

LONELY LANDS.



BY

EMERSON







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LONELY LANDS

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FRANCIS E. BIRTLES.

LONELY LANDS

THROUGH THE HEART OF
AUSTRALIA

BY
FRANCIS E. BIRTLES

*With Portrait, Map, and 34 Photographic Illustrations
by the Author.*

SYDNEY
N.S.W. BOOKSTALL CO.

1909

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PREFACE

To a man whose motto is "Actions not words," the compilation of sufficient material to make a book is no easy task, and I have often felt that I would rather ride a hundred miles than write about it. Probably my gentle readers may wish I had given expression to my feelings in the former fashion only, after they have sampled my wares, but the deed is done now, and the book may, at least, serve as a warning to the cobbler to stick to his last.

I would crave some indulgence on behalf of the photographs contained herein; but, when the untoward conditions under which they were snapped are taken into account, I am sure some allowance will be made. There were many others taken, but the exposure to damp and dust ruined them, so the residue represents the survival of the fittest.

The economic questions dealt with so cursorily must, in time, become matters of great moment to

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Australia, but, whereas they may be mentioned here, in passing, the proper place to discuss them is Parliament.

The holiday aspect of the ride may not appeal to every one, although, I can safely say that, while the hardships were many, they were more than compensated by the pleasures.

THE AUTHOR.

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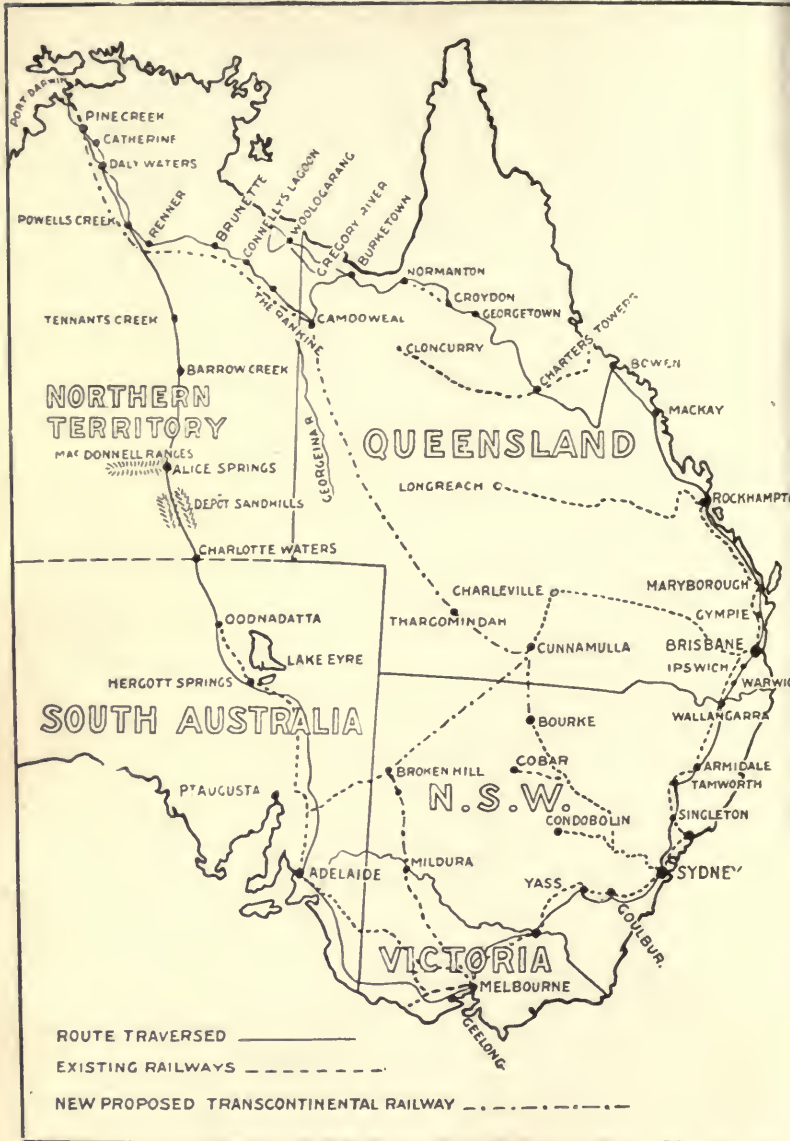
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CHAPTER I.

THE REASON OF THE RIDE.

A FEW centuries ago the adventurous spirit who felt the gall of the home harness eating into his flesh had little difficulty, if he had enough pluck, in finding an outlet for his restlessness. North, south, east or west lay unexplored lands that lured the man whose quest was gold or game, diamonds or discovery.

Expeditions were organised under leaders who sought fame in opening up new territory, in founding oversea colonies, and extending the area of their country's influence. Thus, Columbus, in 1492 set out from Palos in the south of Spain, on that famous voyage that resulted in the discovery of America, and the ultimate founding of that great nation which to-day exerts such a powerful influence upon the world's destiny. The names of men like Drake, Raleigh, Cavendish and Cook come rapidly to our recollection in the matter of oversea discovery; Livingstone and Stanley explored the depths of the Dark Continent,

just as Burke and Wills, and many another intrepid traveller, laid bare the heart of Australia.

But those deeds were done before science and civilisation had put their girdle round the earth. As our poet Lawson puts it:

“ When the North was hale in the march of Time,
And the South and the West were new,
And the gorgeous East was a pantomime,
As it seemed in our boyhood’s view ;
When Spain was first on the waves of change,
And proud in the ranks of pride,
And all was wonderful, new and strange,
In the days when the world was wide.”

We are inclined to think that, nowadays, there are no new worlds to conquer and that the restless spirit of the twentieth century must e’en grin and bear it; but in the short story I, Francis Birtles, have to tell in the following pages, it will be seen that the days of discovery are not yet at an end and that a fair field lies right within the confines of our own Australian Continent. We know but the fringe of our vast island home, while the immense tracts that compose the hinterland, the millions of square miles in the Northern Territory, and the regions remote from civilised centres are comparatively unknown.

But the days of organised expeditions seem to have vanished, and, if one should happen to be inspired

with the same splendid spirit that prompted the explorers in those days "when the world was wide," he must needs carry out his project on his own initiative. No Ferdinand and Isabella will be found to equip him with men and money; no Queen Elizabeth will furnish him with the sinews of war; no generous "government" will offer to pay his expenses should he propose, singlehanded, to face the dangers of hunger, thirst, accident and probable death in an endeavour to cross those waterless wastes and dreary deserts that lie between the north and the south of Australia.

Why the idea should ever have occurred to me to risk a ride on a bicycle over eight thousand miles of territory, much of which was practically pathless, it would be hard to explain, excepting that the old roving spirit of my English forefathers may have reasserted itself after lying dormant for several generations, and awakening the desire to do and dare something outside the hum-drum limits of city life, urged me to blaze the trail.

For, although born in Melbourne twenty-five years ago, of parents whose ancestral home was in Cheshire County, England, the love of adventure had carried me twice round the world before I was seventeen and

precipitated me into the late Boer war, where I served my country in the Field Intelligence Department and afterwards drifted into the Native Constabulary. No doubt my experience in the South African Police has been of much service to me in my recent ride, for in the course of three years there, I covered twenty thousand miles on horseback, besides crossing the great Karoo on a bicycle.

Returning to Melbourne I settled down for a time to my profession of lithographic artist, until once more the nomad in me got the upper hand and I essayed a bicycle ride right across Australia, from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific—but that is another story, as Rudyard Kipling would say.

Since the Immigration Movement, the Defence of Australia, and the Peopling of the Northern Territory became live questions, the thought had often occurred to me that it would be a good thing if someone would bring the matter down to a practical basis by exploring the districts under discussion, and finding out the possibilities of planting a white population in the northern lands that lay between us and those Asiatic hordes who might at any moment swarm across the Torres Straits and invade our unguarded shores. So, after a time, I arrived at the conclusion that, partly by

way of a holiday and partly by way of settling a vexed question, I would ride around on my bicycle and note every turn of the wheel.

Perhaps I ought to confess that the idea of doing my country a service was not paramount in my mind, for I was neither retained by the Government nor refreshed by the Opposition. I set out as a free lance, paying my own expenses and looking for no reward beyond the satisfaction of enjoying myself in a somewhat unique fashion, and, incidentally, of contributing a quota, from personal observation, towards the solving of the White Australia equation.

When my intention became known the truth of the biblical saying about a "multitude of counsellors" became pathetically apparent. Some encouraged, others commiserated, a few derided, many gave me what they called "a bit of good advice," and nearly every one called me affectionately, "old man."

It was, "Look here, old man!" and, "I'll tell you what, old man!" until I began to feel quite patriarchal notwithstanding my twenty-five years.

But there were others who came along with something more practical. Not that I wish you to infer that the good advice party was despised by me; far from it, for I heartily appreciated the kindly inten-

tion, although it was utterly impossible for me to accept such diverse advice as was tendered me.

Having previously gained some little fame as a cyclist, Messrs. Bennett and Wood came forward with an offer to "mount" me on one of their Royal Speedwell road racers, fitted with Armstrong's three speed gear, free wheel, front hub brake, and Dunlop canvas-lined tyres. This I gladly accepted and the fact that this machine has been my trusty companion throughout all my vicissitudes speaks volumes for the excellence of its manufacture.

Again, Messrs. Harringtons Ltd., knowing that I dabbled a little in photography, presented me with one of their Post-Card Cameras, No. 3 Ensign, and Ensign roll films, and I trust I have not disappointed them in the use I have made of their gift. It has been my privilege to contribute from time to time short articles and photographs of points of interest *en route* to THE AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNAL published by this up-to-date firm.

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTFIT.

BY reference to the accompanying map it will be seen that my projected journey started from Sydney and proceeded north through Newcastle, Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Normanton and Burketown. Thence around the Gulf of Carpentaria, across the Roper River to Port Darwin, through the heart of Australia from north to south *via* Alice Springs, and Oodnadatta to Adelaide. Then south by east, through Mount Gambier, Hamilton, and Warrnambool to Melbourne, then north by east, through Albury to Sydney, a circuit of over eight thousand miles.

Now a journey of this kind cannot be undertaken without a lot of forethought and careful preparation. Under ordinary circumstances the amount of luggage one takes is decided by the distance to be traversed and the time to be taken; the bulk does not weigh on one's mind and it will be noticed that the less experience the traveller has the greater the amount of



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THE START FROM SYDNEY,



21ST AUGUST, 1907

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his "traps," whereas old campaigners invariably travel light. But when you are compelled to carry your house on your back, like the snail, you soon learn the things you can do without, and so the eyelist setting out on a lengthy tour must reduce his wants to a minimum and exercise not a little ingenuity as to his packing powers.

My kit consisted of a bronze metal tank fitted to the frame of the bicycle and capable of containing a gallon and a half of water; a light waterproof sleeping bag, lined with beaver; a Winchester repeating rifle (32 calibre) with 200 rounds of ammunition; a camera and two hundred exposures, sealed and waterproofed; films, post-card size; waterproof canvas bags for flour, tea, sugar, &c.; compass; folding double billy can, one for cooking and one for tea; concentrated foods, bovril, grapenuts, soup tablets, peasoup sausages, chocolate; medicines, permanganate of potash, cayenne pepper, quinine, boracic acid; charts, aneroid barometer, cyclometer and compass; matches in waterproof cases; clothing, such as wide felt hat, flannel singlet, woollen guernsey, woollen racing knickers, woollen cycling hose, and long topped boots to stay the legs and help keep sand or water out.

The approximate weight of my outfit was 85lbs., of which my machine accounted for 25 lbs.



PHOTOGRAPH OF SELF AND OUTFIT.

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Now perhaps I owe my readers a word of explanation regarding some of the items in the foregoing outfit, and, as they may some day aspire to follow my example, I wish them to benefit by my experience.

The water tank is preferable to the canvas water bag, because, at many parts of the route, the evaporation from the bag is so great that your supply lasts no time and the salt dust from some of the lakes penetrates the canvas and renders the water quite brackish. Many of the lakes in the interior of Australia do not contain water, but are covered over with a thick, white coating of salt—frequently extending for scores of miles—and the glare and salt dust cause the eyes to smart and produce a painful inflammation. Boracic acid comes in handy under these circumstances, for, when used in solution, it makes a cooling and effective eye wash. At other times, say when crossing hot sand, to powder the feet with boracic keeps them from scalding.

Permanganate of potash, or *pot. permang.* as the wholesale druggists call it, is most efficacious for clearing muddy water, as well as being an excellent antidote for the bites of poisonous insects or venomous reptiles. A very little goes a long way: for a few crystals, dissolved in water, will provide you with a plentiful

supply of good Condy's fluid. (I hope the Australian Drug Company will not accuse me of giving away a valuable trade secret.)

The aneroid barometer need not necessarily form part of the ordinary traveller's equipment, but, as I had arranged with the Government Map Compiler to test and correct the heights of the various mountains I passed over, to me it was a *sine qua non*.

The cyclometer, for measuring distances, was of great service, as there never seems to be any agreement out back between any two people as to the actual distance between any two points. They say that, as a class, land agents are certain sinners in this respect, and that when their advertisements mention "ten minutes from the railway station" you may rely upon the distance being doubled.

The little pocket compass is a veritable *vade mecum*, and as necessary to the overlander as the ship's compass is to the mariner.

The clothing part of the outfit can be readily adapted to the special circumstances of each case, but the food portion will always be a difficulty to a cyclist, as he can rarely carry more than a four days' supply, and he is never quite sure where he may be when his supply runs out. He may be miles away from any

chance of replenishing his slight store and may be compelled to take a tuck in his belt as a substitute for tucker.

Before setting out on an overland ride one has to sit down calmly and count the cost. It is not pleasant to have your name associated with a failure, and, if you are not prepared to go right through with it, better leave the journey alone. For, as the miles are many so also are the difficulties, but, as forewarned is forearmed, it may pay to parade them and be prepared to overcome them.

One of the worst enemies to be encountered is the wide, waterless wastes, of which there are several *en route*, and, as the little tank only holds a gallon and a half, the risk of doing "a perish," as they say in desert parlance, is great. Again, there are hundreds of miles of black soil country to be crossed and should it happen to rain you may find yourself bogged in black mud, and, instead of your bicycle carrying you, you have to carry it.

Just as trying are the vast, sliding sandhills which you must plough through day and night in order to reach the rockland by a given time. The sand is so hot and so fine that it penetrates every seam and crevice, sneaking in over your boot tops until you feel as if your legs were encased in molten lead.

If it should be your misfortune to be marooned in such a sea of sand you may look for a lively time, for the night is made hideous by the howling of wild dogs and demented dingoes until you are in danger of being driven to the depths of profanity. Sleep is impossible owing to the attacks of small, black ants that simply take possession of you and overrun you, regardless of the sacredness of your person or the rights of your property—

In by your ears and out by your mouth,
They travel in every direction,
They run over your nose, from the north to the south,
Till you're tortured beyond recollection.

You haven't even the remedy of the American Colonel who lived in a mosquito-infested locality, but who, nevertheless, used no nets on his bed. "For," said he, "when I go to bed I am so intoxicated that I don't mind the mosquitoes, and, when I awake, the mosquitoes are so intoxicated that they don't mind me."

No, the man on the wheel must lead the simple life if he would win through, and, to keep fit, he must shun the flowing bowl and stick strictly to water. As for the water one meets in some parts of this outlying region, the most that can be said for it is that it is moist. The "crystal spring" of the poets would

be a sad misnomer here, for there isn't any crystal and there isn't any spring, and it is wise, if you can, to filter the liquid through your teeth. It is no uncommon occurrence to have to drag out the carcase of some animal that has jumped into a waterhole and been too far gone to climb out again. Should you happen to miss the waterhole altogether you get an experience that ought to satisfy you for life.

Head winds are the overland cyclist's curse, for, by seriously retarding his progress, they cause him to run short of provisions and oftentimes bring him to the verge of disaster. On the desert plains blinding, stifling dust storms blow for days, enveloping and engulfing many a man and beast, and altering the face of the landscape beyond recognition.

But no matter what happens, be it rain, dust, wind, missed waterhole, breakdown or sickness itself, the overlander must keep moving, for delay may mean death. Is it any wonder then that I caution intending travellers to think well before they rue, to get to know the difficulties that may beset them and the best means of overcoming them? For, truly, the man who attempts, singlehanded, to dare the dangers of the desert, must take his courage in both hands and be prepared to take his chance.

CHAPTER III.

SYDNEY TO BRISBANE, 658 MILES.

*My Send-off from Sydney—A Bolt—An
Unexpected Dip—My First Snake.*

ON the 21st of August, 1907, I awoke from a rather restless sleep and remembered that on that day I was about to set out on my lonely ride to the comparatively unknown North.

I was not without confidence that I would be successful, as my previous rides had put me in good form, but still there remained that slight tremor around the heart that footballers know, just the moment before the kick-off.

The time of my departure had become known to quite a number of cyclists and camerists, and accordingly there was a goodly gathering outside Messrs. Bennett and Wood's cycle works, Market Street, Sydney, shortly before three o'clock to give me a send-off.

I was snapshotted from every point of the compass

by the knights of the camera; I was shaken by the hand by men I had never seen before, as well as by mine own familiar friends, until I began to wonder if these demonstrations were meant for me personally or merely intended to honour British pluck and endurance of which I happened, for the moment, to be the representative. I assure you I appreciated these signs of enthusiasm and determined to do my best to justify the faith that produced them; and, many a time afterwards, when circumstances seemed to be making me their plaything and hope had given place to despair, the recollection of that eager crowd and the remembrance of their parting cheer sent a thrill of new life through me and won me out.

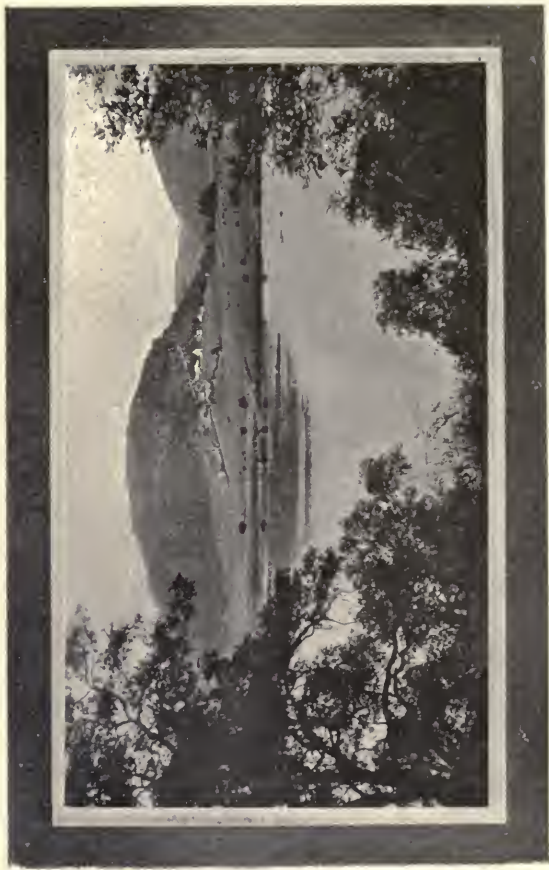
But it had been reserved as somewhat of a surprise to me that a small band of brothers of the bike had determined to convoy me as far as Parramatta a distance of fifteen miles. Now in every quarter of the globe I have found the amateur cyclist to be the prince of good fellows, a friend in need and a jovial one at that; but, nowhere in my travels have I met with a finer spirit of *camaraderie* than amongst the cyclists of Australia.

I felt genuinely proud of that little procession as it passed down Brickfield Hill and, when I said good-

bye to them at parting, I went on my way without the slightest sense of loneliness, realising that the good friends who had accompanied me so far would remain by my side in spirit until we met again. To them, no doubt, it seemed a small thing, conceived in goodwill and carried out so lightheartedly, but it left an impression on my heart that shall never be effaced. For although I am sometimes termed "a hard case" and a beggar to fight when my back is up against the wall, I become as weak as water under the influence of a kindly action, and never miss an opportunity of repaying.

After leaving Parramatta I turned my wheel towards the Hawkesbury district, which is an ideal hunting ground for the artist and the photographer. At every turn of the road and river one can find the most exquisite pictures; nooks, reflections, mountains, creeks, separately and collectively, in such picturesque profusion that the chief difficulty is where to begin. From Wiseman's Ferry to Brooks' Ferry the man of artistic tastes may hold high revel and still leave a feast for those who may follow.

Mounting the ranges above the Hawkesbury one remarks upon the splendid roads, and, those who are historically inclined, may remember that these same



Lonely Landa.

WISEMAN'S FERRY, HAWKESBURY RIVER, N.S.W.

roads were built in the early days by convict labour and stand as monuments of a system of slavery which was a disgrace to British civilisation. There were no "Labour Members" in those days and no minimum wage.

But of course in a route like the one I had mapped out for myself there were bad roads as well as good and these had to be negotiated as they came. Crossing the black soil plains subjected my outfit to rather a severe strain, and the camera, which I carried on my back for safety, got such a shaking that I expected to find every plate in pieces. Thanks, however, to the use of cotton wadding in the case there were no breakages.

At first I was not so sure of my back against which the camera had been bumping with the enthusiasm of a young sledge hammer, but, when I came off and tested it, I was glad to find it also was unbroken. It was a close thing, though, and I would advise my friends to use cotton wadding on their backs as well as on their plates.

Still pressing north I passed through Singleton, Tamworth, the Moonbi Ranges, Armidale and Glen Innes with varying luck but no serious mishap.

Coming down the big hill at Ben Lomond,

for instance, the wire of my brake slipped and the machine bolted with me. Now, a bolt is bad enough if you happen to be on a good road whose turns and twists you are conversant with, but, on an unknown road constructed chiefly of big blunt boulders and short sharp curves, my plight is more easily imagined than described. I was travelling at the rate of about twenty-five miles an hour with my hat balanced on my upstanding hair and my hands clenched over the handle bars looking for the worst but praying for the best. I had done a little buckjumping in my day, but, for pure cussedness and dirty tricks, commend me to a bolting bike on a bouldery road. If the cycling authorities should ever introduce bicycle hurdle-racing I feel confident that even after that short experience, I could qualify and win. Still, as the immortal William has said, "All's well that ends well" and the end of that ride was well, although I could not say as much for some other ends.

On another occasion I was coasting down a steep incline with my brake well under control and my mind at ease, when I spied an innocent-looking creek lazily crossing the road at the foot of the hill. From appearances it seemed about six inches deep, so I determined on letting her go, hoping to get well across

with the rush. Alas for my knowledge of creeks; this one was about two feet deep and before I had gone half way through I had come a cropper in mid stream and was struggling violently to keep my machine upright. You might suppose I was in for a hot time, but, if you will be good enough to recollect that it was midwinter and a frosty morning, perhaps you will be able to feel for me. When I stood upright I could hardly feel myself. I mention these little incidents merely to dispel the false notion that a journey like this is dull and monotonous.

But we must be moving again, for we are a long way off those unknown fields that we hope to find most interesting.

At Wallangarra I said farewell to New South Wales and crossing the Queensland border, made straight for Warwick and then took the short cut over the ranges to Ipswich.

Now short cuts are proverbially the longest way round, but, as this particular short cut saves nearly seventy solid miles, it was worth risking. The road has not been used for twenty years and is consequently in a vile condition—ruts, or watercourses rather, ten feet deep cross the road, whilst boulders are the rule rather than the exception. I had my first taste of



TRAVELLING OUT-BACK IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

Lonely Lands.

