

BY FLOOD
AND FIELD

ADVENTURES ASHORE AND AFT
IN NORTH AUSTRALIA

ALFRED SEARCY

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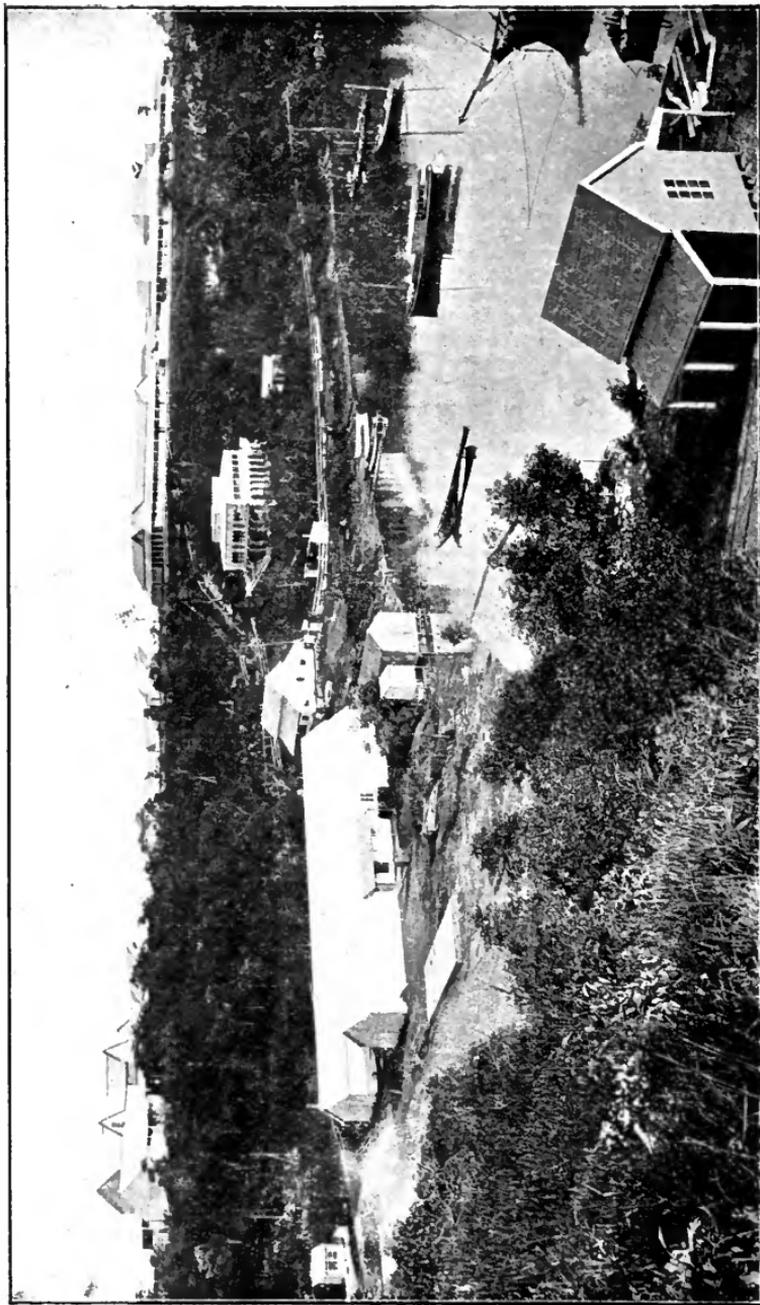


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PORT DARWIN FROM FORT HILL.

Paul Foelsche.

BY FLOOD AND FIELD

Adventures Ashore and Afloat
in North Australia

By
ALFRED SEARCY

Author of
"In Australian Tropics"



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GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

OF THE

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

AND ITS DEPENDENCIES.

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PREFACE

AS I never read a preface unless it be as an afterthought, and only then if brevity has been observed, it would be inconsistent on my part to do more than state that this book is the outcome of a desire, in the first place, to draw attention to the wonderful and varied resources of that portion of our Island Continent known as the Northern Territory ; and, in the second, to set down for the delectation of young and old some of my adventures during strenuous years spent in that much-neglected portion of the great British Empire.

If the reader derive profit or pleasure from this book, his thanks must go to Mrs. Æneas Gunn, authoress of that charming work, *We of the Never Never*, for it was her kindly and reiterated request that chiefly impelled me to the congenial task.

ALFRED SEARCY.

ADELAIDE,
SOUTH AUSTRALIA,
April, 1911.

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CHAPTER I

Introductory

I WONDER how many know, or, having known, remember that the North Coast of Australia was first discovered as far back as the year 1572? The continent was visited several times during the seventeenth century by the sea rovers of those days; but they do not appear to have been favourably impressed with the country or its inhabitants. During the reign of Charles II, the British Ambassador at the Hague, Sir William Temple, reported, as a long-known verity, that a great Southern Continent existed to the south of Java; that its extent was unknown; and that the Dutch authorities had forbidden any further attempt to add to the then knowledge of the discovery under heavy penalties, having as much trade in their hands as they could manage. It had also been reported that the Dutch East India Company had acted in a similar manner, and for the same reason, coupled with a fear that other European Powers might want to take part in any further development, if that were attempted.

