst drafts of fat cattle and sheep helped to swell the revenue.

The Bible says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox which treadeth out the corn." Here at New Norcia I was

interested to observe that the biblical method of threshing out the corn was still practised, with this difference, that instead of oxen "bush" horses were employed. A narrow double circular fence near the rick-yard had been erected, into which the wheat was pitched and fairly distributed. Then a mob of some ten or twelve half-wild, unbroken horses was driven into this enclosure and made to gallop round, whilst now and again fresh supplies of wheat were pitched in. When one set of horses had completed their task the bars were slipped, and away they galloped into the freedom of the forest, and another mob would take their places from the main stock-yard hard by. I was astonished when the cleaning up was performed to see how effectually the trampling hoofs had separated the grain from the ear, and the brother superintending the work informed me there was little if any waste attending this ancient process. As regards the biblical oxen above mentioned, all I can say is, if they were driven round at anything like the pace these horses were, they would not need much muzzling, for there was no time to snatch a mouthful.

Now, as to the main object Bishop Salvado had in view when he founded the mission, *i.e.* the conversion and civilisation of the aborigines of Western Australia, I gathered from remarks let fall by the worthy abbot, from other sources, and from personal observation, that here, as in all similar attempts to civilise the Australian nigger, only a half-measure of success had been attained. They seem to be capable of *learning* almost anything if they are taken in hand when young, but no matter what pains are taken with them, nor how early in life the teaching is commenced, sooner or later they are almost certainly bound to revert to the habits and customs of their tribes. Many natives at New Norcia who had been brought up from childhood in the ways of the

white man would at intervals take it into their heads to throw off all their clothing, arm themselves with spears and kylis, and start off naked into the bush for a long spell of savage life amongst their unreclaimed kinsfolk. After a while they would return, and resume the garb and ways of civilisation. It will be the work of generations to eradicate this instinct; and after all, is it worth while? Civilisation, as we take it, may be bought at too great a price!

There seems to be something unconquerable in these savages. The Western Australian aborigine is about as perfect a type of man in the "Paleolithic Age" as one can meet with; indeed, the Australian natives generally seem to have stood still in the "Wooden Age," for their weapons and implements are almost wholly of wood, and they are the most degraded race possible. Only on the Fitzroy River have I noticed that the natives used chipped flint for their spear heads. I speak from experience, not only of the tribes around the Victoria Plains, but also from a wide acquaintance, extending over several years, with the ways and customs of the aborigines in most of the settled district, from Fremantle in the south to the Fitzroy in the far north, and wherever I have come in contact with them I have always found their main characteristics the same.

The true savage, like the Ancient Mariner, "at uncertain times" seems compelled to revert to savage ways, and so one need not wholly disbelieve the story of the Sydney-side aboriginal who was educated, sent to England to finish his medical studies, obtained an M.D. diploma, and, after setting up in practice as a general practitioner in one of the settlements, one fine day, when his tribe happened to come into the neighbourhood, stripped off his clothes and went into the bush with his kinsmen.

After several months of life on the Victoria Plains,

Frank having rejoined me after a long separation, we decided to lease a herd of bush horses, and engage in the risky but sometimes lucrative business of shipping horses to India, Java, Singapore, and Mauritius. One of us remained on the station—hunting, trapping, and breaking in horses ready for shipment—whilst the other went to sea in charge of the horses, to sell them to the best advantage. For the first few shipments we did fairly well, but later on our bad luck induced us to throw up the business, worse off than when we started. My first trip across to Java was with a rather mixed lot of some eighty horses. We had no end of trouble getting this wild lot down to the port, where they had to be slung and lowered into lighters and taken alongside the vessel—a fine barque of some 700 tons—where they would once more have to be hoisted in the slings and lowered down into the hold. When all were on board ready for sea we were detained by one of the severe north-west gales very prevalent in Fremantle during the winter months, and we were in great danger of being driven on shore. But fortunately the two anchors managed to hold until the wind, moderating and veering to the southward, we got under way and made sail for our destination. Whilst the vessel had been pitching and plunging nearly bows under in the gale, the grooms, two white men, one a colonial stockman, the other a runaway sailor, picked up at the last moment in the "cow-shed" in Fremantle, and two aboriginals and myself, were all more or less sea-sick, so we were glad enough to find ourselves sailing along steadily before a fair wind.

The horses were stalled on either side of the lower hold on the shingle ballast, the space in midships being occupied by tanks of fresh water, whilst on the 'tween-deck beams overhead were stowed the bales of pressed hay, corn, etc. The feeding, watering, grooming, and

the hundred and one other duties that had to be attended to day and night kept our hands pretty full. The hold was kept nice and cool by means of windsails, the horses seemed to be doing well, and we had every prospect of a quick passage.

In the afternoon, whilst the grooms were getting their dinner, I used to take charge down below, and would often sit right aft in the run of the vessel, amusing myself by watching the curious spectacle as the vessel rolled steadily from side to side, as she ran along under all sail before the south-east "Trades." I could see right along the lower hold from end to end; and as the vessel rolled to starboard some forty horses' heads appeared outside the stalls; and as she rolled back to port, all these would disappear and forty other heads would emerge on the opposite side; and so on, alternately, as the nags balanced themselves to the motion of the vessel. It was a strange sight, and reminded me of an incessant "knight's move," or of the old-fashioned weather indicators where Jack comes out as Jill goes in.

After the care and attention to the horses had become mere routine work the time soon flew by, and we looked for a prosperous passage without any deaths amongst the horses, but we reckoned without any experience of the calms so frequent on the south coast of Java and in the Java Sea. On the morning of the thirteenth day out from Fremantle, at daylight, we sighted the lofty mountains of Java, and by midday were abreast of Wynkoop's Bay; and then the breeze we had carried with us all the way from Australia left us becalmed, with not so much as a breath of wind to help to ventilate the hold, where the horses were crowded together in their narrow stalls. The heat was intense, and, our supply of water running short, the poor animals had to be put on short allowance. So long as there was a breeze

it was an easy matter to keep the hold cool and free from the overpowering ammoniacal fumes, which are often bad enough on shore in an ill-ventilated stable; but now, without a breath of wind, the state of the atmosphere down below can easily be imagined. For fourteen long dreary days did this dead calm last without a break, and at the end of that time we had hoisted up and thrown overboard twenty of the best horses on board, as we drifted backwards and forwards with the tide in front of Wynkoop's Bay, where we were surrounded night and day by sharks, feasting on the unusual and bountiful supply of horseflesh.

At last the ardently wished-for breeze sprang up and we bade farewell to this ill-omened spot, a few hours' sail taking us into the straits of Sunda, close past that island of Krakatoa which two or three years afterwards was the scene of the most terrible catastrophe in modern times. It looked peaceful enough then anyhow, and so did the doomed port of Anjer, as, sailing past the anchorage, past Button and Cap islets, and rounding Bantam Point, we found ourselves in the Java Sea, only a day or two's sail from Batavia; but once more we were becalmed. Light winds, calms, and contrary currents delayed us for another three disastrous days, ere we threaded our way through the Thousand Islets, and at last dropped anchor in Batavia Roads.

We landed thirty of the horses here, and decided to take the remainder on to Singapore, where a better market might be found, so that our stay in Batavia was brief, and I saw very little of it on this occasion. Whilst at anchor here my sailor-groom managed to get drunk, and became very troublesome and mutinous, so much so that the captain ordered him to be put in irons. This was easier said than done, however, for

"Welchy," as he was called, was a powerful rascal, and put his back against the pin-rail round the mainmast, drew his glittering sheath-knife and defied all hands. The captain signalled to the Dutch guardship for assistance, but the boatswain, exasperated at being taunted by the reckless blackguard, who had made himself a nuisance to all on board, watched his chance and, making a spring, closed with his adversary, but not before he had received a slight stab in the shoulder. The sight of one of their number bleeding from the weapon of one who was disliked by all of them seemed to rouse the whole crew into a frenzy as the two men rolled struggling on the deck. Iron belaying-pins and hand-spikes would soon have put an end to the ruffian, but just in time to prevent murder the boat from the guardship arrived alongside, and an armed party of marines headed by an officer sprang on deck, dispersed the excited crew, separated the struggling men, and within a minute or two from the time they boarded us "Welchy" was standing in irons with a marine on each side of him with drawn bayonets, whilst the captain reported his conduct to the Dutch naval officer. They passed the prisoner down into the boat and took him on board the guardship for the night, but as we were to sail the next day he was returned on board in irons, and we had to carry him a prisoner to Singapore, where we were glad to let him go without troubling to have him punished for his misconduct.

We had an exceptionally quick run from Batavia. The captain navigated us very cleverly through the many narrow and tortuous straits between Java and Singapore; but about midnight on the third day out from Batavia he managed to run the vessel hard and fast on the Pan-Shoal, which is, as it were, within hailing distance of Singapore. I had not long been

turned in, after an evening spent in playing euchre with two fellow-passengers, and in speculating on what hour next morning we should drop anchor in Singapore Roads. I was just about to fall asleep when I heard an ominous crunching underneath, and a slight quivering of the vessel's frame, which told a tale that could not be mistaken. When I went on deck I found we were grounded on a reef with deep water all round us. There was no immediate danger, for there was little, if any, wind, and the sea was as smooth as a mill pond; the only question being whether the vessel could be hove off the coral reef before a stiff breeze might raise a sea and bump her bottom out. However, nothing could be done before daylight, so I turned in to sleep, until aroused by the crew running out kedges and warps over the stern. Soundings disclosed four feet of water under the bow and over thirty feet right under the stern, and as the tide was falling our bows were soon elevated at a very uncomfortable angle. All efforts to warp off being unavailing, the captain started away in the ship's boat to procure assistance from Singapore. As the tide rose the mate kept increasing the strain on the hawsers over the stern, but all to no purpose, the vessel would not budge though rope after rope was broken in the attempt to move her. At last, in disgust, all hands went below to dinner; but we had not been below many minutes when some one shouted that the vessel was afloat, and sure enough, when we ran on deck, we found she had slid astern off the reef, so quietly that no one had noticed it. All sail was made, the well was sounded and no leak was discovered. We had a fine fair wind, which sprang up almost at the same moment that the vessel floated, and before the evening gun was fired from the fort we had dropped our anchor in Singapore

Roads, landed the horses the following morning, and so ended our passage.

The horses were landed in bad condition. The market was overstocked by some recent arrivals, and so very poor prices were realised. As soon as my business was finished I watched eagerly for a vessel to take me back to Fremantle, as the grooms were under contract to be returned to the colony.

By means of letters of introduction I made several pleasant acquaintances in Singapore, and was invited by one of them to leave the hotel where I was staying, "The Adelphi," and take up my quarters at his bungalow, where I remained during my stay in Singapore. My friend, one of the leading merchants of Singapore, had a comfortable residence about a mile from Singapore on the Bukit-Timah road, placed in the midst of delightful surroundings of tropical vegetation, such as can only be seen in those ever-green islands, so near to the equator as to be within the zone of almost incessant rain. It was a most comfortable, though queerly constructed house, or rather series of houses, connected by verandahs trellised and overgrown with the irrepressible vegetation of the tropics. The dining-room was a building by itself, so was the drawing-room; beyond these was another building, my host and hostess's bedroom and sitting-room; another one-storeyed, long, rambling building contained the three or four guest rooms, each with a sitting-room and bathroom attached, and in the rear of all were the kitchen, stabling, and offices. In front of the house, away from the road, extended a bright green lawn, and beyond this were pleasant alleys and bosky paths, winding in and out amongst all kinds of wondrous vegetation, creepers, bushes, and palms, all interlaced, with here and there some bright flowers

gleaming amidst the all-pervading green. Orchids and other strange but beautiful flowering plants hung in festoons from tree to tree, whilst everywhere one could observe how the efforts of man to direct and restrain the growth of the natural vegetation, and keep up an artificial pleasance, had here and there been frustrated, and in places even obliterated, by the ever-encroaching, the ceaseless attacks of the surrounding jungle.

After the long spell I had had of the dry, thirsty land of West Australia, where for many months of the year no green thing can be seen, unless it be the pale cheerless green of the eucalyptus or other trees and bushes, this charming spot seemed quite a paradise; and loth indeed was I to leave it when the time came to bid adieu to my kind friends, and take up my quarters on board a filthy little trading schooner bound for Fremantle. She was an uncomfortable vessel, not intended for passengers, swarmed with cockroaches, had an uncouth blustering lout for skipper, and a thick-headed Dutchman for mate. The crew were all Malays, and the skipper had with him his Malay wife and child, although I subsequently learned that he had left duplicates of these in Fremantle, when he had sailed thence some two or three years previously with a cargo of sandalwood for Singapore. There he had obtained a freight for some port in Borneo, and, taking a fancy to the life and to this part of the world, he remained in the Eastern Archipelago, trading from port to port and having a fine time of it for himself; but with very unsatisfactory results as far as the owner was concerned, who was constantly writing for him to bring the vessel back to the colony, which he managed to escape doing on one pretext or another. At last circumstances, and the owners' agents in Singapore,

proved too strong for him. The schooner was now under way for Fremantle direct, with a cargo of sugar, cigars, Holland gin, and several other luxuries, necessaries, or superfluities.

We had the usual long and tedious passage experienced in sailing vessels between Singapore and the straits of Sunda. The day before entering the straits the mainboom was carried away through the bad seamanship of our skipper, who, nothing loth, ran the vessel into the anchorage at Anjer for repairs.

A vessel from Fremantle, bound for Singapore, had just anchored in the roads. Our rascally skipper boarded her, and getting all the latest news from Fremantle, returned on board, evidently not over pleased with the information received. I afterwards learned that he had been informed that his arrival was anxiously awaited by the owner, the police, and his legal spouse, and that he would find the colony too hot for him. Be this as it may, for some reason known only to himself, but which subsequent events may help to explain, he shifted the vessel about a mile or so north of Anjer, anchoring afresh in ten fathoms, with only fifteen fathoms of chain out, and forthwith turned in to sleep. About an hour after this, a stiff breeze from the Sumatra coast setting in, the vessel began to drag her anchor, and though I urged the mate to veer away on the cable, he refused to do so without the captain's sanction, and dared not wake him to ask permission. All was evidently pre-arranged, for within an hour's time the vessel had dragged into shoal water, her bottom was knocked in, and she settled down on the reef, fortunately keeping upright. Strange to say, the skipper only managed to awake just as she was striking the reef, but did not seem at all put out about it, and accepted the total loss of vessel in a very philosophical spirit.

There was no immediate danger, and there was no help for it, so I was not much concerned, though the position was not a very pleasant one. My passage money was gone, the groom's passage money also, and I had not a farthing in my possession.

As the water rose and began to invade the cabin I got my box on deck, and sat down on it to await developments; and I watched how, as the water rose in the vessel's hold, so did the cockroaches begin to rise in swarms, until the whole of the decks, bulwarks, rigging, and spars were covered with a mass of the loathsome pests. The crew were busy getting up what stores could be saved from the cabin. Amongst other articles passed up on deck was a basket of fresh eggs. These were quickly noticed by two monkeys belonging to the crew; and, whilst every one was busy, they jumped down from the rigging and rapidly loaded each other with as many eggs as they could hold, and retreated aloft, grinning and dropping eggs on the deck, until I had to fairly scream with laughter at this comic interlude in the semi-tragic, pre-arranged disaster.

An American vessel at anchor off Anjer sent a boat to assist us to get our effects ashore. Here, after a while, we were provided with a room to sleep in by the resident pending our transport round to Batavia, where the British consul would have to deal with us as "distressed British subjects."

Anjer was an important little place, being the port of call for vessels passing into or out of the China Sea from all parts. Here captains made a practice of calling for a last supply of fresh provisions before passing through the straits. Here also they received and despatched letters, so that the Anjer boatmen made a pretty good living, and were able to speak a few words of almost every European language. The settlement was a very old one.

There was a residency, a court house, a hotel, and a European store. The fort contained a small garrison of Dutch troops, there were several Chinese stores, and a large native population.

It was (alas, that one must write of it as being a thing of the past!) a lovely spot. The atap huts in the native kampongs, and the more substantial European and Chinese buildings, were almost hidden amidst the luxuriant tropical vegetation. Long groves of cocoa-nut palms lined the coast for some distance on either hand, through which the military road to Batavia wound its devious way, and formed a pleasant evening promenade. On one side you could get glimpses of magnificent mountain scenery, for Anjer was situated almost at the foot of an important range, one of the many volcanic chains which are the most striking features of Javanese scenery. To seaward there was the ever-breaking surf, and far in the blue distance could be seen the highlands and mountain peaks of Sumatra; whilst nearer still two small islets, clothed with vegetation, stood up boldly from the middle of the straits, now and then hiding the white sails of some passing vessel, or the heralding smoke of some steamer approaching or passing along this great marine thoroughfare.

Landward, between the thickly growing cocoa-nut palms or the graceful Pinang palms, one could see emerald-green glades extending up the steep slopes of the mountains, from whence, as the evening land breeze started up, sweet odours of spices and scented grasses were wafted downwards, together with the chirping cries of the troops of monkeys in the near jungle, and maybe at times the ominous roar of some distant tiger.

The road was lined on one side by a kind of low bush, and I observed as I walked along that if my foot caused a pebble to fly into these bushes, or if by chance I struck

against any of them, right along in front of me all the leaves would close up in succession, as if the news of the assault had been passed along for yards ahead. These were, of course, the sensitive plants, which I had never before seen growing wild, though in Singapore it was in places a very troublesome weed, quickly overgrowing the cultivated clearings.

Our temporary quarters consisted of a small hut, which formed a kind of lean-to at the lighthouse buildings at Anjer Point, and was quite in the depths of the jungle. At night the noises from the mountain side and the deep gorges running up from the beach, all overgrown with dense vegetation, were, to our unaccustomed ears, rather troublesome. The head lighthouse-keeper, a Dutchman, could speak a little English, and as I had picked up a little Malay, we managed to understand one another pretty well. From him I got a good deal of information, more or less reliable, about the province of Sunda, its people, its flora and fauna. For instance, one evening as I was stretched out on my rug under the verandah, admiring the gleaming flashes of innumerable fireflies, and yarning with my Dutch acquaintance, a prolonged wailing sound broke the stillness of the night. I asked what it was, and he, eager to impart the information, replied, " Oh, dot der mongkey ; he look it out for der rain." Sure enough, shortly after this, we had to seek shelter inside from the violence of a tropical shower; and I came to the conclusion that the monkey as a weather prophet, at least in Java, made a better fist of it than our own meteorological wiseacres. Another evening I was startled by the loud roaring of some inhabitant of the jungle, and on asking what that might be, my friend replied, " Oh, dot der teeger ; he look it out for der mongkey." He added that though the tiger of Java is an immense beast, yet the native hunters

are not much afraid of it; and that though one usually associates the tiger's prey with some of the larger-sized animals, even human victims occasionally, yet the Java tiger principally lives on monkeys, fowls, mice, and other ignoble small fry. The Javanese construct massive traps of timber, and, sooner or later, any tiger that has become too much of a nuisance is trapped and held in durance vile. Then, if there is any prospect of being able to sell him alive, the tiger is carted or carried, cage and all, down to the nearest port and shipped to Europe. If, on the other hand, the trouble and cost of transport, and of feeding the brute (on fowls, an it please you), is too much, the Kepala-kampong, or headman, gives notice of a feast and grand tiger-baiting to the surrounding kampongs; whence all the young bloods, the elders, and the pretty Javanese girls in their hand-painted sarongs and holiday attire hasten to take part in the death of the tiger.

The wooden cage is placed in an open space in the centre of a close ring of warriors, armed with long stout spears held firmly in front of each man at an angle, so that when, at a given signal, the front of the cage falls down and the striped monster bounds forth, he finds himself surrounded at every turn by a rampart of spears, against which he throws himself again and again, until he succumbs to innumerable wounds. After the death a general move is made to a kind of open booth, constructed of the usual "ataps," where a feast is spread; and when this is done justice to, music becomes the order of the day. Sets of gongs and various wire-stringed instruments are used to accompany the singers. The sports are kept up till night.

On a subsequent trip to Java I accompanied a friend to see one of these tiger-slayings, and must confess the proceedings were very tame after the first few moments.

Springing from the trap with a loud roar, the tiger immediately crouched down, looking all round for a chance of getting clear. Suddenly he made a dash towards one point of the circle of men and glittering spear-points, only to impale himself on several of them, the shafts being long enough to keep him far out of reach of the men. Turning to another point, he was repelled in the same manner; and so on again and again, until at length, overwhelmed with wounds and loss of blood, the great brute received a spear-thrust in the breast which finally disposed of him.

On the tiger's part the fight was conducted in grim silence with draggling tail, and a generally scared appearance, giving vent only now and again to a half growl, half howl as the spears penetrated. He did not appear to concern himself about vengeance, but seemed only despairingly bent on breaking through the cordon and regaining shelter in the surrounding jungle. The men now and again, as a more than usually fierce charge was repulsed, would give a "Hooo" of exultation; but otherwise the whole proceedings were on their part also carried out in dead silence. Had the tiger charged at the particular spot where I and other onlookers were stationed, no doubt I would have found things rather more exciting, but, as it happened, he did not; and he received the *coup de grâce* in a very short time.