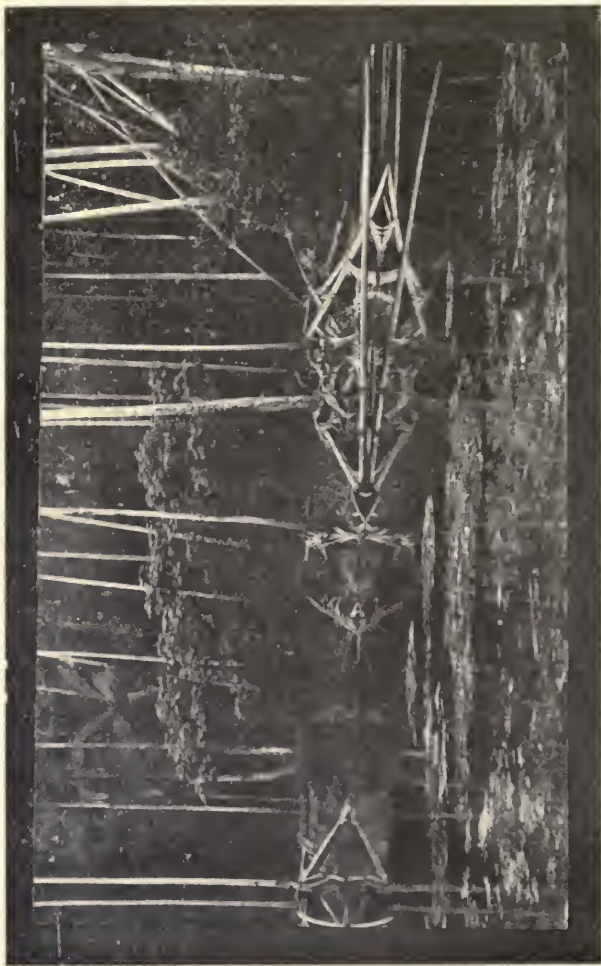
a bush fire when taking this cut and my secret sorrow was that I had not met it the day I fell into the creek.

The grandeur of the scenery over these ranges well repays one for rough riding over rutty roads, but, as the light was fading and I dreaded being stranded for the night without water, I did not get as many photos as I would have liked.

Every day's journey was now bringing me into warmer weather and the presence of stately palms, denser foliage and darker greens indicated the approach to sub-tropical climes. Big, stagnant lagoons covered with water-lilies and resounding with the bass boom of the bull-frog are common as you proceed northward and great stretches of country, covered with rank, dead grass three or four feet high, are met with, affording splendid harbourage for snakes.

More than once a rustle in the grass reminded me creepily that my shins were unprotected, and, I am afraid, I saw more snakes that day than really existed. Once, however, I came across the real thing. I was riding along a narrow wheel track when I noticed a snake, as thick as my wrist and as long as my leg, lying right across the line of march.

Needless to say, my machine started to shy like a young filly and shot past that scaly cuss like a bolt



Lonely Lands

A LAGOON, QUEENSLAND.

from the blue. But, after pulling hard at her head for fifty yards or so I succeeded in bringing her to a standstill, and then started hunting for a big stick with which to give that snake what for. I crept stealthily back, like an Indian on the warpath, and was pleased to find the enemy still there.

I had never killed a snake before, but I knew the theory of the short, sharp stroke that breaks the back and I hastened to put it into practice accordingly. I am afraid, however, than any one looking on would have come to the conclusion that I was an apprentice at the job, for I brought down that stick with a welt that would have floored an ox, at the same time emitting a blood-curdling yell that would have done credit to one of Fenimore Cooper's dusky chieftains. I struck him fair in the middle of the back and he doubled up and performed a wriggling somersault in the air, whilst I jumped back a dozen yards or so, nervously clutching my club lest he might require another bludgeon stroke to finish him.

But, as he fell, so he lay, and on risking a nearer approach, I noticed that his head had evidently been crushed by a waggon wheel and that he had been dead for days.

Was I relieved? You bet!

. After successfully negotiating the short cut to Ipswich, I made haste to reach Brisbane, which I entered on September 10th, having covered six hundred and fifty-eight miles since leaving Sydney.

My travel-stained bicycle was exhibited in the window of Messrs. Harrington and Co., Ltd., Brisbane, and attracted interested crowds during the morning. No doubt they would have enjoyed seeing me standing beside it, but my retiring disposition shrank from such publicity.

CHAPTER IV.

BRISBANE TO CHARTERS TOWERS.

1200 MILES.

AGGREGATE 1858 MILES.

*Contrasts—Through a Bush Fire—A Beastly Bump—
On Trek—A Good Samaritan—Camping with
a Swaggie—Mosquitoes.*

LEAVING Brisbane again on the 13th of September with Normanton as my objective, I met with rather a rough time. A ride like this is a long series of contrasts and one must be prepared to take it as it comes. To-day you may find yourself in a land flowing with milk and honey; of the good things of life there is a positive plethora and you revel in that fine, full feeling that follows a feast. To-morrow you may be forced to the conclusion that you are pedalling through a land afflicted with famine. Sunday finds you in the heart of hospitality; Monday sees you, tired and hungry, toiling along with a tightened belt. And how sharply the contrast asserts itself and what

a different outlook on life the feast or the famine gives to the lonely traveller. Curiously enough the attitude of the people one meets out back furnishes the greatest



F. BIRTLES LEAVING BRISBANE.

Page 29.

contrast of all. In some parts the visitor is welcomed with open arms and treated to the best of everything. In other parts he is looked upon as an intruder.

treated with cold suspicion, refused food, and sometimes even the cup of cold water, notwithstanding the fact that he proffers payment for the things he asks.

Another great contrast that strikes the observer is the vastness of the country and the paucity of the people. Millions of acres are crying out for occupation whilst Britain herds her poor in slums where pure air and sunshine are almost an unknown quantity. But so long as the dog-in-the-manger policy obtains in Australia, so long will the people pray in vain for population, and so much longer will the fulfilment of their dream of destiny be deferred.

One cannot help these thoughts obtruding themselves at inopportune moments, but as this is merely a tale of travel we must keep moving.

I noticed that as I proceeded northwards the daylight became more intense and much "faster," speaking photographically, and I had to stop down or use a greater speed with the shutter. Indeed I found one-hundredth of a second exposure in these northern latitudes of the same value as one-fiftieth around Sydney. Developing was a surprise also, owing to the warmth of the water. So far I had been very fortunate with my glasses, for notwithstanding all

the bumps and spills, only two glasses have been cracked. I worked glasses and films alternately as an experiment and came to the conclusion that the best results are obtainable from films, which I intend to stick to on future journeys. To me they have been a positive luxury.

But this is a digression.

After passing Yaamba, you begin to get into alligator country and must be chary of your camping place. The hideous monsters are endowed with a keen sense of smell and scent their prey a long way off, lying in wait amongst the reeds and long grass ready to rush upon unwary birds, beasts or reptiles and make a meal of them.

A stray cyclist would be considered in the light of a tit-bit; but I doubt if they could bolt the bike.

I should advise that a hammock be added to the outfit and slung well up out of reach, as a precautionary measure, because you may be camping near water without being aware of it.

Just before reaching Gympie I rode plump into a bush fire. Towards evening I noticed a dense volume of smoke rising up before me, away to the right, but I could not make out if it were receding or advancing towards the road ahead. Before long, however, it



Lonely Lands.

THE HAUNTS OF THE ALLIGATOR, QUEENSLAND.

became apparent that I must put on steam if I hoped to beat the flames in the race for the road.

The fire fiend belched and bellowed as he flung his flaming chariots through the long dry grass, licking the tree-tops with his myriad tongues, until the whole hillside resembled a city illuminated by night, forming a spectacle that fascinated the beholder as a snake fascinates a bird. Though I knew I was riding with a heavy handicap, I could not but admire the grandeur of the scene which presented spectacular effects that would have been at once the envy and the despair of the scenic painter. Still, with the fire gaining on me at every turn of my wheel, there was little time for lingering, as the hot breath of my opponent was already beginning to tell upon me, and I felt fagged and faint before I was half way over the course.

Rounding a turn of the road I was dismayed to see that I had only won a second place, for the fire already held sway over fifty yards of the track. Red hot cinders were everywhere, and I had not gone far before one stuck to my front tyre and burned it through. Still I drove on, but a few minutes later my back tyre burst and I was forced to dismount and review the situation. Turning back was hopeless, for there the path had been entirely swallowed up, and



Lonely Lands.

AN EIGHT-FOOT SNAKE, GYMPIE, QUEENSLAND.

burning limbs were crackling and falling in all directions. As I pushed my machine in front of me the soles of my boots began to pick up, and hold lumps of glowing charcoal; a thirst, that, at another time, would have been priceless, parched my tongue and I must admit I felt scared.

Still, you can understand there was less time to think than it takes to read this. In moments like these thought either comes as a flash or becomes paralysed, and, if the latter, the consequence is disaster. Luckily I realised that I must "stand not upon the order of my going, but go at once," so, mounting my bike and riding on the rims I made a dash for liberty. Fear lent wings to my "Speedwell" as I drove it frantically over every obstacle in my endeavour to get through that fifty yards of blazing trail.

My clothes were scorched, the hair on the exposed parts of my arms and legs had disappeared, and the hair of my head was singed to the roots. This was "scorching," with a vengeance, but I don't believe the hardest-hearted policeman in the world would have taken me up for it. Just as I was beginning to smoke at all points the ground seemed to get softer and then I understood why the fire had only command of that short stretch of road, for, just



BAFFLE CREEK, QUEENSLAND.

Lovely Lands.

beyond the fifty yards, I bumped into a swamp and was safe.

I fairly wallowed in it until my clothes were soaked and then I fancy I must have lain for some considerable time oblivious to things in general. I was quite done up and so was my poor mount, with fifty miles between us and Gympie and no tyres. Still there were other things to think about, among which were the making of a camp and the baking of "Johnnie Cakes." After enjoying an *al fresco* supper I fell asleep with the howling of wild dogs for lullaby.

Next morning I tried the experiment of filling what remained of the covers with grass, but the result was a failure, so there was nothing for it but to ride a bit and walk a bit and philosophise to the best of my ability. After twenty miles of this go-as-you-please style I struck a metal road and mounting the machine again drove her for all she was worth until I arrived at Gympie. My entrance into the town must have been quite comical, for, what with riding on the rims and the rattling of my kit and camera, it was small wonder that the people mistook the turnout for a tinker's waggon. I should have felt annoyed at their unconcealed mirth had not my saving sense of humour come to my rescue.



Lonely Lunds.

CROSSING PLACE, CALLIOPE RIVER, QUEENSLAND.

After a delay of two days I was furnished with fresh tyres and a general straighten up and was able once more to face the music and get a few days' march nearer my goal. Those of my readers who have had the patience to accompany me so far may be under the impression that my journey up to date has been mostly a series of disasters, but that is chiefly because I have passed over the pleasanter parts as a matter of course, leaving them to be taken for granted. Again, one does not require any special warning against the good things, but the bad things must be provided against. Still, dilemmas have often comforting compensations, as you will see from the following incident which took place on the journey from Maekay to Charters Towers.

Bowling along with a good breeze behind, enjoying to the full the glorious weather, I became a little careless, as the good road, free from ruts, lulled me to a sense of indifference. At length I came to a spot where a tree trunk had fallen across the path, forcing me to turn off into the grass and ride up a sloping shelf of rock, and, before I had time to jam my brake down, my machine and myself were taking a flying leap through space with a drop of over three feet. The bike landed squarely upright, but the impact with the ground buckled the front wheel into a figure eight.



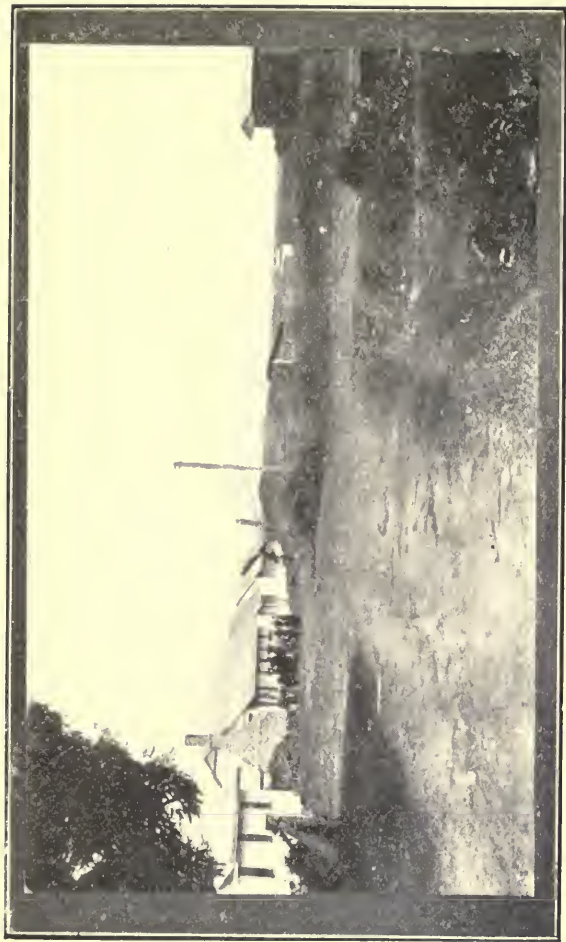
Lonely Lands,

CARTING SUGAR CANE, MACKAY.

I sat down on the soft grass and said—ah, well, never mind, it was nothing religious.

Another tight corner: a lonely track miles from the station I was striving to reach, short of food and darkness not far off. So much for the dilemma; now for the compensation.

Somewhere out in the scrub I could hear the music of distant horse bells and, as the sounds came nearer, I could distinguish what looked like a Boer family on trek. There were two waggons piled up with household effects with an admixture of children, poultry, cats, and caged cockatoos. Accompanying this mixed cargo were some half-dozen men and youths, while three females, wearing the big Queensland sunbonnet and riding astride, brought up the rear beside an old ramshackle buggy in which were seated two old ladies of uncertain age. I waited dejectedly to watch them pass, but such was not their intention. Perceiving my plight they offered me the right hand of good fellowship, although we had not been introduced, and “outspanning,” as they used to say in South Africa, they soon had the billy boiling and I spent one of the pleasantest nights of my life around their camp fire. It was then that I learned that they were selectors moving down south, having been three weeks on the



Lonely Lands.

SUGAR-CANE CUTTERS' DWELLINGS, MACKAY.

road when my misfortune gave them the opportunity of acting the good Samaritan.

Next day, with their kindly assistance, I fixed up my buckled wheel, photographed them in a group, and, with many expressions of friendship (and almost a week's supply of provisions which they had insisted on my taking), we parted company and went on our several ways rejoicing. I had learnt a lesson in bush hospitality that was a revelation to me.

On reaching Charters Towers the Massey-Harris people made my machine as good as new, and for three days I just lay back and enjoyed myself, and, at the end of that time, I was thoroughly recuperated and ready for the road again. To those worthy citizens who helped to make my short sojourn in the golden city of the North so enjoyable I wish to tender my best thanks.

Although Gympie was perhaps the earliest important goldfield discovered in Queensland The Towers (called after Charters, the first gold warden of the district) has long since taken the lead and is now the second city in the State and as up to date as Sydney or Melbourne.

Leaving Charters Towers on the morning of the 17th October, 1907, I made such good headway that by nightfall the town was but a memory.



Lonely Lands,

SELECTOR'S TEAM ON THE LAND IN QUEENSLAND.

I wonder if any of my readers has ever camped out on the rolling plains on a tropic night, and how far his experience resembled mine. Many people will tell you that to enjoy such things you must be half a poet, half an artist and half an idiot, the "third half" being the product of the other two; but I contend that the man who is not touched by the beauty of such a situation has not yet learned to live. When the frugal fare has been discussed and the dying embers of the camp fire are glowing with a dull, ruby red, what more fascinating than to lie back and listen to the sounds of the bush while gazing at the jewelled canopy of heaven? If you cannot feel at peace with all mankind under these circumstances, I am afraid your case is hopeless.

When travelling over sandy country it is a good thing to know that although there seems to be no water in sight, if you dig down in the bed of a creek you will frequently strike cool, clear water that will well repay you for your trouble. It is at times like these that you are inclined to become poetical and speak of the refreshing draught as nature's nectar.

Sandy, rocky and grassy country are found alternately as one journeys north; good sheep land in many parts, but, alas, no sheep, nor any other of the



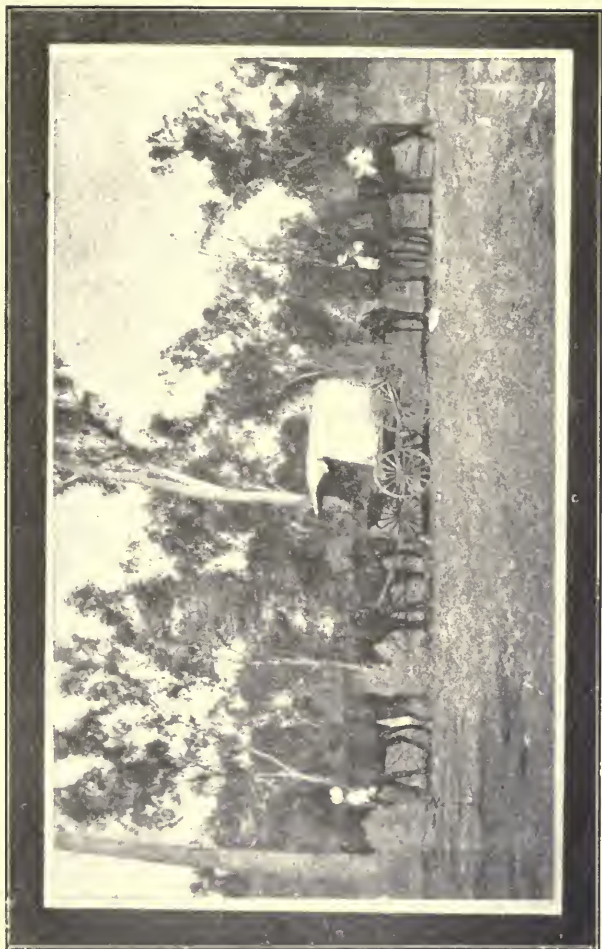
Lonely Lands.

THE ROAD TO THE STATION, MT. M'CONNELL, QUEENSLAND.

animals useful to man. At this time I travelled for two whole days without encountering a single soul.

One night I met a poor swaggie who had got down to his final crust and his last drop of water. Without much ceremony we entered into partnership for the night and soon pitched a comfortable camp. Curiously enough I was still drawing upon the store that my good Samaritan settler friends had showered on me and I was right glad of the opportunity of "doing as much for a mate." Although humping his bluey my camp friend was a man of many parts and, while he looked upon me as a godsend, I was certainly indebted to him for a very pleasant night, for his "yarns" were decidedly entertaining and were mainly personal reminiscences. When we dissolved partnership next morning I was able to add a load to his larder and thereby lift a load off his mind. For unless the inner man be satisfied the outlook on life is apt to be dull and dreary.

I find the strenuous outdoor life conducive to good appetite and robust health, for I am as hard as nails and eat my simple meals with relish, although there *are* times when I fancy I *could* enjoy a good plate of roast beef and a deep, deep draught of the good Rhine—but there! I was nearly poetic again. Those of my



Lonely Lanes.

INDIAN HAWKERS IN QUEENSLAND.

readers who remember the song will know that I hadn't milk in my mind.

The mosquitoes in these parts are both big and bad. They reminded me of "the rale ould Irish gintleman" who used to revel in a row and who

" Would dance and sing and hurl and fight,
And make the spalpeens roar "

I shouldn't at all wonder if these mosquitoes were Irish too; they had all the characteristics, and seemed to be celebrating a wake every evening. They had the faculty of making me join in the revelry and keep awake too. The worst was, however, that they evidently intended me to supply the corpse. But I did not go entirely unavenged.

CHAPTER V.

CHARTERS TOWERS TO CROYDON,
250 MILES.

AGGREGATE 2108 MILES.

*A Lonely Grave—Tramps—Reduced to One Eye—
A Relation at Georgetown—Feathered Fish—
Native Companions—Cyclones—Crocodiles.*

THROUGHOUT my travels I have found the camera a veritable friend in need. It has kept me ever on the alert for "subjects," and has enabled me more clearly to present impressions of the trip to my many friends. I would have been lost without it. Fortunately, notwithstanding all my bumps and bruises, I have only broken a few plates.

Most of my subjects, it will be noticed, make pleasing photographs, but here and there one comes across the pathetic side of the picture. For instance, it is not uncommon out in the heart of the bush to come across a lonely grave; untended, unfenced, overgrown and forgotten, with never a name to indicate who sleeps



Lonely Lands,

A LONELY GRAVE, QUEENSLAND.

so silently beneath. Sometimes the spot is marked by a rude cross; more often by a solitary slab, and the story of the sleeper lies buried with his bones.

I took a photograph of one of those pathetic little places, and, while doing so, I was hardly surprised when a film of mist came clouding over my eyes, and my heart was filled with a fervent hope that the poor wanderer who had fallen by the wayside had found rest at last. A rough rail ran round the sacred spot and a friendly hand had rudely carved the words, "To the memory of Poor Jack." Possibly his mourning mate had never known him by any other name. Such cases are not uncommon out back. May his soul have gone aloft.

Within a day's ride of Georgetown I found my tucker gone and my water tank dry, so went through the usual performance of taking a tuck in my belt. It is an exceedingly economic way of having a meal, for, as certain food advertisements say, there is "no cooking required"; but you must take a grain of grit with it.

Later on in the day I came across a rocky waterhole and simply saturated myself, from the inside out. It is astonishing what an amount of water is required to irrigate such a small area as a man's body. When

I was able to breathe I blessed the all-wise Providence that had made such provision for poor, thirsty souls like me. Perhaps the preceding thirst was necessary to fully appreciate the virtues of clear, cool, spring water.



A CORROBOREE, NORTH QUEENSLAND.

As I came near Georgetown I met a Chinaman riding in his trap, and, as I make a point of passing the time of day with every one I meet when in these

lonely latitudes, I saluted him in the time-honoured way by saying, "Good day, John, how you getting on?" To which he replied without stopping his trap, "Me gettee on welly fast, no time talkee tramps!"

Doubtless I was travel-stained, but "tramps!" I felt hurt.

As I rode into Georgetown I was reduced to one eye, as I had the other closed the night before in a scrap with a bulldog ant. Although I had the advantage of him in reach he got under my guard and with his dirty left planted me one on the right peeper and knocked me out of time. It was another case of science getting the better of brute strength.

Speaking of eyes reminds me of a story that is told of Sir W. S. Gilbert, the famous librettist, of "The Pirates," "Patience" and "Pinafore" fame. One day when standing on the steps of his club another member rushed out excitedly and said to him:

"Did you see a man go down these steps with one eye of the name of Jones?"

"Er—eh—what was the name of his other eye?" said the imperturbable Gilbert, to the utter disgust of the clubman, who, in his excitement, was quite beyond a joke.

You should have seen the reception I received from



Lonely Lands.