About two centuries ago the Malays from Macassar found their way to the coast, which they continued to visit annually, until recently, in search of trepang (*bêche-de-mer*), pearls, and pearl shell. There is little doubt that long before any settlement by white men had taken place in Australia the aborigines of the North Coast were accustomed to visit Macassar; and to this day all the coast

blacks to the east of Port Darwin speak the Malay language.

In 1824 the British Government founded a settlement on Melville Island, and subsequently others on the mainland; but they were not a success, and the last one was abandoned in 1849.

In 1864 the South Australian Government attempted to form a settlement at Escape Cliffs, but it, too, proved a costly failure.

The present capital of the Northern Territory, Port Darwin, may be said to have been first settled in 1869. As the name "Northern Territory" does not convey an adequate idea of the situation of the territory so named, I will give, as briefly as possible, the fuller information needed.

The Northern Territory, then, is the northern portion of the Australian Continent that was annexed to South Australia by Royal Letters Patent in 1863. It is bound on the north by the Arafura Sea, or Indian Ocean; on the south by the 26th parallel of latitude; on the east by the 138th meridian of east longitude, and on the west by the 129th meridian of east longitude. This vast region contains approximately 531,400 square miles, or 340,096,000 acres; about equal in area to that of France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy combined. It is nearly four-and-a-half ($4\frac{1}{2}$) times the size of the United Kingdom; while in some of the cattle stations two Yorkshires could be dropped.

The coast, of which there is a line of 1,200 miles, is for the most part low and flat, bounded by sandy beaches at intervals, but generally by mud flats and mangroves.

Now let me give a few facts about the country itself, which is nearly all in the tropics, or torrid zone. From what is known from authorities up to the present and from

personal knowledge, Mr. H. Y. L. Brown, the South Australian Government Geologist, classifies it thus :—

“ Pastoral country, well watered, good soil along Rivers and Creeks, tropical vegetation and coarse grass, good feed after burning, subject to tropical rainfall (54 inches Port Darwin, 19 inches Daly Waters for 1905), parts metal bearing and probably coal bearing.—Approximate Area, 158,000 Square Miles.

“ Good Pastoral country, often rich volcanic soil, well grassed Basaltic, Sandstone, and Limestone Hills, wide plains and river flats well watered, subject to intermittent tropical rains.—Approximate Area, 34,300 Square Miles.

“ First-class Pastoral country : open, well grassed, rich soil ; possibly agricultural, subject to intermittent tropical rains.—Approximate Area, 29,000 Square Miles.

“ Patches of good country for Pastoral purposes, chiefly along Creeks and Rivers, patches of spinifex scrub and sandhills. Uncertain rainfall, parts metal bearing.—Approximate Area, 148,000 Square Miles.

“ Spinifex, Scrub and Sandhill country, with patches of inferior Pastoral country, badly watered and uncertain rainfall. Parts metal bearing.—Approximate Area, 162,100 Square Miles.”

It is well known that there is no better country for horse and cattle breeding in Australia than in this vast area, if, indeed, it can be surpassed in the world. Also, that the portion known as the Barclay Tablelands, situated between the 17th and 21st degrees of south latitude and extending from the Queensland border to the telegraph line, is suitable for sheep ; and it is estimated that from ten to fifteen million of these could be depastured thereon. That the northernmost portion of the country is an ideal place for buffalo we have ample proof. When the old military settlements were abandoned a few of these ani-

mals—the water buffalo of Timor—were left behind. They increased and spread until now they are occasionally seen in Queensland. During the last thirty years some fifty thousand have been shot for their hides and horns, the flesh of the animals being wasted.

There are numerous rivers, some of which are navigable for deep-sea craft for a considerable distance. On the head waters of these and the tributaries there is splendid country where mixed farming could be carried on, and without doubt will be, with great success. When I say “mixed farming,” I mean the growing of sub-tropical products and the breeding of certain animals, particularly angora goats and pigs. Bacon curing will yet be a great industry in the Territory. That tropical products, properly so called, will do well has been abundantly shown, and a large area suitable for such lies waiting for enterprise near the coast and the rivers and swamps. It is stated that the area in the Territory suited to tropical growths is about the size of the island of Java (the tropical garden of the world) and of Madura combined, which lie so close to Port Darwin. These islands are about a sixth of the size of the Territory, yet they have some 36,000,000 inhabitants to contrast with our two or three thousand.

The question as to whether tropical agriculture can be profitably carried on with white labour has yet to be settled ; but of this I am certain, that the mixed farming I have spoken of can be.

The country is known to be rich in minerals. Gold, silver, tin, copper and wolfram have been found in large quantities, yet comparatively little of the country has been prospected, and this only adjacent to the telegraph line in an indifferent manner. One can imagine the area yet to be exploited. Read what the Rev. Tenison Woods has to say about it :—“ I can confidently assert that the

Northern Territory is exceptionally rich in minerals, only a small portion of which has been made known to the public. I do not believe that the same quantity of minerals, veins of gold, silver, tin, copper and lead will be found in any equal area in Australia. In fact I doubt if many provinces will be found in any country so singularly and exceptionally favoured as Arnheim's Land in respect to mineral riches. The peninsula of Arnheim's Land will eventually become one of the greatest mining centres of Australia."