After a week's stay in Anjer the resident informed me that he could only obtain an open boat to send us round to Batavia in, and that we would have to sail that night. About midnight, the tide serving, we went down to the beach and found our craft, a rickety old fishing prahu, all ready for a start; so, stepping on board, we bade adieu to Anjer and started on our long journey. As long as there was enough wind to fill the grass-mat sail, or as long as we could make way against the tide by means of

the oars, we kept going; but if the wind fell, or the tide became too strong, if the men were tired and wanted a sleep or the sun was too hot,—for any and every excuse, the piece of bent wood with a heavy stone lashed to it, which did duty as an anchor, was dropped, and we had to wait patiently until our old commander thought proper to get under way again. So it is no wonder that it took us six days to traverse the short distance separating Anjer from Batavia.

We kept close in shore all the way, near enough to afford us a good view of the country; and I then formed the opinion, only confirmed on visiting other parts of the island, that Java is the nearest approach to an earthly paradise that one can imagine, as far as scenery is concerned. I have visited many lands before and since, but have never seen such charming scenes as greet the traveller when coasting along the shores of Java. Nowhere can more magnificent mountains be seen, clothed with vegetation nearly to the summit, and seeming to rise sheer out of the sea. It is probably to this latter fact that the mountains of Java owe their imposing appearance.

Here and there are stretches of beach with white sands standing out in pleasing contrast with the background of red soil or of deep green fringes of cocoanut and areca palms. Farther up the slopes one sees patches of cultivated land, between the deep gorges which seem to extend up the flanks of the mountains from the sea nearly to the summit, overgrown with a dense tangle of rich green vegetation.

Farther up still, one can remark the change in the vegetation as the cooler climate of the highlands is reached, whilst far in the interior one can discern great mushroom shaped clouds of smoke capping the summits, which are now and again momentarily dispersed by some

sudden uprush from the active volcanoes beneath. Sailing along the coast at night, the red gleam of the fiery craters, reflected from these ever-overhanging clouds of sulphurous smoke and vapour, presents a weird and extraordinary appearance when seen for the first time.

Whilst coasting along we passed a shallow bay where the jungle trees and mangroves grew right down to the water's edge, and here, jumping from branch to branch, running along the beach, and swinging from tree to tree, were countless troops of small grey monkeys. Their joyous evolutions were most amusing to watch as we slowly drifted past the bay. I had never seen monkeys in their wild state before; and I gathered from our old commander that these small monkeys are a great pest inland, doing much damage to the crops, and being inveterate thieves where eggs are in question.

At last, late one evening, we began to thread our way through the Thousand Islets into the roadstead of Batavia, and having entered the canal—for here as in Holland the Dutchman must have his canal—our Malay crew ran out a line, and towed us up to the "Boom," and made fast to the piles; and there we had to remain for the rest of the night in the most deadly atmosphere in Batavia, where the low-lying, malarial exhalations were considered to be at their worst. There was no help for it; it was too late to find the British Consul in his office, and I had no money to get a room anywhere. Anyhow, I may as well here state that though I escaped scot-free myself, all my grooms were seized with the fever, and two of them died afterwards in Singapore.

Next morning our old Malay commander duly delivered us at the Consulate, and, having been paid his due, went on his way rejoicing, and was seen by us no more.

I was fortunate in obtaining a draft on Singapore for my immediate wants from an English merchant with

whom I had had business dealings once before. He invited me to his house at Nordwyk, where I was hospitably entertained by my host and the kind Malay lady to whom he was married. In the course of conversation I learned that many of the European merchants were married to Javanese ladies, aristocratic dames who could trace their descent for centuries back, and were well dowered too. They seemed a happy couple; and as my friend, an Englishman, said he had no desire to return home, I could see no reason why they should not be so.

In the early morning the European ladies of Batavia may be seen walking about the bazaars in the cool morning air shopping and gossiping, clad in the native dress of Sarong and long Kabya, with their bare feet thrust into curiously shaped embroidered slippers. But they are not supposed to be visible at such times, nor indeed all day, until after the sun has set. Then they come forth into the cool evening air in full dress, to meet their menfolk and friends in the daily rendezvous on the esplanade, where the garrison band plays for an hour or so until dinner-time causes a general retreat.

Both ladies and gentlemen in Batavia take their evening walks or drives bareheaded, which, though rather surprising to the new-comer, is an elegant and sensible practice. The Dutch school girls, no matter what their age, may be seen passing along the streets any morning on their way to school dressed in loose white, embroidered combinations, the lower portion of which reaches just below the knees, and ends in an embroidered frill, beyond which extends an interval of bare legs terminated by short white socks and slippers. With no hats, with their hair hanging down their backs, their satchels slung over their shoulders, in their loose white garments and with an attendant ayah on guard, they look very nice and very cool.

The many coloured costumes of the natives, the white-clad European, the sober-looking Arabs, and half-naked Chinese coolies, the numerous itinerant merchants of all kinds, the gharries and dos-à-dos cars, the creaking bullock drays, and now and again some stately carriage and pair containing a couple of Chinese lolling back in the luxuriously cushioned seats, or a passing troop of native cavalry, all help to make the streets lively and picturesque. In the European quarters the scrupulous tidiness of the streets, such as only Hollanders seem able to attain in civic arrangements, is remarkable.

Whilst at Nordwyk I had my first and only experience of an earthquake, and pretty scared I was too, though I was assured that the three shocks which took place were considered to be very slight ones. I was sitting in the verandah, having my after-breakfast pipe alone, when the first tremor occurred. I could not understand what was wrong, but started to my feet with my hair, as usual, on end. After an interval of only a few seconds came the second shock, more severe than the last, but still I did not understand. I did not feel so much afraid as puzzled. My sensation was not what I realised as being fear, so much as a terrible anxiety and expectancy of something more that was going to occur. The third shock was not so severe as the two preceding ones; but all in a moment the thought flashed through my mind that these were earthquake shocks. I hurried round to the front courtyard, where my friend was just stepping into his carriage on his way into town. He asked me if I had felt the earthquake, which assured me I had made no mistake. One might easily mistake any kind of unusual shock for an earthquake, but no one could ever by any possibility mistake an earthquake shock for any other thing.

After a brief detention in Batavia we managed to get

away in the French mail steamer *Emirene*, bound for Singapore, whence I hoped to be able once more to secure a passage to Fremantle. On board the *Emirene* I made the acquaintance of a gentleman from Ceylon, relative of a celebrated artist, and he, before we arrived at Singapore, introduced me to a fellow-passenger who turned out to belong to the same part of England as myself. The three of us dined together at the Hotel de l'Europe before we finally separated.

Next day my grooms were all struck down with the Java fever, contracted during the night we passed in the canal at Batavia, and I had to leave them in the hospital, except the aboriginal native "Bobby," who was sufficiently recovered to accompany me. I secured a passage in a vessel bound for Fremantle, which turned out to be the same one in which I took my first passage to Western Australia.

Knowing her sailing qualities, I resigned myself to a long passage. Nor did the slow old tub deceive me in this respect. She gave me ample time to renew my acquaintance with every cockroach on board of her, and their name was legion. We put in at Batavia to fill up cargo for Fremantle, and I took the opportunity to have a trip to Buitenzorg, the show place of Batavia. There are some fine botanical specimens there, no doubt; but the chief attraction is the cool air, as compared with the stewing heat of the lowlands.

A grand review of troops, lately returned from the never-ending war in Achin, was held on the Koningsplein. The soldiers seemed to me a rather mixed lot. The European cavalry and the native infantry both detracted from the impressiveness of the ceremony,—the former being mounted on tiny ponies, the riders' feet nearly trailing on the ground, and the latter, because they were paraded in bare feet, with their trousers rolled up, no doubt to save wear and tear.

The *Laughing Wave* having completed her loading, we once more got under way. We called at Anjer for fresh provisions, but this time we did not anchor. The topsail was hove aback, and the vessel stood off and on abreast of the anchorage until the stores had been put on board. Sail was made, and a fair wind and tide soon carried us down the straits, and Anjer disappeared from sight for ever, as far as I was concerned. For ever, because a couple of years later Anjer and the inhabitants of the district, to the number of some 70,000 souls, were swept away and obliterated by the mighty tidal wave—the grand finale of the Krakatoa irruption—which, rushing on to the west coast in the form of a wall of water ninety feet high, annihilated every vestige of the place. Two years afterwards there was not a tree standing, all around being buried in pumice. Before clearing the straits of Sunda we passed close to the ill-fated island of Krakatoa, which at that time showed no sign of the volcanic activity which broke out later with such appalling results. With a light, steady breeze we soon left Java and the islands a long way astern, and settled down to a long steady "bash" against the S.E. Trades. The passage was uneventful, and I was utterly weary of my second trip in the *Laughing Wave* long before we finally dropped anchor in Gages Roads.

CHAPTER IX

Unfortunate Ventures—*Cantat Vacuus*—Light Marching Order—Journey Overland—Champion Bay—The *Harriet*—Sharks Bay—Pearl-Shell Fishery—The Poogie Tubs—North-West Cape—The Islands—The Flying Foam Passage—Mangroves—Oyster Trees—Devil's Gap and Pope's Nose—Across the Bar—Cossack—The North-westers—Hotel Life—Flush Times—The Pearling Fleet—Cockroaches again—Feeding the Fishes—Moving Sand Dunes—Sovereigns worth Twenty-two Shillings—The local Currency—"Shin Plasters"—No Lawyers—Curious magnetic Disturbance—Roebourne—The Heat—A cool Reception—"Bumming."

AFTER a brief stay in Fremantle I returned to the station and resumed horse-hunting, trapping, etc., until a series of disastrous shipments made us determine to give up the business and seek fresh fields and pastures new.

With no other property than our saddle horses and scantily filled valises, with no other advantages than health, strength, and determination, we decided to make a start for Nicol Bay in the far North-West, a comparatively new settlement offering many inducements to adventurers such as we were.

The journey overland to Champion Bay was not fruitful in incident, but we managed to enliven the tedium of the long ride by wrangling, yarning, and singing as we travelled onwards. Each night we put up at one of the stations, and always received that kindly hospitality which was so freely extended to travellers on this route, a hospitality which now and then was rather overtaxed

before a regular line of steamers between Champion Bay and Fremantle had been started, which to a great extent relieved the overland traffic.

Shortly after our arrival in Geraldton a bran new vessel, the *Harriet*, put into Champion Bay bound for Cossack, and in her we secured a passage without much trouble. We sold our horses and only took our saddles and bridles with us, so we were not much encumbered with luggage, which was just as well as it turned out, for the vessel had no accommodation for passengers. The main thing was the passage to Nicol Bay, and that we secured by a rather stiff payment. For sleeping accommodation we had to take turns, sleeping in the skipper's bunk when he was on deck, on one of the cabin lockers, or rolled up in a horse-rug on top of the deck-house. Such little matters of detail were not thought much of in those days, however, and we managed very well under the circumstances, the main discomfort being the pitching and tossing of the little schooner as she fought her way up north.

Sharks Bay, where we called to land cargo, was the seat of a pearl fishery which was at one time a flourishing industry, but latterly the banks had been so thoroughly dredged that now there was not much to be made at it. When too late, the government were taking steps to close up some of the banks. The pearls obtained in Sharks Bay, though more numerous, could not be compared with the North-West pearls for size, lustre, or value. They were generally small, and were mostly straw coloured.

We took advantage of the vessel's stay here to travel across one of the long sandy peninsulas which jut out from the mainland, to visit, in company with the owner of the schooner, the temporary pearling camp which was situated at the head of a deep inlet, which was only to

be reached after a toilsome march across the sandhills. As we approached the camp a most appalling stench saluted us. Imagine the odours from a *montjoye* of putrid animal matter, from thousands of rotten eggs and oceans of sulphuretted hydrogen, all blended in one fell blast, and a faint idea may be formed of the villainous fumes which assailed us as we neared the camp. Asking our guide what was the meaning of this, he cheerfully replied, " Oh ! it's only some one stirring his poogie tub," and then went on to explain the process of obtaining the pearls from the oysters. The contents of the shells are emptied into large tubs, and are allowed to rot there in the hot sun. Sea water is added, and the mass of corruption is constantly stirred up until the whole dissolves away in putrefaction. In a few days there is nothing left in the overflowing tubs but clear water, and when this is run off the pearls are found at the bottom. With many hundreds of these " poogie tubs " round the camp it was no matter for wonder that, as we approached, the air seemed to be poisoned. A very brief inspection of the fleet of small sailing boats and the dredgers was quite enough for us, and we hastily beat a retreat from this unsavoury locality.

Once more the little schooner was got under way, and we threaded our course through the shallow and intricate channels which separate Sharks Bay from the open sea. Nor did we get clear without grounding more than once, before the *Harriet* began to bow and dip her nose into the long swell of the Indian Ocean. There was a heavy swell heralding a stiff gale, which we worked our way into, and which detained us for several days off the North-West Cape, vainly trying to round it in the teeth of the gale. At length the north-wester began to slacken and veer more to the westward, and enabled us to weather the Cape and run down close inland past Exmouth Gulf,

the Ashburton, and the long chain of islets lining the coast up to the Flying-foam passages. Here the vessel was steered through narrow channels once famous for rich patches of pearl shells, and here the strength of the tides began to show in contrast with the almost imperceptible tidal movements on the western coast. Here, too, for the first time we saw the typical North-West coast scenery. High rugged ironstone hills overgrown with spinifex, the coast lined with the ever-present mangrove thickets. The trunks and limbs of these curious trees, which flourish right in the salt water, are so covered with barnacles and limpets that one can almost believe in the old travellers' tales of the "oyster tree."

As we emerged from the northern entrance of the "Foam" passage, the high table-topped hills at the back of Nichol Bay and Delambre Island came into view, with Picard and Depuch Islands in the far distance to the eastwards. Now threading our way between the boulders and reefs, through the Devil's Gap and past the Pope's Nose, we dropped anchor off Jarman Island until there was sufficient depth of water on the bar, as Cossack, or Port Walcot, is situated some distance up one of the tidal creeks so numerous in this part of the colony.

At half-tide we crossed the bar, and once inside the creek we had no need of sail, for the tidal stream rushed the vessel up quite as fast as we cared to go. When the anchor was finally let go abreast of the jetty it spun the little schooner round like a top, tautening out the chain cable until she headed up against the tide and rested calmly on the smooth but swiftly rushing stream.

Cossack, like most pioneer settlements, was not a very imposing looking place. One might look in vain for domes, spires, or Corinthian columns; but on the other hand, one could observe a pleasing freedom from prejudiced and conventional ideas regarding architecture.

Right ahead of the jetty was a small rough stone building of four walls, a shingle roof, one window, and a door. This was H.M. Custom House, Post Office, Excise Office, and Custom House officers' quarters all rolled into one.

Near by was a large, low building, partly of stonework, partly of brickwork, part of timber and yet another portion of corrugated iron. One could only suppose the contractor had made a mistake in the estimates of quantities, or, disregarding such details, had fallen back in succession on each kind of material as the local supply of the previous one became exhausted. This variegated building was the chief store and principal rendezvous of the citizens of Cossack. Here all the latest news from the pearling grounds could be obtained during the "shelling" season; here all the local and district gossip was focussed and discussed, the wants of the community supplied, and the price of many a fine pearl agreed upon between buyer and seller.

Often enough, too, when the monotony of life in this dreary little hole was about to drive one frantic, the proposal "Let's go down to the store" would come as a happy relief. At any time between sunrise and sunset pearlers and squatters might be seen seated on the counter, on upturned buckets or piles of hardware, throwing dice for cigars or tinned peaches and pineapples, the latter being looked upon as great luxuries in a place so barren and arid as Nichol Bay, where the naturally rich soil is often unwatered by rain for months at a time, and where consequently fruit and vegetables cannot be grown, without laborious watering.

Two wooden shanties built close to one another, facing the creek, were dignified with the names of hotels, and here, when the pearling fleet returned to Cossack at the end of the diving season, many strange, exciting, and highly edifying scenes occurred. The verandahs

surrounding these hostelries would then be crowded with a medley company of all sorts and conditions of "Nor'-westers."

Seated on a bench under the verandah, clad in a Crimean shirt, moleskin trousers, broad felt hat, booted and spurred, with a broad belt to which was suspended leather pouches and sheath-knife, would be some squatter from one of the out-stations, hobnobbing with friends of the pearling persuasion. The latter in a still more free-and-easy style of dress, such as the universally worn felt hat, a silk handkerchief loosely knotted round the well-tanned throat, a shirt with the sleeves rolled up and open at the neck for comfort's sake, a pair of loose cotton pyjamas, the belt and pouch, which latter was a kind of North-West trade mark, made up the usual style of dress affected by the average pearler when in port. There was no "side" put on in those days—the flush times of Cossack—when at the end of the season some forty or fifty vessels would come into the creek, bring many a ton of mother-of-pearl shells and many a pickle bottle more or less full of pearls, and some with owners, skipper, and white crew eager to join in the orgies which made Cossack ring again, and the hotel keepers laugh and grow fat.

Every man knew every other man in the place in those days, and was always ready to drink or stand a drink on the slightest provocation, or none at all. Or he would be equally prompt to go round to the back of the shanty and stand up or stagger about in the hot white sand, whilst differences of opinion were being settled by punching each other until the loser was knocked out. I remember one celebrated fight between a Victorian and a West Australian which lasted, with intervals for rest and refreshment, for

three days, and at the end of that time neither combatant had the best of it, and both had forgotten what they were fighting about.

Few were the white men in Cossack or Roebourne who were known by their real names. "Purser's" names were so constantly used that there were many who, from force of habit, would fail to answer if addressed by their real surnames. Such appellations as "Big-Mac," "Tinribs," "Nancy Dawson," "Spinaway," "Spanish Joe," "Antone," "Dongarra," "Shypoo Charlie" amongst others, will be long remembered by old Nor'-westers. In cases where no nickname had been conferred, every one was referred to by his Christian name, or some quaint diminutive of his surname. These were the kinds of men who filled the two hotels to overflowing; the overflow being a lot of half-inanimate forms lying about on the verandah, or cushioned on the loose sand amongst the broken glasses and "Dead Marines" in front of the buildings.

Now and again a string of natives could be seen passing along from the camp at the rear of the sand-hills towards one of the pearling craft. Some clad in the regulation moleskin breeches and cotton shirt, which formed the principal part of their remuneration as divers, or, oftener still, with merely a string round the waist, in front of which was suspended a narrow dirty piece of rag.

The hotel keeper in the North-West considered he was doing you a favour to accept you as a guest at all, and was doing all that could be expected of him if meals were provided, and a sleeping place found, either on or under the billiard table. Failing these choice positions, one had to be content with a horse-rug and the soft white sand in the open air. To be sure, it was a free country. There was no compulsion.

You could sleep on the sand in front of the house or in the stock-yard at the rear. It would all be included in the weekly bill. So also, if you should arrive from inland and sought accommodation for your horse, mine host would point over his shoulder, informing you, as he puffed at his long clay, that there was a stock-yard at the back and some hay and water, to which you would have to help yourself. As a rule the ostler was either drunk, getting drunk, or just coming to the surface, as it were, after a quite recent drunk. Nor was this to be wondered at, when perhaps a dozen pearlers were on the *jamboree* at once, and, not content with the slow process of standing "free drinks" at the bar, would be ordering champagne by the case, and "Shypoo" (colonial ale) by the barrel. Under such trying circumstances, what could a poor thirsty ostler be expected to do, except to get into a state locally referred to as "Beast-o"?

If you wanted a wash, you had the privilege of drawing a bucket of water and using your own towel and soap; or, if a bath was wanted, there was the creek full of sea water at high tide, all of which was included in the hotel bill. One or two early arrived and specially favoured guests would have small rooms to themselves. These were about the size of a berth in a small vessel; indeed, these rooms were built from portions of cabin fittings out of some vessel which had been condemned and broken up in the creek. Even these luxurious quarters, however, could not be depended on. Often enough, during a stay in Cossack, when one wanted to turn in, you would find the bed occupied, and the narrow floor space taken up by three or four of the revellers, who had either retreated to or had been carried and dumped down in the first quiet spot that presented itself. It was no use complaining. Re-

monstrances would be met by the unanswerable argument that it would be more trouble to remove the incapables than to leave them where they were, and that there was "plenty of room on the sand, with no sign of rain," etc.

At anchor in the middle of the creek, riding to the rising or falling tide, or high and dry on the banks of the western branch, lay the pearling fleet. These would come in, one after the other, at the end of the shelling season, after discharging the native divers at various points along the coast. Cutters, schooners, brigs, and luggers all were there, ranging in size from five or six to fifty, sixty, and one hundred tons register.

The scene when we arrived was a busy one indeed, for such a small place. Here might be seen a group of "niggers" scrubbing the copper bottom of one of the vessels as she lay careened over for the purpose. On board another, shells were being packed in hogsheads by the white men, a couple of natives standing on the heads of the casks, whilst the heavy blows from the coopering hammers gradually drew the staves into place. Farther up along the beach, under the shelter of Vampire Island, several vessels could be seen, shored upright, whilst the local shipwrights—in the intervals of seeing how much "Shypoo" they could swallow without dropping—did the necessary repairs.

A common sight, too, was a vessel sunk to the bottom of the creek at high tide with only her spars above water, and this for two or three tides in succession. A closer examination at low water of such vessels would reveal that they had not sunk down, but had been filled with ironstone ballast to keep them down when the incoming tide found its way in through a large gap cut in the vessel's bilge for this purpose. It is the only way of getting rid of a twelvemonth's

collection of inch-long cockroaches which swarm on board all pearling vessels. They are attracted by, and multiply prodigiously on, the shreds of muscle left on the mother-of-pearl shells when packed away in the hold. The damage they do to the stores, etc., becomes a serious matter, and hence this annual "*noyade*."