THE COPPERFIELD, EIANESLEIGH, N. QUEENSLAND.

the sports of Georgetown. They fairly dragged me off my bike and treated me like a modern prodigal son. When I had removed the traces of travel and replenished the inner man the whole sporting community made a bee-line for the bar and fairly toasted me brown. One individual in particular claimed to be a relation of mine and insisted on honouring the acquaintance. I was too tired to dispute the point, but, when he introduced me to a few more relations of his, I retired as gracefully as possible. In the seclusion of the parlour I was informed that it was only Jim So-and-so knocking down his cheque and that whoever cared to claim relationship with him—and there were many—was welcome to assist him in the knocking down process until his fifty or a hundred pounds had been transferred to the publican's pocket.

They "knock down" their cheques on The Etheridge to-day just as was done in the days of yore. The gold diggers from "outside" come into town after six months' hard labour and, after settling outstanding accounts at the store, proceed to make things lively until the last penny is spent.

There is a story told of one of these diggers who awoke one morning on the empty bottle heap in the back yard of the pub. and, after rubbing his eyes



Lonely Lane's.

MUSTERING IN QUEENSLAND—STRAGGLERS.

to assure himself, said, in mingled pride and awe, "My oath, what a time I must have had."

The Etheridge, of which Georgetown is the nominal capital, is an old and most interesting goldfield, which seems to suffer from chronic ill luck. Capitalists are shy of developing it, although, even as it is, over 24,000 ounces of gold per annum are produced. Still the people are happy and contented and quite confident that some day the merits of the place will be recognised. Perhaps the fact that to get there requires a railway ride from Cairns to Mareeba—46 miles, and a coach journey of 216 miles, *via* Herberton tin mines, over a rough road, may have something to do with its backwardness.

I left Georgetown riding behind the mail coach to Croydon, which was 70 miles ahead. Coachie had the reputation of being much averse to be passed on the road and of having a fine disdain for motors, bikes, and all who use them. Should a breakdown occur to "the enemy" he chuckles for all he is worth, possibly having never heard of the scriptural injunction to "rejoice not when thine enemy falleth." If you reminded him he would probably exclaim, "Their troubles."

As many of the lagoons up north are well stocked



Lonely Lands.

QUEENSLAND HORSES AT HOME.

with fish and water-fowl I found my tackle and gun very useful in furnishing me with many a hearty meal.

One day I met a swaggie who, when the subject of fishing tackle came up, informed me that *his* best fish had feathers on them. His mode of fishing was to camp near a homestead and at an opportune moment approach the fowl run, scatter a handful of breadcrumbs over the fence and drop his well-baited line among the "burley." Then he uttered an enticing "chook, chook, chook" and rarely had long to wait for a bite. A sudden yank, a smothered cackle and a stuffed sugar bag completed the operation, and the net result was a poultry supper.

The grey monotony of the Australian bush has been the theme of many a globe trotter, who has either never *lived* in it or has been deficient in observation and the sense of humour. I will back a couple of "native companions" to provide more genuine amusement than most turns at "The Tiv." If only that enterprising entrepreneur, Mr. Harry Rickards, could induce two of these comical birds to dance a few of their wonderful steps he would be sure of a full house inside and "Standing Room Only" outside.

They dance best in pairs and seem to have many different kinds of set dances. A shot fired in their vicinity will start them off in a most ridiculously defiant dance. With wings outspread they prance around in a most fantastic manner, bowing and setting to partners and winding up by striking their beaks on the ground with a sort of "don't-tread-on-the-tail-of-my-coat" flourish and a "d'ye-moind-me now" expression in their eyes. Sometimes they double up their legs and hop about like kangaroos, clearly showing that they possess the faculty to observe and the power to imitate. They are the bush comiques and artistic acrobats and always provide a good "bill."

From Georgetown to Croydon is about seventy miles along a sandy road that takes the coach a day and a half to traverse it. Croydon is about the fourth largest town I have seen in Queensland, built entirely of wood and iron, and utterly devoid of picturesqueness, unless we except the huge mounds of "tailings" that surround the town, like the earthworks of a fortification. The streets are wide but poorly planned, and the place has the appearance of a mushroom growth.

Two years ago a cyclone laid the town flat, but

although iron roofs were whisked about like sheets of paper there were comparatively few accidents. I am in a position to understand the cyclone because during



YOUNG WAYBACKS, QUEENSLAND.

my short stay here I saw a "willy willy" and think it may interest my readers. A tall, thin column of dust, sucked up like a waterspout at sea, came career-

ing down the centre of the street, playing pranks with every loose thing that it met on its way and causing considerable commotion amongst the terrified shopkeepers. It remained for some few minutes dancing a hornpipe in front of my hotel, at a cross street, as if undecided which way to go, all the while whirling like a dancing dervish, sucking up straw, paper, dust, &c., and gaining in volume every minute. It was most fascinating to watch, but woe betide those who may be caught in the maelstrom. Down the street it went, forming a thin, yellow column a couple of hundred feet high and carrying everything before it. By this time the whole town was on the *qui vive* and crowding in its wake to watch its career. It went up another street at right angles and then made a straight dart for "Chinatown." I followed as quickly as I could and got on to an hotel verandah where I had an uninterrupted view. As it passed the back premises I got a fair idea of its power. It just seemed to touch a stable and up went the roof exposing two terrified horses inside. The great sheets of iron, gyrating and whirling, were sucked up like paper, threatening death or destruction to anything they might meet.

With a roar like a furnace the column swept onwards towards the miserable Chinese tenements on the

outskirts of the town. No one there seemed to be aware of the approaching fury, for not a soul was about. Suddenly roof after roof went up in the air,



CHINESE SHOPKEEPER IN CHINATOWN.

the alarmed Chinese flew hither and thither distractedly, believing their last hour had come. They were too far off for us to hear their screams, but I was

told that they were heartrending. In less time than it takes to tell, the "willy willy" had completely devastated the place and passed on to the bush, leaving a trail of wreck and ruin behind it.

I remained four days in Croydon pulling myself together and studying human nature, and, let me tell you, there are some shining specimens in this vicinity. Taken as a whole the people are a sturdy, well-conducted lot, with that spirit of independent manliness typical of the fighters against circumstances so frequently met with on the frontiers. Jack has no master here, so there is no subservience and no arrogance.

The miners are hospitable to a fault and every handshake carries with it an invitation to "give it a name." Drink and dust are the two commonest commodities in the town; the one the consequence of the other, and the simple citizens accept the situation with a philosophy worthy of a better cause. Water is rarely used except as a diluent, a bath being a luxury during the dry season, and the want of it is apt to become a habit.

Here, on the fringe of the mighty Northland, it is surprising how little the people know or care about that land that is a puzzle to the rest of Australia. In



Lonely Lands.

A YOUNG ALLIGATOR, LEICHHARDT RIVER, N.Q.

my travels I have had it brought home to me that the North does not know the South, and the South is, to a great extent, indifferent to the North, that wonderland of spinifex and mystery.

Reports reached me that the "niggers" were bad all along the coast line and that drovers were having trouble with them.

A recent arrival told me that he had several times had a brush with them and that they had a mania for killing the horses *for their tails*, so as to get hair for their fishing lines. I fancy *my* horse's tail would have been too many for them.

Crocodiles were numerous along the way and I was told that those found in fresh water were harmless, but as the Scotchman sometimes says, "A hae ma doots." The harmless kind live principally on water grasses and have pointed snouts, whereas the dangerous reptiles of the tidal rivers and the sea, which, rightly or wrongly, they call "alligators" up here, have a square nose, and are the nastiest things that man, beast or bike can encounter.

The story is told of an Englishman up here, who, knowing the danger of bathing where sharks frequented, asked his black boy if he could show him a spot where he might enjoy his swim without fear of



A CAPTIVE ALLIGATOR.

Lonely Lands.

sharks. The boy conducted him to a sequestered pool and the visitor plunged in and enjoyed his swim. On the way home he casually asked the boy why the place was free from sharks and was astounded when he replied: " 'Cos plenty big pfeller all'gator there."

That was his first and last visit to that pool.

CHAPTER VI.

CROYDON TO BURKETOWN, 350 MILES.

AGGREGATE 2458 MILES.

*Yellow Jack—Around the Gulf—Troublesome Blacks
—Black Tracking—A Bit of Baccy—The
Rifle Fish—Bush Photography.*

THE journey west from Croydon to Burketown, a distance of 350 miles, was anything but interesting and nothing happened worth recording except some solid hard work. Melancholy tracts of stunted gutta percha in turn give place to vast plains which, after the wet season, become covered with a wonderful growth of Mitchell grass, wild sorghum and all kinds of herbage admirably suited for cattle; but the capital and enterprise that might place the cattle there are evidently amissing.

Burketown, situated right up at the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria, is a queer place with a queer history, and was founded in the early sixties when



Lonely Lands.

BURKETOWN.

“Bobby” Towns and Sir John Robertson were hot on the “Far North.” As a first instalment towards a settlement, Sir John sent a ship round to the Albert River, containing so many different kinds of birds that he himself declared “Noah’s ark was a fool to it.”

In its early days Burketown was, perhaps, the hardest drinking place in the world and it accordingly became the rendezvous of the scum of Australia; the hard cases, the deadbeats, the loafers and the ne’er-do-wells turned to Burketown as the needle to the pole. Luckily there were others, for some of the best and most enterprising men in Queensland, attracted by the possibilities of the place, also migrated thither and before long there was a prosperous, if mixed, community in the little town.

When things were humming and money was as plentiful as mosquitoes in the port, there came a ship from Java which left behind it some mysterious disease which was not long in making its presence known and its baleful influence felt. Some said it was “Yellow Jack,” others thought it was typhoid, but, whatever its name, it killed almost every man it laid hold of, for, once the disease was contracted, it was allowed to run its course, as there were no doctors and the only medicines were Holloway’s Pills—and

rum; both good in their way, perhaps, but utterly powerless when pitted against this mysterious ravager.

But though grim death stalked triumphant through the town, the sporting proclivities of the Australian were not to be denied and the usual programme was races in the morning, funerals in the afternoon and debaucheries at night. Bets were freely made as to whose turn it would be next, and the familiarity that breeds contempt was extended even to Death.

Then followed a flood that washed the half of the cattle of Carpentaria out to sea and sent most of the settlers up a tree, not metaphorically, but literally, there to remain until the waters subsided. Whether the flood had anything to do with "Noah's Ark" or not it would be hard at this late hour to determine, and I scarcely think that the flood was arranged in order to give the history of the place a scriptural flavour, for, I am morally certain, that few in Burketown in those days could be accused of doing anything religious.

For a time the little town was quite deserted, but by and by a fresh lot of sturdy adventurers came along and rebuilt it on better social lines. Still its vicissitudes were not yet over, for, at different periods later, it was blown down by cyclones, and, on another occasion, destroyed by fire. It almost seemed as if an

irate Providence were visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children; but, as London, after being ravaged by plague and fire, arose, phoenix-like, from its ashes, so plucky little Burketown came up smiling every time to "breast the bar" and "face the music," as the local language so pithily expressed it.

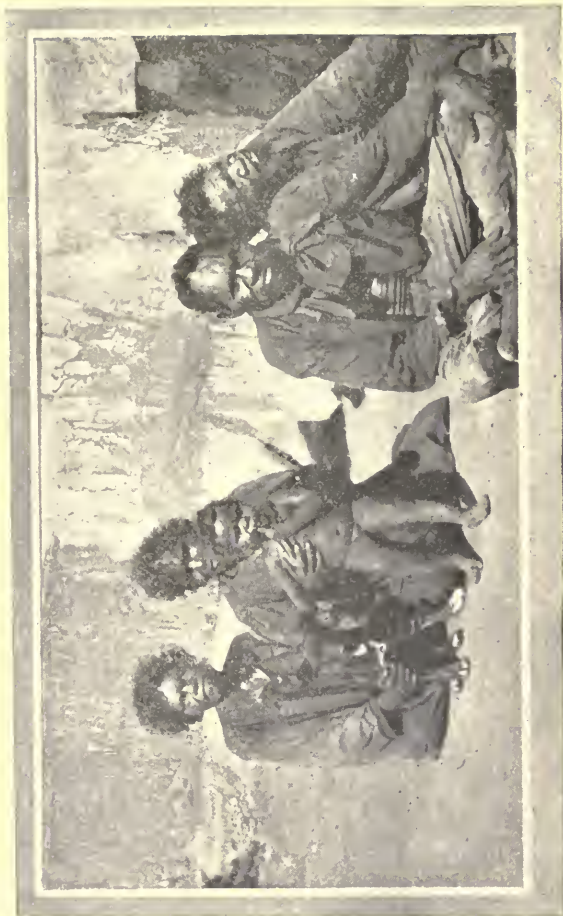
Leaving Burketown on November 11th, I took the coastal track around the Gulf of Carpentaria. The country has a certain park-like appearance, but is very sandy and totally unfit for stock, having a damp, oppressive atmosphere, not unlike that in tropical South Africa.

There is a general idea "down south" that Queensland is tropical in appearance, with ferns, wild flowers and palms in profusion. But this is not the case and it is only on the banks of rivers that anything approaching tropical vegetation is to be found. Most of the country is as dry and barren as the other dry parts of Australia, and I must confess to a feeling of disappointment.

Around the Gulf the climate is decidedly unhealthy. A white person only lives here by stress of circumstances, dosing himself regularly with quinine to avert the danger of dengue or Gulf fever, and making his escape as soon as circumstances will permit. From

freely-expressed opinions gathered around this locality I am afraid the "White Australia" idea will never reach fruition. The people that promulgate this doctrine are all the time thinking of "the other fellow"; grand thing for him, patriotic sentiment, white man paramount, draw the colour line, &c., &c.; but, if you suggest that they themselves try the experiment, they are indignant at your effrontery and amazed at your want of comprehension. By all means let us endeavour to keep Australia as white as need be, but common sense should teach us that nature has located the various races in the places best suited to their physiques, and, after all, why shouldn't we make use of the coloured man in regions which are his natural habitat, instead of exterminating him and then finding that the white man objects to work under such trying conditions. Let the Australian be master and the negro be man, as he expects and is willing to be, and we need have no fear for the future.

There is a margin of low-lying country, roughly speaking, about two hundred miles, running inland from the coast, and extending nearly all the way from Burketown to Port Darwin. During the wet season, which lasts, roughly speaking, three months either side of Christmas, horses and cattle will not travel during the middle of the day owing to the intense heat.



Lonely Lands.

STATION BLACKS, WOLLOGARANG.

I wonder if it has ever occurred to my readers that biking in these outlandish places is a very different thing from doing a stretch along the well-made roads down south. Here there are positively no roads, and one is glad to avail oneself of a stray cattle pad. In many places you have to prospect for a path or push your bicycle through the scrub. On more than one occasion I have had to carry my bike, and, with all its paraphernalia, that is no light task. Don't imagine for one moment that I am growling; I am merely indicating the little things that make the row a hard one to hoe, but, having set out to take the rough with the smooth, I am satisfied. -

Following up cattle pads I passed the Nicholson River, with big sandbanks on either side, looked in at Turn-off Lagoon cattle station and thence on to Westmoreland and Wollogarang.

Wollogarang is a cattle station, three miles over the Queensland border, which has seen many vicissitudes in its day. The former owner was speared a few years ago by the natives and the homestead is now surrounded by several thicknesses of fine wire netting to prevent missiles coming through; on the assumption that prevention is better than cure.

Even now the station hands rarely go beyond the precincts of the homestead without being armed



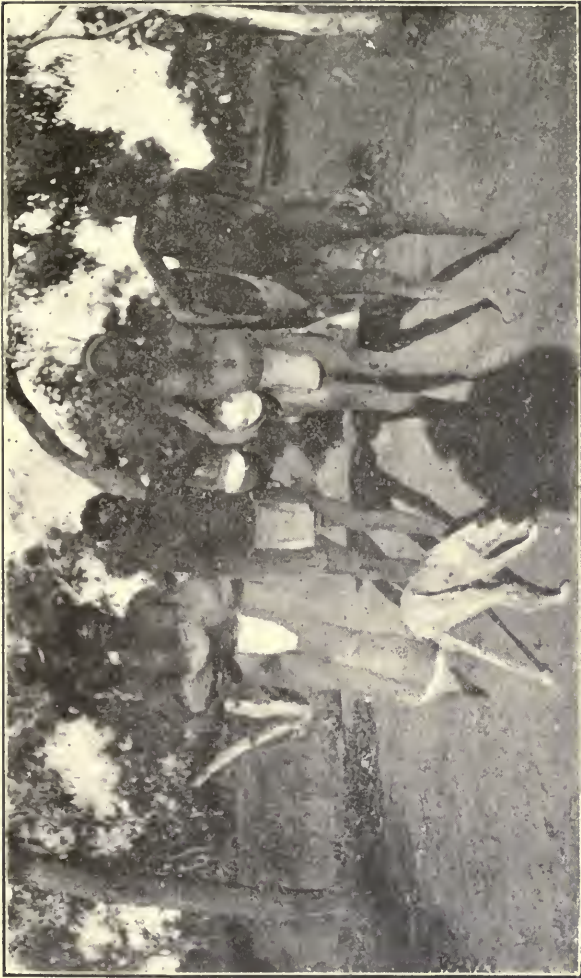
FATHER AND SON, N.T. STATION BLACKS.
Lonely Lands.

Just before I arrived here the blacks had been giving a lot of trouble, spearing cattle and hiding horses in the bush, so as to cause the hands to form search parties and thus give the lurking niggers an opportunity of raiding the homestead in their absence.

This state of affairs did not tend to comfort me, for although I hope there is as little of the coward about me as about most men, you simply have no chance with the aborigines who know the value of fighting from cover, and, as they live there and you are only passing through with about three days' rations, they can afford to bide their time and let hunger do the rest. In most cases discretion is the better part of valour and "he who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day."

Knowing the slender hope of waging war successfully against these tribes, it was always my endeavour to give them a wide berth. Of course all the blacks are not hostile, but you are in their hands before you are sure of that. I always adopted the British jury method of treating the prisoner as innocent until found guilty and, as you guess from the fact that you are reading my book, it has hitherto proved successful.

The Gulf native is a fine, well-built specimen with



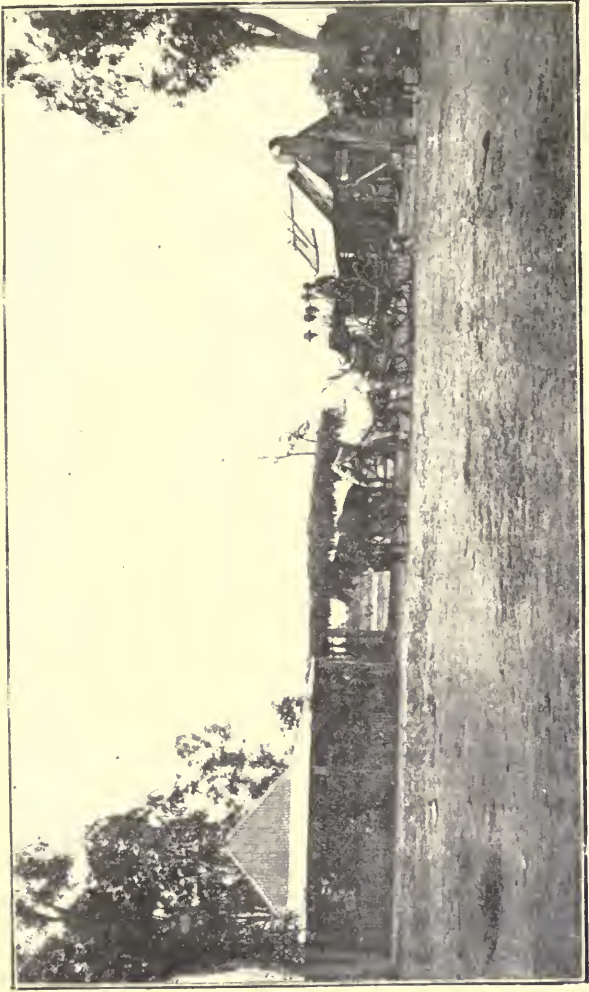
NATIVE COMMERCIALS, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

something of the Jewish type about him, and a lordly disdain for hard work.

The gins as usual do all the work; hunting, fishing, making nets and tracking, and they are generally pretty proficient at all of them. Their tracking powers were well illustrated one day when I was out shooting near a friendly camp. I had shot an iguana about a mile and a half away and, leaving him on a stump, had walked back to camp. It was nearly dark when I told them of the iguana, but they picked up my tracks immediately and had the iguana roasted for supper before I turned in.

The cuisine of the Gulf native differs in many respects from that of his "white brother," not only in substance but in the method of preparation. The Frenchman who delights in frogs and snails might soon acquire a taste for a native concoction, but the average Englishman or Australian would have a long way to go. Here is a good sample of a savoury supper: a big grey lizard, an iguana, a half-starved bandicoot, half a dozen fresh-water mussels and several knobs of a clear-looking gum. The gum which had been lying out in the hot sun all day (112 degrees in the shade) was doubtless intended to give the "outfit" a good flavour. I was an interested spectator



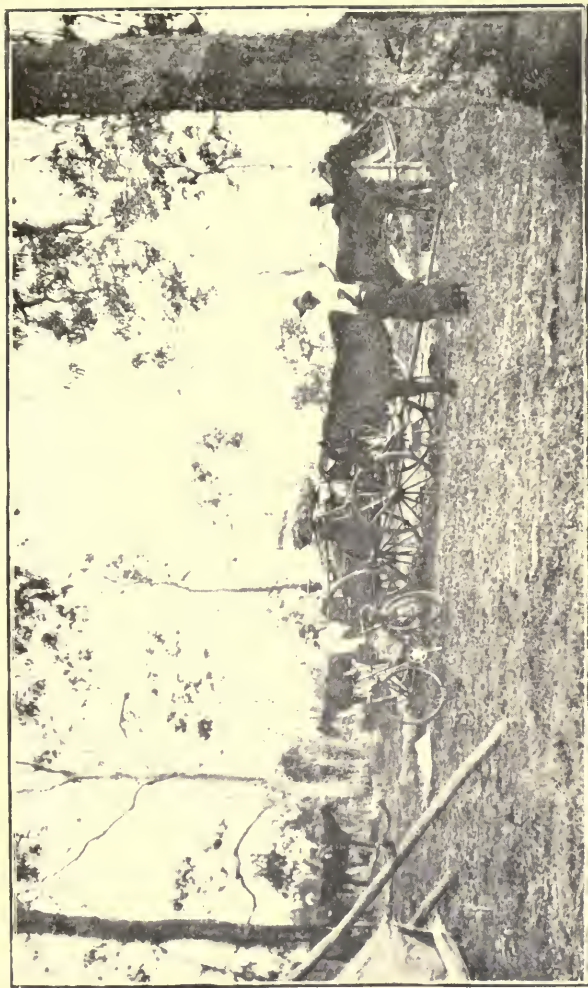
Lonely Lands.

WOLLOGARANG CATTLE STATION, N.T.

as the meal was being cooked. A small fire was built up (lit by a firestick which is never allowed to go out) and, when it was sufficiently bright, stones were laid on top until quite hot; water was then sprinkled over them and the various animals laid thereon, heads, tails, skins and all complete. When supper is ready the "buck niggers" have first "whack," the gins and piccaninnies second, while the dogs come in at the tail end. There is never anything left for a next day's "hash," a thing to them unknown; and this at least must be said for the bucks: no one complained that the iguana was underdone, the bandicoot burned to a cinder, or the plates cold. But I suppose that was but an added evidence of how low they rank in the scale of civilisation.