In addition to the undeveloped wealth I have mentioned, there is on the coast the pearl-shell fishing and trepanging. The waters abound with magnificent edible fish, and a great industry could be established in curing, drying and otherwise preserving them for export. In this connection a portable preserving outfit might be added for the outlying islands, so that these could be worked in conjunction with like establishments on the mainland.

The coast of North Australia has many magnificent harbours, and, having seen them all, I can say Port Darwin is the best. It is most central, has deep water, is perfectly protected, and could be fortified with ease. The great rise and fall in the tide offers natural facilities for docking vessels.

Yet this fine coast, this grand country, although the first to be seen by Europeans, is to-day the least developed. Why it is so is a conundrum I should be sorry to have to answer. If I attempted to do so I might hurt the feelings of those who, in part, have been responsible for this unsatisfactory state of things, and perchance injure myself without doing good.

In face of the fact that this portion of our island continent is Australian in name only, does it not behove us to bestir ourselves and prove to the world that we are worthy

of the great inheritance, lest some foreign power, making our lethargy an excuse, step in and use it for us? The vacant places of the earth are becoming fewer every day; while many countries are congested with population. What, then, more natural than that those who have the interests of their peoples and countries at heart should think of a vast territory like ours languishing for the very power that is theirs in superabundance?

I have often wondered what the history of New Holland would have been had the early sea rovers known the riches of the land they accidentally found, and carelessly turned their backs upon. Certainly very different from what it is at present. No doubt our grand old flag would be flying over at least a portion of this fair land, but probably by force of arms instead of by peaceful conquest. Having such a country, should we not do our best to induce our people here and beyond seas to engage in the work of its development, and so place our safety on a sounder footing, while adding to the power and resources of our great Empire?

To the young man with courage and industry I would say:—Go to the Northern Territory; I know of no better field for such as you.

That occupation and development must and will come I feel confident; and then Port Darwin, which, from its geographical position, is the front door of Australia, will become its Singapore, and the great entrepôt of trade with the East.

Having given the facts that I trust will inspire many to action, I will now relate some of my adventures in this land I love to praise.

CHAPTER II

Blown out to Sea

THOUGH it is now many years since I said farewell to the Northern Territory, the recollection of my life there is so vivid and thorough that, seemingly, not one incident of importance has escaped me. You will, dear reader, have noted that a sound, a song, a wind-whisper, or a wafted perfume will recall incidents, the memory of which has lain dormant for years. Well, often by such agencies are awakened for me the old-time days, and I am again in the jungle, mangroves and swamps. And who, having once come beneath the spell, the wonderful fascination of the tropics, can ever forget it? Kipling felt it when he wrote :

“ If you’ve ’eard the East a-calling,
You won’t never ’eed naught else.”

It seems to me that the love of roving and adventure was a natural instinct with me, derived doubtless from my father, who, as a soldier, saw much service in the “ John Company’s Bombay Artillery,” under Sir Charles Napier.

This being so, it is not perhaps strange that while still little more than a lad, I found myself on a schooner trading in the Indian Ocean among the Jenimber Islands, lying eighty miles south-west of New Guinea. They are under the Dutch Government, and were jealously guarded against traders of other nationalities, so much so that a fleet of pearling boats belonging to an English company were strictly kept outside the limit by a small gunboat. If a

boat wanted wood or water her diving gear had to be placed on the store ship which accompanied the fleet before venturing to land.

One day, when off Selaru Island, I started, with the permission of the skipper, in the dinghy on a fishing excursion along the coast. I was passionately fond of the sport, and would take all risks for a turn at it. Before long I was gently drifting, having good fun, and taking no thought of the weather, when down came one of those sudden squalls so common in the tropics. It was accompanied by thick, heavy rain. Realizing my danger, not without fear, I plied my paddles with all the power at my command, in an endeavour to make the land. Snap went one of the blades, and I fell backwards in the boat, striking my head against the bottom with such force that I saw a multitude of stars. At the same instant the other paddle slipped from my hand, leaving me powerless, and at the mercy of the gale. I had no kellick (anchor), and as the wind was right off the land, out to sea I sped. The rain fell so thick that anything beyond a few yards was completely hidden, leaving me no hope of being seen by those on the schooner. Once over my fright I saw the necessity of keeping the boat before the wind, so I tore out a bottom board, which I used with fair success as a steer oar. On and on I went. The light of day waned, and with its going the strength died out of the squall, though a stiff gale still blew. By this time I had grown faint with hunger, but I had no water, and nothing better than raw fish to eat. However, I made as good a meal as my unsavoury provender would admit of.