When it becomes known that one of the fleet is to be scuttled on a day tide, all those who care for a fish dinner collect round the vessel. As the rising tide gradually drives the vermin up from their foul retreats amongst the timbers and thence overboard, shoals of fish are gathered round to feast on them. There is no retreat for them up the masts or rigging. At every point of retreat a nigger lad is stationed with a handbroom or piece of canvas to beat them off into the water. At such a time a judiciously dropped dynamite cartridge does great execution amongst the fish, and generally secures a good feed of mullet or of the many other kinds of edible fish which collect round.

On the far side of the creek was quite a flotilla of dinghys, the boats used for diving from; and up the east fork, abreast of Vampire Island, was the stock-yard and shipping place for cattle and horses, backed in the distance by a prominent range of ironstone hills; whilst forming the southern limit of the townsite, and standing as it were sentinel over the road leading to Roebourne, is a curiously formed hillock locally known as "Nanny-Goat Hill." At the northern limit of this very imposing town was a corrugated iron building, called "Peed's Store." There was a rough wooden tram line, half buried in the shifting sands, running thence to the small jetty. The western boundary was a range of ever-moving white sand dunes, beyond which was situated the Native Camp, a kind of slum suburb with which nearly every townsite was provided in those days.

When our vessel dropped anchor in the creek we could not understand why several of the inhabitants boarded the vessel asking for sovereigns, and offering as much as a guinea or even twenty-two shillings for each golden coin. The reason why gold was at such a premium when we arrived was because it happened to be just about the time for paying taxes and duties. The customs and inland revenue people would only take payment in legal tender.

Now, at the time I write of, there was no bank in Cossack, and the currency was the most cosmopolitan imaginable. If you changed a sovereign or half-sovereign you would get in exchange Mexican dollars, Chinese, Spanish, or American dollars, French five-franc and fifty-centime pieces, Spanish pesetas, rupees, Dutch gulden, Italian lire or Russian roubles, each having a local value; but not an English coin could be seen, or so few as not to be worth taking into account. Coins of any kind were few and far between. The main medium of exchange in the North-West was what was known as "Shin plasters." These were promises to pay, printed—sometimes only written—on a thin rubbishy paper, yellow up to a certain limit, then white or red as the face value increased. Most of them were issued by the principal firm of storekeepers in Cossack and Roebourne; and, as they were of the flimsiest paper procurable, and were frequently crumpled away in the pocket of the holder, many a "Shin plaster" went astray, as may be supposed, much to the profit of the firm issuing them. They answered every purpose locally, and only became a nuisance when one wanted to carry money to the southern settlements.

As may be supposed, it took one some little time to get used to the intricacies of this complicated means of exchange, and one had to be on one's guard lest a peseta,

which was locally good for only one shilling, was tendered in place of a Dutch rupee, for example, which was considered equal to one - and - sixpence. There were also some nice shades of distinction in value between the Chinese, Japanese, American, and Mexican dollars,—the latter being most esteemed, and exchanging for the full four shillings and twopence. Then there were a lot of small coins,—the annas, centimes, nickels, kopecks, and a crowd of small white coins, all of which would be tendered as a matter of course in exchange for payment made in more or less undecipherable "Shin plasters."

However, people were honest in the North-West. In those days there were no lawyers in the district. Neither was there any church in the townsite. A school and a lock-up were about the only institutions in the place devoted to the improvement of mind and body.

Amongst the white men forming the crews of the pearling vessels, who were in some instances also the owners, might be found Spaniards, French, Malays, Americans, Italians, and colonials. In only two other places have I encountered such a mixed lot, one of these was Singapore and the other Port Said.

Before ending this description of Cossack it may be interesting to mention a very remarkable phenomenon which can be observed when approaching the port from the sea. The first time I noticed it was about twelve months after my arrival in the district. I was on board one of the pearling craft coming into Cossack at the end of the season, and happened to be at the helm at the time. We were standing in towards the mouth of the creek. It was nearly calm and the sea was as smooth as a mill-pond. Suddenly, when we were nearly abreast of Delambre Island, about three miles distant, the compass card became violently agitated, and commenced to spin round and round in an astonishing manner for

some minutes as we sailed slowly onwards. Almost as suddenly, the normal magnetic influence resumed its sway, and the card once more became staid and trustworthy. We had evidently sailed over some place where abnormal magnetism entirely interfered with the ordinary influences. The magnetic spot, for I know not what else to call it, could not be of great extent, for I have passed close to it dozens of times during my stay in the North-West without noticing any effect on the compass. But, on the other hand, I have observed the phenomenon on several distinct occasions, and each time the cross-bearings showed it to be in the same position on the chart. The depth of water hereabouts, if I remember rightly, was about six fathoms at low water. It is a natural curiosity which cannot be easily explained. It cannot well be that the compass is here affected by the ironstone ranges. If this were so, why should their influence be confined to so small an area? Again, the compass is not merely deflected. When passing over the spot it seemed not only to lose all its peculiar properties, but to be violently agitated, and spin round whilst within the affected area. If one sailed the vessel a few yards to the westward or a few yards to the eastward of the spot indicated by former recorded bearings, no effect on the compass was observable. It was only when passing right over the actual position that any result occurred, thus proving to my mind that the disturbing influence only acted in a vertical direction.

From Cossack a road led across the marshes and over the range to Roebourne, the capital of the North-West, which we reached after a few days' stay at Port Walcot. Roebourne we found to be a slightly more staid and quiet place than Cossack, being the government headquarters for the district. It is situated about nine miles south from Cossack, had a population of about three hundred

and fifty souls, and is surrounded by those vast level plains of richly grassed country which make it the foremost pastoral district in the colony. It would be the ideal country for the sheep farmer were it not for the long and frequent droughts which prevail. The heat is terrific in the long summer months, and the absence of trees or any kind of shade makes it seem worse than it really is. Roebourne was surely the place where the newly arrived tourist, panting and mopping his dripping face, exclaimed to an old resident, "Good gracious! what does the barometer reach here in the shade?" He received the cheering answer, "Oh, about 125°; and—and—there ain't no shade." Very few European-born ladies can stand the heat, and even the fair colonials find the summers of Roebourne more than they like. It is a dry healthy heat, however, and the menfolk seem to manage very well. I soon got used to it myself.

I remember, one withering hot afternoon, strolling round to the small wooden shanty in which a friend of mine, one of the government officials, lived, in order to pay an afternoon call on the lady of the house. All the rooms were on the ground-floor. There were no two-storey buildings in Roebourne, on account of the frequent hurricanes; and, on this account also, every house of any size has a stout wire rope carried over the ridge pole, which is set up taut to ring-bolts in the ground, so as to prevent the house being turned over during these "Willi-Willis."

The door, of course, stood wide open. Not a sound could be heard of any one stirring within. I rapped on the door. "Who's there?" was called in feminine tones. I mentioned my name, and said I had called to see my friend, and inquire how she had enjoyed the previous evening's dance, etc. There was a slight splashing sound from the room on the right, and then the same voice

replied, "Well, you can't come in; you can sit down in the verandah and talk if you like, but the children are asleep, and I'm having a read in the bath and don't intend to get out of it until after sundown." And so this afternoon call had to be carried on under these amusing conditions. On leaving, the fair lady begged me to rouse the nigger girl at the back of the house, and make her draw another couple of buckets of water, as she said her bath was beginning to boil.

After bumming about for a week or two I managed to secure an engagement on one of the sheep stations about thirty-five miles west from Roebourne, where wool-washing and shearing were in full swing. There I remained for several months, occasionally riding into Roebourne for the mails or to attend some social gatherings, at which, in spite of the temperature, dancing would be carried on until daylight.

CHAPTER X

Pioneer Squatters—An Exploring Party—Arrival at Beagle Bay—Landing horses, etc.—"Beach-combers"—Preparations—The Kimberley District—Frilled Lizards—Hostile Natives—Escort Duty—"Native Companions"—Curious Dancing—Lake Louisa—Inland Mangroves—Off-saddle—Hut Building—A Stroll round the Lake—Emus—A mighty Nimrod—The Plague of Flies—Hostile Message—Notes on Natives—The Language—Weapons—A Primitive Race—Spears—Tribal Customs.

WHILST in Roebourne on one of these occasions I met some people who were about to take sheep to Beagle Bay, and thence intended to explore and take up land on the Fitzroy River in the Kimberley district, which had recently been traversed and reported on by Alex. Forrest.

This kind of work seemed to be more promising of adventure than knocking about on the stations in the settled districts, and there seemed to be an opportunity for doing a bit of exploring and land-jobbing on my own account, so I offered my services to the expedition. My offer was gladly accepted, hands being scarce in the North-West.

I reached Cossack the next day. A few hours were spent in shipping fodder and a few locally purchased ewes. The bulk of the sheep on board the vessel had been brought from the far south. Next morning we sailed away, bound for Beagle Bay, distant some four or five days' sail.

We arrived after a prosperous and uneventful passage, and dropped our anchor at the head of the Bay in about

three fathoms. The rise and fall of the tide here is about twenty-six feet, so that when the tide ran out we were left high and dry on the mud bank, and were able to land the sheep, horses, and stores without much difficulty. There was a corrugated iron building a little way up from the beach, where the only two white men in the district had established a temporary station for "beach-combing," whence, aided by some of the local natives, they searched the adjacent reefs at low water for mother-of-pearl shells.

Here the stores were temporarily secured from the weather and pilfering natives. All hands were then engaged putting carts and drays together, overhauling and mending harness, saddles, pack-saddles, etc., in preparation for the journey inland. It was decided to form a temporary sheep station at Lake Louisa, about thirty-five miles inland, until such time as a permanent run had been taken up on the Fitzroy River, and a fall of rain would permit the flock to be travelled across the peninsula to the "promised land."

The country about Beagle Bay was very different from what we had left behind us in Nichol Bay. There the country consisted of extensive treeless plains, interspersed with high barren ranges of ironstone overgrown with spinifex. Here the richly grassed forests ran nearly down to the beach, and were only separated from it by a dense border of mangroves. The vegetation was much more luxuriant, and in greater variety. In the Nichol Bay district water was scarce, whilst here surface springs of fresh water were abundant. The general run of the forest country was a dead level, and was composed of many trees which are not to be found south of Roebuck Bay. Many of these were quite new to us. In their branches, flying or springing from tree to tree, were numerous wild pheasants, vampire bats, and frilled

lizards. The natives seemed to be numerous compared to the few one meets with in the southern districts; and, owing to the abundance of game, they keep more together and are met with in larger bands than elsewhere. They are, however, a treacherous and murderous lot, not having as yet had any experience of the white man's powers. These are the natives that many years ago murdered in their sleep the explorers Panter, Harding, and Goldwire, and only recently they had killed a white man at Lagrange Bay. We had therefore to be on our guard; and strict orders were given that under no circumstances, either day or night, were we to go about unarmed. For these savages are cunning enough to watch the white man until they see he has been lulled into the carelessness of going unarmed. They watch their chance, and then his light is put out. To all aboriginal natives of Western Australia the killing of a white man is the most intensely interesting incident which can break the monotony of their savage existence. It is only fear of the consequence which restrains them in the more settled districts.

Going about armed with a heavy Colt's revolver dangling and dragging at my belt was most irksome at first, but it had to be put up with, and, like most annoyances, one soon got used to it.

After a few days at the Bay I was told off to escort and assist the teamster appointed to take the first dray-load of tools and stores to Lake Louisa. My duty was to ride ahead and indicate the course through the forest, by following the marks clearly "blazed" on the trees by a previous party.

Our road led through forest and thicket most of the way, but here and there we came to richly grassed clay flats where numerous springs of water were, curiously enough, situated on the top of low evergreen mounds.

Pheasants, kangaroos, and emus were frequently seen, and we came across numerous flocks of "native companions," holding their curious revels in the solitary glades on either hand of the track.

The antics of these birds (a kind of flamingo) are very curious. They seem to collect together only to have a bit of fun. A circle is formed round one of their number, who gives a display of dancing and jumping up and down, most amusing to witness. I never shot one, or had the opportunity of examining one of them closely; but they are graceful looking birds, and have long legs like a crane. Their plumage is of a bluish-white tinge.

We arrived at our destination about sundown, after a midday halt at one of the springs for rest and refreshment. Here, for the first time in Western Australia, I saw a natural lake of real fresh water. It was a mile or more in circumference, nearly circular, and seemed to deepen rapidly from the shores. It was covered with wild ducks (whistlers), and they rose up in clouds on our approach. The lake had evidently been of greater extent, for a much higher water mark could be distinctly seen on the surrounding mangroves many feet above its present level. A curious feature of Lake Louisa was its being bordered by a thick belt of genuine mangroves, which are usually to be found only on the seacoast. Beyond these there stretched the primeval forest, with its dense undergrowth of bush and grasses.

We decided to camp on the east side of the lake, and prepare for the arrival of the other members of the expedition, whom we expected to arrive with the sheep about sundown the following day. So, having unsaddled and hobbled the horses out, we had supper and turned in for the night, taking turns to keep an armed watch; for here the natives were known to be both hostile and daring.

Before the sun had risen next morning we started off, axe in hand, to cut timber suitable for framing a hut in which to secure the stores. It would also serve as headquarters for all hands. Owing to the abundance of timber, we were not long in cutting and dragging to the site selected a goodly supply of forked uprights, corner posts, and rafters; and whilst my companion proceeded with the framework I went off to an adjacent flat to cut rushes for the sides and roof.

By the time the rest of the party with the sheep, etc., arrived next day a well built hut and a temporary stock-yard had been erected. The task of making everything snug and shaking down in our new quarters did not take long. Feed and water for the flock were abundant and within easy reach of the camp. So we all settled down until preparations for the exploring expedition to the Fitzroy River were completed.

There being now very little to occupy my time, I used generally to take a double-barrel and stroll round the lake, on the chance of securing a few wild ducks, but they were so wary it was difficult to get within shot.

One afternoon I walked round the shores of the lake until opposite the encampment, and there stretched myself behind some bushes on the margin of the lake, hoping that a flight of the wild "whistlers" would alight within gunshot.

For about half an hour or more I remained perfectly still, outstretched, with the gun in front of me, when suddenly I heard a slight rustle or movement behind. It seemed to come from the forest surrounding the lake. Turning my head slowly, I saw what made my heart beat quickly with excitement. There, just emerging from the edge of the forest, was a troop of eight emus. They were evidently hard up for water to be about here in broad daylight, and were at the same time very shy of

coming into the open. The clang of the distant sheep bells and the many strange sounds and odours wafted across the lake from the direction of the camp would easily account for this. They were stealthily walking in single file from side to side, approaching the water's edge in a zig-zag manner. Every few yards they halted and listened warily with outstretched neck, until the leader once more ventured to move. I was delighted to see that their winding movements would soon bring them within gunshot. Luckily, they had not perceived me, though I was stretched out almost under their beaks. They were too much occupied in looking out for more distant dangers to be able to notice the immediate peril at their feet. But as yet I was powerless. The problem was, how could I make a change of front without attracting their notice? I was facing the water on the look-out for ducks, whilst here, right behind me, was far nobler game. The least ill-considered movement on my part would send them running at express speed into the shelter of the forest. I was afraid to move; and yet, "Nothing venture, nothing win" thought I. So, waiting until they were heading from me in the course of their zig-zag movements, I commenced to squirm myself round. Cautiously, and with infinite pains, I faced about, and at length got fairly turned, with the lake behind me and facing the forest.

Waiting for another chance, with the utmost care I succeeded in getting the gun round into position, and cocked both triggers very carefully. Careful as I was, however, one of the locks, being somewhat stiffer than the other, gave a slight "click" as it came to full-cock. The emus heard it, and came to a dead stop. I held my breath. For a good ten minutes I lay flat and motionless. I dared not even blink. The thrice-accursed flies knew it as well as I did, and crowded into the corners of

my eyes, up my nostrils, and into my ears with a determined persistence only to be found in the Australian fly.

At last my patience was rewarded. The giant birds once more seemed to be lulled into security, and gradually approached me.

The emu being so large a bird, I knew a charge of shot would not have much effect unless at close quarters, so I determined to wait until the shot would have as much effect as a bullet.

At last, after much hesitation, the nearness of the water seemed to overcome their prudence. They advanced directly towards the lake, and came slowly within fifteen yards. I let fly at the leading bird, which dropped on its back, kicking its long legs in the air.

The others, startled by the report of the gun, dashed away for the forest at full speed. I was on the point of starting up to give the *coup de grâce* when, just in time, I noticed one of the emus head away from the retreating mob and come running back to its dying mate. My remaining barrel quickly disposed of this one, and I now considered I had done a fair afternoon's work. Here was good fresh meat, and plenty of it, a toothsome change from the salt meat on which we had been living for so long. The game being too heavy to carry with any comfort, I started at once for the camp. I knew well that any of our camp niggers would be only too willing to carry in the "Yellabelli"—emu being the greatest possible delicacy in the opinion of all natives, probably because it is a kind of game which they, with their primitive hand weapons, are very seldom able to secure, as it is very wild and quite as fleet of foot as any ordinary horse.

Half-way round the lake, meeting one of the native shepherds, I asked him if he liked "Yellabelli." He

admitted having a longing for a "blow-out" of emu, but in a very dubious kind of way, for I was noted as the worst shot of the whole party, and he knew it. "Well, then," said I, in an unconcerned manner, as if it was an everyday affair for me to knock over an emu or two, "you track me back and bring in two emus. You will find them close to where I have been stopping." He grinned unbelievingly, but started on my tracks, and shortly after I reached the camp he and his woman came in, each bending under the weight of a dead emu.

In the opinion of my comrades they were not very good eating, being out of condition; but the natives had a high time, stuffing themselves with emu flesh until they were nearly ruptured.

In the estimation of the aboriginals I rose immensely, the slaughter of no less than two "Yellabelli" at one time proving me to be a "mighty hunter" in their eyes. I tried to put on some swagger with the other members of the expedition on the strength of it, but my shooting was too well known. I was asked if the emus had been resting against the muzzle when I fired. Alas! I must confess, this was the first and also the last time I ever shot an emu.

Flies are a great pest all over Western Australia; but here and later on, on the Fitzroy, they were something terrible. In Cossack and Roebourne they were bad enough, in all conscience; but to the eastward here the torment was almost unendurable, and only endurable because there was no escape from them. Fly-nets were useless. Myriads of flies were on the warpath all day long, from the moment the sun rose until sunset. All day they would be forcing themselves into the corners of one's eyes, up one's nostrils, into one's ears and mouth, and swarming on every sore place or scratch on the

hands and feet, climbing over one another in their eagerness to attack a raw spot.

They would literally eat the eyes out of your head unless you were constantly—not whisking them away, but actually pulling them from the corners of the eyes. To make matters worse, there were swarms of a large kind of fly, very like a horse-fly, which sting very painfully. Sand-flies, almost invisible, but more venomous and irritating than either of the others, helped to keep things lively as long as the sun was above the horizon. No sooner had the sun set than all these diligent tormentors would depart in peace. Not in peace did they leave us unfortunate bipeds, though, for now the work would be at once taken up by the nocturnal mosquito. Its menacing hymn would sound the onslaught as soon as the buzzing of the others had subsided.

So numerous are the flies in this part of the northern district that the natives have acquired a habit of keeping the eyelids nearly closed. This gives them a very peculiar expression when talking to one, and is noticeable all along the coast.

We had not been long at Lake Louisa before the local tribes of aboriginals sent a hostile message to us through one of our Beagle Bay natives, in which they announced their intention to kill and eat a white man, as they had done a little while back at Lagrange Bay. As we kept a watch every night, and always went about well armed, no notice was taken of this impertinence, and these same truculent gentry, seeing we were well armed, took good care to keep out of gunshot.

The natives of the Kimberley district differ in appearance, language, and customs from their black brethren in the south. The difference in language is not at all peculiar to them, for throughout the vast extent of this colony the various tribes speak such widely differing

lingoes within a few miles of one another that it has long been recognised as being almost useless for the white man to make himself familiar with any one of the numerous dialects, for by travelling a few miles in any direction he ceases to make himself understood. Hence the ridiculous-sounding broken English which is almost universally used. In the North-West, however, there seems to be more knowledge of the local languages than down south.

The Kimberley aboriginals are taller and finer built men as a rule, but are not nearly so active as the south-western natives, nor as smart in the use of their weapons. These are heavier, and are not so skilfully fashioned as those of the south, with one remarkable exception on the Fitzroy River, which I shall mention later on.

All over Western Australia the native weapons are made wholly of wood. In this connection, the practice in the south of barbing the spears with pieces of broken glass must not be taken into account, for where there are no white men there is no glass, and without broken bottles this refinement in spear making would never have come into use. Nor do I here take any notice of the clumsy stone hatchets which are in use here and there. These are not weapons, but rather domestic implements. The aboriginal seems to have stopped short in his inventive development ages ago.