I gave each of the members of this small tribe a piece of tobacco about the size of a pea, which was eagerly accepted and put behind the ear for future use, but no one uttered any word of thanks. There is no such word in their limited language.

It is surprising what an amount of work a myall (wild bush) nigger will do for a bit of tobacco. A couple of tons of wood will be carried to a station, perhaps half a mile away, for about two sticks, less than a quarter of a pound.



SHADFORTH'S DROVING PLANT, WESTMORELAND, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

The niggers here are experts in dumb language signs; twisting and twirling their fingers about they understand each other with marvellous swiftness and accuracy.

After leaving Wollogarang I travelled for a day out along the cattle tracks and there struck the first rain of the season. The wind blew with cyclonic force and it was not long before every little creek and river was running a banker, and the path began to peter out. I hunted up and down the banks of a river for the faintest semblance of a track, but the rains had obliterated every trace. As the country in this direction was low-lying and soon flooded, I retraced my steps to Wollogarang, as my small stock of provisions would not allow me to wait until the waters subsided.

Sometimes when riding through forest land I noticed strange, brown bunches hanging from the trees, and, on knocking my head against them, I have been deluged with a shower of small brown ants that quickly began to explore the dark regions down my back. After one experience of their attentions I learned to dodge these innocent-looking bunches and, mixed metaphorically, "let sleeping dogs lie."

Returning to just below the Nicholson and shooting squatter pigeon for meat—the country is swarming with them—I travelled to Egilabria and thence



"WILD FELLAHS," GREGORY, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

south to the sweet-tasting waters of the Gregory River. The water is full of magnesia and lime and the more you drink the more you want. A little pinch of tea goes a long way with this water. I spent an afternoon fishing here and found the Gregory one of the best rivers for sport I have come across. But don't be afraid, for I haven't a solitary fish story in my whole collection. Besides this is a book of facts.

Fish of many kinds abound here and the water is so clear that you can look down and gaze into a natural aquarium. Big black eod, black bream, garfish, catfish, salmon, trout and rifle fish are all to be seen: The rifle fish gets his name from his method of getting his food. He is by no means a big fellow, rarely over half a pound, but his speciality is "spitting." No Yankee who could expectorate clean through a keyhole or dowse the glim of a candle at long range would be any match for him. For precision of aim not even the smartest Sydney larrikins could hope to prevail against the rifle fish of the Gregory. Any insect flying within a yard of the surface takes his life in his hands, for, pausing a second to take aim, this expert suddenly shoots a little ball of water from between his teeth in the most approved fashion and the fly is floating on the surface

preparatory to being "taken in and done for" At first when I was told this yarn I took it *cum grano salis*, but on watching the little beggar I found his tale to be true.

For real good sport, however, commend me to the black bream, as he is found in this northern river. He generally weighs between five and six pounds and fights to his last ounce. Ere the bait has touched the water he is rushing down stream with it, and it requires much careful play and some patience to land him. There is no lying on the bank with your line tied round your toe in this stream. The fish take the bait with a rush and you have to look slick to catch them. Sometimes a crocodile will shove his ugly snout above water and shed a tear for the loss of his "mate," but beware of him, for his intentions are far from honourable.

The weather at this time was so bad that I had to be careful of getting my camera wet, as there was no means of drying it and my stock of films was running low. Everywhere I called the people wanted me to "take them" and more especially was this the case where there was a baby. The camera was a sure road to their good graces and—their larder. On one occasion parents brought their little invalid girl a

distance of thirty miles to be photographed and, although I was short of films and had yet a long way to go, I could not refuse the pleading of the mother, who evidently saw that her little one was not long for this world. I took the little angel face by herself and with her parents and forwarded the negatives to Messrs. Harringtons Ltd., of Sydney, who were good enough to print them and forward the photographs to the thankful parents.

CHAPTER VII.

BURKETOWN TO CAMOOWEAL, *via* WOLLO-
GARANG, 800 MILES.

AGGREGATE 3258 MILES.

*A Wild Pig Hunt—A Run on the Bank—Inhospitable
Whites—Ants—The Timely Mailman—A
Bush Dance—Heroic Teamsters—Flies—Barcoo
Sickness—Heavy Rainfall—Strong Tea—
Boots in Bogland.*

BUTTERFLIES abound on the banks of the Gregory; all colours, shapes and sizes, many of them as big as the two open pages of this book. For beauty of design and wealth of colouring they would be hard to beat. Botanists, specimen hunters and curators of museums would be well repaid by a visit to these parts.

Wild turkeys are plentiful and I have ridden my bicycle to within three yards of them. I had also good sport chasing wild pigs on foot, but the porkers were too nimble for me, although I was not too nimble

for them. Once I thought I had a little chap, but, just as I would make a grab at him, he would give a little squeal and an aggravating twirl of his tail and elude me again. In despair I made a final rush at him, but this time he turned right round, and, making a dash between my legs, sent me flying on my back. It was indeed a *coup de grace*. Very little of the "*grace*" attached to me; but a good deal of the grass did. After that I took to fish, as pork proved too exciting.

After following the Gregory for one hundred miles I branched away to the south-west and enjoyed fairly good going, though occasionally muddy from recent rains. Once more I was in open scrub country and compelled to carry water.

I was now travelling up the slopes of the tableland country where there was no chance of being flooded out. The rivers may run a banker to-day, and to-morrow, so steep are the courses, one may have to walk miles up or down stream to get a drink. Three times in a ride of a hundred and sixty miles I had to sit down on the banks and wait for the waters to go down.

One evening I camped with a teamster on a hill near a dry river. While we were having tea a strange

murmur could be heard in the distance, a little later the murmur gave place to a gurgling roar and the river was "up." We went down to watch its rise and, even while looking on, our retreat was nearly cut off and we only reached the higher ground by wading knee deep.

In the morning the road looked exactly like a river with trees hanging over the sides. For half a mile I could see this view and I enjoyed a swim along the road in the still back waters, the current being a few hundred yards away. I had to wait here two days and then wade through muddy silt and water, carrying the bike and outfit in two separate loads. Going down the steep, greasy bank I slipped with my load, sat down suddenly and slid for twenty yards before landing in a couple of feet of water, leaving an alligator-like trail to mark my descent. The teamster and his boy were delighted. I am afraid I could not truthfully say that I was. No doubt it was funny seen from the top, but that was not my point of view.

This is a sample of the "eyeling" I had. Some days I was as much off the bicycle as on. Like the learner whose friend said to him:

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh," replied he, "it's not the getting on that troubles me, it's the getting off."

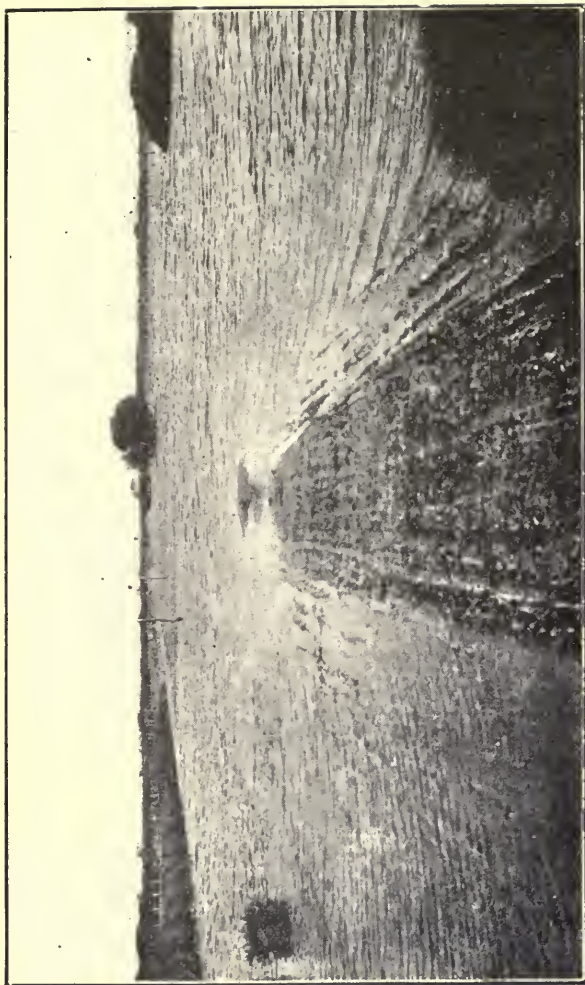
My case exactly.

In between rivers there are seas of black mud, sticky as glue. On many occasions I have had to carry my bike across first and then go back for my kit. Lack of food and sometimes lack of water make me keep travelling. I have been bogged on the black soil plains, and, strange to say, have had to go back for water.

The country is like a sponge for soaking up moisture.

At a place called The Thornton I expected to get provisions, but was sadly disappointed and my next chance was fully fifty miles ahead. Now under ordinary circumstances fifty miles would be a mere bagatelle, but here it meant about four days' hard travelling. Luckily I overtook a team, bogged to the axles, and got a few supplies.

On arriving at the "fifty miles" (the O'Shanessy River) I found the inhabitants inhospitable and it was with difficulty I managed to get a couple of eups of flour for which they demanded sixpence a eup. No doubt this will be hard to understand, for you would fancy that in such out of the way places people would be glad to welcome a stranger from the outer world; but these folks must have been exceptions.

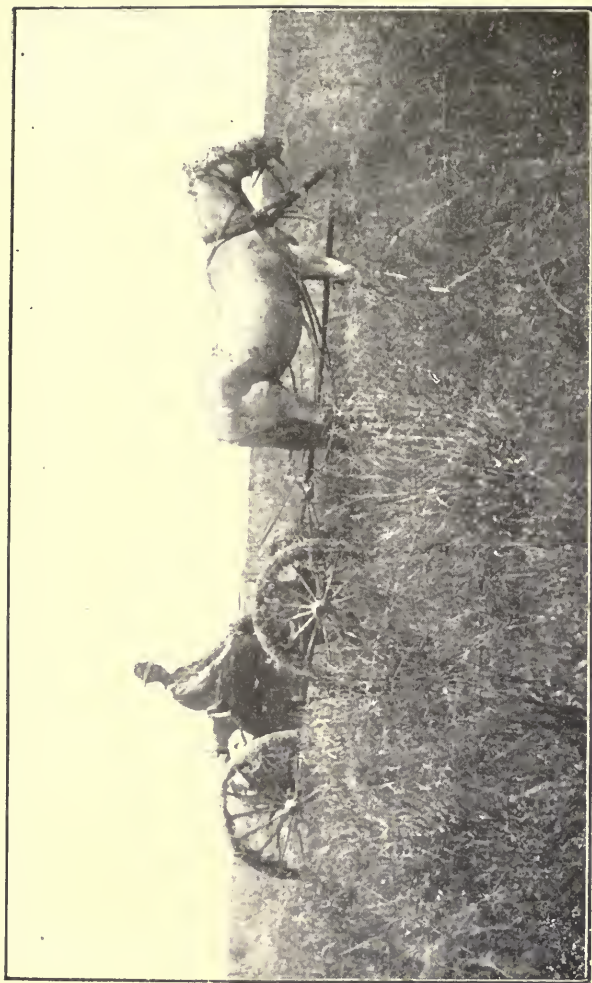


Lonely Lands.

FLOODED ROADS.

They reckoned, all the same, that they were "white." Give me blaeks next time. I'll risk it.

I went straight on with thirty miles of blaek soil mud ahead of me. After going about two miles I camped hoping that, by daybreak, the road would be drier. Barely had I made my damper when the rain began to come down in torrents and it was damper still. I spent a wretched night. I was hungry and tired, my clothes were damp and the bedding was ditto, and I had just come to the conclusion that nothing could be more miserable when a school of small, blaek ants swarmed my eitadel and then I recognised that, by comparison, I must previously have been happy. Shifting the location of my camp was of no avail, the ants had evidently telepathic communication with their relations, for they were ready to receive me and their anties were positively indecent. The very recollection makes me blush. I got up about three in the morning, had a drink of cold tea and a few spoonfuls of sugar, of which I had plenty, and then got under weigh again. But things were no better than before and, as the rain had evidently come to stay, I hung my harp—no, I mean my bike—on a bush, covered it with a waterproof and went back to the O'Shanessy. A teamster was camped here



MITCHELL GRASS COUNTRY—BOGGED ON THE BLACK SOIL PLAINS.

Lonely Lands.

with his wife and family and they treated me most kindly. He was going north with an empty waggon and, I am afraid, with an empty store of provender also. But what he had he gave gladly and I can tell you I was very thankful for even small mereies. He left two days after for the next waterhole three miles away over some stony ridges.

That night the heavens opened and seeking around for an ark of refuge I struck the outer shed of a "farm" and camped there for the next three days. The old man was cleaning out his well and he offered me my tucker if I was willing to wind the windlass. "Barkis was willin'."

Late one afternoon I made a fresh start, went back for my bike, crossing the river waist deep, and, after making everything tight and compact, started out to push all night, as it was utterly impossible to ride.

I was getting up an excellent appetite, but had nothing to appease it with except sour damper, when, miles away on the horizon, I espied a mounted man, who afterwards turned out to be the mail man with packhorses—his buggy having been bogged along the road.

I told him of my plight and he unearthed the

proverbial half-loaf that is better than no bread, some corned beef and a piece of cake.

These he set before me, and, like the prophet of old, I *did* eat. My feeling for mail men almost approaches reverence now. Many an old maid has uttered similar sentiments, but, doubtless, the "spell" was different.

After travelling all night I reached the Chester Creek just before daybreak, having covered eighteen miles, and, by this time, I was "dog tired," so I lay down and slept, I hope, the sleep of the just, for about four hours, until the blazing sun woke me again to continue my walk to Camooweal, a distance of twelve miles.

Camooweal, when I struck it, was a mud-bound tin hamlet about two hundred and forty miles from nowhere, near the Queensland border and just on the fringe of the Never-Never.

It was also perilously near the borders of starvation, as the teams bringing supplies were bogged and provisions were at low tide. There were some hundred and fifty souls waiting anxiously for the arrival of the "overland ships," as the teams are called, and there would be a celebration when they came.

The local constable "took me up" on arrival and I



CAMOOWEAL IN THE WET SEASON.

Lonely Lands.

was sheltering under the roof of the local barracks for over a week. Perhaps I ought to mention that it was a friendly arrest, for without my kindly "Bobby" I might have found it difficult to get any supplies at all.

Being so far out back this place is a little world in itself. Christmas celebrations were observed in the usual out-back fashion while I was here and the strenuousness of the proceedings struck me with amazement. Everyone rode in from the outside on horseback, the women as well as the men riding astride, and it was considered the proper thing to get "well away" before starting. This may seem paradoxical, but those who have been "there" will understand.

The "dancing," as they were pleased to call it, was a rough kind of horseplay in which brute force predominated and where the weakest went to the wall—and generally remained there—unless taken to the hospital. You had no need to trouble about "steps," unless you took steps to get out of the melee. All you needed to join in the dance was abundance of energy, generally the outcome of bad whisky, and the ability to yell so as to be heard above the frantic strains of a concertina. A native corroboree was not a circumstance to this "civilised" dance and yet nobody there would miss it for anything.

At the function I attended the company danced till daybreak to the elemental accompaniments of wind and rain and left for their homes in the morning soaked both inside and out.

At Camooweal whilst waiting for the flood waters of the river to go down I spent most of my time shooting kangaroos and wild turkeys out in the ridgy, gravelly scrub desert at the back of the township. As there are no bogs nor swamps there, I rode out on horseback, accompanied by the local police boy (aboriginal), who by the way was a splendid stalker. I have seen him walk up, step by step, to a mob of kangaroos, in plain sight all the time. If the 'roos looked up he would be as still as a stump, but when they started to feed again he would advance a little further until at length he would come within twenty yards of them and then fire. One day he got two full-grown bucks in one shot with his rifle.

Stalking turkeys was a difficult matter. We used to ride around and around them in ever-narrowing circles until within range, when one of us would dismount and lie concealed in the grass whilst the other would continue circling, leading the spare horse, until the turkeys were slowly worked up towards the concealed hunter, who generally managed to bag a few.

This so-called turkey is really a bustard, of a grey or brown tint, with a tuft on his head and weighing from twenty to thirty pounds. The genuine scrub turkey is black in colour, but I have come across him very seldom.

When the river was up it was over a mile wide. A team camped on the banks one night was nearly overtaken by the flood waters, which, without any warning, came roaring down in a solid wall. The teamster had the greatest difficulty in getting his horses together in the darkness, but, by almost superhuman efforts, he managed to haul up on to higher ground just as the cataract swept everything before it. Had he been caught there would have been absolute starvation on the station to which he was bound. Oftentimes the heroism displayed by these teamsters is worthy the Victoria Cross; for, by their dogged perseverance and their strenuous exertions against fearful odds, they time and again save the lives of the exiles on the outstations. Those who know will readily admit that this is no mere figure of speech, but the sternest of stern realities.

Flies are a source of great annoyance in this district and seem to be more trying than great hardships, and the more you worry about them the more they worry



Lonely Lands. TEAM CROSSING THE BLACK SOIL PLAINS, NEWCASTLE WATERS, N.T.

yen. All the same it is hard to grin and bear it, the more so that even as you grin they take a mean advantage and walk right into your mouth. Sometimes they come out; sometimes they don't. They get so mixed up with one's food, too, that blanc mange is often mistaken for currant pudding until you stick your spoon in and the "currants" begin to emigrate. But emigration is dealt with as a separate chapter, so we shall wait.

Barcoo sickness, so common about here, is caused by the flies getting into the system and causing severe retching, which sometimes continues for weeks and is a very serious matter. These obnoxious little wretches will find out every tiny scratch on the skin and will irritate it until they cause inflammation. The poor horses are often driven nearly mad and in some instances the little foals have actually died from the tormenting of these pestilential plagues. As they attack the heads chiefly the horses form in single file and the swish of the first horse's tail keeps the flies off the head of the second and so on, each doing something for the one that comes after. I suppose that they must form a circle so as to give the leader some relief from the last one's tail. Fully ninety per cent. of the animals, both cattle and horses, have large

holes eaten round their eyes and the poor brutes live such a life of purgatorial torment that death must often mean relief.

It is no uncommon sight to see horses standing in water with nothing showing but their heads and every now and then they dip right under and stay thus as long as they can. They have trying times.

As soon as the river went down a little I waded across and started out for Avon Downs station, some fifty miles ahead. The country was frightfully boggy and several times I got cramp in the muscles of my legs owing to the severe strain of walking through the bog with a big load of mud and grass on my boots. The old proverb says, "A rolling stone gathers no moss." What about "A boggy boot gathers much mud?"

This made the fifth time I had crossed the border between Queensland and the Northern Territory before I got away to Darwin. I think I bore all this crossing with wonderful equanimity. The government rabbit-proof fencing, erected between these two States, starts twelve miles out from Camooweal and, as it is already over three thousand miles long, I fancy it should be the longest in the world. It cost about £46 per mile to erect and would be well worth it if it



Lonely Lands.

THE BORDER VERMIN-PROOF FENCE, QUEENSLAND AND N.T.

were effectnal in keeping Master Bunny out. He has not yet appeared here, but has been met with two hundred miles to the south-west and also in the heart of Central Australia. Owing to the big floods, it is difficult to see how the rabbit is to be kept out of Queensland, for he is almost sure to float over the wires when the waters rise above them and, when they settle down—well, so will he.

Avon Downs cattle station is splendidly grassed and would make an excellent sheep station. As it is there are a few sheep there, but the chief difficulty is the searcity of wood for fencing posts, although now that so many kinds of iron standards are on the market it becomes merely a matter of money.

There are many sub-artesian bores about the place, that is, bores that require pumping by windmill or steam. Local rumour has it that artesian (self-flowing) bores could be got by sinking deeper, but the rental of the land would probably go up and, as land in the Northern Territory is leased at from ninepence to one shilling per square mile, it probably pays to leave things as they are.

I am not applying this to one station but to nearly all in the Territory, especially in the tablelands country, which is, I consider, the finest pastoral land

in Australia, as far as grass is concerned. If only water from the bores could be obtained the land would carry a hundred times more stock than at present. In the dry months the animals are kept in very poor condition, not for lack of grass, but because of the distance they have to travel between watering and feeding grounds. Naturally they eat out the grass country around the permanent water holes first, and then keep extending further afield until they are miles from water, but, by a system of bores, this would be unnecessary.

As an example of what the rainy season is like I may mention that here, at Avon Downs, during the last wet season seventeen inches of rain fell in twenty-four hours on one occasion, and, at another time, twelve inches fell in five hours.

Leaving Avon Downs, I next set out for The Rankine, and the very first night out I got into a horrible bog and had to camp without water. I must say I felt very feverish. Lying on the damp ground, the steamy heat and thirst made me feel very ill, and, I assure you, photography nor films did not interest me much that night. I kept thinking of a clump of trees I had seen away in the distance to the left of the track, and, in my half delirious state, I was several



Lonely Lands.

MITCHELL GRASS COUNTRY, N.T.

times on the verge of going towards that clump. I am glad now that I didn't, for to wander away here would mean losing the already faint track and being swallowed up in the unexplored Never-Never country. Breakfastless and feeling gone in the legs I get under weigh next morning and half an hour afterwards came to a small "gilgi" (waterhole) which was nearly dry I was *quite* dry.

The little water that remained was filled with a kind of water beetle, locally known as "wee woggies," so I had to use the strainer before I could use the water. I managed to get enough sticks to build a fire and make some tea. I may tell you I made it strong for sanitary reasons. Nevertheless I enjoyed it, but the peculiar circumstances were contributory towards that.

Soon after tea it began to rain again, but this was an improvement rather than a disadvantage, for the mud was not quite so sticky and the bike wheels were enabled to go round instead of sliding along with me tugging at it as a man tugs an unwilling ass. Twelve miles ahead I knew I had a fourteen mile desert to negotiate, but the desert provides better going than the swamp, so I was rather glad. However, before reaching the ridges I encountered about three miles

of blue bush swamp, the worst I have had to contend with throughout my long journey through these lonely lands. Before I had gone ten yards I sank knee-deep in white clay and water, and, on endeavouring to extricate myself, I found that in getting out of the bog I had also got out of my boots, leaving them eighteen inches under the surface. With considerable difficulty I pushed my machine over to a blue bush near, and, laying it down, returned to fish out my buried boots.

But this was more easily said than done, for the tighter I tugged, the deeper I sank, until it seemed to me that it would be better to lose my boots than my body, for I was fast going down to perdition. At last with a final effort I managed to dredge the oozy deep and bring up my bluechers, filled to the brim with clay and water. It took me some little time to scoop out the filling, and then, for further safety, I tied the salvage round my neck and fairly floundered towards my bike. Words fail to express the situation—at least *good* words do and bad ones are barred in a book of this kind, for one may be had up for “language” as well as libel in this land.

Only those who have been bogged in blue bush swamp can appreciate the self restraint exercised under these exciting circumstances. For I went from

bad to worse, until, at last, I went plump up to my chin in slimy, lukewarm water, holding on to the handles with difficulty.

But to my credit be it said I never even whispered



BLUE BUSH COUNTRY.

“damp” nor anything like it—I had got beyond that.

I tiptoed along for a hundred yards or so with lips tightly closed and nose just above the bog, when, to

my delight, I felt my feet on firmer ground and, carefully crawling up a sudden rise, with difficulty reached the "ridges."