All through the night I travelled I knew not where, and when day broke I found myself on a heavy, tumbling sea. The schooner on which I had served was at no time a missionary one, so that the habit of saying prayers had fallen

into abeyance, but now, helpless and alone on heaving leagues of ocean, I prayed most fervently. The wind had fallen away, and the sun shone out in all its intensity. The heat became greater and greater, which, added to a thirst I could not slake, seemed to consume me, and I fell into a semi-conscious state. While in this condition there was another blow, but when it came or when it passed I could not say. A delightful sensation was the next thing I knew—that of something cool trickling down my throat, and I opened my eyes to see a number of dark men bending over me. Some were partly clad with a kind of shirt, others wore short trousers, while all had gaudy handkerchiefs tied round their heads. They were kind, and provided salt fish and rice, of which I ate, and then fell into a deep sleep. After a long rest I awoke. The craft I then found was a proa¹ of some ten tons, manned by Malays. I knew noth-

¹ Compared with modern sea-going craft the proa can scarcely be called beautiful, although picturesque; and when it is remembered that it is exactly the same to-day as it was centuries ago, and figures in no end of piratical raids carried out by these swarthy Malays, it is not without a certain wild romantic interest. The hull of the proa is of wood, very high at the stern and low at the bow. The timbers are fastened with trenails and the caulking is of leaves cemented together. The top, sides, and deck roof are of bamboos, the sails are of matting, while many of the ropes and hawsers are of plaited cane. Some carry iron anchors and others wooden ones, to which latter stones are lashed. When a wooden anchor is used a man is sent down into the sea to make everything nice and snug at the bottom. They have two rudders, one on each side of the square stern, slung in cane becketts, and so fixed that when getting into shoal water they can be hauled up. When the craft is in deep water they go down several feet below the proa's bottom and act as centre boards, or keels, to steady her. The mast is a kind of tripod, the after upright being stouter than the others and fitted with steps on which the sailor-men stand when hoisting the sail. The other uprights act as stays. The sail is of matting stretched on two bamboo yards of

B

ing of Malayan, nor they of English, but gathered from their signs that they had sighted my boat, made for it thinking they had a prize, and so rescued me.

It was evident the Malays had been driven off the land in the gale I had experienced; and knew no more than I as to their whereabouts. That they were in an anxious state was evidenced by the eager look-out they kept. During the afternoon heavy clouds banked up, and not long afterwards it came on to blow furiously again. There was nothing for it but to let the craft run before the wind, and the men at the rudders found all their skill and strength was needed for this. The craft was flying light, her tripod mast acting as a sort of sail, so that if it had not been for the deep-set rudders we must have been blown clean over. As it was, each moment threatened to be our last. This continued for three days, we living—or rather existing—on salt fish and water. On the night of the third day, it being intensely dark, breakers were seen ahead, but we were powerless to do other than race, apparently to our doom. What moments! Right through great crested breakers we dashed, each of us hang-

immense length and of such girth that a section would make a fair-sized bucket. These yards are suspended in a manner that admits of their being inclined in any direction—straight up, slanting, or horizontal—whichever suits best for the wind. At the end of the lower yards is fitted a cross handle, so that when it is desired to furl or reef this can be done by its aid. There is a sort of bowsprit upon which two or three small sails can be set. The deck is of split bamboo or rattan, bound together with wire or fibre, and can be rolled up at pleasure. Near the nose is the skipper's cabin, to enter which you have to crawl on your hands and knees, while over the stern are a number of small cabins made of bamboo, the whole having the appearance of a large pigeon house. The hull is divided into several compartments, in one of which water is carried. The galley consists of an iron pan full of sand.

ing on for dear life ; while the waves curled over us in such rapid succession that the boat seemed speeding beneath instead of through them. At last the climax came. With a mighty swirl the proa was dashed upon the beach, torn asunder and strewn in a thousand pieces, and we, with the debris, were carried by the rushing flood high up on the beach. As the back-wash set in I dug my hands into the sand, and when left by the retreating water scrambled to safety, there to find the master of the proa and his five men. Hungry, and sorely in need of water, we presented a picture of abject misery. To add to our terrors a terrific thunderstorm broke over us, followed by torrential rain. Never did I see more vivid lightning. The flashes leapt from every part of the sable dome, some in the far distance and others perilously near, zigzagging and writhing like immense serpents of fire. With each flash the sea and land were as distinctly visible as if the brightest sunlight prevailed. The beach, which was littered with the remains of our proa, rose somewhat abruptly, backed by open forest country and jungle. In between the terrific peals of thunder there fell on the ear the long-drawn wail of the wind and the booming of the waves as they broke on the shore. Cold and miserable, but with our thirst quenched, we awaited daylight. Before it came the storm and rain had ceased, and we were cheered by a lovely, star-bespangled, tropical sky, which seemed an earnest of better fortune to come. What we had passed through was in all conscience bad enough ; but, as the sequel proved, it was but the prelude to a more terrible ordeal.

CHAPTER III

A Tragic Sequel

AFTER a seemingly interminable space of time day at last dawned—lovely and unmarred by the evils wrought through the hours of darkness. Beyond a range of troubled water the sea was a dead calm, the rain having beaten down the great waves, while the sandy beach below us was fringed with foam left by the small rollers. We recovered from the wreckage two large knives, three spears with iron heads, two old flint guns, a pistol, two bows, and several arrows. After the rigours of the night we revelled in the warmth of the morning, and the delicious odours rising from the damp earth and wafted from the jungle. But when “Old Jamaica” was well above the horizon we were equally glad to seek the comfort of the shade. I made a substitute for a hat from a piece of old sarong, giving it a lining of large leaves as an added safeguard against the sun’s rays. My raiment consisted of dungaree trousers and a thin singlet. Whether the impression arises from the cool of the early morning being contrasted with the heat which prevails an hour after the sun has started on his diurnal journey, I cannot say ; but it always seemed to me that the heat then was more trying than at any other period of the twenty-four hours.