What few crafts they have retained are of the most primitive kind. In parts of the colony they make fishing nets out of the spinifex, which they manage to spin into a strong, serviceable cordage. They spin their own hair clippings into a kind of worsted, and use it for various ornamental purposes. Their kylis, wommeras, etc., are carved out of the solid wood, but very roughly indeed. It never seems to have occurred to the Australian native that a bow and arrow is a far more

efficient appliance, either for hunting or warfare, than a hand-thrown spear. The idea of such a weapon seems never to have presented itself to them. And yet there is plenty of evidence that for centuries past the roving Malay traders have known the great southern continent, and have frequently touched on its north-west coast, either having been driven out of their course or deliberately sailing in search of tripang and pearl shells. Now, these daring sea-rovers have used the bow and arrow at all times, and they must have had intercourse of a certain kind with the natives; otherwise, how can one account for the not unfrequent instances where natives of a markedly lighter hue than the others have been met with here and there amongst the coastal tribes. So it would appear that the bow and arrow at least must have been noticed by the aboriginal without their having the wisdom to adopt it in preference to their own weapons.

This trait, however, is only in keeping with the general characteristics of the aboriginal. He can be taught anything, but of himself he will learn nothing useful. Show him some seed, plant it, and let him see and eat the result. He will not attempt to follow the example given. Show him the use of salt as a preservative of meat; though there may be tons of natural salt close to his camp and game scarce, yet will he eat of his game until it is too rotten for even a native to tackle; and then perhaps he will starve for days for want of the meat he has allowed to putrefy.

To invent and wield so extraordinary a weapon as the "kyli" (known in Europe as the boomerang) argues a certain amount of inventive power; but even this, however, seems to be a very ancient discovery. That the aboriginals of Western Australia have made little, if any, progress beyond what I may term the "Wooden Age,"

which must have preceded the "Paleolithic Age," is pretty well proved. They have made little, if any, use of the flint either for their own implements or weapons, and this leads me to return to the exception mentioned above.

On the Fitzroy River, on the lower reaches, the spears are superior in workmanship to any I have seen in other parts of the colony. The shaft is formed of two distinct parts, whereof the portion nearest the point is of solid spear wood. The other, and by far the longest part, is a long hollow reed, neatly joined on to the solid half, whipped round with dried tendons, and smeared over with resin from some of the numerous resinous trees growing in this district. But the spear-head itself is the part which differs most from the ordinary native spear. The latter is merely a continuation of the shaft, scraped to a fine point, hardened by fire, and barbed in different ways for different purposes. The Fitzroy spear-head, on the other hand, is made of chipped flint, and is fastened on to the shaft with tendons and resin. It is very cleverly fashioned, neatly finished and polished, and is made in the conventional arrow-head shape.

Where did these wildest of savages learn this art? and how is it the practice has not been handed on from tribe to tribe as so many other things have been, such as the use of whilgy, of the kyli, of pieces of iron from wreckage, and other fine arts, if I may be permitted so to style them? They have other curious tribal customs which, as they have been already described by scientific writers, I need not mention in these pages.

This digression regarding the aboriginals in the Kimberley district may be excused on the ground that here, as in all parts of Australia, the natives are a doomed race. To be sure, they are more numerous than in the south; but that is only because these parts have only

recently been settled, and there seems no reason to suppose that this primeval race will be better able to withstand the deadly influences of the white man's civilisation in this part of the colony than elsewhere. But it is now time to continue the narrative of our exploring expedition.

CHAPTER XI

The Exploring Party—Dan the Interpreter—Riding through the Forest—Bush-craft—"Churchyard Flat"—The Fraser River—Alex. Forrest's Trail—Burying the surplus Stores—Waterless Camp—Salt Marshes—A thirsty Ride—Phantom Lakes—The Fitzroy River—Still no Water—A dismal Outlook—Wild Natives—Friends in Need—Water at Last—Off-saddle—The River Natives—A good Shot—A screaming Farce—Our Guides—Splendid Pastures—Great Floods—Bamboos—Vampires—Wild Duck—A champion Duck-eater—*Toujours Perdrix*—Remarkable Cave—Mount Anderson—Native Drawings—The Return—Our Guides leave—Again no Water—The solitary Native Woman — Her Capture — Terror — The wonderful "Yowadahs"—Dan reassures her—She satisfies our Wants—End of the Expedition.

AFTER a few weeks spent in preparations and in getting the sheep settled down in their new quarters a start was at length made for the Fitzroy River, where the leaders hoped to find suitable runs on which to settle permanently.

Our party, all well armed and well mounted, was made up of five white men including myself, and Dan, a Beagle Bay native, who was useful in many ways, and would act as our interpreter when we should fall in with the Fitzroy natives. At first our course led through the sombre forest country, which extended inland for many miles. So dense was it, and so flat was the nature of the country, that for many miles we had to rely exclusively on the compass. Nothing could be gained by climbing the trees. The only prospect thence

was a seemingly interminable dead level of timber. Not a bit of rising ground or hillock could be seen. There was no track whatever, so that all our leader's bush-craft was called into play to avoid leading us round in a circle. As is generally the case, once Dan was well beyond the limits of his own run he was of no use whatever as a guide.

There was a strange fascination in riding along through this forest, in places where a white man had never before penetrated. The ample foliage of these more tropical trees contrasted strongly with what was to be found in the great southern forests. Its denizens, too, were strange and interesting. On all sides one could hear the rustling of wings, and could trace the dark plumage of the wild pheasants as they flew noisily from tree to tree; or one could see the grey, uncanny looking frilled lizards scrambling up the trunks or along the branches on either hand, as we disturbed them by our passage. Small red kangaroos would bound across the path, wombats and other small game starting up almost under our horses' feet and, darting away at lightning speed, would startle our horses now and again; whilst all around us overhead, immense flocks of multi-coloured cockatoos shrieked discordantly as we rode beneath.

All this was easy enough for me to note and admire as we rode onwards, for I had no need to pay any attention to the difficulty our leader had in keeping a straight course in the desired direction. I have often wondered since, as I did then, at the confident way in which he pushed onward through the forest, only stopping his horse now and again to consult his compass. Every direction seemed to me the same, for the weather was rather cloudy, and I, at least, found the sun of very little assistance as regards orientation.

About fifteen miles from the lake we at last came to

a brief change from the sameness of the forest. We passed through a curious patch, where the soil was hard red clay, and clear of timber or undergrowth. Here a most extraordinary spectacle presented itself. The ground was thickly covered with perpendicular slabs of red stone, so alike in size and shape that it looked for all the world as if we had come across some vast disused cemetery. The resemblance to a graveyard was so striking that we unanimously christened the spot "Churchyard Flat."

After one night's camp in the heart of the forest we pushed on towards the north-east until the edge of the forest was reached. Gradually the growth of timber became more scattered, and at last we came to the open grass country round the head of the Fraser River. Here we struck the trail of Alex. Forrest's expedition of the previous year, and we made a halt at one of his camping places, all of which were plainly marked by a conspicuous F, with a number cut in the back of some prominent tree. A few miles farther on we reached the head of the Fraser, which here at this season was a mere dry river bed. We managed to obtain water, however, by digging in the bed of the watercourse, and decided to camp for the night, as darkness had overtaken us. Before leaving camp next day we decided to bury a supply of provisions, which would not be required until the homeward journey. This would relieve our pack horses of a good deal of unnecessary weight. It, of course, had to be done with great care if we hoped to find it again; for if any wandering lot of natives were to drop across our tracks—and this they were almost certain to do—they would soon notice any careless traces of the *caché*, and would not take many minutes in rifling it.

A deep hole was dug close to the camp-fire, care being taken to keep the freshly turned-up soil close round the

hole. In this was deposited about eighty pounds of flour, a ham, and a quantity of tea and sugar. The hole was then filled in, and the soil was well rammed down, so that very little loose soil was left. This was carried some hundreds of yards from the camp and dispersed in all directions, so as not to attract the attention of these children of nature, whose optics are trained from childhood upwards to observe the slightest sign or mark made on the face of the earth. What is more, they know how to read and understand every mark when they do see it. Having disposed of the surplus soil, the next step was to conceal the *caché*. A lot of dead wood was piled on top of it, a fire was made, and here we cooked our last meal before leaving the camp. Any native tracking us would now merely observe that we had used two fire-places, a not unusual thing to do. They would never think of turning up the ashes to seek for a hiding-place.

For the next thirty-six hours our journey carried us over a grassy country much cut up by dry watercourses. We were following the general course of the Fraser, where we knew it must approach nearest to the Fitzroy. From time to time we struck the bed of the river in the hope of obtaining water, but at this time of the year there was none to be obtained here. Our horses had difficulty in forcing their way through dense thickets of "stringy-bark," which for miles crowned the stony ridges we were constantly crossing. From our camp at the head of the Fraser we pushed on until long after dark, when, having failed in finding water, we had to camp without any for the horses, and only a very stinted supply of brackish water for ourselves, about a couple of quarts remaining in one of our canvas water-bags.

Next morning a start was made before dawn, as it was now imperative that we should strike the great river before our horses, or even perhaps ourselves, might give

in for want of the precious fluid. Because we were thirsty and had no water, the day—it is needless to add—turned out an exceptionally hot and trying one. For many hours we rode cheerlessly on over a vast, dismal stretch of salt marshes, where the only vegetation was the stunted salt bushes and tangled masses of the squalid looking samphire plant, and we were exposed to all the withering heat of a tropical sun.

On these great salt flats, as if to add to our discomfort, we found the mirage to be most deceptive. If it was not that we were well accustomed to its illusions, we could have sworn many times that silvery lakes of shining water—that water for which we were so longing—were spread out invitingly on either hand. Our leader, however, never swerved to the right or the left, but pushed steadily on in the direction he had selected. At length, about noon, with the scorching sun nearly overhead, we crossed a sandy ridge and there before us was the noble Fitzroy River, calmly flowing seawards between its steep and widely separated banks.

Our jaded and thirsty horses needed no spurring now, as they hurried towards the long-looked-for refreshment. The banks of the river were too steep for them to approach it just here, so our leader dismounted to fill a bucket which was carried on the pack-saddle, whilst we impatiently waited until our turn should come to water our horses and ourselves. "Alas! there is many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip." We had all dismounted and were holding our impatient horses by the bridle, restraining their eagerness as they whinnied at the sound of the splashing water, when a forcible ejaculation and a look of disgust from our leader told its harrowing tale without much need of explanation. We had struck the Fitzroy, sure enough; but unluckily, too low down, where the tidal waters from Kings Sound rendered the

stream quite undrinkable. We had evidently kept too far to the westward. There was no help for it. The only plan was to follow the river up stream until we reached beyond the influence of the tidal water. The matter was becoming serious as regarded at least one of our party, who was nearly exhausted to the heat and want of water. Gloomily turning our poor nags away from the river-bank, we mounted and proceeded on our way up stream. We had not travelled more than a mile or two when we espied a group of wild natives, on a small islet in midstream, fishing with nets and spears.

They saw us at the same moment, and what a novel sight it must have been for them. Neither they nor their forefathers had ever seen a white man. Still less had they ever seen such enormous quadrupeds as our horses, never having clapped eyes on anything bigger than a kangaroo, though, as we afterwards learned, they had seen the horse tracks of Alex. Forrest and his party.

They stood motionless, grasping their spears, not knowing whether to remain or to fly. Fearing they might adopt the latter alternative, our leader ordered "Dan" to ride down to the water's edge, hail them, and explain that we were peacefully inclined, and were anxious they should guide us to the nearest fresh water. After a good deal of "wongying" and consultation, four of them plunged into the stream and swam towards us. Not a vestige of covering encumbered their free limber movements, as they emerged dripping and panting from exertion and excitement. We could see, as they swam towards us, that they were fine specimens of the genuine unsophisticated savage. Each was armed with a long, light flint-headed spear, which they carried in their teeth as they swam vigorously through the swift running stream. A long narrow throwing stick, a wommera or shield, and one or two kylis thrust through

a waistband formed of their own hair spun into threads completed their equipment.

After a word or two with our interpreter they turned towards us with a laugh, and, pointing up river with their spears, started off at a rapid walk or rather a loping kind of trot. Needless to say, we followed them for about half an hour, when they struck inland away from the river, and, a little distance on, we came to the dry sandy bed of a tributary of the main stream. Here they halted, resting on their long spears with one foot curiously propped against the opposite knee, and announced that there was plenty of good drinking water obtainable. There was certainly no visible supply, but we understood what was meant, for we had not dug down into the dry sandy bed of this nameless watercourse for more than a couple of feet before the sweet, cool, eagerly longed-for fresh water began to trickle freely into the improvised well.

To expedite matters, a couple more holes were dug out, and thus our horses were soon satisfied, and, after being hobbled out, grazed contentedly on the bush grass surrounding the camp, for we had decided to rest and recruit here for the remainder of the day.

One of our party fainted off, and fell from the saddle before his turn came to get a drink; but we soon got him all right again, by bathing the back of his neck and temples with cold water. As for myself, somehow I did not suffer so much from thirst as the others did; certainly not so severely as on the memorable day when I lost my way on the burning sand-plains near the Murchison.

When we unsaddled and formed our camp several of the bush natives elected to camp near by, as they seemed anxious to observe the ways and customs of the white men they had heard so much of, but had never seen until this day. They squatted around as we sat in the

shade of a clump of Flooded-gums watching our every movement; and at last, plucking up courage to do so, came nearer, felt our limbs, examined our clothes and arms, and gave a yell of admiring wonder when one of our party exhibited the whiteness of his breast as compared with the sunburnt blackness of our arms, hands, and faces.

The ticking of a watch held to their ears seemed to give them as much rapture as it does to the ordinary child. When we lit our pipes their astonishment was increased. The striking of fire from a tandstickor match seemed to bring their amazement to a point. Here, indeed, were a lot of magicians who could make fire whenever they liked, without having to carry a live fire stick, or go through the laborious process of drilling a reluctant flame out of a piece of hardwood!

Whilst they were all seated quietly watching our movements, one of our party, an excellent shot, espied an eagle-hawk soaring far overhead, and took this opportunity of letting the aborigines see what the white man's weapon could do. He raised his "Winchester," fired, and the bird came headlong to the ground almost at our feet. The natives rushed up to it, examined the large ragged hole torn in its breast by the bullet, and returned wondering to see the still smoking muzzle of the gun. Our leader, too, thinking it wise to improve the occasion, let drive at a gum-sapling some three hundred yards distant. The shower of bark proved that this bullet likewise had found its billet. They examined the tree curiously, stuck their fingers in the hole, and appeared satisfied that if the "Chillaman" could bore such a hole in hard wood, their own carcases would stand a poor chance; and they expressed something to this effect to our interpreter "Dan."

The first shot fired was the occasion of one of the

heartiest laughs I ever took part in. These natives had, of course, never heard the discharge of firearms before, so when the rifle was fired, as was quite natural, they all gave a start which lifted them well clear of the ground on which they were seated. The ludicrous effect of this simultaneous jump made all the white men roar with laughter, in which the blacks joined, though they had not the remotest idea what we were amused at. Their joining in the laugh only made matters worse. We laughed until we rolled, quite helpless, on the sand. The more we laughed the more they laughed, until presently all hands had laughed themselves into exhaustion.

The wag of our party, however, treated us to a still more side-splitting exhibition. He had noticed the propensity these river natives had for laughing at anything, or nothing at all. So he made a bet that he would cure at least one victim of this inclination. Walking up to one of them, a tall bullet-headed young warrior, he sat down, quite seriously, right in front of him, and, after looking him steadily in the face for a few moments, he burst into an imbecile laugh *à propos* of nothing. "Bullet-head" followed suit at once, and went one better. A still louder and, if possible, more idiotic laugh from our funny-fellow was the response. Not to be outdone, "Bullet-head" answered by a more hearty laugh, which only seemed to put his opponent on his mettle. And so they went on at it for a good twenty minutes, our mate laughing with a purpose and "Bullet-head" following his lead with the greatest good will, until at length we could notice a change of expression on his face. Gradually it dawned on him that the white man was "taking a rise out of him." He still laughed, but his laugh was becoming more and more a mechanical response to the provoking guffaws of his adversary. Slowly his laughter dwindled away, until at last he could

only muster a feeble grin; this in its turn died away into a crestfallen look, and the comedy was over. He never laughed again that day, and shortly afterwards the lot of them started away for their own camp.

Next morning two young men came into camp and volunteered their services to accompany us so long as we remained on the Fitzroy. We accepted the offer, and though we guessed pretty well that their principal object was to act as spies and report our movements, we found them very useful in showing us suitable camping-places and in many other ways. When we resumed our travels we came to some splendid grass country, which seemed to extend a long way back from the river. It was cut up by numerous watercourses. Wherever we turned there appeared to be a superabundance of grass and water. Almost every few yards, in some places, were great clay pans full of fresh water and crowded with wild ducks, teal, etc., and for miles we rode through the richest grass lands we had ever seen in any part of the colony. It seemed to be a squatter's paradise. Sheep and cattle would be sure to fatten and thrive here, if anywhere. There was the best of sheep country for miles and miles as far as the eye could reach, well timbered and with frontages on one of the finest rivers in the colony.

To the unobservant, the disadvantages of this land of plenty were not so evident. But our leader was too good a bushman not to notice them at once. He pointed out, as we rode along, under great Flooded-gums, miles away from the main river, far up overhead, fifteen or eighteen feet above the level of the ground, great masses of drift, lodged in the branches and forks of all the trees we passed. This was an unerring sign of the excessive floods to which the country must have been subjected at no distant date. What had happened before, might of course, easily happen again. There was no getting away

from the fact that the settler on the Fitzroy would have to run the grave risk of having his flocks and his buildings swept away out to sea. There seemed to be little, if any, high land on the south side of the river where stock could be driven in time of flood, so we decided to pass the river at the first eligible crossing we could reach, in order to explore the northern side.

In many places along the river we found the banks were lined with a growth of small bamboos, which we had not observed growing in any other part of the colony. Vampires were to be seen in thousands hanging head down from the branches of the trees, to which they were attached by their hooked and bat-like wings. We shot one out of curiosity, and found it to be a very curious looking creature. The head was like that of a fox, the fur was of a dark reddish-brown colour, and the membranous wings of this particular specimen, when stretched out, extended quite three feet from tip to tip.

The pools and clay pans, which were numerous in every direction, were alive with "whistler ducks." Whenever we rode near to one of these pools there would be a mighty whirring of wings, a shrill chorus of whistling, and then the daylight would for a moment be obscured, as countless myriads of "whistlers" rose on the wing and hurried away to some more distant retreat, but generally, not before the immense flock had paid toll to one or other of our shot guns. So numerous were they that if one fired both barrels into the thick of them, as they rose, one could hardly fail to knock over half a dozen or so. Though a very bad shot myself, I more than once managed to bring down this number. On the other hand, I must admit I was the only one of the party who was skilful enough to fire both barrels into a solid mass of wild ducks without hitting one of them. I was fre-

quently complimented on this score; and it was generally allowed that though I was not very successful in helping to fill our game bags, yet no one attempted to dispute my proficiency in emptying them. All hands allowed that I was a champion duck eater, if not very brilliant as a duck shooter.

Around the river would have been a paradise for any one fond of shooting, but my comrades only shot game for eating purposes. We lived almost entirely on ducks whilst on the Fitzroy. It was a welcome change, and saved our stock of salt provisions. Whenever we camped for the evening every one's attention was most earnestly directed to the cooking of ducks. With the usual good appetite of travellers, we were easily able to polish off at least two or three of these small wild ducks apiece. Selecting a duck from the heap, each hungry explorer would rapidly pluck and prepare it for cooking as follows. A long flexible sapling was pointed at both ends. Spitting a bird on the flexible end, the other would be cunningly forced into the ground, close to a glowing wood fire, so that the leverage of the bird's weight curving it down close to the heat, a capital roast was obtained. A slight twist to the sapling would ensure the uniform cooking of the juicy morsel. Cooked in this manner, these ducks were delicious.

We lived in clover all the time we were on the river. I used to imitate our Beagle Bay nigger "Dan," who used to roast a couple of extra ducks for himself before leaving camp and discuss them as we rode onward during the day. I used to carry them rolled up in my rug strapped on the pommel of the saddle. We, of course, had to keep an armed watch at night, turn and turn about, timing our reliefs by the motion of the stars, for there was only one watch carried by the party. We found the tedium of the long sentry-go was greatly

relieved if one had had the forethought to provide a cold roast duck, the picking of which served to while away the time. We certainly did manage to get through an enormous number during our sojourn in these parts. I feel sure our camping-places could have been recognised for months by the heaps of feathers and bones we left behind us! *Dux indicat viam,* as an old writer says.

Continuing our journey through much the same kind of country, we reached a peculiar hill known as Mount Anderson. Here we found a curious spring of fresh water situated on top of the hill inside a large cave. A palm tree was growing inside the cave, alongside the spring. The tree had grown upwards in a slanting direction, towards a hole in the roof of the cavern through which it had thrust itself. It was a remarkable instance of the way all plants struggle to reach the light. The inside of the cave had for ages been used as a place for grinding down flints, etc., for we found the rocky interior cut up into grooves and hollows where the aborigines had been at work. A few rude figures were scratched on the surface of the rocks inside and on the entrance walls, the work of some primitive artists, mostly rough human figures, and in one instance a representation of a running emu.

Here we camped for the night, and it was decided to retrace our steps, thus bringing our exploration to an end. Some heavy showers had warned us to return ere the summer rains might have converted the whole of the country between the Fitzroy and Beagle Bay into one vast quagmire. The object of the expedition had been attained. We had traversed and explored the country between Beagle Bay and the Fitzroy River, and up the course of that stream for many miles, long before a white man had settled there. The squatters who had organised the expedition were now in a position

to define the areas they wished to lease from the government; and, for my part, I had had the opportunity—an opportunity which is every day becoming more and more rare—of meeting with and observing the habits and ways of aboriginal tribes who had never before come in contact with the white man. They were almost as interesting to us as we must have been to them; for here we were able to observe the genus homo in a very primitive state.