Everything on the machine was wet—camera, food, and clothing—whilst I found my legs bleeding from the attacks of leeches and my feet cut with sharp sticks. I covered these wounds with clay to keep the flies off, but the heat of the sun soon cracked the clay and I suffered from festering sores for weeks after.

After three miles of good travelling I struck heavy sands and went ploughing along for eleven miles with the machine in front and me following—the effect in this instance going before the cause—until I came to Lawn Creek, where I camped for the night, feeling tired, weak and feverish.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAMOOWEAL TO BRUNETTE, 240 MILES.

AGGREGATE 3498 MILES.

*A Shivoo—The Philosophic Teamster—Friends in
Need—Beef and Beetles—Padding the Hoof
—Down with the Fever.*

NEXT morning, when I had time to estimate the damage done by that dip in the blue bush bog, I found that my camera had suffered considerably, and I was correspondingly cut up, for I had been indebted to it for much good material for my book.

After four days of heavy travelling I reached the Rankine River and rode right into Mr. Thull's store, which is built up of tents and bough "mia-mias."

It was here I met a party of station hands out on what is termed locally a "shivoo." In other parts this function is called a jamberoo, a beano, a bender; but, as Shakespeare has assured us that "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," so, I fancy, it is not the name but the result that lends the charm to



Lonely Lands.

THE RANKINE STORE, N.T.

the institution. Instead of riding hundreds of miles to the nearest "pub," and there "knocking it down," those who intend taking part in the celebration lay in a stiff stock of whisky and other liquids that possess the power of putting you a little "forrader," load up the pack horses, then mount and make for the scrub.

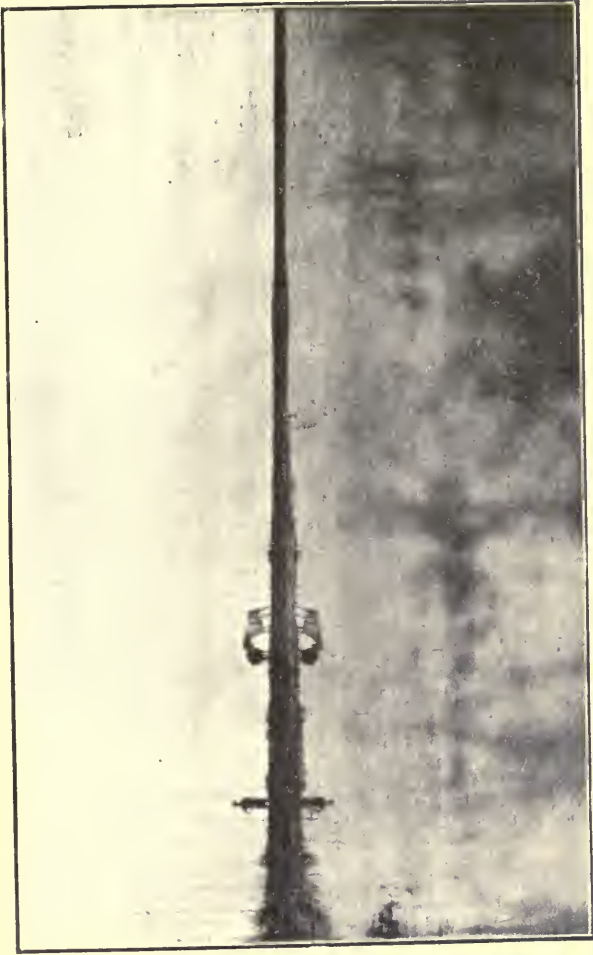
The picnic generally lasts just as long as the liquor and by that time the camp is reduced to chaos. During the "shivoo" the niggers around have managed to hide all the horses, and, after living at the camp until there is little left to live for, they show their extraordinary tracking powers by "finding" them and getting whatever reward may be forthcoming. The recognised niggers' perquisites are the "empties," of which there is generally a good stack. The natives take the bottles, break them into pieces, chip them into shape with stones and use them as spear heads. It is very questionable if the spears do as much damage afterwards as the vile contents did before, and, assuredly, the conduct of the "intelligent" white men is but a poor example to the ignorant blacks.

The next thirty miles was a dry stage, over a patch of country that the rains seem to miss. Not a tree is to be found anywhere and the tropic sun simply bakes the unfortunate traveller until he is "done"

right through. When I got to the creek I found it steadily rising owing to recent rains at the headwaters, and it was waist deep as I crossed over. On the other side I found a teamster and his waggon, but, curiously enough, no horses. He informed me that he had been stuck there for two months, and, for all I know to the contrary, he may be there yet. He said that in the first instance, the heavy rains and the swollen streams had prevented him travelling, and, in the meantime, first one horse wandered away, then another, and another, until he found himself bereft of the means of locomotion altogether. But he was a philosopher, as many of his confreres are, and was waiting patiently, like Micawber, until something would turn up.

After another day's journey I arrived at Alexandra cattle station, and found myself in hospitable hands. One especially notable feature of this place was the immense size of the pigs and goats. They looked more like well-grown calves, and it is evident that the limestone country agrees with them. It is to be hoped the mosquitoes are not built on the same generous lines.

My next stage was to a waterhole called Connelly's Lagoon, which is practically a permanent water. It



CONNELLY'S LAGOON, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

was discovered a few years ago by a drover who was out looking for his strayed horses. The former track was some two miles from the Lagoon and, during the Kimberley "rush," many a man nearly perishing from thirst passed close by without being aware of the proximity of water. There is no indication of water, as the Lagoon is right out on a big plain. Now, instead of a fifty-mile dry stage, the distance is cut down to thirty-two, a considerable saving where water is scarce in a dry season. No doubt those straying horses cost a lot of "eussing" at the time, but many a seeming curse has proved a blessing in disguise.

Owing to the boggy state of the country having delayed me so much I found that my stock of provisions would not carry me any further, so I set out on foot to go back to Alexandra for more stores.

After walking twelve miles barefooted, like Robinson Crusoe, I came upon fresh footprints, and, on following these up in the most approved black-tracker style, I was fortunate enough to strike a kangaroo-hunting party's camp and was made welcome. Perhaps my down-at-heel appearance touched a tender chord in their hearts, for they gave me a liberal supply of flour and more than a modicum of meat, and once again I went on my way rejoicing.

Retracing my steps it was not long before I came to the spot where I had left by bicycle, and, after making things taut, I started out through six miles of swamp to try and overtake a party of drovers whom I expected to find camped about twelve miles ahead. They were travelling out to bring back cattle overland. I soon found that it would be impossible to reach them before dark if I had to drag my bike through the mud and slush, so I determined to abandon her once more and use Shanks's pony. After walking about a mile I found the track hard and rideable, but I did not return for the machine, thinking it might only be a small patch, but, to my chagrin, it turned out good all the rest of the way. The water at which the drovers were expected to camp was a mile and a half off the road, and, as it was after sundown, the track soon became indistinguishable, so all I could do was to blunder along somehow. Just as I was beginning to despair I stumbled across a fresh-looking newspaper on a bush and on it lay a big tin match box with the words "Due left: clump three trees:" scratched on the bottom.

This gave me heart again, so I turned in the direction indicated, but, after ploughing through long grass for a while, I lost sight of the trees and "coo-eed"

several times. This was answered by a flare of light in the distance and I afterwards learned that, on hearing my shout, one of the drovers climbed a tree and set fire to a bundle of newspapers, so as to give me a guide light.

Meantime those rough-diamond drovers had boiled the billy, and, by the time I arrived, there was a good square meal awaiting me. In bush parlance, I tucked in; and, though the firelight was failing, my appetite seemed as if it would never fail. Just as I was enjoying this frugal repast a swarm of black beetles came surging along and fairly took possession. They flew into the tea, burrowed into the damper and attacked the meat with such fury that I had to eat fast to save the situation. Beating them off was out of the question—they were in myriads—besides there was not enough firewood left to keep up the fire, so I had to trust to luck as to what I was eating. In the darkness it was hard to see which was beef and which was beetle, but you were made painfully aware of the difference just the moment it was too late. I have never seen a beetle since without feeling a shiver running up my spine. Ugh! it was awful.

That night it rained and, as the mosquitoes were hostile, we got no sleep. Philosophise? Yes. and something else.

Next day I went back for the bike after asking my friends the drovers to let Brunette Downs know I was coming. That was my only means of "wiring," but it was just about as speedy as some other wires I have sent. Our telegraph department could do with a smart fillip occasionally.

After the rain I found that the good track I had tramped over the night before was now nothing but a bog, so that the difficulty of dragging the machine was doubled, and, by the time I got back to the now deserted camp, it was pitch dark and there was no hope of a fire. So I pulled up some grass and camped. But alas, I did not sleep, for the mosquitoes tortured me to such an extent that I was rudely awake all night. The only time I had a rest—how inadequate language is occasionally—was when I raised a smoke and to do this I had to burn stockings, socks, ration bags and a pair of drill pants. I even went so far as to tear strips off a small calico fly, which was thus reduced to five feet by four. Those of my readers who have passed a night over the pungent smoke of burning wool will be able to form some slight conception of my "rest." I wonder if the "management" down under in Hades are on the lookout for a really efficacious torment; if so, may I suggest a course

of mosquitoes and burnt rags for some of their worst cases.

At daybreak I was again "on the wing," flying through space at the rate of half a mile an hour, retarded by rain, muddy roads and fatigue. Bike pushing is bad enough on a good road, but on sloppy tracks where you slip two feet back for every one forward it is the very de—ah, well, *you* know.

After six days of this sort of thing my rations had run out to a little flour and a dash of sugar. Burnt flour and boiling water seasoned with sugar is hardly the meal to train on and yet that was all that sustained me the day I found myself seventeen miles from Brunette station.

But I still had a grain of grit left, so I hung my bike on a tree, tore up the remains of my tent fly and used the strips to keep my shoes on. Half of one foot kept slipping out between the sole and the upper and a few miles' walking made my feet so sore that I discarded my shoes and made the best of it barefoot. By midday I had done nine miles, when I sat down and had a spell. There was nothing else left to have

Just as I got up to proceed a bit further I saw two packhorses (one with a saddle on) appear on the stony ridge, followed by a mounted nigger and a white

man. This party having had the "wire" from the drovers had come out to look for me and I felt they had just about come in time.

The white man was Mr. Cameron, storekeeper and bookkeeper at Brunette, and, as he had photographic tendencies, we knew each other by repute, and soon became the best of friends. He at once set the "boy" to prepare a meal, to which I did ample justice, and, after the high living I had been accustomed to during the previous week, can you wonder at it? There was also a complete change of clothing for me, which I appreciated greatly, for the things I had on were covered with mud several weeks old and I must have presented a sorry spectacle when friend Cameron first set eyes on me.

I rode the remaining eight miles on the spare horse, but I felt weak and knocked up and the day after I reached Brunette I was down with fever

CHAPTER IX.

BRUNETTE TO NEWCASTLE WATERS,
280 MILES.

AGGREGATE 3778 MILES.

*The Carriage Drive—Overlanding Drivers—
Language—The Order of the Bath—A
Narrow Escape from Hostile Blacks.*

FOR three weeks I lay at Brunette tossing and turning in the grip of malarial fever, but, luckily, I was again in the land of the good Samaritan, and all that patient, intelligent nursing could do for a man was done for me. To the good people who watched over me when delirium got the better of reason, and who anticipated and ministered to my slightest desire in the convalescent stages, I owe a debt of gratitude which words are inadequate to express. I had almost said, "I hope I'll be able to do as much for them some day;" but, when I look back on what it all meant, I hope they will never be in such straits. They deserve better things.



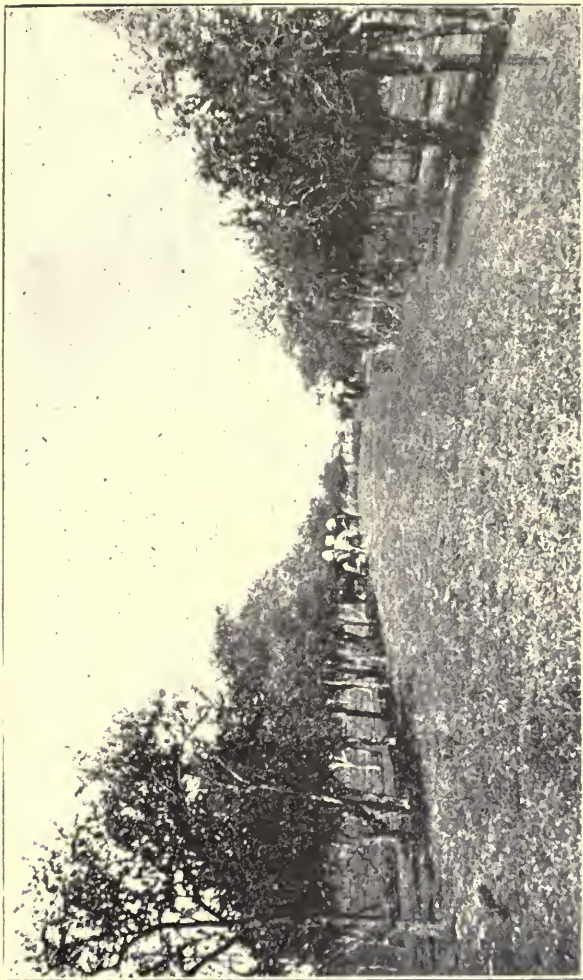
CORELLA (DESERTED HOMESTEAD)—SCENE OF "ROBBERY UNDER ARMS."

Lonely Lands.

Still, as the old proverb says, "It's a long lane that has no turning," and the turn came for me in due time and it was not long before I was able to feel again the joy of living. A few days before leaving Brunette I rode back for my bicycle, accompanied by one of the "boys" whose mission it was to bring back the horse I rode out on. Some people might say, "Why not send for the bicycle," but, you see, I wanted to keep an unbroken trail throughout my long journey and this was the only way I could do so.

I found my faithful friend hanging on the tree just as I left it and the meeting was touching. In cattle country there is always great risk in leaving any article, such as a bicycle, unattended, for cattle are as curious as ladies, and, after sniffing around and investigating, they are apt to play up and toss things about and few bicycles are built to stand such treatment.

I spent a few days recruiting at Brunette and enjoyed myself immensely with Mr. Cameron and Mr. Lowe, both keen camerists. They took me out on photo and horse hunting expeditions and it is hard to say which sport I enjoyed best. One particular photograph of "The Carriage Drive," a wonderful natural formation, is reproduced here and is worthy of attention.



Lonely Lands

THE CARRIAGE DRIVE, BRUNETTE, N.T.

This carriage drive is six miles long, well "metalled," and has a single unbroken line of trees on either side, forming an avenue.

It may interest many who are thinking of going on the land to know that Brunette station covers an area of seven thousand square *miles*, leased from the Government at ninepence per square mile. It is splendidly grassed and admirably adapted for raising cattle and horses. Few places in New South Wales could beat it for this purpose.

When the day came for saying good-bye to Brunette I was genuinely sorry, for, to me, it had proved a veritable oasis in the desert; but the call of the North was yet unanswered and, as the copy book headlines used to tell us, "Time and tide wait for no man"

Next day I arrived at Anthony's Lagoon and rested, as I found myself scarcely fit for hard travelling yet. All the way through this part of the journey—since leaving Bowen (Queensland) I had kept an accurate account of the distances between waterholes and it is in work like this that the cyclistometer tells: for, instead of getting an approximate bush measurement calculated by a horse walking so many miles in so many hours, you get the actual distance. My silent cyclistometer was instrumental in settling quite a number of

bets as to these distances, and I was generally asked to attend the ceremony that invariably accompanies such settlements. It is intended to publish these cyclo-metric records in the Queensland papers and they ought to be useful to travellers in general and stock travellers in particular, as the watering of the mob is a matter of moment.

Here I got very bad reports about the track ahead, and I afterwards found that they were under rather than over estimated. Long creeping vines kept me constantly stumbling and the wheels, chains and other gear of my machine would get so hopelessly tangled in the runners that I had to stop from time to time to clear away. In one part of the country I was three days travelling before I was certain that I was going in the right direction, and to get off the track on either side meant getting into hopeless blue bush country which, wet or dry, is positively impenetrable.

Several times I noticed thin columns of smoke going up in various parts of the country and I was suspicious as to their meaning, as they are generally niggers' signals to each other when following a droving party for the purpose of picking up the leavings. Should there be few leavings the natives are not above spearing a few stragglers, and, if they are hostile they



Lonely Lands.

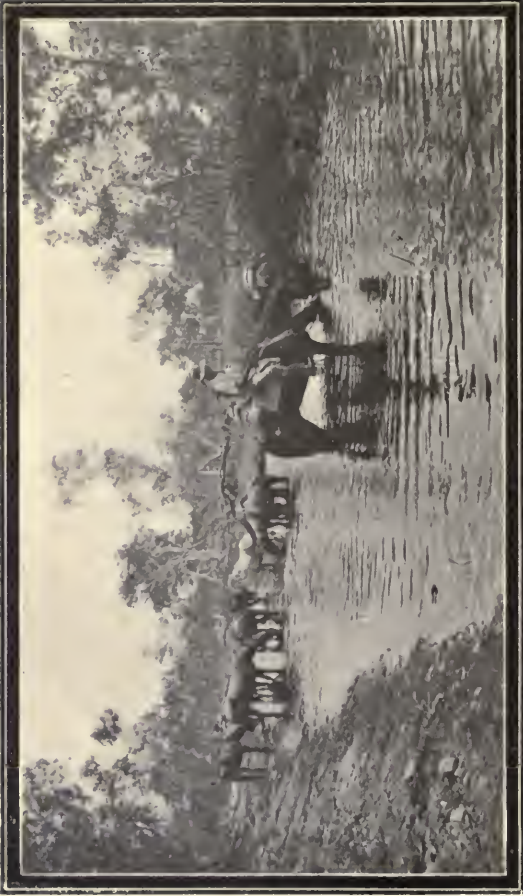
OVERLANDING CATTLE ON A CREEK.

are not particular as to whether the stragglers are men or beasts.

As it is hard to say whether the aboriginal tribes are hostile or not until you actually come in contact with them, I made it a rule to steer clear of them whenever possible, as I had no desire to test the precision of their spearing. Dodging throwing sticks, called *nulla nullas*, may be exciting sport, but it has few charms for me.

Eight days out from Brunette I encountered a droving camp, which proved to be that of Mr. Walter Rose returning with two mobs of cattle, each one thousand five hundred head strong, from Victoria Downs cattle station and heading towards New South Wales, which they expected to reach in about twelve months' time. This overlanding requires a lot of pluck, endurance and practical experience, and a good leader is as necessary in the overlanders' camp as in the army during a campaign.

After this meeting I had no trouble in finding the track, but the cattle had spoiled all the waters. It is the unwritten etiquette of the road to keep cattle out of the usual drinking places, but, in some instances, the waters are deliberately spoiled by a drover who knows that a rival is coming along behind him. This



Lonely Lands.

A TERRITORY DROVER'S PLANT "WATERING."

“closes the track,” that is to say, makes it impossible to be used for want of water and necessitates a long detour and a corresponding delay.

Waterholes will last a long time if the bottom be not trampled up and one good hole will water a big mob; but oftentimes, whether from *malice prepense* or from sheer indifference the cattle are allowed to wander through the chain of holes, spoiling all and using little. When the Renner Springs—Anthony’s Lagoon track is “closed” a drover has to take his cattle hundreds of miles to the poorly-grassed Gulf country before he can turn South.

I should say that one experience of that kind would make him considerate of others and careful not to commit a breach of etiquette.

The blue bush here is full of cracks running in all directions and, on account of the undergrowth, it is difficult to avoid them. You only know you have discovered one when you have landed at the bottom and then all that is left for you is to lift the bicycle out with the best grace possible and go prospecting for the next. While it may be good exercise for the muscles, it is trying to the temper and apt to make sudden calls upon one’s profane vocabulary, which, in itself, is a woful waste, for half the satisfaction got

from "language" is the way that it impresses the other fellow, who often admires the speaker according to the volume and variety of his effort. Should the audience be absent the effort is useless.

On the tenth day I could see mountains a little further on and a glorious view was later on obtained from the ridge, or "jump up," as it is termed locally. Looking backwards I was able to say farewell to the black soil plains, and that without a pang of regret. A few miles down-hill cycling and I had arrived at Renner Springs. The chief spring is in the middle of a clump of trees—a little round pool of clear, cold water, with bubbles rising to the surface and surrounded by ferns and reeds. Here I camped for the day, glad to be beyond the sight of those seemingly everlasting plains with their five hundred miles of bogland.

Being now within a mile of the overland telegraph line, I turned in with the comfortable assurance that I would not have to search the country for tracks again and that I would have a good guide for the rest of the trip.

On leaving Renner Springs next day I followed the telegraph line for twenty miles, through sandy

country to Powell's Creek, where there is one of the most important telegraph offices along the line.

I was well treated here, and while I rested, the gins washed my clothes, which, after wallowing in mud and dust, were badly in need of it. I was never before so much impressed with the truth of the saying that "cleanliness is next to godliness," for, after my thorough clean up, I felt so good and respectable that I am sure I would not have uttered a wrong word even if you had paid me for it. The moral influence of a good wash suggests that one of the chief institutions of a religious cult should be The Order of the Bath.

Showing how great minds agree, some of my musical readers may remember that Sir W. S. Gilbert, in *The Princess Ida*, expresses the same sentiments, though in a much more whimsical manner. In the song of "The Ape who loved a Lady" he tells how the ape

"With a view to rise in the social scale,
He shaved his bristles and he docked his tail,
He grew moustachios, and *he took his tub*,
And he paid a guinea to a toilet club."

The italics are mine, but that same tub has been the hall mark of the higher life since Naaman the Syrian was commanded to wash seven times in the River Jordan. No doubt he needed it and the prophet knew



Lonely Lands.

FREW'S PONDS, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

it. I certainly needed it, and, to my profit, I also knew it.

Next day I set out for Newcastle Waters' cattle station and, as the country slopes gently downwards and is hard and gravelly, I made some fine running, which was a real treat after the bogland of the black soil plains. On the way I passed a poor kangaroo which was quite blind from the attacks of flies, and I was told that such cases are not uncommon amongst the animals of the bush.

Racing down these tableland slopes one day I heard a peculiar noise which sounded something like that made by black cockatoos, but, owing to the rushing of the wind, I could not hear properly. Coming round a corner I surprised a dingo and several half-grown pups and caused great consternation among them. The mother promptly took to the bush, but the pups turned tail and ran straight down the track for dear life. Seeing here a good chance of getting even with the dingo tribe for the unholy howling I had had to endure during many sleepless nights, I promptly gave chase and was just about to bag one when a number of lubras and piccaninnies jumped up and ran shrieking into the long grass. I had committed the unpardonable sin of attacking niggers'



GOVERNMENT WELL ON THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE, NEAR DALY WATERS, N.T.
Lonely Lands.

dogs, for it is well known that the natives often think more of their dogs than of their children, and any one interfering with them has to look out for squalls and take the consequences. Although I knew all about this I had taken the dingoes to be unattached, for there was no sign of natives about, but a short distance down I ran right through a band of "bucks" who were evidently on a hunting expedition, as they were fully armed. Attracted by the howling of the pups and the screaming of their women folk they stood like statues, with spears poised and eyes ablaze, awaiting my oncoming. It did not take me long to grasp the situation, and, concluding that a flash past would be my best move, I put my head down and pedalled for all I was worth. The rush rather upset their calculations, for, although fully a dozen spears were sent whizzing after me and the sound of their peculiar "singing" sent a few shivers down my spine I escaped unscathed. One spear better judged than the rest found an opening between the spokes of my front wheel, but the angle at which it struck and the speed at which I was going caused it to snap and the broken half caught me a severe rap on the right arm. In the excitement of the moment I was hardly aware of the stroke, but later on I had occasion to "rub the place to

make it well'' and to thank my stars that things were no worse. I rode fully fifty miles before I camped that night, and as a precautionary measure I lit no fire, but was content to have a cold tea.