By this time we were all as hungry as hunters, but the want of food gave me no alarm, for I was in the company

of crafty providers. On the shore near where we were resting stood a large, dome-shaped block of coral, in a pool of water left by the receding tide. To this walked one of the Malays who, having examined it, thrust his spear into a hole below the water-line, and next moment, with a yell of glee, held up a three-pound fish. This was repeated in other holes, until he had speared a dozen fine "fellows." So far so good, but what about the cooking? I clapped my hand on my hip pocket and gave a cheer as I felt the flint and steel I had always carried were still there. One of my companions, knowing their use, brought from the bush a piece of bark, composed of paper-like flakes, and quite dry. This, the paper-bark tree, resembles the gum, and only grows in swampy ground. In a little more than no time we had a fine fire blazing, our fuel being drift-wood and wreckage; and on this the fish were placed as they came from the water. If you desire the real and best flavour of fish, that is the way to cook them. The skin peels off with the scales, the internals form into a ball, and the natural juice and fat are retained. And what a feast we had, and how invigorating the sleep that followed!—unbroken by a dream of danger. Only those who have experienced the pangs of hunger, and the exhaustion that follows a struggle for life, know how to say a grace or sleep as sleeps a child.

The sun worked round until it found and aroused us from sleep. Then came a "yabber," on my part with signs, and it was decided that we should follow the sun with a view to picking up a white man's camp, which one of the crew thought existed in the west. So a start was made, each man carrying what little treasure he had recovered from the wreckage. The skipper, who was a remarkably big man, carried the guns, and I had a piece of wood to use as a walking stick. We were soon amongst

the trees, and I speedily had convincing proof that my bare feet were to have a bad time of it. However, before long we came to a sort of path made by large cattle, judging by the tracks, and by following this we avoided the grass. A couple of miles having been covered, we came to a fine clump of jungle on a rise. Below us stretched a lagoon, two or three acres in extent, and standing at its margin were a buffalo cow and calf. Being bare-footed, our approach had not been heard by the animals, but they soon got our wind, and made off into the thick timber. The horns of the cow as she drank from the lagoon, seemed of great length, but when she poked out her nose in flight, they appeared to lie along her back. For such cumbersome beasts they displayed remarkable agility. The sudden rush of the buffalo started many varieties of water-fowl, numbers of which, after circling round, again settled on the water. The lagoon was surrounded by a fringe of high reeds, and beyond these, until the forest was reached, the grass was from eight to ten feet high, just beginning to change colour and indicating that the dry season was well advanced.

The lagoon, viewed from the deep gloom of the jungle, with its patches of water lilies and its coveys of water fowl swimming hither and thither, searching for food, was a picture of peace and sweet content. Alas, how soon was this same locality to be the scene of base treachery and bloodshed. We had been resting some time, and were thinking of resuming our journey, when about a dozen black men appeared. With one exception they were fine, stalwart fellows, nearly six feet in height, perfectly naked, and by no means bad-looking. The exception was a stout, strongly-built man, some inches shorter, with a vicious cast of countenance. Each carried two or three spears. We leaped to our feet, and as we

did so, the short native addressed the Malays, and all were soon talking freely, which surprised me. During the conversation I frequently heard the names "Marigi," "Rob," and "Tingha," showing they had some knowledge in common. At last the small man, who seemed to be the "boss," turned to me, and in very good English asked who I was. I related what had occurred, and he in turn, said his name was Wandi Wandi. He also gave the names of his comrades, but retention of them was beyond my memory, although I recognized two of them afterwards, and with great reason. Wandi Wandi said he would lead us to a trepang camp belonging to a white named Rob, and which was only a "piccaninny" way off. I then thought the phrase meant a little way, but subsequently found it meant anything from a few yards to a hundred miles. He also informed me that "Tingha" was in charge of one of "Rob's" camps, and that Marigi was the Malay name for the country we were in, meaning "all same blackfellow's country," or unknown land.

By this time I had begun to have misgivings as to the friendly intentions of the blacks, for Wandi Wandi gave me every now and then a look that sent a cold sensation to my heart. Have you ever, reader, been in a boat when a big shark has come alongside, and marked the monster's eyes as it surveyed the occupants? If so, you can form some idea of the veiled danger that lay in the furtive glance of this evil-looking savage. But I did my best not to betray suspicion, while endeavouring to glean information as to our position and the chances of reaching a settlement. After the Malays and blacks had talked for some time, seemingly on the best of terms, the Australians conversed apart. From their excited manner it was apparent something serious was being discussed,

and that two of them, Mangerippy and Arranboom, who spoke broken English, were opposed to what was being urged by the others, especially by Wandi Wandi. However, they yielded to the majority, and after a few words to the Malays, matters were got ready for a start.