We resolved to return by a different route as far as the head of the Fraser River, for by this means we would be able to explore a larger area, and, what was of more importance, we would be able to get clear of that part of our route which would be most quickly turned into a bog if the threatening rain should overtake us before we had crossed it.

So next morning at daybreak we saddled-up in the midst of a drizzling shower, and, fording the river, we made a bee-line for the head of the Fraser. We were still accompanied by the two young natives who had remained with us, but after the first day's journey, finding we were travelling right away from their country, they left us, saying they were afraid to fall in with any hostile natives, and were anxious to return to their own tribe. Their services were rewarded with some trifling present, such as an old clay pipe, a leather belt, and a stick or two of negrohead tobacco, and they started back for their own run, rejoicing.

Towards evening on the second day's march from Mount Anderson we were anxious to find water near which we could camp for the night, and therefore kept a good look out for any wandering aborigines who might give us the desired information. The sun was getting low as we arrived at a grassy clearing, about a mile in diameter, in the midst of the timber

lands we were then traversing. In the middle of the clearing we espied a native woman (the first and only female we saw during the whole of our explorations) leading a child by the hand. She had evidently been collecting seeds and roots, and was on her way back to some distant camp. She was a quarter of a mile distant when we first saw her; but she saw us at the same moment, and, snatching up the child, she rushed towards the shelter of the forest. Now, it was necessary we should secure her before she reached the thicket of "iron-bark" towards which she was running, or we would have little chance of getting any speech with her, so, clapping spurs to our horses and galloping forward, we soon overtook and surrounded the poor naked, trembling wretch. She was a fine, well made woman, as far as her body and limbs were concerned; but as to her face, she would not allow us to see it, covering her features with her trembling hands, whilst the little naked picaninny buried its face between her bare, quivering thighs.

Imagine the horror and terror of the wretched creature on finding herself suddenly surrounded by queer outlandish looking creatures, strange of colour, clothed in curious garments, and armed with strange weapons that glinted and shone in the sunlight. What manner of creatures could these be that had suddenly burst forth from the thicket and had crowded round her? What meant these fearful and hateful forms with heads and bodies somewhat like her own people, but standing on four monstrously shaped legs? Surely these must be the wonderful "Yowadahs" of which she had heard the old men speak at night by the camp-fires, when they were repeating the strange reports handed on from tribe to tribe for hundreds of miles; reports that mentioned a strange race of

white men, and of four-legged monsters far larger than the greatest "old man" kangaroo that had ever bounded through the forest. Yes, indeed! these must be the wondrous "Yowadahs" whose tracks had even been seen by the hunters only a short year ago. What other resource was there for her in this appalling plight, but to stand shaking with terror, and cover her bowed face with both hands to blot out the frightful vision, whilst the child clung in silent terror to her knees. She, poor thing, as she stood there helpless, gave the most unmistakable and undescribable evidences of mortal terror.

She cannot, however, shut out the strange sounds coming from these monsters. They must be deciding how they will kill and eat her. But hark! Does she not hear one voice close to her which repeats in reassuring tones words which, though they are not of her own dialect, yet she can understand a little here and there?—Yes. It is so! And now, peering through her trembling fingers, she sees a two-legged man of her own colour, who has just got down from one of the great monsters. Her deadly fear is somewhat relieved, for now he approaches and assures her that she need not fear the white men; that they do not care for the broiled flesh of native women; and that the four-legged monsters, which are, in very truth, the far-famed "Yowadahs," care still less for human or any other flesh. Reassured somewhat, she flings herself on the black breast of the stranger (who has on nothing but a well worn pair of moleskin pants) and buries her face in his bosom, to blot out more effectually the hideous, menacing forms surrounding her, and endeavours in faltering accents to answer the questions put to her regarding the position of the nearest water-hole.

It is difficult to imagine, still more to describe, the effect our sudden appearance must have had on this

wretched creature, but the above may serve in some measure to express her emotions. Fortunately, our Beagle Bay native "Dan" had some slight knowledge of the language spoken in this district, so was able to reassure our captive, who informed him that we would find water at no great distance by journeying in a given direction.

Leaving her still trembling, but free, and with a huge chunk of damper at her feet, we rode off and were not long in finding the desired water-hole, at which we camped for the night.

Next day we travelled on, striking our outward trail towards noon, which we followed up until we reached our previous camp at the head of the Fraser River. Here we found the ashes of our camp-fire undisturbed, though the tracks of some half-dozen aborigines around the camp clearly demonstrated that our precautions had not been unnecessary. We dug up the provisions we had buried, and they formed a welcome addition to our diminished stores. The rest of the journey hence to Lake Louisa was uneventful; and so our expedition terminated.

CHAPTER XII

Farewell to the Pioneers—Beagle Bay—A Pearling Cutter—The Lacepede Islands—Guano—Eggs galore—Habits of the Sea Birds — Green-Turtle — Notes on Turtle — "Hauling-up" — Turning Turtle—Hauk-Bills — Snapper—Loggerheads—Eggs —Hatching out — The breeding Season — The Back-beach — Sail to Baldwin's Creek—Beagle Bay—Bubbling Spring—Burglary—A long Tramp — Native Fires — I escape — The Grass Seeds—Flooded Flats—A Halt—The Night Attack—Daybreak and Desolation—The deserted Camp—Blacks approaching—Discovery—Retreat—Shanks his Mare—Pursued—Facing the Niggers—All's well that ends well.

SHORTLY after our return from the Fitzroy, seeing no prospect worth my remaining at Lake Louisa, I became anxious to get back to Cossack. The only means of doing so would be on board any one of the pearling fleet which might put into the Bay for water or firewood, so I went down to Beagle Bay as soon as I heard of a vessel having anchored there. She turned out to be a small cutter having on board a diving apparatus and pump, the only one in use on the coast. The shelling industry at that time, and for some years afterwards, was carried on by means of native and Malay naked divers, though later the diving-dress proved to be the better paying process.

On inquiry, I learned that a hand was wanted as "life-line man," and that the work was simple and could soon be learned. My duty would be to help the diver into his dress, load him with the shoulder leads, screw on the helmet, lower him to the bottom,

and give, and respond to the few signals required. Certainly, it would be months before I could hope to get to Cossack; but I could do no better, and here was at least a change of scene. So I finally decided to engage in this capacity for the duration of the cruise.

As soon as a few casks of water had been filled we set sail from Beagle Bay and crossed over to the Lacepede Islands, to land some stores we had in charge for the solitary inhabitant of this group of islets, who was stationed there by the government to warn off any vessels attempting to load guano without a licence.

The Lacepedes are low sandy islets situated about twenty miles from the mainland, on which a considerable deposit of guano had been formed by the myriads of sea birds which for ages had used them as a breeding-place.

Latterly the export of guano had practically ceased, but during the "boom" there had been a good deal of business done here. A government staff had been stationed on the principal islet, and a large stone building had been erected; but, when we arrived, only a solitary white man remained there as a kind of "man in possession." He was, sometimes for months, without any other companionship than that of the wild sea fowl and the numberless turtle which frequent these barren islets; but he appeared to be contented enough in his Robinson Crusoe-like position; the only hardship he complained of being the scarcity of books and newspapers, which he eagerly sought from any vessel passing or approaching his lonely realm.

The island immediately to the northward of the main island, and separated from the latter by a narrow "gut" through which the tide stream ran with great violence, was the favourite breeding-place for the many thousands of sea birds which came here from all parts to lay their

eggs and rear their young. These birds we found to be quite tame, but whether from ignorance of man's wanton destructiveness, or from comparative helplessness when on *terra firma*, it was hard to decide.

One could walk on this islet, over acres and acres of ground almost packed with gulls, gannets frigate-birds, boatswains, mutton - birds, sea-hawks, and many other varieties too numerous to mention, without their attempting to get out of one's way, or, if they did, it was only to waddle on one side for a step or two. Acres of ground were covered with eggs of many sizes and colours, and in all stages of development. Though one could easily load a boat at any time with these eggs, yet experience taught that it was seldom worth while doing so, as ninety per cent. would turn out to be quite unfit for eating, being either stale, nearly hatched, or quite addled. When a supply of eggs was wanted, and one wished to be sure they were fresh, we had to go to some part of the breeding-ground and smash all the eggs on, say, a few square yards of surface. Within forty-eight hours this cleared patch would be covered with new-laid eggs in place of those destroyed. This method could be repeated again and again.

The young birds, in various stages of growth, were curious objects, reminding me of the toy rabbits of one's childhood, being a plump mass of soft white down. The parent birds returned towards sundown from many miles distant, where, in the midst of the Indian Ocean, they had been seeking their daily subsistence, and that of the younglings left alone hungry on the islet. On their return they disgorge into the throats of the young birds a large portion of their diurnal collection of fish. These young birds, as yet with no wing feathers, and quite unable to provide for themselves, remained squatted down on their own particular spot, without

moving therefrom for weeks at a time. They were certainly queer-looking creatures. If one approached them and held a hand over their heads, instantly their brightly coloured beaks would gape open in expectation of something being lowered down their gullets, evidently under the impression that a moving object could only be a purveyor of food to their good selves.

It was very interesting to watch the old birds returning about sundown from all directions, and converging towards this desolate-looking islet. How far did they fly over the face of the ocean, and how did they find their way back from the vast distances they must have traversed, were the questions which suggested themselves to anyone lying on the low rank herbage watching their return. It was quite evident that some must have been away for many days, and have flown hither from vast distances. Often I would observe them flying towards the island with wearied and feeble wings, and hardly able to make the last few strokes. When they did alight, utterly exhausted, they would lie prone on the ground with outstretched wings, completely "knocked up," not even having energy enough left to fold their wings. They would lie for hours where they had fallen before being able to stand on their feet and seek their offspring. These were evidently the unsuccessful fishers. On the other hand, I saw others arriving quite brisk and lively after the day's work, and settle down for the night after feeding their young.

That some of the birds came from great distances was evident. Here could be seen countless Mother Carey's Chickens at certain seasons. These birds are well known to congregate in high latitudes, and must have come to these low latitudes for breeding purposes only.

The Boatswain and the Frigate-bird are to be met with in mid-ocean hundreds of miles from any land, and yet

these also came here to breed in great number. Again, though the great majority of them began to come ashore about sundown, yet there would be many birds arriving from distant leagues of ocean during all hours of the night.

None of these sea birds, as far as my own experience went, were worth eating. The flesh was too fishy; and, even when skinned and stewed in several waters, the rank flavour was perceptible. But the eggs, when fresh, were excellent, and in never-ending profusion, for as fast as the laying season for one variety would be coming to a close that of some other would be just commencing. Few pearling vessels passed these islands without sending a boat ashore to load up with eggs, for after a long spell of salt junk no greater luxury could be wished for. For days after, the changes would be rung on fried, boiled, roasted, poached, and scrambled eggs, not to mention the mighty number that would be eaten raw or beaten up in whisky "square-face" or "shypoo," as the case might be.

The stench of decayed fish, rotten eggs, and deposits of fresh guano rendered the actual breeding-place by no means a pleasant spot to remain in. In addition, the young birds were overrun with a kind of vermin peculiar to themselves, but which was most unpleasant to have on one's body or clothes.

To the pearling fleet, however, the chief attraction of the Lacepede Islands was the immense number of green-turtle, which also made this their breeding-place.

All along the north-west coast there are numerous sandy islets where turtle "haul-up" to lay their eggs, but the Lacepedes seem to be the favoured spot for hundreds of miles around. Here, during the breeding-season, thousands of females every night "haul-up" to deposit their eggs; whilst between August and October

the water all around is quite crowded with the bulls and females, as they drift with the tide on the surface, blowing, splashing, and rolling over and over in the swift rushing stream.

It is no exaggeration to state that, at certain times of the year, any one man, strolling along the sand beach at night, could easily " turn " a hundred turtle in three or four hours. The state of the weather seems to have no influence on the females. Be the sea calm and just silently lapping against the silvery sand, or be it lashed into fury by one of the frequent storms, it seems to make no difference to them. They will "haul-up" on to the beach as numerously and as determinedly when a heavy surf is breaking right up to the foot of the sand dunes as when it is quite calm. The male turtle are never seen to leave the water.

As is well known, once they are " turned," turtle are quite helpless, and unless re-turned, will lay there until killed by the heat of the sun. This, I am sorry to say, is too frequently the case. The beach was strewn with rotting turtle that had been carelessly or wantonly "turned" by the nigger divers landed from pearling vessels on former visits.

Some of the turtle are of an immense size, the average weight being from two hundred and fifty to three hundred pounds. The edible or green-turtle are most numerous; but there are great numbers of the hawk-bill variety, from which is obtained the tortoise-shell of commerce. " Snappers " and " Loggerheads " are also occasionally seen, the latter being noted for the vicious manner in which they bite anything within reach of their knife-like jaws. Edible fish of many kinds are numerous. So, on the whole, it is not matter for wonder that the native divers of the pearling fleet consider the Lacepede Islands to be a kind of fairyland where all good things

were to be procured by merely stretching out the hand. Few pearling vessels touched at these islets without taking away twenty or thirty turtle for the divers, by whom turtle flesh and turtle eggs were regarded as the acme of all possible luxuries. With an occasional bucket of salt water dashed over them, these turtle would keep alive, and crawl about the decks for a long period; for how long I was never able to ascertain, for the appetites of the niggers invariably outstripped the lasting powers of the doomed turtle.

The eggs laid by one female, or those procured from her when killed and opened, would generally fill a two-gallon bucket. The mature eggs are about the size, colour, and shape of a tennis ball. There is no hard shell, simply a cartilaginous capsule, which contains only a bright yellow yoke, there being apparently no white in these eggs. They are very palatable and rich when cooked, and can be used for all kinds of culinary purposes, being quite free from any fishy flavour.

The female, when about to lay her eggs, "hauls-up" some considerable distance above high-water mark, sometimes climbing laboriously even the steep sand dunes to reach a position which she deems suitable, ever and anon halting to raise her armoured head and expel a loud-sounding gust of pent-up breath, just the same as if she were in the sea and had come to the surface to renew her supply of oxygen. This drawing in and holding of the breath when on shore always used to strike me as rather amusing. It seemed to be such an unnecessary economy, once the reptile was out of the water. It should be hardly necessary to add that turtle cannot remain under water for long without coming to the surface to expel and draw in a fresh supply of air. The noise they make when doing this is always loud enough to attract attention to their proximity out at sea.

To return to our turtle. Having arrived at the spot selected, with her powerful front flippers she proceeds to excavate a deep circular hole in the hot white sand, deposits her eggs in rapid succession, and then commences to cover them over by sending showers of sand with great force to her rear as she slowly returns towards the water's edge. I have repeatedly watched this interesting process on the many occasions I visited these islands. But it is not well to stand too near whilst she is retreating to the water, for the showers of sand are flung backwards with such violence that one would stand great risk of being blinded.

They seem to take absolutely no notice of any moving object near them, though their dull, glassy eyes are wide open. This, I imagine, is on account of their eyes being unadapted for sight when out of the sea; for when in the water they are very keen-sighted, the slightest movement alarming them.

Once she has finished the concealing process, so effectually is the work done that it is almost impossible to find the place where the eggs have been hid, so evenly and uniformly has the sand been scattered around; and there they remain for the heat of the sun to do its beneficent work.

When hatched, the young—little mites of things—crawl forth from the sand and make straight for the sea. But before they reach their native element they have a keen experience of a struggle for existence, which seems to point more towards a survival of the luckiest than the "survival of the fittest." Countless gulls and sea-hawks, ever on the alert, gobble them up right and left, so that only a few fortunates reach the shelter of the sea, and even then they have to "run the gauntlet" amidst crowds of hungry sharks, ever skirmishing around outside the line of breakers on the look out for these

new-comers. Turtle are so prolific that, were it not for this, the sea would be crowded with these reptiles.

In the height of the breeding season it was amusing to watch the scene in some favoured spot where the gradually shoaling bottom invited the females to "haul-up." Just outside the line where the water was too shallow for a turtle to swim in would be stationed a ring of bull-turtle, waiting for the females' return. Outside these, again, in the deeper water, where the in-rolling swell just began to curl over and break, one could see another living and moving circle. These were the sharks cruising about on the chance of whipping off an occasional flipper or two from such bulls as might be so unlucky as to be unable to escape their kind attentions. To quote the Irishman's remark, the water would be "fairly stiff with sharks," and woe to the unwary bull who permitted himself to be cornered ere he reached the deep water, for it is no uncommon thing in these seas to catch turtle with one or more flippers partially bitten off, its horny armour protecting it from any other form of attack by these sea wolves.

The anchorage at the Lacepede Islands is very exposed and dangerous in the hurricane months. So, when intending to make any prolonged stay, the pearlers generally ran through the "Gut" on to what was called the "Back-beach," where at low water the vessel could lay aground on the dry reef. After a few days' stay at the islands we sailed for the mainland, putting in to Baldwin's Creek—where the "Southern Cross" pearl was found, of which more hereafter—and there we remained some weeks, endeavouring to get shells by "beach-combing," until at length it was decided to sail for King's Sound and make a serious start at shelling.

So one evening we sailed round to Beagle Bay and stood up to the head of it, anchoring in about two and

a-half fathoms, where at low water the vessel would be high and dry on the sand, and firewood and fresh water could be taken in with facility.

When the tide was out a curious sight was pointed out to me. Nearly alongside the vessel, in the hard sandy bottom of the Bay, two or three holes could be seen, out of which were bubbling as many springs of clear, fresh water, welling up so plentifully that by scooping out a hole we were able to fill our water-casks right alongside the vessel. The water was as sweet and fresh as possible, though coming, as one might say, out of the midst of the salt sea.

Towards noon one of the native lads we had on board and the Chinaman cook strolled up inland towards where the corrugated iron hut, serving both as store and dwelling-house, had been erected. They had not been long gone when they came running back, in a great fright, saying there were no white men and that the "bush-niggers" had broken into the store.

As I knew that my friends the pioneer squatters had left several tons of flour, tools, and stores of all descriptions locked up here until they could conveniently cart them over to their selection on the Fitzroy River *viâ* Lake Louisa, two of us started off to see the state of affairs, taking care to arm ourselves, as the natives were notoriously hostile and treacherous. On arriving at the store we found they had broken in by cutting and hacking with their stone axes round the chain securing the door. This passed through a hole in the wooden door and thence round the lintel-post, where it was padlocked, so the niggers had chipped away the wood all round the hole until the chain could be slipped out.

For fear of surprise, my companion kept watch outside, whilst I entered, being better acquainted with the contents of the store, and found that several bags of flour

had been torn open and about half of the contents of each had been abstracted or strewn on the ground. Sugar bags had received particular attention, it is needless to add, and tobacco cases had not been neglected. Tools were lying about, and nearly everything had been upset. But I was surprised to note how comparatively little had been taken away. Whether it was fear of the white Nemesis, or whether it was owing to our cutter being in proximity to Beagle Bay, I could do no more than surmise; but I called to Sam, and urged, though no very serious inroad had been made so far, that as the natives, left to themselves, would soon make short work of what remained, it was only fair and right we should warn the squatters at Lake Louisa, so that the remainder of the stores could be saved. I was anxious to render this service, as my friends had been kind and very obliging to me during the time I formed one of the exploring party, and I was the only one of the cutter's crew who knew the way through the bush to Lake Louisa, so Sam agreed to my making a start for the lake, provided I chose to take the risk of a long, solitary journey.

I was never a lover of walking, and knew that the distance was about thirty miles, through a rough country ranged over by hostile natives. But I was sure to have company and a horse to ride on the return journey; so, not out of any daring, but out of sheer thoughtlessness, I ignored all objections and warnings. I decided to travel all night, making a start at sundown, as I would thus avoid being seen by wandering blacks, and would not be far from the lake the following morning. Moreover, I could do the long march with greater comfort during the cool hours of the night. For arms I took a Snider-Enfield rifle and a six-chambered revolver, with as many cartridges for both as I could conveniently carry. I was sure to reach camp in the early morn, where I was equally

sure of a good meal; so I carried just enough bread and meat for a snack midway. Springs were numerous *en route*, consequently I was not concerned about a drink. A little tea and sugar, mixed ready and tied in a paper at the end of the rifle, completed the load. I wore a thin cotton shirt, a pair of moleskin trousers, blucher boots, no socks, and the usual slouch felt hat. Thus equipped, I carried little weight except the heavy arms, and felt sure that, even if attacked—unless whilst passing through some dense thicket—I would be able at least to "get my own back" before the savages could wipe me out.

I knew by report that bush natives will seldom attack a white man in the open, or when he is well armed. They prefer to watch for a chance when he may be asleep or unarmed. So I did not in the least doubt but what I would reach my journey's end safe and sound.

When I started from the vessel, as the sun began to dip behind the forest trees bordering the head of the Bay, I followed the old track as closely as possible, as thus I would be able to get along quicker. The clear tropical night would give quite as much light as I wanted, and in case I missed the track the "Southern Cross" would indicate the general direction to steer in, allowance being made for that constellation's motion round the south point of the heavens.