LUBRAS DANCING.

CHAPTER X.

NEWCASTLE WATERS TO PORT DARWIN,
650 MILES.

AGGREGATE 4428 MILES

*Lonely Lands—Qualifying for the Bar—One Mad
Fellah—Chow Land—Chinese “Language”—
A Social at Port Darwin—In Hospital.*

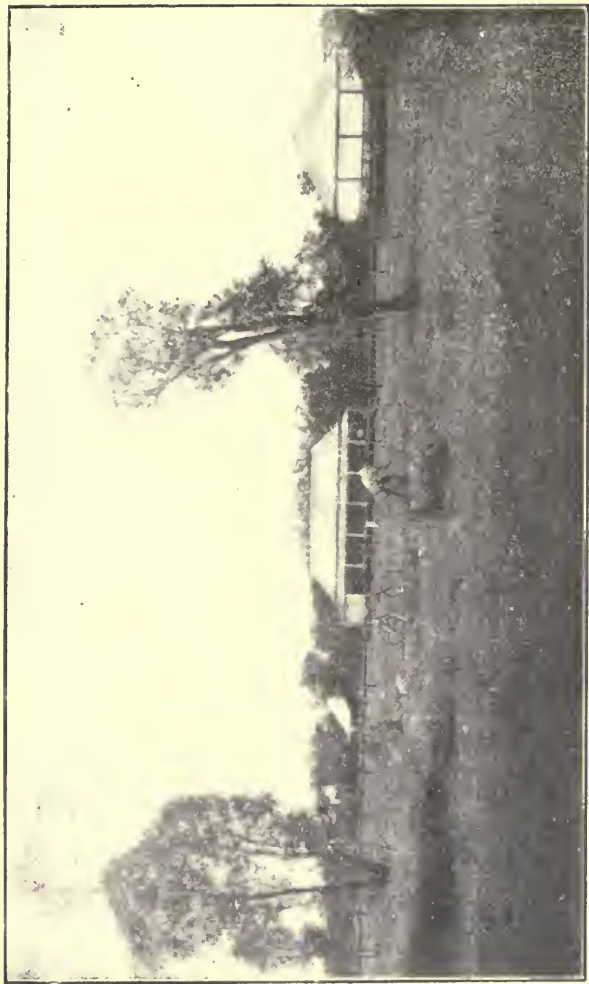
AFTER a few days of splendid going I got down to the low-lying Gulf Country once more. This country is well wooded, and, here and there, mirror-like lagoons are to be met with, whose waters are covered with yellow and violet, sweet-smelling water lilies, and where water-fowl are to be found in abundance.

The scene reminded me of some of the “lakes” in our public gardens, but with the added charm of isolation. This is the type of country reaching as far as Newcastle Waters, where I camped for one night and enjoyed a chat with the manager, who had been out of touch with Sydney for years.

The next stage was to Daly Waters and on the way there the long grass, the mud and the cut-up tracks gave me a lot of trouble. Outside Newcastle Waters bullock drays had cut up the country for fifty miles, and the earth was standing up in abrupt ridges to a height of eighteen inches, which meant lifting the front wheel to get the machine over, as the scrub was too dense to go off the track.

At Daly Waters I met Mr. Holtze, postmaster, who is a keen photographer, with plenty of subjects to hand, of which he makes the fullest use. He has also a good knowledge of the flora of the district and makes a most interesting companion. Between Daly and the Catherine River I went a whole week's journey without meeting a single soul. No wonder the place is known as the lonely land. The complete isolation is very depressing and it takes all one's inner resource to preserve mental balance. Possibly my readers may doubt whether I preserved mine, seeing that I have rushed into print at the earliest opportunity: but it is my humble hope that they will give me the benefit of any doubt that may exist. Even a prisoner at the bar is entitled to that.

Progress over the next two hundred miles—the week's journey—was extremely slow on account of



DAILY WATERS TELEGRAPH STATION, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

the heavy nature of the road; and the long cane grass which was often three times my height, made it impossible to see the track. I could not walk with the machine owing to the manner in which the vegetation pulled it from my grasp, so there was nothing left but to mount and charge through, taking a spell every half mile or so. One of the thoughts that enabled me to survive the loneliness was that later on, if all else failed me, I might qualify for the bar, as I was having excellent practice at the main part of the business: I was becoming a devil to charge.

At Bitter Springs I got into fever country again—dark, gloomy jungle, with marshy, evil-smelling odours about. When lying out in this kind of country I could not get any proper sleep, as the hot, stagnant air was stifling and the mosquitoes were brutes. I saw signs of Myall niggers about, but I was too tired to care much. On going down to the creek for water I came upon a freshly-built stack of sticks laid across stones, all ready for lighting, while flat stones, roller stones and a quantity of seeds all ready for rolling out, together with fresh foot prints, indicated that I had disturbed a native camp. Several times during tea the cockatoos started to shriek and fly about, clearly showing that the niggers were hovering about

the vicinity, probably as hungry as hawks, but yet too scared to approach. Their dread is accounted for by the fact that there is a superstition among them that any one who is, or looks, mad, will cast the evil eye on them, so when they meet such a one they keep beyond the influence of his optic. Doubtless when they saw me come, spinning along on the silent bike, covered with mud after the day's ride, with bare legs, long hair and no hat, they came to the conclusion, not without reason, that here was "one mad fellah."

In the bush inhabited by hostile natives I have never objected to the term, for it is frequently a better protection than fire arms, and, then, I must admit that appearances were decidedly against me on this occasion.

Curiously enough, although I often scare the human inhabitants of the bush, I rarely disturb the birds and other animals. You see I come into camp silently and not with a rattling kit and jingling bells as pack-horses do. I am practically a freemason of the bush, although sometimes the denizens might justly complain that I had not acted "on the square."

The next day I was amongst mountainous country and camped late in the afternoon at a splendid water-hole called Providence Knoll. Most likely the name



Lonely Lands. MY CAMP (A CALICO FLY AND CHEESE-CLOTH MOSQUITO NET).

was given to the place by some weary overlander, like myself, who stumbled across it just as he was at the last gasp and who reckoned that Providence had guided him to the spot. Be that as it may, it has been a godsend to many and will be to many more.

The following night I camped on a mountain that had no water, so I was able to more fully appreciate the value of that last hole.

At the Catherine River I touched the outskirts of civilisation once more. Mr. Jaensch, the postmaster, and his wife made me have breakfast, although it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and, as I had had no food since the morning before, I was nothing loth. In the afternoon my kindly host took me for a row on the river and it seemed strange to be boating two hundred miles inland, in country which, but a few years ago, was popularly supposed to be a desert. I had a look at a rubber tree which had grown wild to the height of forty feet, with a trunk about four feet in circumference at the base. On cutting the bark, a viscid, milky-looking juice oozed out and, by rubbing this in my fingers, I got a fair resemblance to rubber solution. It was quite sticky and it seemed to me that, if it were properly treated, a marketable rubber might be obtained.



Lonely Lands.

THE GARBAGE MAN.

There were also a number of American cotton bushes growing wild; the soft, downy "buds" being in full bloom. Pumpkins grow profusely without any trouble, and the same may be said of numerous other vegetables, and yet the ground has never been tilled.

After leaving Catherine River I had good bush roads before me and in six and a half hours I had put away sixty miles without any trouble. Of course there was nothing of the record about this, but it was a change from half a mile an hour and I rejoiced in it. I passed several tin mines on my way in to Pine Creek. It is astonishing how little "tin" is wanted on a journey like this, for, as a rule, most of the people you meet are only too glad to barter their hospitality for your company, and, in some of the out-back districts, where they often don't see a fresh face for months, it is easily understood. But before long this will be all changed when the possibilities of the country are appreciated and the tide of immigration has begun to flow.

Passing into Pine Creek I began to meet vehicles on the road and after my solitary sojourn it was quite refreshing, even although most of the people I met were "Chows."

The first man I met was a Chinaman on trek, swinging along with his swag swung from both ends of a

bamboo, after the manner of the vegetable man who supplies the suburbs of our cities with "welly goo



HIS EVENING STROLL.

eallot" to "makem plenty soup." The weight of the load would have astonished some of our athletes, but

there he was, as unconcerned as if he were merely carrying the baby instead of "waltzing Matilda."

The second man I met was a Chinese wood cutter, the next a Chow parcels carrier doing his afternoon delivery, and, after that, the signs of the Chinese invasion were everywhere. Chinese hamlets with gaudy flags floating over the shops and Joss houses, Chinese-looking horses, dogs, and fowls, but no cats. In fact not a few of the white men looked Asiatic, owing to the wearing of Chinese boots and clothing.

I frightened one Chinese "outfit"—two horses, a waggon and a driver—into the scrub. The animals seemed quiet enough as I cycled near, but, just as I came within their line of vision, they made a bolt for the bush with ridiculous and disastrous results. As John had been asleep on the seat I was scarcely to blame, but his rude awakening let loose a volume of vituperation that could hardly have been beaten by the rowdies of "The Rocks." I am sorry now that I did not wait to apologise, but both he and I were going so fast that all I could distinguish was some ruddy reference to a dam full. Maybe he was talking of the tanks, but his English was weak and I was never strong as a linguist.

At Pine Creek I had a good "clean up" and a bran



Lonely Lands.

ADELAIDE RIVER, N.T.

new suit and fresh shoes. I also had a meal of vegetables and fruit, the first for five months, and I again regretted I had upset the Chinaman, for the products of his garden were good. After living on weevilly flour and salt meat the green food was a most welcome change.

After dinner numerous wires of congratulation came up from Port Darwin and I was asked to keep myself open for Saturday night, three days ahead, as the Darwin Athletic Association had arranged to tender me a welcome social.

As I had lost my engagement book in that same black bog that ruined my camera, I was unable to say definitely whether I was engaged for that evening or not, but I risked it and wired back an acceptance.

The following Saturday afternoon I was within a few miles of my northern destination, and the fresh salt air from the ocean seemed to put new life into me. Four miles out a party of cyclists met me and escorted me into Palmerston, or Port Darwin. It is a town of alternatives in more ways than one. On our arrival we were welcomed by the other members of the club, and, after "several washing-the-dust-downs," we disbanded for dinner.

As it was then six o'clock in the evening and dinner



Lonely L'ands.

A STREET SCENE, PORT DARWIN, N.T.

was at seven I had a great scramble to get ready. First I was taken to a Chinaman's store, where a suit of khaki and some shirts were purchased; then we proceeded to another Chow store for other commodities, and last, but not least, I had my hair cut by John in his best style, finishing up with a "scrape," which was sorely needed. Not that I had neglected myself altogether on the way, for I have given you instances of times when I had many a close shave: but this was different.

The dinner was good, the company excellent and the soft-footed, Chow waiter had evidently served his apprenticeship at Fillempagain, for he was a past master in the art of sweet persuasion. His bland smile made you feel that you could trust him with your watch.

The social at night was most enjoyable after my roughing and the complimentary speeches, especially that of Mr. Justice Herbert, made me feel quite proud. But, as the things that were said of me may be found reported in *The Northern Territory Times*, you must excuse me mentioning them here. When the caterer counted the "empties" in the morning he assured me it had been a decided success, and he was a man of probity and experience. In any case my best



Lovely Lands.

TYPICAL DARWIN STREET BOYS, N.T.

thanks are due to the local sports for their warm welcome to Palmerston.

Next morning I started shivering and, though it was a hot day, I could not get warm, even with three heavy blankets over me. A couple of hours later I could not get cool, and then I knew that my old enemy, fever and ague, had downed me again. Every other day for eight days I was unable to walk and latterly I was unfit to get up at all. For days I was delirious; for forty-eight hours I was blind, raving, singing, shouting and behaving generally in a way that, in other circumstances, would have earned me seven days without the option. But, under Dr. Strangman's clever treatment I was able to get up after eleven days in the hospital, and although I have had a couple of fever bouts since I hope soon again to be well and strong.

It was somewhat humiliating to me to break down just at the apex of my journey, so to speak, but better there, where I could get scientific treatment, than in the depths of the desert where the end might have been death. No doubt "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will."

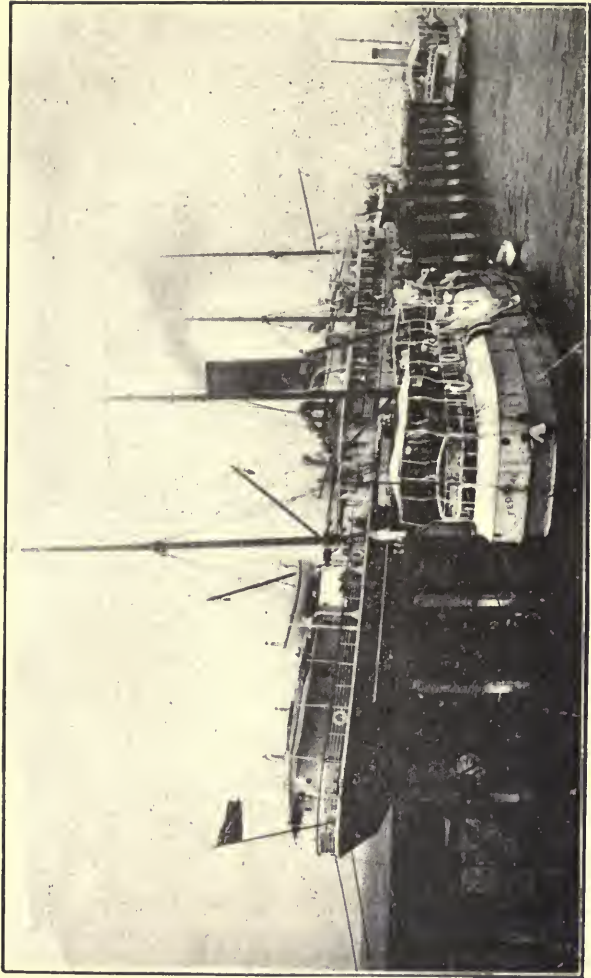
CHAPTER XI.

PORT DARWIN.

A Chinese Artist—Opium Fishing—The Aggressive Celestial—Settlement in the Northern Territory.

PORT DARWIN or, more properly, Palmerston, is the most northerly seaport town of any importance in the Northern Territory. The harbour looks like Port Phillip bay, with its large expanse of water; but the surrounding banks are similar to those of Sydney Harbour. The water is not navigable for large steamers, except through the main channel, and there is poor shelter for shipping. The S.E. wind, which blows for about five months after the wet season, often blows so strongly as to make things hum. This is the "fever wind," but as it passes over the harbour it doubtless becomes purified to a great extent, filtered through the ozone, as it were, and Port Darwin gets the benefit.

The town is situated at the head of the harbour on



Lonely Lands.

DARWIN JETTY, PALMERSTON.

a small cape or headland. The white population resides at the "back" of the town, which is the best residential portion of the cape. A minute's walk away is the beach, or rather a series of beaches, broken by stony ridges jutting out into the sea, but covered at high tide.

On the lower side of the cape is Chinatown, which, to the visitor from the steamer, appears to be the principal portion of the Port, although it consists of but one long street, with galvanised iron shops, unpainted and ugly. Over the shop doors are various brilliantly-painted signs, with little flags flying, and what seems, but for the bright colouring, to be wax funeral wreaths.

There is little of the gaudy Asiatic splendour about this Chinatown, but there is sufficient of the Asiatic squalor.

There are approximately three thousand Chinamen in the country and about eight hundred white people. Definite information about population is difficult to get, as the people here seem to have acquired the usual tropical dislike for details.

But even this indefinite estimate shows that the number of whites is altogether out of proportion to

the number of Chinese, and, as the disproportion is growing, it behoves those in authority to see to it.

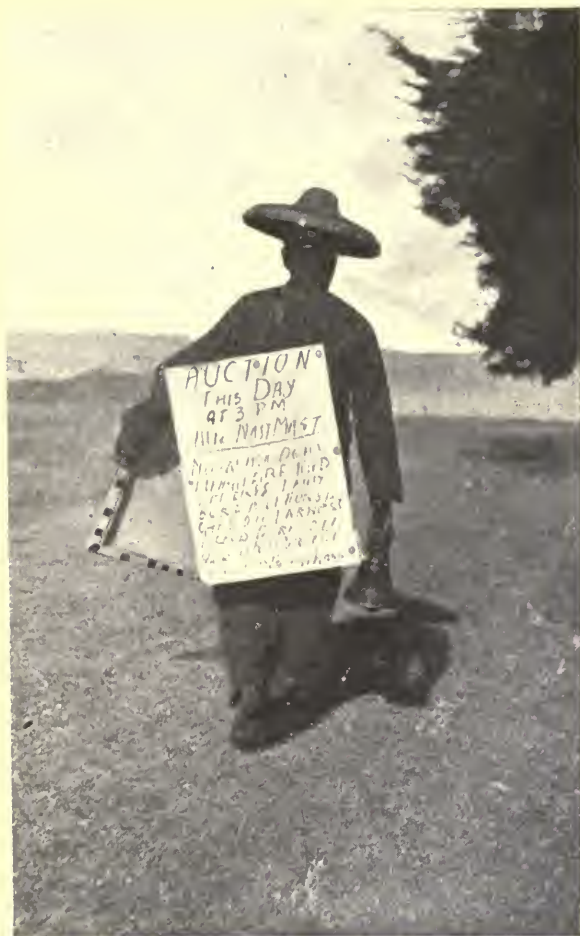


FRUIT MERCHANT—DARWIN STUDIES.

At a Chinese fruit and pork shop—a common combination, though a curious one to our Southern, civilised ideas—I noticed a group of Chows reverently

and gently poking with a stick a small piece of pork that hung about six feet above the window counter. On enquiring I found that a guessing competition was in progress. On payment of sixpence the Chow hands in his guess as to the weight of the pork, which becomes the property of the winner, who immediately shoves his stick through it and goes home to have a good time. This is repeated daily and crowds of Chinese are to be seen there every day, as the sport appeals to their gambling instincts.

Around Darwin the Chinese have all the good land, which they till in a primitive way, producing chiefly bananas and pineapples. Fruit, however, is very dear; ninepence for a pineapple, and sixpence a dozen for bananas are prices that John asks without a blush, and, as there are no middlemen, the profits must be handsome, if the vendors are not. It is just the same in the shops; the Chows demand big prices for everything, while they themselves live on the proverbial "smell of an oil rag." No wonder the steamers are always crowded with prosperous celestials going "home" for a holiday. They can afford it. If anything particular is wanted one must go to the Chow store for it. The three European stores seem to be unable to stock up sufficiently to capture the local



TOWN CRIER, PALMERSTON, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

trade. There are about twenty Chinese stores, and here is a typical sign of one of them—"Wun Lung: Baker, Photographer, Fishing-boat Owner."

I was examining the portraits exhibited in the window of a Chinese brother artist, and puzzling out how it was possible to tell one face from another—they all looked as if turned out of the same mould—when the artist strolled out and asked:

"You wantem plicter taken? Me takem all plicter! Welly good, eh?"

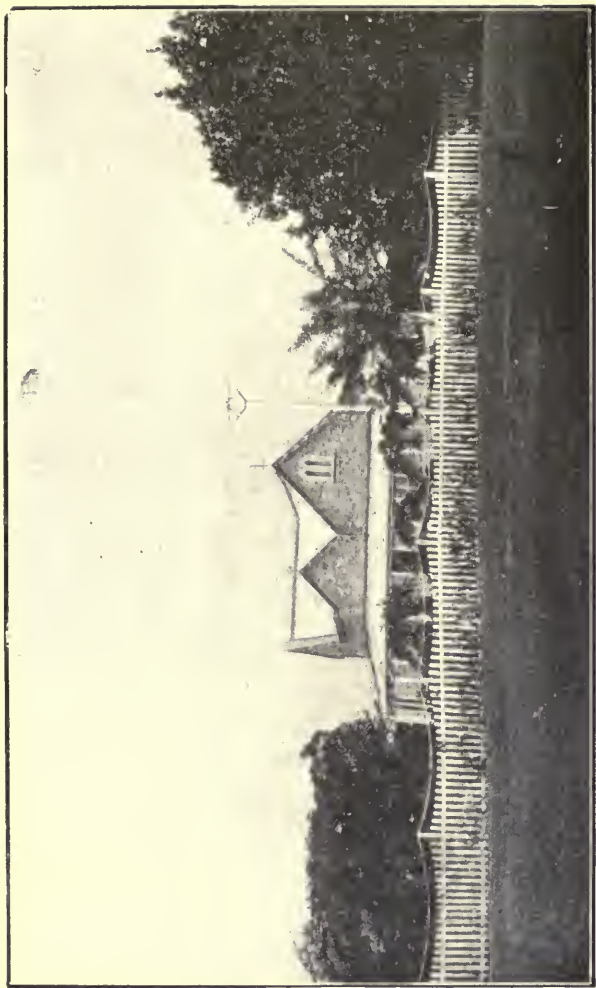
"How much do you charge," I asked.

"One pong one dossen. Welly cheap, eh?"

"All right, by-and-bye, maybe."

"All li. You wantem blead, you wantem fish, you wantem plicter, all li, you come see me, all li, Goo-bye."

Some of the "fishing" boats do precious little fishing, I fancy, when the China steamers are nearly due. The opium traffic is, to all intents and purposes, as brisk as ever, in spite of strict and watchful observation on the part of the Customs officials. There are numerous ways in which the prohibited article may be smuggled in, which are known only to the "Celestial Ray." One way is to drop the opium overboard near



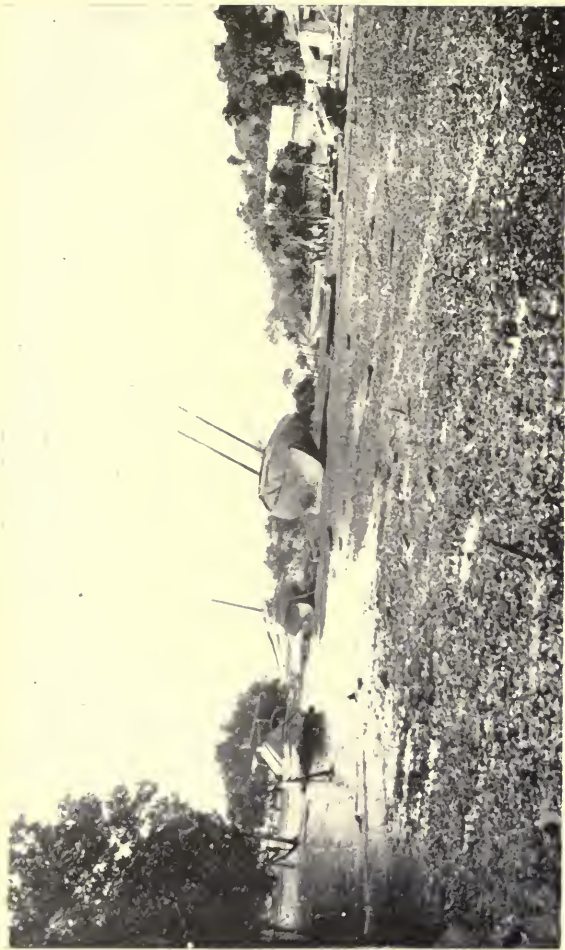
Lonely Lands

THE GOVERNMENT RESIDENCY, PALMERSTON, N.T.

a pre-arranged spot, the "fishing boats" being near at hand to recover it.