Then, swift as a bolt from the blue, the peaceful scene was changed to one of ruthless savagery. With tiger-like spring Mangerippy and Arranboom threw themselves upon me, and down I went on the broad of my back with the savages on top of me. I made a desperate struggle for liberty, but I was like a child in their grasp, and quickly realized the futility of resistance. Then I saw Wandi Wandi snatch the guns from the hands of the skipper, and as he did so another black struck him with a weapon on the head from behind with such force that I heard the crash of the bones. Death must have been instantaneous. The other Malays made an effort to escape, but with no hope, for all, with one exception, were dispatched at once, and much in the same way as the first had been. The exception made a bold rush for life, but a stick thrown with unerring accuracy, brought the poor fellow to the ground, and before he could rise he was dispatched with a tomahawk. All now were dead but myself; and you can imagine how in fear and trembling, with the perspiration pouring from me, and my tongue tied with terror and thirst, I waited for my fate. Minutes that seemed like hours passed, and still I was spared, though guarded by the natives who had thrown me down. Then by degrees I began to hope that for some reason or other my life was not to be taken. Those implicated in the bloody work drove a spear into each body, my captors, seemingly against their will, having to do the same; and lastly I, led by two of the murderers,

had to touch the spears in each. This rite over, which may have signified that we were all then alike guilty, I was taken charge of by Arranboom and Mangerippy, shallow graves were scooped out at the spot where we had rested in peace and harmony so short a time before, and the evil work hidden by the earth.

Wandi Wandi, at this stage, was graciously pleased to state they would not kill me so long as I did not try to run away; but I felt sure that I was in no way indebted to him for my life, which had been spared because I was powerless in the hands of Mangerippy and Arranboom. They were evidently my friends, and I determined to cling close to them. An attempt to escape from such fleet-footed, keen-eyed bloodhounds as the others had shown themselves to be, would indeed have been courting certain destruction.

The blacks then returned to the beach, where they gathered up the wreckage and burnt it, removing all trace of the disaster. Wandi Wandi told me that the place was known to white men as Point Brogden, and to black-fellows as Mandool.

It being now well on towards sundown, it was decided to remain till the morning, the natives being greatly averse to night travelling. The evening meal consisted of fish from the shallow water, speared in the most dexterous manner, and roots from an adjacent swamp. These were cooked in the hot coals, and made a passable dish. The meal over, the natives lay back and were soon asleep, but not so with me. The strain of the past hours had so affected my nerves that it was long before I was blessed with oblivion. I awoke as the sun was appearing above the horizon, and for a few moments could not imagine where I was. Then the horrors of the previous day rushed to my mind, and a strong depression seized me.

This with an effort I threw off, for I knew that all my strength and courage would be required for the ordeal before me, which I determined to see through with a stout heart.

CHAPTER IV

At Wark

ANOTHER meal of fish cooked in the coals having been disposed of, a start was made inland, the way taken being nor'-west. It led through open forest country, with here and there a belt of jungle, and at intervals lagoons surrounded by patches devoid of timber, but covered with tall grass, which would have made the travelling very trying for any one but a darkskin. The leader never hesitated, and seemed to be travelling to his goal with the certainty of a homing pigeon. The pace of the party had to be that of mine, which did not please some of them, especially Wandí Wandí. At the end of three hours or so a halt was called for our midday meal, when my companions again showed their skill as providers. One scaled a tall palm, the top of which he cut off; a second, after some searching, climbed a hollow tree, and with his tomahawk cut a hole from which he hauled out a mass of comb, dripping with honey; while a third, as the result of his fossicking, returned with a large iguana. A fire was speedily set going by means of a firestick brought from the beach, and on this the lizard was placed. While this tit-bit was cooking the wild honey and cabbage-palm centre were partaken of. The honey I found very palatable, as also the cabbage palm, which had a flavour of almonds. The lizard course proved better than it looked. When torn asunder it had the appearance of

delicate chicken, and I found a piece, handed to me by Arranboom, much more tender and tasty than many a chicken I had struggled with. At the risk of being thought callous I must admit that I enjoyed the meal, for I was young and hearty, and the natural craving for food rose superior to the estimate of my company or the memory of their heartless crimes. And then I had trust in the two natives who had saved my life, and would still protect me if protection were needed.

Our journey so far had been uneventful. We had fallen in with many buffaloes, and wild fowl were disturbed in great numbers at every lagoon. There was one bird which particularly attracted my attention. It was about the size of a domestic pigeon, of slate colour, and squatted on the ground until almost trodden on, when it would dart off with a whirr to alight on the top of some tall tree. It is known as the squatter pigeon, and is, with one exception, the best for human consumption among the almost endless varieties so suited in this country.

After the blacks had satisfied themselves with food, they made cigarettes with grass-like tobacco, found in one of the Malay's boxes, rolling it up in pandanus leaf. In passing, I may state that fresh water is usually found at the roots of the pandanus tree, and the natives choose its base at which to sink for supplies. The trees grow in clumps, and burn as readily as dry wood drenched in kerosene, the flames roaring as they do their work.

When our rest was considered long enough, the journey was resumed through country similar to that passed in the forenoon. I was suffering much from lacerated feet, but had to tramp on. While doing so I noted balls of leaves hanging from the branches, seemingly gummed

together, and about the size of small cocoa-nuts. One of these I plucked, when I was immediately covered with large green ants, each armed with powers sufficient to send the most lethargic on a war-dance. How they stang ! and how my dusky mates laughed ! But for me, it was no laughing matter, and it was not till Arranboom and Mangerippy had come to my aid that I got rid of my foes.