By the time I had cleared about four miles it was quite dark, and I now felt pretty certain not to be molested, unless, to be sure, I should happen to run right on top of a party of niggers. But this was a very remote contingency, for all aborigines are fearful at night, and seldom move from their camp-fires once darkness has set in, but cower down alongside of each other, frightened and trembling at every nocturnal sound they cannot account for. What it is they are afraid of is

difficult to say, though they have some vague ideas about weird nocturnal phantoms called "Joonos." Anyhow, I allowed that their fear of "Joonos" would stand me in good stead, as the track now led through a very dark thicket of tee-trees, through which I strode along at a steady pace of about three and a half miles an hour, which I calculated to keep up all night.

Suddenly I came to a halt, for right in front, a little to the left of the route, the light of a fire twinkled through the foliage around me. I judged it was not far from the confines of the thicket, and that a party of natives were camped near one of the springs. This was rather a dilemma. I could indeed leave the camp at a respectable distance by keeping on, but I could not well diverge from the partially cleared track, as the bush was so dense I would not be able to force a way through without arousing the savages. However, under cover of the darkness, I reckoned to get past the camp. I took off my boots, and then, apart from the chance of treading on some dead branch, or the fear that some of the tame "dingoes"—always prowling round native camps—might scent me and give an alarm, I felt pretty confident. There was not a breath of wind to indicate whether I was to windward or to leeward of the camp, so I had to take my chance as regards the dogs. Keeping my firearms handy, I glided along the track, which at length carried me so close to the camp-fire that I could just make out the shadowy forms of those around it, and hear the droning of some dismal "corroborree" with which one of the natives was lulling himself to sleep. My heart began to thump pretty hard as I neared, for fear of an unlucky step or the warning howl of a camp dog, and it was not until I began to leave the flickering camp-fire behind that I dared even to breathe with comfort. About two miles farther on another camp-fire was passed, but this

time not so closely. Now leaving the forest for some open glades and well grassed flats, I cautiously lit my pipe and tramped along cheerfully enough.

The country about here was very different now, from what it had been a few months before the summer rains had fallen. What had then been nearly bare ground was now covered with a thick growth of grass quite five feet high, which, being in seed, caused me great discomfort. The barbed seeds kept working into my clothes, their prickly points pressing against my skin forced me to halt several times to pluck them out. I found that I could walk along barefooted much better than when wearing an ill-fitting pair of "store boots," so I tied them in the branches of a tree and left them for the return journey. Keeping steadily on, a new obstacle soon presented itself. Right across my path, and as far on each side as I could see, extended a vast sheet of water where before had only been a hard dry clay flat. It soon proved too deep for wading through, so a long detour—for more than an hour—was necessary before I could once more strike the track. When I did, however, the grassy country with its tormenting prickly seeds had been left behind, and only the more open forest country had to be crossed. Once more, and as I hoped finally, I sat down to pluck the accursed grass seeds from my clothing, which was so thickly embroidered with them that in places nothing could be seen but the oat-like seeds on end. Another and yet another sheet of rain-water forced me again and again to diverge from the right direction, thus considerably increasing the distance to be traversed by my wearied legs; but I was comforted by feeling sure that a horse would carry me back next day. I began to shift the heavy rifle from shoulder to shoulder in sore discomfort; and what time the elevation of Sirius and Orion indicated that midnight was

at hand, I felt that a rest and a feed would not come amiss.

The resolution was no sooner put than it was carried unanimously. A neighbouring growth of "yangits" proved that water was handy, so filling my "billy" I sat on the still warm ground and ate a portion of my slender stock, but made no tea. As every precaution had to be adopted to avoid a flare, it would have been unwise to make a fire. Around me, as I rested my wearied limbs, all was peaceful and still, the only sounds being the cheeping of the lizards and crickets, which chirruped away on all sides.

Not for long, however, did I enjoy the grateful repose; for hark! again hark!—yes! a dreadful sound quickly put me on the alert once more. Despair seized me. This time I knew there was no escape, as the dreaded, menacing sounds became stronger and nearer. Where to flee for refuge! I shuddered as I listened to the songs of triumph and ferocity which now came from all sides. I started up, but it was useless to resist. I was completely surrounded and defenceless. Help there was none. I was utterly undone. With a rush they fell upon me mercilessly, and began to drink my life's blood. The mosquito is a relentless foe and knows no pity. My face was partially protected by clouds of tobacco smoke, but the thin cotton shirt might as well have been off my back for all the protection it afforded; and, on the faith of an honest man, the moleskin trousers were pierced through as if they had been made of gauze. Anyhow, though rest was almost imperative, it did not take long to decide that to keep moving was good enough for me.

A few hours more tramp, and the grey dawn began to appear in the eastward. As the light of day became brighter I began to look about me for fresh tracks of sheep, etc., for I was now not far from the lake. But no

tracks could be seen, so I supposed the sheep had not been fed this side of the lake since the last rainfall. But drawing nearer and nearer to the lake without seeing any tracks at all, my lip began to fall, until at last, emerging from the forest, the clear expanse of water lay before me in dead silence. Not the sound of a human voice or the clang of a sheep bell to cheer me, nor any sign of smoke where smoking embers should be. Then came the dismal conviction that my long journey had been for nought, and—worst of all—that I would have to walk the whole distance back again. With this ugly prospect confronting me I kept on to the hut, a hut which I had helped to construct some months back, only to find the green grass growing all over the inside. Some time must have elapsed since the squatters had moved on bag and baggage. They had evidently made a start after the first rainfall, and must by now have been far on their way to the Fitzroy River.

How far they had got did not much concern me; however, as I had neither the power nor desire to keep tramping indefinitely after them, I decided to camp where I was until darkness would give me a safe passage back to the Bay. Meanwhile a much-needed rest was the first consideration, as a preliminary to which I made a good fire and a "tin-billy" full of strong tea, and finished the remains of the bread and meat. I had another thirty-five miles to walk before I could get another meal. My frugal repast finished, I threw myself down to rest, but not to sleep, for it was here that the bush niggers at Lake Flora had sent in a threatening message some time back when we were first camping at Lake Louisa. Now that the white men had cleared out, they would not hesitate to come to the lake.

Surely enough, I had not been resting for more than two or three hours when, purely by chance, I saw on the

opposite side of the lake a party of wandering natives. There were three men and two women, the men armed with spears and "kylis." They seemed to be tracking something. Suddenly it flashed on me that they were tracking myself, and so it was. Almost in the same moment the leader must have raised his eyes and seen the thin column of smoke from my smouldering fire, for with a wave of his hand he fell flat on the ground, the others at once imitating him. They could not see me as yet, but as I could follow their movements without stirring I decided the best plan would be to lie low and not let them know I was aware of their proximity. I felt confident they would not attack me, only three to one, and especially when they could see that I was well armed. One of the men made a detour, crouching behind every tuft and bush which might conceal him, in order to get nearer. I watched him out of the corner of my eye until his progress brought him on my rear, when I turned over, shifting my rifle, as if only for a change of position, and watched his gradual approach to within reconnoitring distance. He stopped about eighty yards from me, and a brief inspection seemed to satisfy him. Still under the impression that I was unaware of his being near, he returned as carefully as he had come. He probably delighted his hearers with the whispered news that here was one solitary white man who could easily be "rubbed out," were it not that he was armed with a big and little "Chillaman" (rifle).

A few moments afterwards the party started off in a direction which informed me of their intentions almost as well as if I had been taken into their confidence. They were making straight for Lake Flora, about four miles distant, where a large tribe of natives nearly always were camped. They evidently intended to get as many of their savage kinsmen as would give them

the courage of numbers, when they doubtless expected to be able to indulge in a feed on the tit-bits of my body, which are so tempting to a good healthy appetite. I don't reckon they would have found much fat on me anyhow, but I did not intend to give them the chance if I could help it. After weighing the pros and cons, it did not take long to decide that full speed ahead would be my best policy, for there were some thickets of iron-bark extending some miles from the lake which I would have to traverse, and there my kind friends would easily be able to ambush me. In the open I would have a better chance. So it was wiser to start at once in spite of fatigue, for now that my presence was known there was no need to travel in the darkness.

It now being about noon, I once more shouldered the rifle and started on the long tramp back, keeping, you may be sure, a bright look-out on all sides. As I began to traverse the thicket I brought the rifle ready cocked in front of me, determined that if the first intimation I got of concealed foes should be a shower of spears, to have at least one shot at them before going under. So on I pushed with all speed, feeling that if once in the open the niggers would be much more chary of attacking me. As I marched along I noticed, on my tracks of the previous night, a lot of other tracks alongside my own, evidently those of the natives who had tracked me out to the lake. It was curious to note and to be able to read this story on the ground as I walked along. The sun was pouring its overpowering rays on my devoted head as I blundered along, my wearied legs almost giving under me, but I found fear to be an excellent spur. I kept up a good five miles an hour, expecting every moment an attack from either side of the thicket which surrounded the track, and it was only this fear which urged me on

until, in about half the time I would otherwise have taken, I debouched into the more open forest.

Towards sundown, after clearing a small thicket of the trees, on looking back—as I needed to do frequently—the long-expected niggers came into view. They were as yet still within the thicket, except one or two in advance of the others. As near as I could hurriedly guess, there were about twenty-five of them, all brandishing spears, clubs, and kylis. As soon as they saw I had discovered them they let out a loud "Hah-h-h—Ooh-h-h" of defiance. They were about three hundred yards distant. Having no desire for them to come to closer quarters—with my heart thumping as much, I think, from excitement as fear—I knelt down and "let fly" into the thick of them, as it was important to "choke them off" before matters became too serious. Whether my shot took effect or not I could not ascertain, and indeed, in my flurry, as likely as not the bullet did not find its billet. But it certainly took effect, in so far that it stopped their advance. They all retreated into the thicket, and I saw no more of them. This is a good instance of the cowardice of these savages. Here was one solitary white man, and not at all a brave one either, able to drive back twenty-five of them with just a show of defence. Still, it must be admitted that when one is only able to do execution at about forty yards with a clumsy wooden spear, it must be rather disconcerting to find your opponent able to bore a hole through you at ten times that distance.

Turning on my way, I kept on again until darkness enabled me to throw any prowlers off the track; then I turned off into the thicket, and at the first clear spot fell exhausted to the ground. I must have slept soundly, for I only awoke when the sun's burning rays reached my upturned face. I did not wait to wonder why the

natives had not followed and surprised me whilst asleep —their usual plan, but at once pushed on towards the Bay, which was not far distant. I struggled through the last mile or so of boggy salt flats, and, to make a long story short, I reached the cutter safe and sound, and thus ended a long forced march which I shall never forget.

I reckon that, taking into account the long detour to avoid the flooded clay flats, I must have travelled quite seventy miles in about thirty hours. I have never walked so long a distance since, and don't want to.

CHAPTER XIII

Sail for King's Sound—Tide-rips—An anxious Moment—Fierce Tides—Alligators or Crocodiles—Black Scurvy—A Cripple for Months—Recovery—The *Harriet* again—The Pearling Industry —Mother-of-pearl—Value in the Old Times—Malay Divers—On a Pearling Vessel—Equipment—Sail from Cossack—The Geographe—A narrow Shave—Port Usborne—Cascade Bay—The Pearling Fleet—Good News—A Day's Shelling—A hard Life.

NEXT day we got under way for King's Sound, where the previous year a large quantity of shells had been found, and where we expected to find the pearling fleet. The passage was without any noteworthy incident until towards evening, when we came abreast of the "Twins" islets off King's Sound. Here we came into the region of "Tide-rips," a phenomenon I had never seen before. As our frail craft sailed towards the two lines of appalling breakers, which are ever to be found here at certain stages of the ebb tide, I felt I would much rather have been safe on shore than where I then was. Right ahead and on either side extended the lines of roaring breakers, from which there was no escape, as the tidal stream was rushing us helplessly towards them. The only thing the old skipper could do was to keep the vessel head on.

In a minute or two we were amongst the apparently mountainous breakers, and for one sickening moment the cutter's bow was thrown up nearly perpendicularly, the next instant it was buried to the main-mast as her

stern rose high in the air. It was impossible to stand without holding on; and, to add to the terrors of the situation, there was the deafening roar of the "tide-rip." A brief interval, and we were rushed into the second line with the same effect, and then passed unharmed into the smooth water beyond.

The tidal stream in and around King's Sound runs with great violence even at neap tides; the rise and fall at spring tides being thirty-six feet. The ebb stream rushing out from the funnel-like formation of the Sound is barred by a chain of rocky islands, where in places the stream runs at quite nine knots an hour at certain stages of the spring tides, and that over an uneven rocky bottom,—hence the "tide-rips." Since that day I have frequently sailed through tide-rips in various places on the north-west coast and off the islands of the Arafura sea; but though at times their appearance is very terrible, I have never known any damage to be sustained when passing through them, nor have I ever seen such a violent breaker-forming tide-rip as the one first mentioned.

As the tide was ebbing, there was no getting to an anchorage that night. All we could do was to heave-to and drift amongst the reefs and rocks, which were enshrouded in darkness; so we had to take our chance. A fresh gale sprang up during the night, and we drifted goodness only knows where. However, at daybreak we were clear of everything and made sail again, once more passing near the "Twins." But this time the sea was smooth where a few hours earlier or later the tide-rip would be roaring. Off Cape l'Eveque, in the clear water, we could see the coral reefs, over which the flood tide was sweeping us until we anchored under the shelter of Swan Point.

At daybreak we proceeded farther up the Sound, but could see nothing of the pearling fleet. Afterwards we heard that they had cleared out long before our arrival,

as shells were difficult to obtain in the great depth of water. Also alligators and crocodiles had in several instances attacked the divers with frightful results. We here remained for some months, getting very few shells, and a monotonous life it was. Here I contracted a wasting and terrible disease [black scurvy] which nearly finished me. We were hundreds of miles from any medical assistance, and only bad provisions to live on. Towards May, however, even these began to give out, so we made sail for Cossack. By this time I had been ill for over two months, and unable even to sit up. When we finally anchored in Cossack I was so weak and near to death's door, I had to be carried on shore.[1]

Long before I was able to discard my crutches one of the neighbouring squatters had driven me out to his station, some thirty-five miles inland, where I was able to recruit on the only cure for this disease, namely, fresh vegetables, surrounded with every care and kindness by my genial host and his charming wife. Long life to them!

Shortly after my return to Cossack I joined the schooner *Harriet* for the next season's work. She had just returned from the island of Timor with a crew of Solorese divers.

At the time I am writing of, the early "eighties," the pearl-shell industry was almost entirely carried on by means of naked diving, aboriginal natives being chiefly employed at this work. But all who desired to start pearling—or, as it is more correctly termed, "shelling" —were not able to obtain the cheapest labour, namely, nigger divers, and had to fall back on Malays. The Australian nigger of the north-west coast in those days

[1] I mention this illness, because "Black Scurvy" is the disease which used to decimate our Navy in the olden days, but is now hardly known. Dr. O'Meehan playfully told me "I had no right" to recover from the state I was in.

had no idea of the use of money, and his cheap services were only paid in kind, and that on a very limited scale. If I remember rightly, the form of agreement, which had to be made before a Justice of the Peace, stipulated that each aboriginal diver was to be found in food, tobacco, and the following articles of clothing at the beginning and at the termination of the engagement, namely, one cotton shirt, one pair of trousers, one belt, and one handkerchief. There was no other remuneration whatever, unless it were a free supply of tobacco during the shelling season, which by government regulations lasted for six months. On the other hand, the pearler who depended on Malay labour had to sail his vessel over to Timor [though against this may be set the other man's risky and expensive "prospecting" expeditions into the interior], there, give due security, to the tune of about £20 per head, to the Dutch Government for the repatriation of each diver required; and then only could he get a licence to proceed to one of the islands of Solor, Adonare, or Alloo, where once more he would have to bleed freely to the local rajah or chief before he would allow any of his people to engage as divers. These, unlike the aboriginal natives, were keenly alive to the main chance; a fixed rate of wages had to be paid in rupees, in addition to food of their own kind, of which large quantities had to be bought for the ensuing season. Even thus heavily handicapped, the Malay-carrying vessels managed to make a good thing out of it, at a time when good shell was selling at from £160 to £200 per ton, and when a stroke of luck in the way of pearls might more than pay all the expenses. From this may be judged the profits of the other vessels.

Of the pearling industry, as it is generally called, very little is known by outsiders, who are mostly under the impression that here, as elsewhere, pearling means seek-

ing for pearls. But it is not so, for the work is called "shelling" by those who at the same time inconsequently style themselves "pearlers." In the Persian Gulf, the Ceylon Pearl Fisheries, and in the West Australian Sharks Bay Pearl Fisheries, the term "pearling" may be properly employed; for there people "fit-out" for the small "pearl-oyster," which used to be of small value except for the pearls it might contain. In those places no pearls meant no profits. In Ceylon and the Persian Gulf these oysters were obtained by naked diving, and in Sharks Bay by dredging from small sailing boats.

In North-West Australia, in my time, the industry was principally carried on by means of large cutters, schooners, or brigs, etc., ranging from ten to one hundred and twenty tons, carrying naked divers. The "fit-out" in this case was to obtain as many tons as possible of the *meleagrina* or, *Avicula margaritifera,* or mother-of-pearl shells of commerce. These vary a great deal in size, condition, and value, according to the part of the coast or "patch" from which they are obtained. The average size is about fifteen hundred to the ton, weighing when dry from one to two pounds. The price obtained depends upon whether the shells be "chicken," "sound," "wormy," or "dead." But it must be remembered that in any one of these shells a pearl worth the proverbial king's ransom may be found. In a good season the take of pearls would generally go a long way towards paying, or entirely paying, the cost of wages and outfit, leaving the value of the shells to the good. Given ordinary good luck, with a fair amount of fine weather—for rough winds make the water so thick that diving cannot be carried on for weeks at a time—and I consider "shelling" a far more lucrative occupation than gold digging. One may "fossick" around for months and not find gold

enough to pay for food; but it was a bad season indeed when the pearler could not wind up the cruise with a balance on the right side. A poor man could generally get advances for food, equipment, and wages from the local storekeepers; so shelling was not by any means confined to the capitalist.

But nowadays, when unpaid native divers are scarce, and most of the work is done by means of the diving apparatus, more capital is required, and the "pearler" on a small scale is gradually becoming extinct. In my time the industry was at its height. There was a pearling fleet of some twenty or thirty vessels, each carrying four or five white men and from twelve to forty native divers. It was no uncommon thing for a vessel to obtain twenty to thirty tons of "shell" worth say £115 per ton, and pearls worth from £500 to £1500. These were the flush times in the "Nor'-West"; and money easily earned was freely spent when the fleet returned to Cossack to "lay-up" in the creek from April to September. The season before I started at this work, a schooner, the *Pearl*, had obtained twenty-nine tons of excellent shells in just the last few weeks of the season. Several similar instances might be cited. Fresh "patches" of shelling ground were being found on different parts of the coast, and shells were gotten in deeper water than had ever before been attempted. Every year, however, the government regulations, framed to protect the native divers, became more and more stringent, regulating the hours of diving, the maximum depth at six and a half fathoms, and in many other ways tending to check abuses which would have finally died out with the advent of the more permanent and certain methods of the diving apparatus.

The *Harriet* carried thirty-six Malay divers and the Serang. The two owners, myself and another white

man, each in charge of a "dinghy's" crew, and a Chinese cook, made up the complement of hands. Amongst these, however, must not be forgotten a couple of Solor monkeys and a large black retriever. The Malays lived in the main-hold on a platform of planks laid over the water hogsheads. The fore-hold was full of firewood, and the after-hold contained bags of flour, maize, rice, curry stuffs, and dried fish for the Malays; whilst in the "lazartte" were stored the provisions for us white men, who lived together in the small after-cabin and had meals in common. In this hot climate, with the swarms of cockroaches on board, no one cared to sleep below, our beds being made on top of the skylight, protected from the night dews by the awning, which was always spread unless actually under sail.

We carried four "dinghys," each about sixteen feet long, parbuckled, two on each side, by means of masthead tackles; but the most convenient way—used on some of the vessels—was a series of davits whereby the boats could be carried upright, ready for lowering with all their oars and equipment in place. Each boat contained four oars, a small can-buoy, and a conch shell for bailing. With a crew of eight divers and a white overseer, these boats could live in any kind of rough sea; for, after all, it did not matter much if the boat were swamped, as the divers would always jump out and raise the gunwale—by treading water—until the white man had bailed out. As a matter of fact, I have been out shelling at times in the midst of hundreds of these dinghys, in such rough seas as most people would think no boat could live in.

Having concluded all business in Cossack, we set sail out of the creek, and, whilst standing well to the northward to get a clear offing for our night's run along the coast, we passed over a peculiar spot—not far distant

from Delambre Island—which has attracted the notice of many seamen frequenting the port of Tien-tsin [one of the three names Cossack is known by].

It was here that I noticed the peculiar deviations of the magnetic needle which I have described in a former page.

Shortly after dark, whilst running before the wind at about six knots an hour, the look-out man reported "breakers ahead," and on both bows. The skipper rushed forward and, owing to his knowledge of the coast, took in the situation at a glance, roaring to me, who happened to be at the helm, to "hard-aport."

I quickly jammed the helm hard over, stooping low down as I did so, for as the vessel veered to the starboard she "jibed," and the main-boom came crashing over with a jerk which nearly wrenched the main-mast out of her. We just managed to squeeze the vessel along the line of breakers until we could keep away, between the shoals and the shore, on our course once more. It was a narrow shave indeed. We had nearly run slap on to the Geographe Shoals, the flood tide having carried us farther in than had been allowed for.