Another way is to drop the pareel, weighted, overboard—perhaps even alongside the jetty. Attached to the case is a long string with a small float on the end—a cork perhaps. This is wrapped in a piece of paper with a weight sufficient to sink the float also. In two or three days' time the paper bursts and the float comes to the surface, and would easily pass unnoticed, especially if under the jetty, which is deserted when the steamer leaves. The plaicid-looking Chow, "fishing" from the jetty with a hand line, has something to do with the opium trade. At any rate he is never there "fishing" when the steamer is away.

The guileless heathen is to be reckoned with in mining also. As he is not allowed to have the ownership of a claim, he gets a white man to act as owner, while he finds the capital and working expenses. There are many mines about the country absolutely controlled by Chinese, though popularly believed to be white men's property. Indeed, there is scarcely a paying business of any kind but what has Chinese capital behind it, and this will be a serious factor in the future development of the country. It looks very much like a "combine" amongst the Chows to exclude



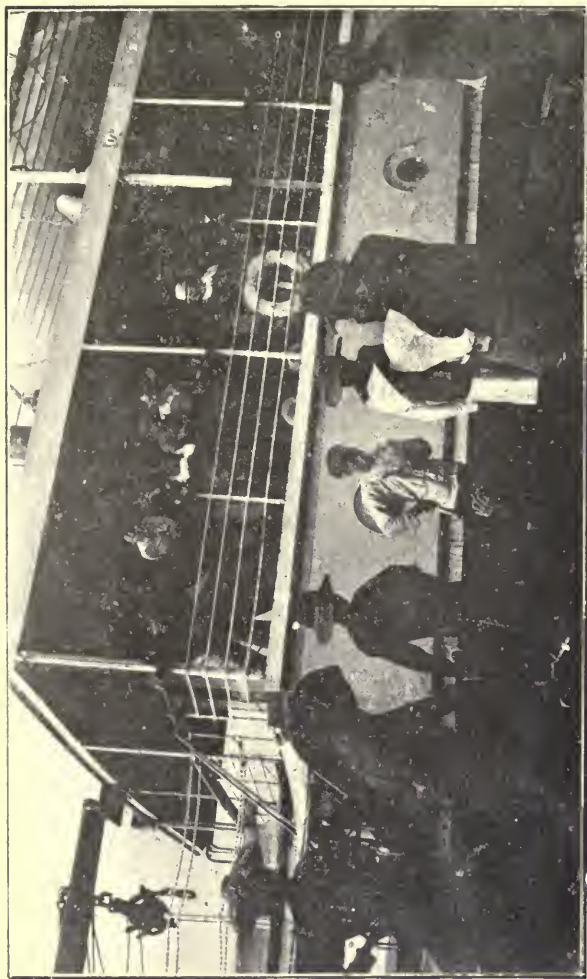
Lonely Lands.

KARLS BEACH, PORT DARWIN.

the white man as far as possible. They can do it, too, especially to the man without capital. People in Darwin would probably scoff at the idea, but, from what I have seen, there is more in it than meets the eye. The Chow is very clannish and determined when he makes up his mind. If you speak against him in Palmerston, you will be told that he is indispensable.

The state of affairs, as far as the Celestial invasion is concerned, should cause our statesmen to look around for a remedy and, if necessary, appoint a Commission to inquire into the problems connected with white settlement in the tropics. The peopling of the far north is really one of our most pressing national questions, and we may well wake up to the fact that it is a question beset with many and peculiar difficulties.

Very shortly the Commonwealth will, I suppose, be assuming control of the Northern Territory, and the work of settlement there will then have to be seriously entered upon. From every point of view it is desirable that the initial steps should be taken in the full light of the best knowledge the experience and scientific research of the world can furnish, and it is my opinion that any money spent in obtaining this knowledge would be a cheap investment, if it were



Lonely Lands. A CHINESE INVASION, DARWIN JETTY—SEARCHING FOR CONTRABAND.

the means of saving large subsequent waste of funds and possibly of human life.

The settlement of the right kind of people on the land will be a matter of particular moment, for no doubt it will be largely a question of the survival of the fittest. Some authorities are of opinion that the whites of the Mediterranean littoral—the Spaniards, the Italians, and the Greeks—are better adapted for this purpose than the inhabitants of countries further north, because, it is argued, they are already acclimatised to tropical conditions, whereas they are nothing of the kind. As a matter of fact, Australians living anywhere between Brisbane and Rockhampton, not to mention further north, are subjected to greater heat than is to be met with in the Mediterranean; and we have abundant evidence that the Anglo-Saxon is better fitted to withstand the sub-tropical climate than these others, chiefly because of the fact that he has a larger stock of latent energy to begin with.

Amongst the various nationalities I came across in my hasty run through the Territory, the Briton, the German, the Dane, and the Swede seemed to me the most successful settlers. Still some may say I was only a bird of passage and therefore not able to give an opinion, but it must not be forgotten that I encountered and conversed with men of all classes who



PRAYING SHRINE, JOSS HOUSE, PALMERSTON.

Lonely Lands.

have lived in those northern lands all their lives, and who were therefore well able to speak from experience. True, some of them were drovers or miners or teamsters, but they were nevertheless men of keen observation and natural ability, whose intelligence often made me inclined to hide my ignorance. But if we turn from these humble observers and weigh the opinions of the trained thinker in the person of the resident medical man, we find such an overwhelming testimony in favour of the white man that there is hardly any room left for doubt.

At the recent medical congress held in Melbourne (October, 1908), such men as Dr. Macdonald, of Geraldton, North Queensland, and various others of equal note—men who had given years of intelligent study to this Northern Territory question—unhesitatingly declared that there was no shadow of doubt in their minds but that the Australian or the Britisher could thrive and rear a race of hardy descendants there.

Of course there are patches of country to be found there that are unsuitable for colonisation; but why trouble about these when there are so many other parts eminently suited to a white population?

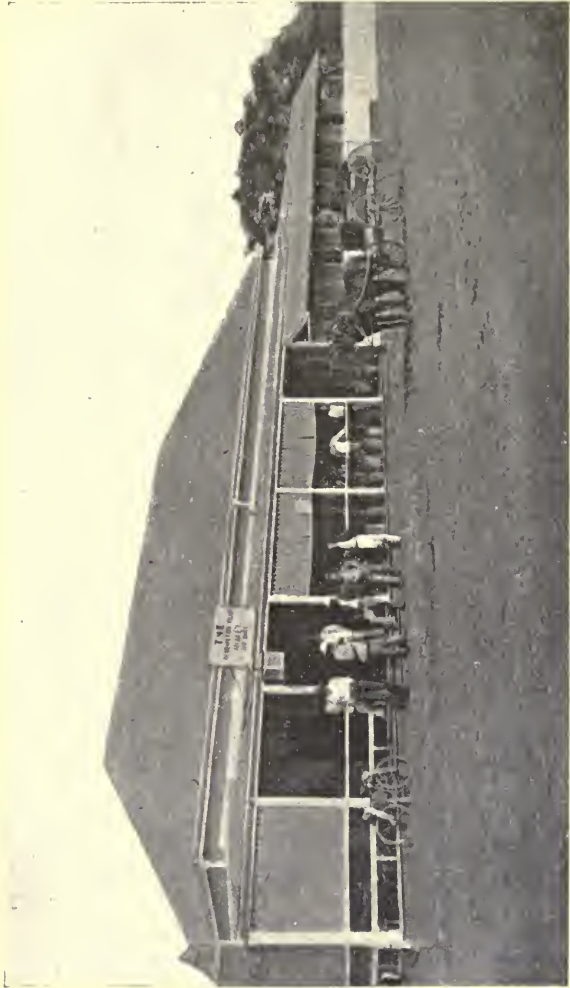
Failures, so far, of white men to maintain health



SUBMARINE TELEGRAPH STATION, PALMERSTON, N.T.
Lovely Lands.

in the tropics has been due principally to the non-observance of the rules of personal, domestic, and public hygiene. The discoveries of modern times indicated that tropical countries had their special diseases that required special means for their prevention. The adoption of such means had enabled France and America to accomplish in their tropical possessions that which a few years ago would have been regarded as impossible.

There are many industries that could be established with success in these regions, such as mining, agriculture, cattle rearing, the growing of rice, tobacco, cotton, coffee, tea, and other commodities too numerous to mention. Of course, in order to compete with the open markets of the world, some form of cheap labour other than white would be necessary, but that is not inconsistent with a White Australia, for, properly regulated, the white would always remain master of the situation, supplying the mental portion of the organisation, while the "native" supplied the manual. Brain and muscle have formed successful combinations in other similar situations; then why not here?



Lonely Lands.

THE CLUB HOTEL, PALMERSTON, N.T.

CHAPTER XII.

PORT DARWIN TO TENNANT'S CREEK, 890 MILES.

AGGREGATE 5318 MILES.

*The Transcontinental Railway—Iguana Hunting—
Fowling—A Big Snake—Native Burials—Fish
in Central Australia—Surprising a Native
Camp—The Stranded Motor.*

SOME of my readers may have come to the conclusion that they would rather I went on describing my journey than waste time talking on subjects of such a serious nature as Northern Colonisation, but they must bear with me a little further while I touch *en passant* upon the Transcontinental Railway. Having covered the ground with a view to gleaning reliable information on this point, I am of opinion that if the railway route from Pine Creek to Oodnadatta be made it will be a huge failure. There is no pastoral nor agricultural country worth talking about on this route, as it would practically run through

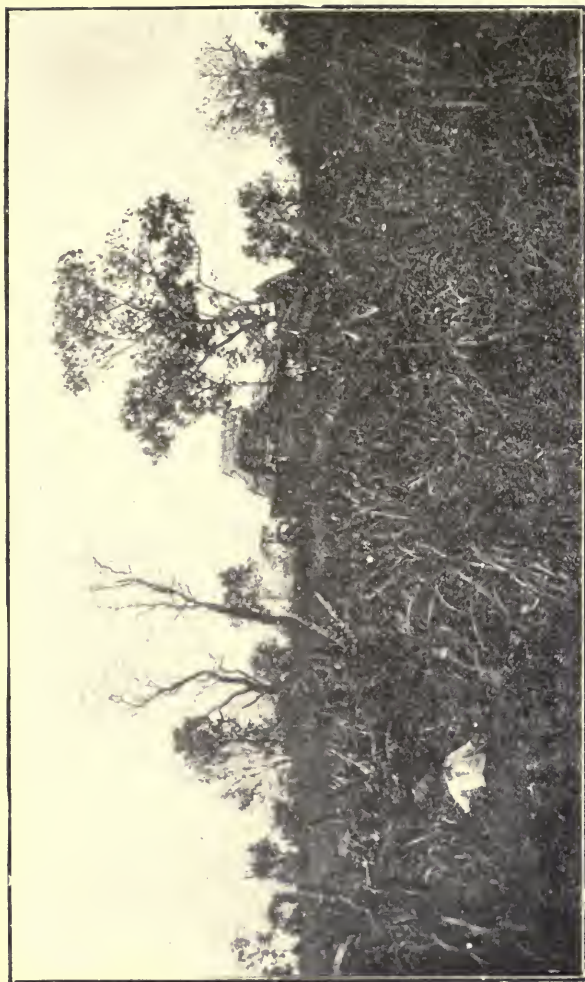


HOMeward—A CHINESE STUDY IN PALMERSTON, N.T.
Lonely Lawls.

desert land. The Pine Creek to Bourke (N.S.W.) is the most direct, and only about three hundred miles of the whole route would be poor country. All the proposed routes I have examined seem faulty—some of them are planned to run through terrible bog country, while others run along tableland ridges through two hundred miles of country where even a goat would require to be a bit of a Blondin.

No doubt these routes are all right when drawn on the survey map, but if there had ever been an actual survey the engineers would have seen at a glance the absurdity of the proposals.

In my poor opinion the line should travel south to Renner Springs, approximately east to Camooweal, south-east to Boulia, Eulo, Cunnamulla, and Bourke. Two hundred and fifty miles would link up Adelaide; ninety miles link up Melbourne with the overland trunk route. Brisbane would join at Cunnamulla. To link up all the Queensland lines with the main trunk would not be necessary, as the country would be opened up from east to west, and the same would apply to New South Wales. It is not intended to lay down the law on this matter, but merely to throw out a hint or suggest a caution lest a plan that has not



A CHINESE GARDEN, N.T.

Lonely Lands.

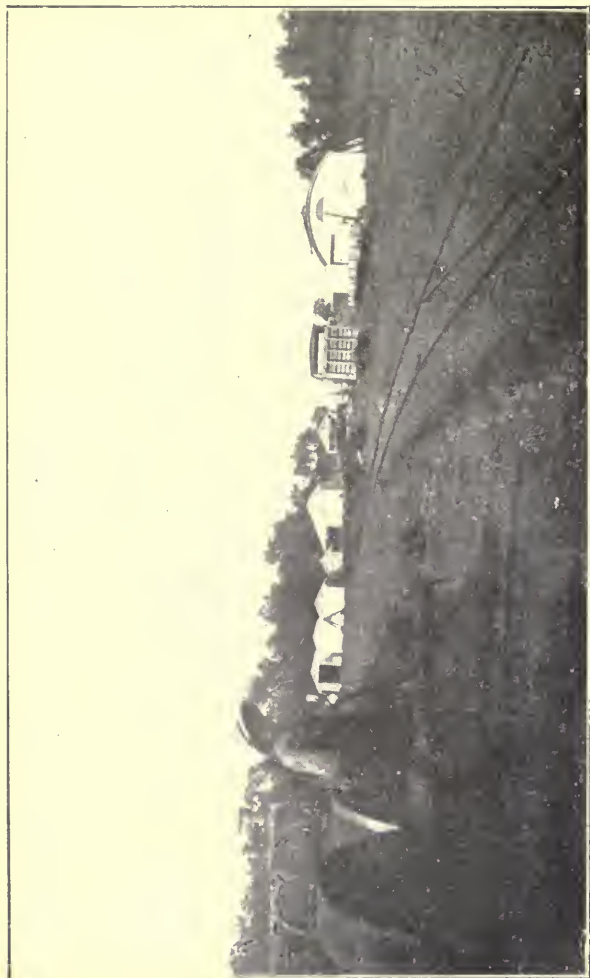
been thoroughly proven should be adopted and end in disaster.

And now I shall resume my ride, craving your indulgence for a few pages further. It is well known that an ass goes faster when he thinks he is going home, and there is a good deal of the donkey about many authors, in so far as they often rush their readers over the final chapters at a breakneck pace, in order to reach finality.

Leaving Port Darwin on 18th June, 1908, accompanied by some local sports, who came out a few miles just to see me off the premises, as it were, I set out for the journey down through the heart of Australia to Adelaide. Owing to my recent illness I found that ten miles a day was quite enough travelling in the hot sun, and it just began to be borne in on me that I had hardly the fitness of the proverbial fiddle. Still I was gaining strength every day and had hopes that after a little training "Richard would soon be himself again."

Through the fever-belt I found the going much better, as the long grass was broken down by the strong S.E. monsoon and in some parts the natives had burnt a lot of country whilst hunting for iguanas.

At a station on the Elsey River I replenished my



Lonely Lands.

PORT DARWIN RAILWAY STATION, N.T.

larder with poultry in rather a doubtful manner. An old gin had been left in charge, but, like other brands, she was easily "squared" if taken the right way. The fowls were wild and could fly a hundred yards at a time, so that I was utterly unable to catch them.

The advice of our grandmothers about putting salt on their tails was out of date, but a bit of "baecy" placed in the hands of the gin worked wonders, and soon I had enlisted the sympathy of a willing band of lubras, piecannies, and dogs, who, after a few miles of cross-country work, brought in a fair supply of fowl. Added to that the fowls had lost most of their feathers in the rough and tumble, which saved me the trouble of plucking them. So I wrung their necks, strapped them on to the bike, and, after distributing a little more largesse amongst the hunters, rode jauntily away. There may be some doubt in the minds of my readers as to whether the means of acquiring the birds were fair or foul, but in an expedition like this, the etiquette of "the twelfth" is apt to be forgotten.

At Daly Waters I was getting well out of the fever country, but between there and Newcastle Waters I was unfortunate enough to contract Bareeo sickness,

which pulled me down considerably and left me exceedingly weak. For days the only food I could hope to retain was damper and tea without sugar.

Crossing the Black Soil Plains I had terrible trouble



LEAVING PORT DARWIN.

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getting the bike over the big fissures that open up in the dry season. Horses have a rough passage in crossing at such times, as their weight breaks down the

edges of the cracks and their legs are continually being caught. These fissures extend to a considerable depth, and are so continuous that—well, here is a “yarn” as it was told to me:—A man crossing that part lost his dog one day, and, being unable to find it, went on his way. After travelling all day he made his camp and presently was surprised to hear a muffled whining, which reminded him of his lost doggie. Looking down one of the cracks he espied poor Fido, wagging his tail and looking up appealingly for help. Needless to say there was a glad reunion. The animal had fallen down a fissure in the morning, but by following the scent, had travelled underground and kept pace with his master.

Well, I am not responsible for the truth of that story, but it is no steeper than many a stiff snake yarn. Snakes, death adders, and centipedes were plentiful around these parts. Whenever an opening offered I killed what I could. I had learned a lot since my first adventure in the snake line and could now execute commissions with promptitude and despatch. The biggest snake I bagged was a nine-footer, which I met near Murrundi and which I snuffed out with half a railway sleeper. I “snapped” him as soon as I got him to remain steady. The head rest



Lonely Lands.

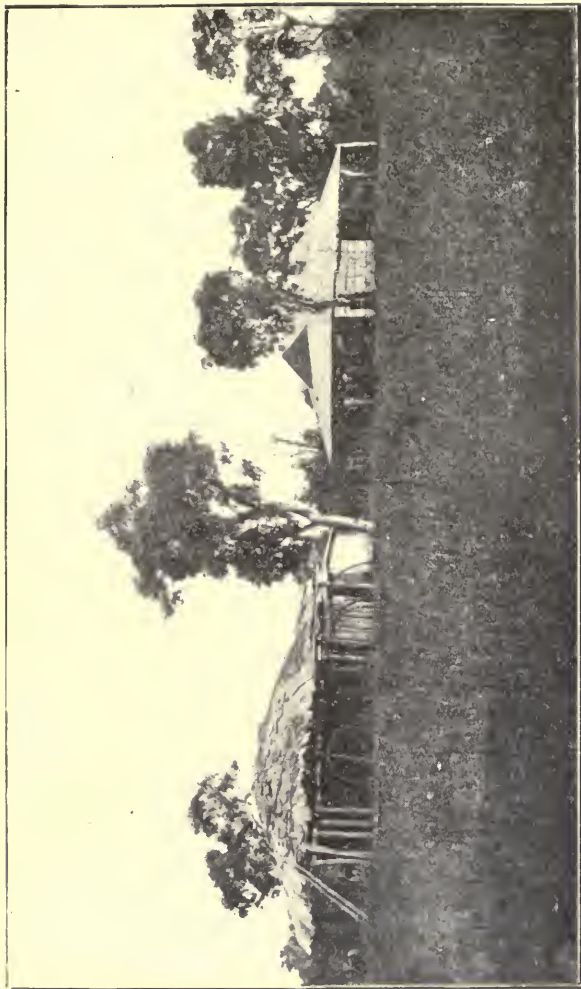
A DESERTED TIN MINE, YAM CREEK, N.T.

was not necessary. It is remarkable that every snake I encountered made for the bicycle. Perhaps the glitter and silent running appealed to them. I surrendered the machine to them every time by hastily dismounting on the opposite side and hunting for a stick or a stone with which to settle the question of ownership.

At Newcastle Waters I felt comparatively well and strong again. The country around here is splendid and well watered. On my run through to Powell's Creek I found the waterholes fast drying up, and around them all sorts of game were congregating, and tossing each other for drinks. The scramble reminded one of a Lady Mayoress's function when there are more guests than good things, or of the supper rush at a charity ball.

When nearing the overland telegraph station a splendid view of the unknown desert country away to the west is to be seen from the top of some mountainous ridges.

At Powell's Creek I got an idea of how much the bush nigger is afraid of pig. The telegraph master and operator had occasion to kill a pig, and the screams of the porker made every nigger within hearing disappear into the scrub, from which they did not



Lonely Lands.

ELSEY RIVER STATION, N.T.

return for days. Territory niggers will neither kill nor eat a pig, and although wild pigs are numerous they are never meddled with.

Up the creek is to be seen the burial ground of the natives. It looks like a bough shed built up in the trees. The body is placed on top of this and covered over lightly with boughs. The crows are often among the chief mourners at a funeral. They come to "sooff" and remain to prey.

I came back over the same country to Renner Springs, thence on to Tennant's Creek. Here the travelling was bad, as the route was principally over heavy sand and spinifex. At one part I was all day doing thirty-three miles, which I had to traverse without a drink of any description. My tongue was glued to the roof of my mouth and I was in a pretty parlous condition.

One night I ran right into a camp of blacks who had been setting fire to the country in their search for game, chiefly iguanas.

These reptiles burrow in the ground, and, after a fire, are always to be found concealed in the burrows. The natives dig them out with sticks, and it is at this part of the performance that the fun is to be had. Sometimes the iguana, after fighting "with his back

to the wall," will dart out suddenly between the legs of his would-be captors, at the same time snapping



A NICE BEDFELLOW.

right and left at everything in the way. But the ever-watchful half-bred dingo dogs are always on the

alert, and, before you could cough, there is to be seen the most wonderful mixture of iguana, dogs, and dust that could possibly be imagined. When the "gins" join in and add their harsh, split voices to the din, you could fancy yourself at a wool sale. The dogs are evidently under the impression that the mixture has been labelled "to be well shaken before taking," and they shake things up most vigorously until they are hauled off by the hind legs by the piccaninnies. When the dust has gone down the iguana is taken up, and this performance is repeated until the last iguana has been baited and slain.

Very heavy travelling fell to my lot on the way to Attack Creek. Stony ridges intermingling with spinifex did not produce an ideal track, and as a consequence the going was "vile."

It was here, in Central Australia, that I saw fish. A large rock-hole was teeming with them, from four to five inches long. The hole was well clear of all watercourses, so the puzzle is how the fish came there. The only feasible solution I can think of is that fish spawn had been swallowed by birds and deposited there by natural causes.

Between Attack Creek and the Gilbert Creek I spent a blazing hot day without a drink. I mean, of



Lonely Lands.