On and on we went until sunset, when from the distance came the sound of cooees, to which my fellows answered. Then we climbed up a small rise overlooking a creek running into a fair-sized waterhole. On the crest of this were a number of native humpies, made of boughs and sheets of bark, and from each there rushed barking mongrels, mangy beasts ; but at strong language from Wandi Wandi they slunk away. Then what seemed the whole of the members of the camp came out to receive us, and my presence excited great interest. What explanation Wandi Wandi made I cannot say. He did a lot of talking, if not of lying, and the reason given by him for the possession of the property of the murdered Malays did not in the least disturb the crowd. Thus we came to Wark, the aboriginal name for the camp.

After the excitement had abated, I went to the creek and bathed my feet, tying them up in the rag I had used as my head covering. On returning I was addressed by a rather good-looking, clean black in excellent English. Surprised, I asked if he had been to school ? No, he had not, but had worked a long time at Port Essington for white men, one of those mentioned being a prominent legislator in South Australia. He had also been employed on a sugar plantation at Port Darwin. He gloried in the name of Tim Finnigan, and I was tremendously taken with him.

The "boss" of the camp, a great fellow, known as Big Jack, also displayed much interest in me, but the others eyed me with evident suspicion.

After a meal composed of baked roots and birds, which, as usual, had been put on the fire as brought in, I lay back near one of the fires for rest, having, I should add, declined an invitation from Mr. Finnigan to stay in one of the humpies. Before long the camp people started a corroboree, the men singing and beating sticks, the women adding their voices and clapping their bare thighs with open hands, and this monotonous music had the desired effect of sending me to sleep.

With the first peep of the sun I awoke, feeling a new man, although my feet were much inflamed and gave great pain. Clearly the only thing I could do was to keep their wounds clean. That I could do by constantly bathing them; but what frightened me were the blow-flies. They were buzzing in myriads, as all know who have had anything to do with a native camp in the tropics. Fortunately one of the blacks came in with some geese, and with the aid of a knife lent me by Tim, I removed the fat from one of them and melted it down in an old bouilli tin. Plenty of these ornaments were lying about, having probably been brought from one of the white men's trepang camps. When the fat became cold, I applied it to my wounds, and experienced instant relief; at the same time it protected them against the flies.

After the morning meal I noticed an unusual stir, and ascertained that a journey was contemplated by some one. As you may surmise, I was in a state of trepidation lest it meant a move-on for me; and great was my relief when Tim told me that Wandi Wandi and the others concerned in the late murders were going to walk to a camp "a long

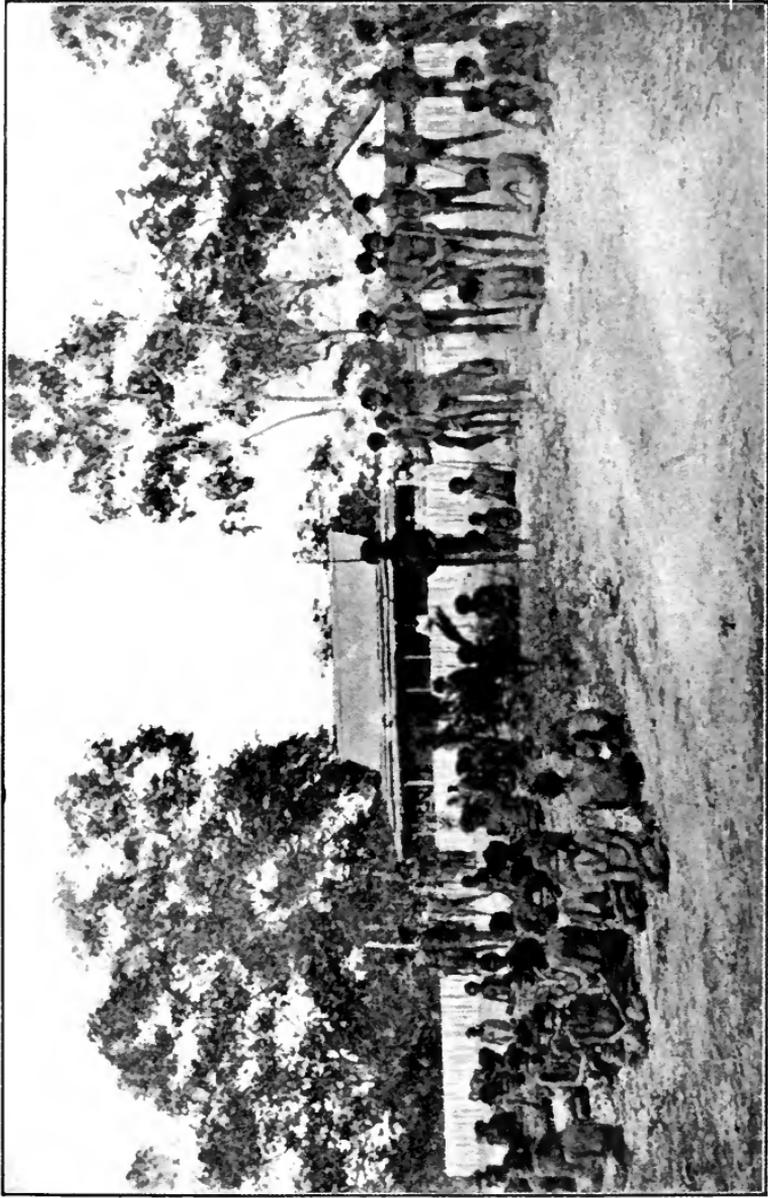
way," fearing punishment for what they had done. Their departure was marked by the wails and howls of the women and children, but I was as pleased as they appeared to be sad when I saw the brutes disappear in the bush. Arranboom and Mangerippy remained, and matters brightened up at once, every one treating me then in a most friendly way.