No other incident broke the dulness of the passage before we arrived at the Lacepede Islands. Here we took on board some dozen or so of green-turtle, each weighing about three hundred pounds, and a goodly supply of fresh sea birds' eggs; then we proceeded towards King's Sound, where some weeks were spent trying for shells without success.

Amongst other places we visited in the Sound was Port Usborne, named after one of Captain Stoke's officers.

As the vessel neared the narrow tortuous passage, between high cliffs which seemed scarcely a ship's length apart, the tidal stream—eddying and boiling in the confined entrance—took charge of the vessel and spun her

round and round between the cliffs and over a rough coral bottom, until it had impetuously carried us holus-bolus to the open waters of a beautiful land-locked harbour surrounded on all sides by mountainous cliffs. Here we were once more able to control the vessel and soon anchored in a convenient spot, where, many years previously, H.M. surveying ship *Beagle* had found a place suitable for careening and taking in water. We found Captain Stoke's narrative and description of this harbour very accurate, but we were unable to find the cascade of water he mentions. Probably this cascade, like most Australian waters, was only a temporary or intermittent one. Anyhow, we had to leave Cascade Bay without any water. Having obtained our water and firewood in Cygnet Bay, we got under way, rounding Cape l'Eveque, and commenced to beat to the westward in search of the pearling fleet.

The following evening, as we were standing on the in-shore tack, the "look-out" reported the mastheads of several vessels, apparently at anchor in the open sea to the westward of Point Gontheaume, the northern extremity of Roebuck Bay. Now all was excitement and speculation. The position of the fleet, and its being at anchor, assured us that a new "patch" of shells had been found. A few more tacks to windward and we were able to make out the vessels, to recognise many of them, and to see numerous dinghys at work. It was past sundown ere our saucy little schooner rounded up and stood in the midst of the fleet. The anchor was hardly on the bottom before a dinghy was manned, and the owner and skipper hurried on board the nearest vessel. After seeing all clear on board for starting shelling next morning, we turned in until we were aroused by the return of the Boss, who delighted us with the information that a new "patch" had been found by the schooner

Dawn; that shells were plentiful—running about thirteen hundred to the ton; that pearls seemed somewhat scarce, but that several ten to fifteen grain beauties had been obtained; and that the average depth of the water was from six and a half to seven fathoms.

At daybreak the "rouse-out" was sounded. After a hasty but solid breakfast of fresh rolls, butter, marmalade, coffee, tea, turtle steaks, fried fish, and corned mutton the word was given to "lower-away." Amidst the rattling of tackle blocks, the creaking of slings, and clattering of oars and equipment the dinghys were lowered into the water, and each boat's crew descended to their places. The white man in charge, standing up with the sculling-oar, pushed off and sculled against the strongly rushing tide.

The divers, taking their places on the gunwale, dropped off the boat one by one, feet first, and, turning when five or six feet under water, quickly disappeared from sight. Once they were all down I had to let the boat drift with the tide on the surface, to correspond with the movements of the divers, who were, of course, swept along the coral bottom by the tide, until first one and then another head appeared here and there round the dinghy. When all are once more on top a few vigorous strokes bring them alongside, sometimes with, sometimes without shells. Clutching the gunwale, each springs to his place, where the water streams from his dripping and glistening body, whilst the rapid breathing gives evidence of the great exertion sustained. After a few minutes' rest the same operation is repeated until sundown, when a return is made to the vessel, from which, by this time, one has probably drifted some three or four miles.

The shells were then passed on board, a careful tally being kept of each diver's take. Those who were below

the average were punished by being made to clean up the day's take, a by no means easy task, as frequently shells are so covered with coral, sponge, and weeds that it is difficult to recognise them as mother-of-pearl shells until this growth is removed. After chipping and scraping they are well washed, and piled in heaps round the mast ready for opening. Then only are the "punishment gang" permitted to have their supper and turn in.

Meanwhile we used to have our supper, which was a solid one, after fasting in the open air under a broiling sun since six o'clock in the morning. No one attempts to carry food, the dinghys being so constantly awash with the drippings from the divers and an occasional sea flopping over the gunwale. Any food taken out with one, however carefully wrapped up, is sure to be damaged. The only refreshment that can be carried is drinking water in bottles, so one has to ring the changes during the long day on a drink of water and a smoke of the pipe, or a smoke of the pipe and a drink of water. Supper finished, it may well be imagined we were not much inclined for long yarns, but rolled into our blankets, to sleep that sound sleep which can only be earned by hard work, and which could always be enjoyed in the refreshing sea breezes we had at night.

At daybreak a start is made to open the shells. Each white man, armed with a large butcher's knife, seats himself in front of the pile, and, seizing the first to hand, with a dexterous application of the blade severs the muscle of the mollusc. The shell at once gapes open, and a couple more swift slices clears the shell from the fish, which is then examined for pearls. So the work goes on. When all the shells have been opened and examined we breakfast, whilst the small boys stacked them round the mast "heels," up to dry, before

being separated into halves, and stowed below in bulk or packed in hogsheads as most convenient. Breakfast over, it is "lower-away," and the same routine follows day after day, whilst weather permits, until the end of the season.

CHAPTER XIV

All about Pearls—My own Theory—The "Great Blister"—"*Barroks*"—Black Pearls—Straw-coloured Pearls—Pink Pearls—Cocoanut Pearls—The Pearl-Faker—Cleopatra—The Southern Cross Pearl—The Fable—The Truth.

AND here a few notes on pearls, the outcome of seven years' experience in the getting of them, may be of interest. Though the subject is not an intricate one, yet the very first question in this connection which presents itself, namely, What is a pearl? is a difficult one to answer. An orient pearl may be described as a concentric, calcareous formation with a nacreous lustre peculiar to itself, a lustre which, on microscopic examination, is found to result from innumerable zig-zag saw-like edges. It is found not only in the pearl oyster (*Avicula margaritifera*), but in the shells of many other molluscs. It is the only precious gem—as far as is known to the writer—found in the actual state in which it is worn. A perfect pearl needs neither cutting, polishing, nor any preparation whatever.

Broadly stated, one may hope to find orient pearls in any shells with a nacreous interior; but, on the other hand, it is hopeless to search for them in shells with a dull or porcellaneous inner surface, such as that of the edible oyster or the unios in some of the northern rivers.

The much vexed question, how the formation of pearls is to be accounted for is one which has never yet been satisfactorily answered.

Certain *savants* declare that they are the result of the mollusc's efforts to rid itself of the irritation set up by particles of sand, coral, etc., and they refer to the Chinese practice of introducing figures of Buddha into pearl oysters, leaving them there until completely coated with nacre. But though it must be admitted that these curious figures—many of which may be seen in our museums—are covered with a bluish, ill-coloured nacre, they cannot be held to solve the problem, for from this to the formation of pearls is a very far cry indeed.

The theory that pearls are due to disease, which is maintained by many writers, seems to be nearer the truth.

In most organisms excess of production is frequently manifested, as though nature, having erred in her original estimates, comes to be embarrassed by surplus material, and has to cast about for the easiest method of dealing with it. Thus we find plants and trees with abnormal growths of bark, excrescences, and gnarled protuberances on the exterior, and hard cores of material, such as knots, etc., in the substance of the timber. In human beings and animals, osseous deposits on the limbs, and in many instances calcareous and lithic deposits in various organs, may be instanced. These, I submit, are all pearls; every organism having its own peculiar pearl.

"Even the stones cry out"—Who has not noticed amongst the flagstones in our great cities, some on which the attrition of myriad footsteps has worn the stone away in places, leaving unsightly knobs of harder material exposed to view, and to the execrations of the hurried pedestrian? These also are pearls in their kind!

So is it with the pearl oyster and the mother-of-pearl shells. Every margaritiferous mollusc has power to deposit layer after layer of nacre until its shell or house becomes stout enough to protect it from most of its

submarine enemies, and their name is legion. When this object has been attained, any remaining nacre-producing power is expended in the usual manner, namely, in the formation of globules of a nacre which is harder, more dense, and of a finer lustre than the ordinary kind, either loose in the shell, enveloped in the substance of the mollusc, or, as in a curious instance mentioned farther on, embedded in the substance of the shell itself.

The weak point of the above theory perhaps is that though pearls are seldom found in young shells, yet some very fine ones have occasionally been found in them; still, the greater number, and probably the largest and most valuable, have been discovered in very old shells, such as are riddled with worm holes and completely covered with sponge and coral growths.

Whatever may be the way in which they are formed, fine pearls are so scarce, even on the richest "patches," that there is not much likelihood of the supply keeping pace with the demand. The London merchants draw their supplies from places so widely apart as Bahrein in the Gulf of Persia, Ceylon, the South Seas, Sharks Bay, Torres Straits, and the north-west coast of Australia. But of these places, it may be said that few pearls from the Persian Gulf reach the European market direct; the Ceylon fishery is nearly played out; the pearl oyster banks in Sharks Bay, Western Australia, were in much the same plight, owing to over-dredging; the South Sea fisheries are very scattered and of no great extent. Hence most pearls, and certainly the finest, used to be obtained in Torres Straits and North-West Australia.

In the Persian Gulf and Ceylon fisheries the small pearl oysters are obtained by diving, whilst in Sharks Bay they are secured by dredging from small boats. In these fisheries pearls are the principal object, the small shells being not of so much account as in the

North-West and Torres Straits, where, as already stated, a fleet of vessels is equipped for obtaining the mother-of-pearl shell of commerce, the giant *Meleagrina margaritifera,* which is worth from £100 to £200 or even more per ton, according to quality,—whether "chicken," "wormy," or "dead." These are the golden-edged mother-of-pearl shells, far more valuable than the South Sea black-edged ones, and in them have been found the largest and finest pearls obtained of late years.

These shells run about fifteen hundred to the ton. One valve is nearly flat, and the other concave; the thickest part or "heel" being from an inch to an inch and a half in thickness. But in the case of some monster shells, seen by the writer, the "heels" were nearly four inches thick. These, however, were very exceptional shells, and only a small number were obtained, by a schooner belonging to Mr. Streeter of Bond Street, when prospecting off the Montebello Islands.

It will easily be seen that the "North-Wester" has a great advantage over pearlers in other parts. He "fits-out" for shells; but if at all lucky he may, and very often does, obtain enough pearls to pay wages and all expenses, leaving the value of the shells to the good. However, now that native naked divers are superseded by Manilla men with the diving dresses, the owners are not very likely to see all the fine pearls which may be found.

Pearls are not so plentiful in mother-of-pearl shells as in the smaller pearl oysters, but they are generally larger and of a finer lustre. Seed pearls and minute "*barroks*" are very frequently found buried in the powerful muscle which closes the valves, and which is, by the way, the only edible part of this giant oyster. The larger pearls are sometimes found loose within the shell, and roll out when it is opened; but this is of rare

occurrence. Nine times out of ten they are embedded in the pellucid "mantle," where, if of any size, one can detect them the moment the shell is opened, the white gleam of the pearl contrasting with the pale azure of the "mantle." Very valuable pearls have been found encased in a kind of "blister" attached to the nacreous inside of the shell, and these "blisters," even when empty, often fetch a good price, being well adapted for brooches and scarf-pins.

During the first season's "shelling" at Roebuck Bay, on one occasion we came across an old worm-eaten shell containing a large "blister," which was removed in the usual manner by punching a ring of minute holes round its base; a slight tap was then sufficient to detach it. For many weeks it was untouched, no one caring to risk opening it, for, if filled with black ooze, which is frequently the case, it would be of little value. The rapidly falling barometer at last warned us to fly to the nearest creek for shelter from the impending "Willi-Willi"; and whilst there the skipper, having nothing else to do, fell to examining, and handling, the big "blister," which by this time had become the talk of the whole fleet. At last, baffled in all his attempts to solve the problem, and emboldened by an overdoze of "square-face," he gave it a smart blow with a hammer, which cracked it open, and out rolled a huge pearl, nearly perfect, and in size and shape resembling the glass balls used in the game of solitaire. It weighed about eighty grains. A few specks and discolorations were removed by a skilful "pearl-faker," and it was afterwards sold in London for £1500.

Another curious find on the same "patch" was a fine "Bouton" pearl, which was deeply embedded in the thickest part of a shell. It was discovered quite accidentally, there being no external indication of its

existence. It was sold in Fremantle at the end of the season for £700.

A remarkable pearl was found a few weeks later. It was about the size of a horse-bean, irregular in form but of the finest lustre. It was remarkable on account of being parti-coloured, one half being jet black and the other white, the dividing line being as sharply defined as though it were a work of art. It was sold for about £15, and was set as a scarf-pin.

Jet black pearls are very rare. I have seen and handled many hundreds of pearls, but never a perfect black one. Dull, dirty, blue-black pearls are common enough, and are of little value; unless, as sometimes happens, the removal of one or more of the concentric layers reveals a bright surface beneath.

Straw-coloured pearls are not at all uncommon. Indeed, they predominate on the Sharks Bay banks. They often have a very beautiful golden tinge, and are highly esteemed if perfect in other respects. Speaking from my own experience, a full treatise on pink pearls might be written in the words "There are none," though, to be sure, I have sometimes seen dull, lustreless pearls of a decidedly reddish tinge; but these were generally "dead pearls," and of very little beauty or value.

So-called pearls are sometimes found in cocoa-nuts, amongst the islands of the East Indian Archipelago, and are highly prized by the Malay chieftains on account of their rarity. I have seen several of these curiosities set in brooches or thumb-rings, of which the largest belonged to the Rajah of Alloo. It was about the size of a small walnut, and was very hard and white. But it was quite lustreless.

A pearl, to be perfect, must possess the following three qualities. It must be symmetrical in form, whether it be pear-shaped, egg-shaped, oval or spherical,—any

irregularities of surface rendering it imperfect. It must be free from either black or white specks, patches, scratches, or excrescences. And it must possess a uniform and brilliant, orient lustre. Being perfect in these respects, a pearl's value depends on its size and weight. Mere seed pearls may be perfect, but owing to their minuteness they are usually sold by the ounce. But a pearl of from two or three grains weight is sold on its merits, its value increasing by leaps and bounds according to weight. Thus, if a pearl of one grain be worth say ten shillings, a similar one of two grains would be worth twenty shillings *per grain*, and one of three grains thirty shillings *per grain*, and so on in progression until quite fancy prices are reached. For irregularly formed, or as they are termed "*barrok*" pearls, high prices are sometimes obtained on account of size or quaintness of form.

The orient beauty of a pearl would be even more appreciated than it is, were it not for the stupidity of some jewellers in setting it amidst incongruous surroundings. To set a fine pearl in a group of diamonds or with other stones which do not harmonise with its lustre is, in my opinion, unfair to both. But if set in a surrounding of deep blue enamel, or, if gems are desired, amidst sapphires, its lustrous sheen will be shown off to the very best advantage, blue being the best colour for this purpose. So well is this rule of contrast and colour known amongst "pearlers," that a piece of blue velvet or blue paper is invariably used for displaying pearls to a prospective purchaser. Black has nothing like the same effect.

Defective and blotchy pearls are often rendered valuable by the art of the "pearl-faker," who, taking advantage of the concentric formation, removes the defective layers by repeated parings, followed by free use of the acid bath,

and finishes off with Chinese tooth-powder. As may well be imagined, this is very tedious work. The operator has to manipulate the pearl very delicately, or it might be ruined by an unlucky slip of the knife.

Mention of the acid bath naturally suggests a reference to the legend of Cleopatra and her pearls, a legend which, like that of the "Southern Cross," will not bear looking into too closely. We read in more or less detail how this impulsive lady, being anxious to do honour to her guest, called for a cup of vinegar—British wine perhaps—and, dissolving one or more priceless pearls therein, drank this expensive draught in his presence! Now, it is certain—*experto credite*—that either Cleopatra must have had a cast-iron stomach to have survived so corrosive a potion, as would have been needed for this purpose, or at any rate the beloved Antony must have waited for hours or even days before the pearls could have been dissolved in anything so weak as vinegar.

The truth of the matter is this. If a pearl be dropped into a vessel containing the very strongest acid, a slight scarcely perceptible effervescence sets in whilst the acid is eating into the surface, after which there appears to be no further corrosion, even if the pearl be left a considerable time in the bath. The acid seems at once to decompose the outer layers into a slimy substance, which so completely protects the pearl from any further action of the acid that when the "pearl-faker" wishes to make any deeper impression he has to lift it and wipe off the protective coating. He may have to repeat this again and again ere the acid can accomplish its work.

Who would suppose that the "Southern Cross Pearl" —that celebrated gem of which so much has been written, that wonderful freak of nature—is mainly the work of the "pearl-faker"? Few, indeed, are the periodicals

which have not at one time or another published erroneous accounts of this gem and its discovery. These imaginary accounts have been so numerous and so circumstantially inaccurate that it may be interesting to set forth the generally accepted narrative in a cutting from a paper,—which was doubtless copied from some other periodical (for the item has travelled round the world's press over and over again),—together with a letter from the original owner, to which are added a few notes about the celebrated pearl from the present writer's own knowledge of the matter.

Narrative (A)—The Story.

"A Pearl of Pearls.—The extraordinary pearl, or rather cluster of pearls, known as the "Southern Cross," is probably the most remarkable of its kind nature has ever produced. So far as is known, it occupies an absolutely unique position in the history of pearls. It consists of nine pearls *naturally grown together* in so regular a manner as to form an absolutely perfect Latin cross. The pearl was discovered by a man named Clark while pearl fishing at *Roebourne* in Western Australia in the schooner "Ethel," the owner being a catholic called "Shiner Kelly." When the shell was opened both Clark and Kelly were filled with awe and amazement. Kelly, regarding it as some heaven-wrought miracle, *buried the pearl*,—for how long it is not known. It was discovered in 1874, and five years later was on exhibition at Roebourne. At first sight it might be supposed that the component pearls of the cross *had been artificially grouped together*. A minute examination under *strong light and high magnifying power has dispelled the idea of its artificial character*, and stamps it as a natural freak of a unique character. As this cruciform group of

pearls was found in the southern hemisphere, it has appropriately received the name of the Southern Cross. The pearl has changed hands many times, and each time the person parting with it has doubled his money It is now owned by a syndicate of Australian gentlemen, who value it at £10,000."

Narrative (B)—The Truth.

" *The Discovery of the Southern Cross Pearl.*

"To the Editor of the ——. — Sir, Having had my attention drawn to two paragraphs published in the "——" of the 14th October 1886, in which it was stated that "Shiner Kelly" was the finder of the now well-known pearl cross, and that he, through superstitious awe, buried it for a length of time; and also that Mr. Alexander Forrest had seen it in Roebourne in the year 1879, I feel it to be my duty—being the person referred to — both to myself and the public, such statements being wholly inaccurate—to give a true account of the facts of the case. The —— copied the paragraphs referred to from the ——. The —— is alleged to have published the same on the authority of Mr. Maitland Brown. To Mr. Maitland Brown I wrote on the subject (copy of my letter attached), but received no reply.

"I left Cossack on a pearling cruise *on the 12th November* 1882, and on the 25th March 1883 I and three natives were out "beach-combing." I found one shell only and the natives two, and I returned at night tired and so disgusted with my bad luck that I determined to go back to my home at the Lacepede Islands. Next day, however, I was more successful, getting altogether about 200 pairs of shells. During my absence a boy named Clarke, in my employment, in opening one

of the shells obtained the previous day, found the pearl above-mentioned. He said it was a perfect cross when he got it, but when he handed it to me *it was in three pieces.* In this condition—*i.e., in three distinct pieces*—I sold it to a fellow-pearler, *Mr. Frank Roy, for* £10. *Subsequently he sold it to Mr. Frank Craig for* £40. Mr. Frank Craig sold it to a syndicate of leading gentlemen in this colony. *The pearl was found off Baldwin's Creek,* in lat. 17° south, long. 122–30 east. What I wish particularly to impress on the public is—(1) That the pearl when sold by me *was not a perfect cross,* but was in *three distinct pieces*; (2) *that it was not buried by me as stated*; and (3) that, as it was not found till March '83, Mr. Alexander Forrest could hardly have seen it in the year 1879. I would only add, that I have no interest now in the pearl referred to, and that my chief object in writing is to protect such of the public as may be interested.—Yours, etc.,

(Signed) "JAMES WILLIAM SHERBROOK KELLY.

"COSSACK, 28*th Feb.* 1887."

The italics in both the above paragraphs are mine, and serve in the case of Narrative (A) to indicate those statements which the present writer, from his knowledge of the facts, can declare to be false, and in the case of Narrative (B) those statements which, for the same reason, the writer can vouch for.

Narrative (B) certainly contains the true history of the pearl as far as it goes. But there is another fact which, strangely enough, Mr. Kelly seems to have forgotten to mention—namely, that the pearl, when he sold it to Frank Roy in three pieces, consisted of only eight pearls, and that to make it resemble a well-proportioned cross — the right arm being absent — another pearl, a match in shape and fit, was subsequently procured and

fastened to the others. Thus, there are no less than three artificial joints in the Southern Cross Pearl.

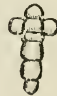
I also happened to be on a pearling cruise between November and April 1882–83, and had occasion to touch at the Lacepede Islands shortly after the "Southern Cross" was discovered. When Frank Roy showed it to me it was in three pieces. These were afterwards joined together by diamond cement, and the pearl, still wanting one pearl to transform it into a shapely cross, was sold in Cossack at the end of the season.