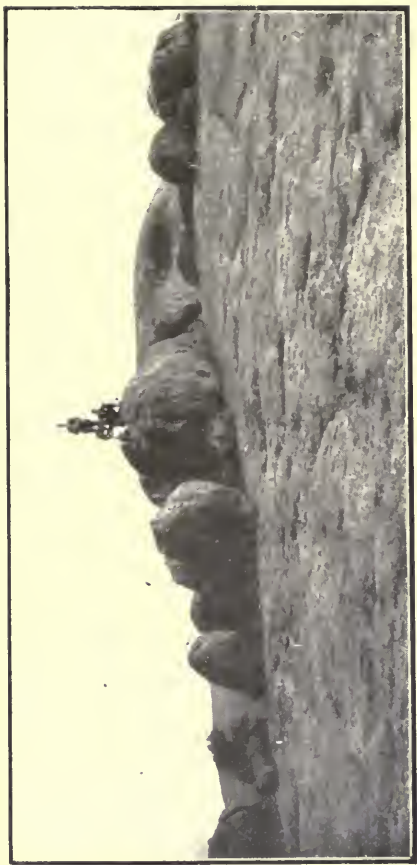
A CAPTIVE ALLIGATOR. PALMERSTON, N.T.

course, a drink of water, tea, anything moist. Cyclists who have been riding all day know that on account of the free perspiration in hot climates like ours the balance of liquid matter in the body must be made up or intense thirst supervenes. But few find themselves in such awkward circumstances that they have not the certainty of a drink at the end of day. When, however, you have to "carry forward" your thirst over night and into the next day you feel as if an ocean would be too small to supply the balance. Although the distance between the two creeks was only thirty-three miles, it took me all my time to accomplish it in a day and a half.

On getting near the waters I saw a fire; getting nearer I saw another, then another, and before I quite understood my position I was right in the middle of a blacks' camp. As I swept into their midst, the flames gilding the bright parts of my bike and making them flash fire, the niggers threw courage and common sense to the winds and took to their heels as one man.

They are horribly afraid of anything that travels silently. "Kidicha" (quiet devil) they call the bike, which may account for their consternation.

From their cover behind the trees, however, they saw me begin to unload my traps, and, plucking up



Louisa Lands

TYPICAL ROCK HOLES, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

courage again, they began to approach and watch the process of unpacking. I took good care to let them see I had nothing that would be of any use to them, and, not feeling too sure of their attitude towards me, I began to act up to my reputation of "mad fellah." I talked to myself, I laughed and I sang. I struck various dramatic attitudes whilst I recited a verse of "The boy stood on the burning deck" (I remembered the deadly effect of that piece in my Sunday school days), and, after showing them my agility in a few steps of the Highland Fling, I wound up with the traditional "Hooch" with which Scotchmen generally bring this fascinating dance to a close, and once again the niggers took to the bush. My impersonation of the "mad fellah" had been a decided success and I was left master of the situation. Now, although I have about the average sense of humour, I assure you I did not feel as funny as this appears, for, all the time I was "fooling." I was apprehensive lest they might penetrate my "disguise," in which case I might expect a rough time.

If I had not been dog tired and utterly exhausted, having fasted for nearly twenty-four hours, I should have ridden right on, but I had reached that stage when I *must* rest, no matter what the consequences.



Lonely Lands.

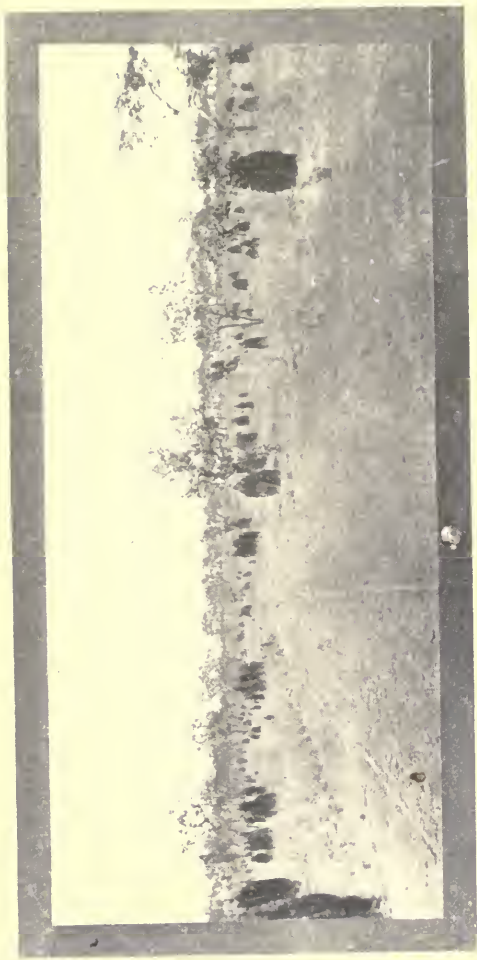
A GIANT ANT HILL, N.T.

So I took up a bundle of dried leaves and boughs that I found near one of the fires and dropped them on the glow. In the glare that followed I saw a snake dart out from amongst the boughs. I had actually lifted him with the firewood, but though I could hear him drawing himself about in the grass I was unable to find him.

Coming back to the fire I drew upon the water resources of the enemy and boiled the billy. It was not a restful meal, but it served. Nor was my attempt at sleep a huge success, for, what with the niggers on the one hand and the snake on the other, I hardly closed an eyelid.

Needless to say I was up with the dawn and away before further trouble overtook me. Just after leaving this place I came across hundreds of ant hills, some of them standing eight and ten feet high. They are sometimes called "magnetic" ant hills, owing to the fact of their pointing due north and south. They are decidedly "electric" if you happen to sit on them unawares.

At Tennant's Creek I was most hospitably received. I had a good "clean up," which was a longed-for luxury, and a splendid meal of beef and vegetables, after which I had a look at the garden. The vegetables were growing as well as ever I had seen them any-



ANT HILLS, BURKETTOWN ROAD, N.C.

Lonely Lands.

where, and I came to the conclusion that even the desert will grow anything when water is obtainable.

Forty miles south of here I passed the stranded motor car in which Messrs. Dutton and Aunger made their first attempt to cross the continent from Adelaide to Port Darwin, but which had to be abandoned on account of heavy rains. She seemed to be in splendid trim, and, although a bit rusty-looking, seemed quite capable of still crossing the continent.

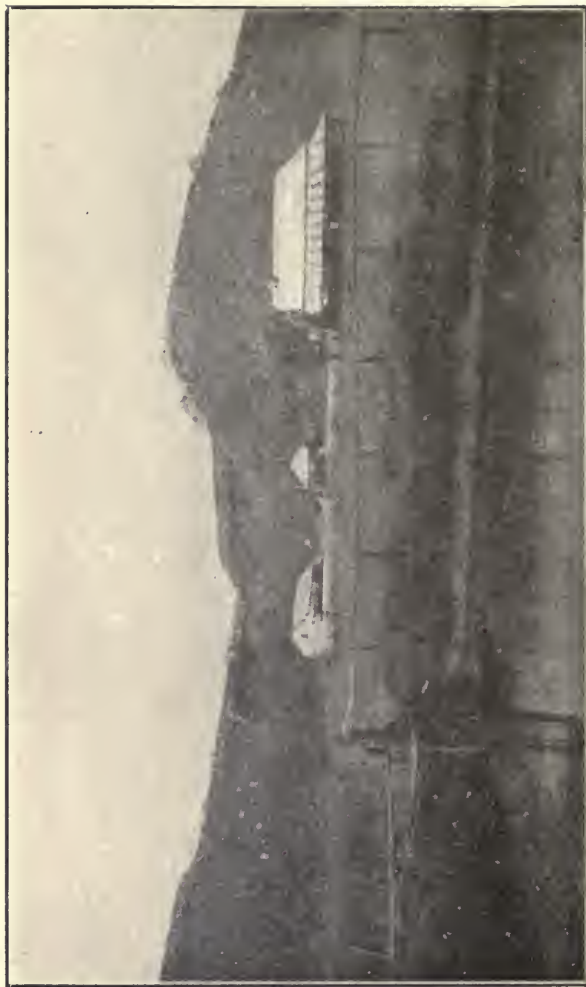
CHAPTER XIII.

TENNANT'S CREEK TO ALICE SPRINGS 330 MILES.

AGGREGATE 5648 MILES.

*Lazy Niggers—Iguana Stew—The Overland Telegraph
—Dutton and Amger—Afghan Camel Corps—
Bush Burglary.*

NO one would ever dream of accusing the Australian aborigine of being a "hustler," but for down-right laziness the niggers of the Northern Territory take the cake, and those between Tennant's Creek and Barrow Creek are *facile princeps*. They seem too lazy to move about and are always going about with their hands in their pockets (metaphorically). Some people may say that that is better than having their hands in other people's pockets—a certain sign of civilisation—but the latter at least shows a spirit of enterprise. The buck nigger would scorn the idea of working—he won't even hunt—he just throws himself down and lies, and lies, and lies.



Lonely Lands.

BARROW'S CREEK TELEGRAPH STATION, N.T.

The gins do whatever is necessary by way of providing for their lords and masters, and some of their efforts are nothing short of wonderful. A favourite dish of theirs is a mixture of iguana and leaves, served in "coolamons" (native dishes). As it looked all right I ventured to taste a little of it and I can sacredly swear I can taste it yet. "Strong" was no name for it: it ate its way into my vitals like acid, and flavoured everything I ate for months after. I rinsed my mouth again and again, but it was of no avail. I had acquired that taste and it meant to stick to me. I had never fully understood what an "acquired taste" really meant. Now I know: and the knowledge is mine for life.

I had previously eaten iguana tail roasted and found it not too bad (N.T.B. we Australians say); but I hope I'll be dead when next I eat iguana and leaves.

Between Tennant's Creek and Barrow Creek grows the giant mulga of Central Australia. The wind sweeping through these trees makes a wonderful, fascinating "sigh," which charms, while at the same time suggesting a threat. It is the spirit of the desert wind speaking, but only the man who has heard it can quite understand.

Most of the "creeks" in this part have no water in



CROSSING THE SANDY DESERT, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

them. Barrow Creek is one of that kind, and is mentioned here because some years ago it was the scene of a terrible tragedy, a number of post officials having been foully murdered by hostile blacks. The graves of the unfortunate men may be seen about a hundred yards away from the telegraph station.

The "hands" on an overland telegraph station generally consist of the telegraph master, an operator, and one or two line repairers. These men lead a life of lonely monotony; the work is not hard, but the dullness is terribly so. Most of them become students of nature and know their surroundings like a book. As a class they know more about our native tribes than any "learned" body of savants to be found in Australia, and a more kindly lot of men does not exist. They were of infinite assistance to me, for they gave me most valuable information about the route, advising me what to avoid and what to avail myself of, besides wiring down from station to station that I was on the way, with the happy result that on reaching the next stage I was an expected and welcome guest.

When a "break" occurs, pack-horses are brought in, food and water supplies strapped on, and in a few hours "the flying gang" is well under weigh. It often happens that the repairers have to inspect scores



Lonely Lands

A NORTH QUEENSLAND TELEGRAPH STATION.

of miles of line before the damage is located, and they may be away from headquarters for weeks at a time.

The telegraph line does not run straight, as many people imagine, but follows along the top of the ridges as far as possible, in order to avoid the boggy country, which in the wet season is practically impassable.

Below Barrow Creek the South Australian Government has put down some splendid wells, where hundreds of head of cattle can be watered. The water is drawn up by means of a "whim" and a big bucket worked by an old whim horse, whose daily round is confined to a circle of about sixty feet or so. Alongside each well is a big steel-plate tank capable of holding some thousands of gallons of water, which can be run into long troughs.

It is a most wonderful sight to watch the thousands of birds that water here; shell parrots, tom-tits, Java sparrows, finches, small grey doves no bigger than sparrows, and cockatoos of all kinds. Hovering over all might be seen the ever-hungry hawk, waiting his opportunity to swoop down and annex any small bird that exposed himself to his fury. I was glad to note however, that the weaker birds were adepts at keeping cover, and, although Master Hawk made many feints and artful ruses, he rarely succeeded in getting a



Lonely Lands.

THE BIKE AND MOTOR IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

bird to fly out and give him a chance. Whilst I was having a meal there some of the smaller birds came and took shelter under the kit on my bicycle. They evidently trusted me. (I know some people who won't.)

It is a humane rule of the road always to draw a few bucketfuls of water for the feathered friends of the bush. If you can stop a white cockatoo's screeching he makes a very fine dish, either roasted or stewed. A small rabbit trap used with discretion brings in many a meal. If the same plan were pursued in some of our suburbs where cockies are "kept" it would be appreciated by many a long-suffering neighbour, although it might end in a lawsuit instead of a meal.

On the way down to Alice Springs I had splendid fast cycling. About thirty-five miles north of the Springs I met Messrs. Dutton and Auger on their second attempt to cross Australia in a motor car, a feat which they happily accomplished. It might seem rather a singular thing that we couldn't miss each other in the heart of Australia, but we really met by arrangement made over the wires.

The popular idea about Alice Springs is that it is in the middle of a desert, whereas it is right in the



Lovely Lands.

CAMEL MAIL, ALICE SPRINGS, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

heart of the Macdonnell Ranges. The township, called Stuart, consisting of a few houses, a store, and the inevitable "pub.," is on a scrub and grass flat, surrounded and overtopped by high mountains on every side. It is approached through a wonderful gap on the north side by following the steep, winding path of a dry creek, which, in course of ages, has carved its way through the mighty rocks on the mountain side.

A day's journey by bike are the famous Arltunga gold fields, which, in spite of high freights from the south, still manage to pay their way.

There are approximately a thousand camels carrying goods up, most of them driven by Afghans and, in some cases, owned by them as well. These Afghans are allowed to carry firearms and have their revolvers stuck conspicuously in their belts. Relying on their arms they treat the natives badly, and more than once the white people have had to interfere to stop trouble. The chief cause of the trouble is that the Afghan lures the nigger's gin away from him and very often leaves her stranded hundreds of miles away from her own tribe. When captured by another tribe she is, according to aboriginal custom, subjected to all sorts of indignities and becomes a slave and a chattel amongst her captors.

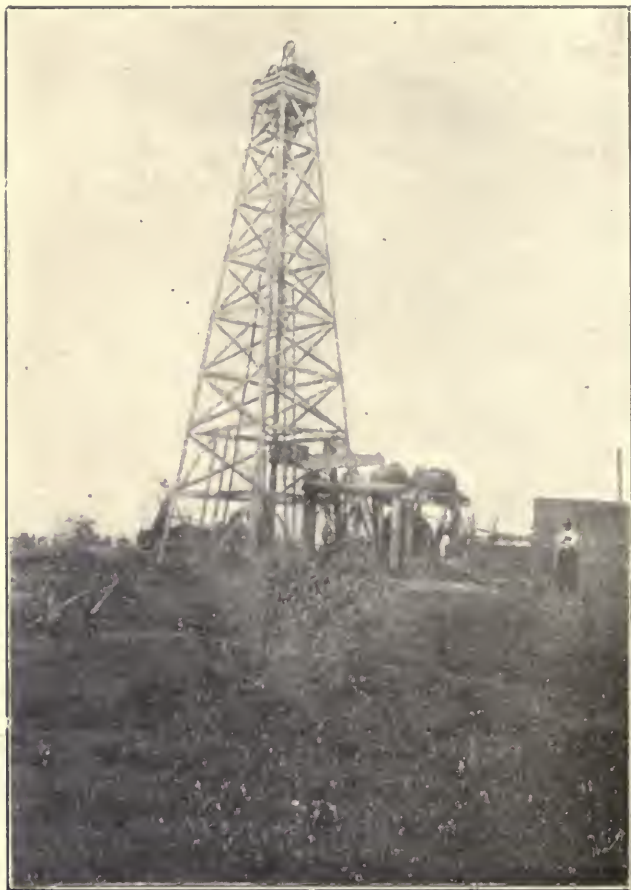


Lonely Lands. A TYPICAL CAMEL WAGGON, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

There are others than Afghans who are far from blameless in their treatment of the native women, and they are not blacks. Right through the Territory the blacks are unprotected from a moral point of view, and it is time that South Australia passed some effective legislation to protect the native races. I have known of native women kept against their wishes, and, if they ran away, they were "tracked" down by "boys," brought back, and beaten for trying to escape. Such things to my knowledge do not happen in Queensland or elsewhere in Australia. As soon as the borders are reached the gins are either sold or bartered.

After leaving Alice Springs the rain started again, and for three days and three nights I had to camp out in a continuous drizzle and go on short rations to boot. On the first night I managed to make a fire and steamed alongside it all night. Yet in this sandy country I could get no water for the billy. The next night I camped inside a large rock cave, and noticing that it was damp I swabbed down the sides of my shelter and succeeded in wringing out as much as did for a drink. I drank that water reverently, with my eyes closed.

On reaching Ooraminna Rocks, and just after having had my harrier replenished, I had the misfortune



BORING FOR WATER (JUNCTION BORE), CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.
Lonely Lands.

to have my premises burgled by a wild dog. I had left my bike and gone for a little excursion off the track, when the brute came along and tore open my "blanket" and collared a bit of meat that was wrapped in it, and which I had been husbanding with a view to a tit-bit tea. On returning, I found that he had dragged bike and all that belonged thereto right into the scrub and was having a right royal time. He had just eaten down to the bone when I surprised him, but one good blow with a stick was all I could get in, although I chased him through the scrub for half a mile. But he knew his way about and bested me at every turn. I retraced my steps a wiser and a sadder man, and went to bed without that *bonne bouche* tea I had talked of. It was my turn to be wild and I was so.

This happened on a Friday, but I don't suppose that had anything to do with the final disaster. I am not superstitious as a rule, but it is rather a coincidence that this should come to be told at the end of chapter thirteen. Perhaps some of my readers who have devoted their leisure to the study of the occult sciences may be able to enlighten me.





23RD SEPTEMBER, 1908.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE SPRINGS TO ADELAIDE, 1200 MILES.

ADELAIDE TO MELBOURNE, 700 MILES.

MELBOURNE TO SYDNEY, 570 MILES.

VARIOUS CROSS RUNS ON JOURNEY,
182 MILES.

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*Rare Accommodation—Rabbits—The Stony Desert—
Home Again.*

THE depot sandhills were heavy travelling, as the surface had been broken up by camels, but sitting down to bemoan the state of the "roads" was of no avail, so I just kept plugging along.

At one of the mail changes I camped for the night, and you ought to have seen the "accommodation." It is certainly indescribable, but here are the dry facts. The only erection in the vicinity was a two-roomed hut, in which were found two gins, a few piecaninnies, two bucks, about thirty goats, and six canine mothers with their litters, all huddled round the fire in what we might term, for want of a better name, the kitchen.

I bargained for the room, "with the use of the kitchen," as the advertisements have it, for there was no other shelter of any kind about and the wind was blowing bitterly cold. So I entered into possession and made arrangements to cook my evening meal, whilst the other lodgers looked on in abject indifference. All except the goats, who crowded round me and impeded me to such an extent that I had to use both my boots and my frying pan to ward them off. Perhaps they noticed that my pan was a bit dry and, as every goat there considered himself a good butter, he desired to offer his services. Be that as it may, I was not long in getting warmed up, for, between the heat of the small room and the heat of my temper, I was like toast before I reached my supper. I can conscientiously say I never ate a meal surrounded by so many noisy claimants for a scrap in my life before. What with the dogs, the goats and the little piceaninnies I was in a fair stew; but the bucks and the gins held themselves aloof. And it was well that it was so, for, if I had had two gins thrown in, my case would have been desperate indeed. It would have been a strong incentive to sign the pledge. When I "retired" to my room I found it quite impossible to sleep, for the goats



CROSSING THE STONY DESERT, NEAR OODNADATTA, SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Lonely Lands.

were huddled against the partition and kept up a continual scuffling, bleating, and clattering of hoofs on the stone floor, whilst the dogs fought them for the warmest corners. After vainly trying to compose myself to this music, I gave up the unequal contest and cleared out before daybreak.

Rabbits began to be numerous now, and spills were common on account of my bike breaking through the surface over their burrows. The first I had met up north was eighty miles above Alice Springs, after that they were everywhere.

At Charlotte Waters I was out on to the "gibber" country: big, open, stony plains stretched away as far as the eye could see—the "Stony Desert" of the early explorers. The general colour of the country is a blood-red, and the glitter of the sunlight on the stones is very trying to the eyes. At Oodnadatta I was once more into civilisation and on to the railway line. I passed across the southern end of Lake Eyre, with its white, gleaming expanse of salt. Here I gathered some petrified shells (one of the curiosities of this country) and inspected the natural artesian mineral waters. Some parts of the country are twenty-eight feet below sea-level.

I passed through a heavy sand storm, and then with



Lonely Lands.

OVER THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, N. S. W.

a gale and a half behind me, rode into Hergott Springs. From thence I passed through the beautiful, snow-clad mountains around Beltana, down to Petersburg, with its smiling valleys, and on to Adelaide. Along the road that ribbons round the coast of Victoria from Adelaide to Geelong and Melbourne one meets such easy going, by comparison with the "wilds," that very little happens to disturb the even tenor of one's way, and the route is so well known that further description is superfluous. It was the comparatively unknown country that appealed to me and that I have attempted, in most meagre manner, to describe. But as there is little mystery about the road from Melbourne to Sydney, and, as many cyclists have traversed the route before, giving descriptions more or less graphic, it is sufficient for the purpose of this book to say that I duly covered the ground that was necessary to complete my record round and arrived in Sydney on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 23rd, 1908.

I had thus covered a distance of eight thousand three hundred miles and been thirteen months on the trip.

Before closing this chapter I would like to express my gratitude to those cyclists who came out as far as

Liverpool and Bankstown to welcome me home again. There were too many of them for me to mention individuals, and the nearer we came to the city the greater grew the procession, until we made quite an imposing spectacle as we swept up Brickfield Hill and along George Street to Market Street, and thus completed the circuit.

The members of the Sydney Bicycle Club and the Cyclists' Union entertained me in their rooms on the afternoon of my arrival, and assured me, in various voices, that they considered me "a jolly good fellow," which nobody could deny.

It was a sentiment that I was pleased to hear, although, had some of these gentlemen seen me when things were "otherwise," they might have altered their adjectives and changed their tune.

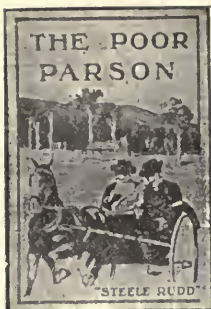
To those readers who have accompanied me right through I offer my sympathy and my thanks. They deserve both.

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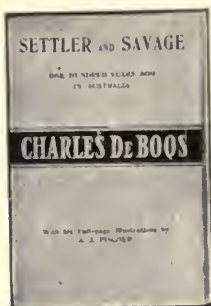
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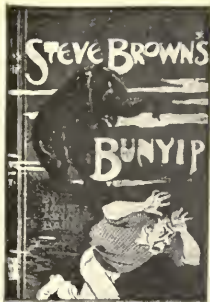
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But the faith o' men that have
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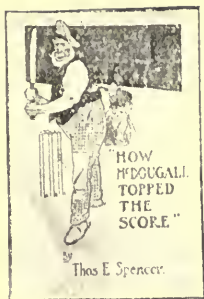
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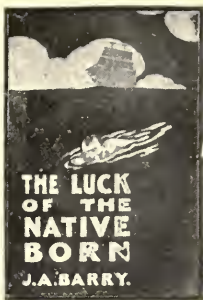
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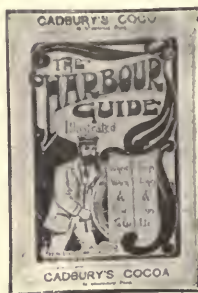
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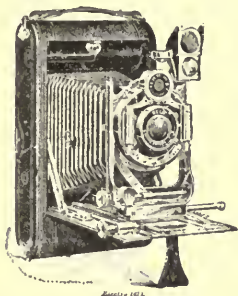
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