As if to assist in the deception, nature had fashioned a hollow in the side of the central pearl just where the added pearl would have to be fitted; and—the whole pearling fleet with their shells and pearls coming into Cossack about this time—it was no difficult matter to select a pearl of the right size and with the convexity required. The holder paid some ten or twelve pounds for the option of selecting a pearl within given limits; and then, once more with the aid of diamond cement and that of a skilful "faker," this celebrated gem was at length transformed into a perfect cross.

If my memory serves me faithfully, the three pieces in which the pearl was sold to Frank Roy were formed thus—

The skilful use of diamond cement transformed them into this shape—

there being obviously one pearl short. This being remedied, the pearl, when last I saw it in Cossack, had as nearly as possible this shape—



However, putting on one side all consideration of "faking," this pearl was a very curious freak of nature. It seemed as if the mollusc had attempted to fashion a string of pearls into some regular design; and the suggestion of a cross was so striking, it would have

been a pity not to have "faked" it into a more perfect resemblance.

The statement that "the pearl was discovered by a man named Clark while pearling at Roebourne" is distinctly interesting, because Roebourne is, or at least was when I lived there, quite eight miles *inland*.

Of the pearl's history after it left Cossack nothing is known by myself; but, as far as I know, this is the first time that the complete history of its discovery has been written.

CHAPTER XV

More Notes on Pearling—Discipline—Sea Snakes—How the Men dive—Breaking in Beginners—The Time under Water—Accidents—Dangers of the Diver—Sharks—Roebuck Bay——The Death of Ahmun—Shark Stories—Shark Fishing—A Dose of Medicine—Boy and a Shark—Storms and Willi-Willis—A Government Expedition—Trip to Java—More Years at Shelling—Discovery of Taunton Reef—Sounds from afar—Krakatoa—My last Pearling Season—The 1887 Willi-Willi—The End.

AFTER this long digression on pearls it is time to return to a description of the life one leads when seeking them. I have given an outline of the routine of a day's shelling, from which it may be seen the work was far from easy. It was exhausting and perilous for the divers, and full of privation, exposure, and danger for the white men. Only the hope of a prosperous season reconciled one to the life. When shells were plentiful and the weather fine the work was exciting and interesting enough; but during rough weather, when one had to be constantly straining at the oar to keep the dinghy from drifting too rapidly, or when hour after hour might pass without the men bringing up a single shell, the discouragement was great. The rays of the vertical sun beating down on one's shoulders at such times seemed as if it would never reach the western horizon, which was the signal for returning on board.

As may well be imagined, when three or four white men had to control and compel some thirty or forty natives to carry on work which they detested, a very strict dis-

cipline had to be maintained. It was the rule that no talking was allowed amongst the divers when in the dinghy, nor were they even permitted to address the white man, unless, maybe, to answer a question as to the nature of the bottom, whether "nanoo" (sand) or "bannin" (shelly bottom), etc., or unless some urgent necessity arose. Sometimes, indeed, I have pushed off from the vessel's side of a morning and have not heard a word spoken until we returned on board at night, unless chance might take me within hail of some other dinghy, when felicitations or condolences would be exchanged, as good or bad luck might happen. At times, when the "patch" was small, the dinghys of the whole fleet might be congregated on a very small area, in which case the scene was animated enough. On all sides you could see divers slipping into the water and others just coming to the surface, puffing, blowing, and coughing to clear their eyes, ears, and mouth from the salt water—some with, others without, shells. Others would be swimming to regain their dinghy or squatting in their places for the few minutes' rest permitted, and, if the wind were at all fresh, shivering with cold; for although the weather might be extremely hot, the constant plunging in and out for many hours at a time tended to reduce the bodily temperature considerably. The white men would be seen standing up in each dinghy. They were lightly clad, with shirt sleeves and trousers rolled up, in all varieties and colours of costume, from the regulation shirt, trousers, and felt hat, with leather belt sustaining sheath-knife and pouch, to the more comfortable pyjama suit, or even the Malay sarong, a garment of vivid colours which I used greatly to affect myself when shelling in calm weather. Some would be straining hard at the end of the scull-oar, forcing the boat against wind and tide in the endeavour to keep it as long as possible on the

"patch," which was marked by the discoverer's buoy, which also might be observed nodding on the surface, and canted over by the swiftly rushing tide. Others, their men all being below, just kept the dinghy's head to wind until, by judicious use of the oar and well-calculated drifting, all the divers reappear on the surface within a short distance from their own boat. This is the secret of saving the divers from wasting their powers and time uselessly. Generally the small patch would be soon worked out, and the dinghys would drift apart again, and once more be dotted at long intervals on the surface of the sea, where sometimes the low-lying coast-line could not be seen at all; or perhaps only some white sand-hill, bush-covered hummock, red cliff, or rocky headland could be seen from the low level of the diving boats.

Snakes were very plentiful in these tropical waters. After rounding the North-West Cape the whole of the seas along the coast, and right across to the East Indian Archipelago, are infested with these reptiles. Though I have sailed and shelled over the whole extent of coast from the North-West Cape right away east to Cape L'Eveque, and down into King's Sound and Exmouth Gulf, nowhere have I seen so many marine snakes as in and around the shelling ground at Roebuck Bay. Bright yellow, yellow with brown stripes, brown, black, green, and bronze-coloured snakes I could see every day basking on the surface, outstretched, coiled up asleep, or swimming along with a leisurely undulating lateral motion. The average length was from three to four feet, and about as thick as a man's arm in the middle, tapering towards a vicious looking flattened head, a wide mouth armed with sharp needle-like teeth, and cruel-looking glittering eyes, and a serpent-like tail flattened out to serve

as a propeller. There are no fins, and the small closely set scales are often marked with striking patterns in some darker shade than the general colouring.

They are easily killed when on the surface. A blow with the edge of one's scull-oar breaks the spinal column and instantly disables them. It is then easy to grasp them by the slimy tail and rap their heads against the thwarts or side of the boat. So numerous are they, however, that one soon gets tired of so commonplace a matter as snake killing. They are very pugnacious, and when the divers chance to surround one it makes for the nearest open mouthed, and probably inflicts a nasty bite, if nothing more serious. But as a rule the native or the Malay divers are too smart for them. I have never seen a diver bitten, and have never heard of any experiment being made to ascertain whether these snakes are venomous or not; but from what I could gather from my Malays, whose language I spoke, the snakes are not poisonous. I have often, when out shelling on a calm day, seen a diver returning to the surface at a great rate followed by the gleaming yellow of some snake, whose peaceful slumbers on the sea bottom had been disturbed. My word, yes!—If you want to see a diver move smartly, you must watch until a furious water snake is a few feet behind him. They do not seem to fear them very much, though, for once safe in the dinghy there is generally a good laugh over the incident. This is further evidence that the men know, or believe, that the water snake's bite is not fatal, though probably painful enough.

I remember one calm day out shelling, when the sea was as smooth as glass and the vertical December sun enabled me to see far down into its deep blue depths, my divers (aboriginal natives on this occasion) were all below, and the tide had drifted the boat close to a

large snake lying asleep on the surface. I was just raising my oar to give it "domino," when I happened to catch sight of an indistinct shadow in the clear depths below. This rapidly resolved itself into an old nigger returning to the surface, with closed eyes and motionless limbs, urged swiftly upwards by the pressure of the water,—for it must be understood that the hard work of diving is the effort to get down and to keep down in anything over one fathom, no exertion being required to regain the surface. I saw he would ascend close to the snake, so awaited developments. Sure enough, old "Binjiry" emerged, with hardly a ripple within six inches of the sleeper. Opening his eyes, and finding himself in close proximity to the now awakening snake, he did not, as I expected, start off full speed ahead for the boat; but calmly and without any hesitation he grasped the startled reptile by the neck, and swam towards the boat, laughing as the snake twined its body round his arm and neck. He then, pensively and methodically, pounded its head against the side and threw it from him.

I have mentioned that both aboriginal natives and Malay divers slip down feet first into the water; they seldom if ever dive into the water head first. The reason they assign for this is, that constantly to plunge head first brings on a severe headache. Anyhow, feet first is the way they drop from the boat into the water; and, when a few feet below the surface, they turn over and swim straight down towards the bottom.

They all experience great pain in the ears when first learning to dive; and the process of "breaking in" new recruits is a difficult task until—as they aver—some membrane in the ears is broken and frees them from any further pain. Strange to say, their hearing does not seem to be much affected. So painful is diving in anything over three fathoms to new hands, or "Munjungs,"

that the only way of making sure that they do reach the bottom is to insist on their bringing up pieces of weed, coral, or sponge. Sometimes it is necessary to order two of the old hands to take hold of the recalcitrant's wrists and swim with him to the bottom. After a short course of this drastic treatment all trouble on this score ceases.

As may be supposed, where the tide sweeps the divers along the bottom at the rate of three or four or even six miles an hour, they have to be very smart in seeking and grabbing any shell within reach. I have never tested them with a time-keeper; but by counting seconds on many occasions, from the moment a diver's head sank below until it again came above the surface, I estimated the average time under water was fifty-seven seconds. Part of this is of course expended in swimming to the bottom, where they can remain only a very few seconds, as time must be allowed for reaching the surface before letting go their breath. Practice in ever-varying depths enables them to gauge this limit of time to a nicety. But sometimes they cut things too fine, and then a catastrophe was inevitable, unless much watchfulness was exercised by the white man, who has to keep his eyes turned in all directions once his men are down. So long as a diver can hold his breath the pressure forces him to the surface at a speed which seldom requires accelerating by strokes with the hands or feet; but the moment he lets go his breath—if under water—his upward course is arrested and his body commences to sink. Now, when the white man sees this, either he must plunge in to the rescue himself, or direct such divers who may be on the top to do the needful.

On a calm day, when one can see far into the blue clear depths below, I have often seen one of my men shooting rapidly upwards until within perhaps a foot or two from the surface, when a sudden gush of bubbles

from the man's mouth would tell its own tale. Instantly he would begin to sink gently downwards, and only quick action could save this diver who had miscalculated his time. However, as it was not infrequent for divers to go down and never come up at all, one may conclude that, where the time to be allowed is comprised in so few seconds, even the most experienced make fatal errors.

And yet the non-return of a diver need be no matter for surprise when one remembers what a lot of chances are against him when at the bottom of the sea. He may be entangled in masses of rope-like weeds, or be disembowelled by the sharp edge of some giant coral-cup as the tide sweeps him along the bottom, or be held fast by the hand through unwittingly placing it in the gaping lips of some monster clam-shell, and thus be anchored to the bottom. The last supposition is founded on the numbers of times divers come to the surface groaning with pain, having accidentally put their fingers in the lips of the pearl-shell they were seizing. The pearl-shell turns the tables by seizing them, and their sorely pinched fingers can only be released by aid of the white man's sheath-knife.

Not the least amongst the dangers to which divers are exposed are the attacks of sharks and other marine monsters. The shark is an ever-present foe to the naked diver; and on parts of the coast they are so numerous and voracious that accidents are almost certain when diving is carried on in these ill-omened waters.

Roebuck Bay was a bad place for sharks, and accidents were painfully numerous during the first season it was worked. There was one patch a little to the northward of Cape Villaret which seemed to be particularly fatal. Here, one calm morning, my dinghy happened to be the last to leave the vessel. The tide was running out strongly, and soon drifted us far astern. Presently all

my divers (Malays) had dropped into the water except one old chap named Ahmun, who lingered a few seconds to arrange his chew of "sireh" (betel-nut), having done which he also slipped from the gunwale and disappeared.

Few seconds had passed before he returned to the surface, his eyeballs almost starting from their sockets, his features distorted with fear and agony, as he called, "Oh Tuan, iu bezar" ("Oh master, a great shark"), and then he swam frantically towards the dinghy, which was distant about ten yards. When he came to the surface I had noticed what appeared to my inexperienced eyes as some peculiar brown halo which surrounded him in the clear green water. But as he began to swim a broad brown trail was left behind him. Then only did I realise that it was the poor fellow's life blood which was discolouring the water. A few sturdy strokes and he grasped the gunwale of the boat, and his poor head sank down as he repeated in feeble and heart-rending tones, "Ah Tuan, oh Tuan, iu bezar s'kali" (Ah master, oh master, a very great shark). I grasped him by the arm, and called the other divers to assist me. When we had lifted him into the boat a frightful sight met my view, a sight which is as fresh in my memory now, as I write, as if it were only yesterday that I witnessed the tragedy. Half of the man's body had been torn from him. The shark's teeth had grazed and torn open the *pericardium* without having touched the heart itself.

On the impulse of the moment I at first thought it my duty to put the poor wretch out of his agony, but I saw the change of death pass over his distorted features. The movements of the heart—at first inconceivably violent—gradually became slower, and with a long drawn sigh poor Ahmun passed away.

On closer examination it turned out that the shark—

if it was a shark, for there were no signs of one on the surface—had bitten one clean mouthful out of the man's left side, and, where the teeth had passed through the breast-bone and the base of the ribs, the cut, as is always the case, was as even as though it had been done with a fret-saw. How he had managed to swim quite ten yards, or even rise to the surface, has always been a matter of wonder to me. Giving orders to "dyong" (paddle) back to the vessel, I hoisted the ensign half-mast, which soon brought our other dinghys alongside, and having got the anchor up, we ran in-shore and buried the body above high-water mark on the beach. Shelling was only resumed after a trip to the Lacepede Islands, for turtle, had given our men time to get over their dismay.

The day after our return to the fleet a nigger had half of his buttock torn completely off, though he recovered after much care and nursing. The same week one of the native boys on the "Dawn" had his leg bitten off. He died within a few hours from shock. In fact, the situation became so serious that steps had to be taken to drive the sharks away temporarily, if possible.

The following Sunday the whole fleet started shark fishing, and, putting in practice what we did on our own vessel, we soon secured a monster about ten feet long by means of the shark-hook. And now was put in hand a piece of pearler's craft which I had not seen before. A rope was passed round the shark, and he was slung alongside, by one of the boat-tackles, half in and half out of the water. The belly was then ripped open in order to let the intestines, etc., drift away with the tide. In a few minutes the sea all round us was "fairly stiff with sharks," great and small, fighting each other as they struggled to devour the remains of their defunct friend. And now shark-hooks, harpoons, spears, and even rifle bullets were brought into play, until not only were there

nine or ten dead sharks hanging alongside, but many must have been vitally wounded and drifted away. This part of the programme was only a means towards an end. So far the sharks had been only attracted by the feasts spread out for them. The sea was still alive with them, and now was the moment to put in practice the master-stroke which was to scare them right away from the vicinity.

Our skipper dived below into the cabin, muttering, "Hold on a bit, I'll give 'em a dose that will choke 'em off. The brutes won't want *no* more medicine after I've done with 'em." He returned on deck with a cartridge of dynamite (of which we carried several pounds for fishing purposes) and about two feet of waterproof fuse, chuckling to himself as he inserted the fuse into a long detonator and pressed the latter into the soft dynamite, where a few turns of twine secured it. He then cut a large strip of flesh from one of the dead sharks, and carefully wrapped the cartridge in this, securing all with twine and rope-yarns. All being ready, the fuse was lit, and, holding the bait for a second to ensure the fuse being fairly started, he dropped the whole overboard. We could see the smoke bubbles passing off as it sank out of sight; and what was more interesting, we could see an enormous shark following it down with felonious intent. A moment or two later we heard the familiar report, and felt the sharp jolt under the vessel's bottom which told us the fuse had burnt home and exploded the charge. Whether our skipper's dose of "medicine" had been swallowed before the explosion we could not, of course, swear. We could only rely on circumstantial evidence, which was strongly in his favour. *Imprimis*—We had seen a big shark following the bait, intending to swallow it. Secondly, the shock of the explosion had been heard and felt. Thirdly, immediately afterwards

an immense, broken shark's liver—the only part that could come to the surface—floated past the ship. *Ergo,* we were right in concluding that Mr. Shark had been dispersed.

Anyhow, as the result of that Sunday's crusade the fleet was freed from further molestation for several weeks. In fact, I do not remember another accident that season. The sharks evidently considered that part of the Bay had become too hot for them.

The following year I was again shelling in Roebuck Bay, and one calm day happened to be near a dinghy belonging to another vessel. Suddenly I heard a scream behind me. Turning, I saw a native boy from the other dinghy on the surface, beating the water frantically as he struggled against something which was trying to pull him down. He kept calling "Jacky, Jacky" to the white man in agonised tones; but before the dinghy could be slewed round there was a terrible splash, and the poor lad was dragged out of sight. He reappeared in a second or two, and was quickly lifted into the boat. I shouted to learn what had happened, and was told that the whole of the boy's right leg had been torn off. The lad was quite conscious, and one would imagine the loss of blood—the femoral artery being severed—would have quickly carried him off. Yet he lived for several hours after being taken on board the schooner, appearing to have no pain, and was even able to answer questions. It appeared the divers in his boat had all seen a large shark prowling about where they had been diving for an hour or two before the accident. But the men keeping well together when below, it had been afraid to attack them, for sharks are as timorous as they are voracious. The boy had somehow got separated from the rest, and had been seized whilst ascending. The lad said he never saw any shark, but when near the surface

he had been gripped, and that, while he was seen splashing on the surface, the monster had been all the while increasing its hold until, being unable to grip any more, the boy had been dragged below and his leg severed at the same moment. The teeth had passed right through the ball of the hip-joint, and had gone through the solid bone as cleanly as possible. The rows of teeth in a shark's jaw are so placed that once it has gripped anything it cannot let go even if it wants to (which it doesn't); and the razor-like edges are able to sever any substance less hard than iron.

After these painful reminiscences, which are necessary for showing the dangers of a diver's life, I must conclude my description of shelling operations. They are frequently interrupted by storms of wind and rain known amongst "pearlers" as "Cock-eyed-bobs." The wind starts up quite suddenly and blows with great violence. Heavy rain pelts down, accompanied by extreme cold. The storm subsides as suddenly as it had come; but the water for days afterwards would be so thick that no diving could be done. The shelling ground being very exposed, we frequently had to up-anchor and run for the nearest creek whenever the falling barometer indicated a blow. The whole coast between North-West Cape and Cambridge Gulf is subject to fierce hurricanes between the months of October to March. These are called by the natives "Willi-Willi." They sweep all before them, and cause great loss of life and property.

At the end of my first season at pearling I was appointed to take charge of a government expedition in the Revenue cutter *Gertrude*, during the temporary illness of the Inspector of Pearl-shell Fisheries. We were to search along the western islands for any wreckage; for a Fremantle vessel, *The Ariel*, with passengers on board, had left Cossack and had not since been heard of. The

search expedition failed to find any traces of her, though I explored some three or four hundred miles of coast-line.

Shortly after this I took charge of a small pearling schooner, my early sea training standing me in good stead, and I took her to Java with a load of cattle. On our return we shipped some natives and did another season's shelling at Roebuck Bay. The following years I was in charge of another vessel, the *Expert,* during which time we were fairly successful.

Whilst cruising to the westward on board this vessel I discovered, fixed the position, and reported to the Admiralty Survey Office a dangerous reef right in the steamer track. According to custom, this was named after me, and may now be seen on the Admiralty chart "No. 1055, Bedout Island to Cape Cuvier," North-West Australian Coast.

During the six or seven years I was "pearling" I made several voyages to Java in the off-season, and visited many islands in the far East somewhat out of the track of the ordinary traveller. The life in these places, the people, and the places themselves have been written about so often that it is needless for me to add anything. Nor did I meet with any adventure worth remembering.

However, in this connection it may be worth recording the following incident. One day I was sailing my vessel to the westward, and was standing through the Flying-foam passage. Sounds of explosions, on shore, as we then thought, could be heard plainly, though we could not understand what they were. Twelve months afterwards, when passing by the place where Anjer had once been, I learned that the reports we had heard that day on the coast of North-West Australia were the explosions which accompanied the world-famous eruption of Krakatoa Island, distant from us over nine hundred

miles. There was no doubt about it. The date and hour, allowing for longitude, corresponded; and many other phenomena noticed on our coast proved that I had listened to the reports of an explosion that was occurring at such an immense distance.

The pearling season 1886–87—which was the last I was engaged in—was a very unsuccessful one at first. I decided to take my vessel to the westward with a division of the fleet, and try some old grounds where we had done well previously.

At Exmouth Gulf we tried all the old "patches" day after day without success. We tried all along the coast eastward to Baningarra, and by the end of January, after three months' work, I had only one and a half tons of shell in the hold. The weather was very bad, and interruptions on this score were so frequent that I find, by referring to an old journal, only six days shelling was possible in the month of January 1887. But towards the end of February a new "patch" was discovered off Lagrange Bay, and before the end of March I had eighteen tons of shells on board, which total would have probably been doubled had not my vessel, in common with the rest of the fleet, been swept away from our anchorage in the great Willi-Willi of 1887.

Returning to Cossack, I decided on a trip to England, in order once more to see the "Old Folks at home," intending to return in time for the next shelling season. Accordingly, having settled my affairs, I took steamer for Singapore. I happened to miss the mail steamer, but ere long one of the ever-ready Blue-Funnel Line putting into Tanjong Pagar harbour, the *Stentor* carried me home. Here the edict of fate—which makes "the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley"—decreed my remaining in England.

And now, O reader, you and I, like unto ships that

meet in mid-ocean, have been "hove-to" in company for a little while. Let us dip our ensigns, for the moment has come to "fill away," each on our respective course.

Adieu, then, to the plains and forests, to the coral shores, and the fragrant isles of Australind.

THE END.

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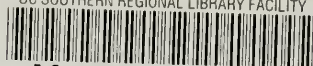
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