Oh, the odours from that camp! I think it was Coleridge who enumerated the smells and stinks of Cologne, but he would have been utterly baffled at Wark. The occupants of this precious settlement had not the faintest idea of sanitation. Decaying bones were everywhere; and the mangy eurs slept in the humpies with their owners, whose customs were as repellent as their four-footed friends were scabby. It was an instance of every prospect pleasing while man and dog were vile.

I found that sleeping in the open was not the best of all possible nocturnal conditions. The dews at night were more like rain, and as my very clothes had disappeared, thanks to the habit of the blacks, who, in the matter of personal raiment, are communists of the most advanced order, it was imperative that I should have a shelter for myself. This took the form of a dome-shaped humpy made of boughs and strips of bark, propped up with sticks. Then came a wearily monotonous time. It was, as far as I could judge, about a month before my feet got well, and all this time I was suffering the tortures of the tanning process, the only protection I had against the rays of the sun being a piece of an old sarong tied round my waist, and, when from "home," a head covering made of palm leaves. First I was burnt red and then nearly black, but bird fat and determination conquered. Added to the more than discomfort caused by the sun, I had to contend

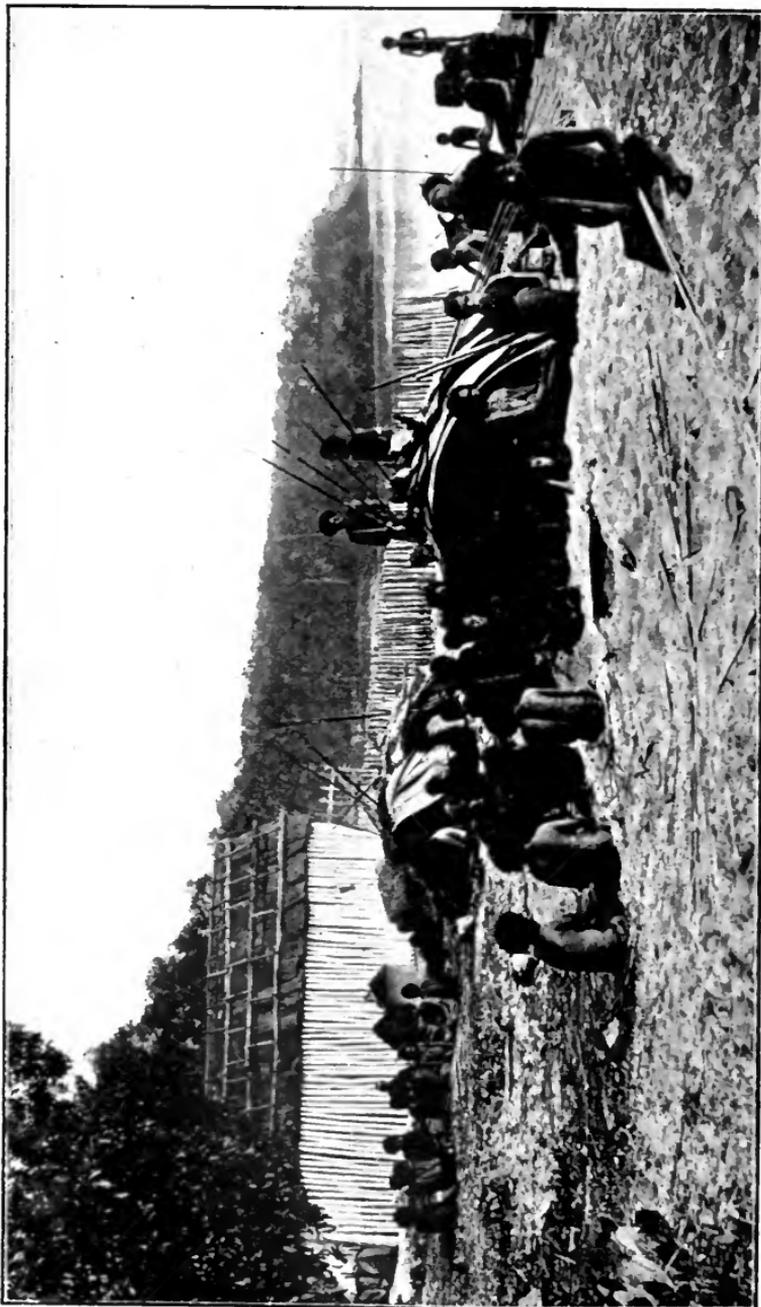
with mosquitoes, sandflies, fleas and March flies, the last-named about an inch long.

During all this irksome time I was on the alert for a chance of escape, but none came. As compensation I had the good will of each, who seemed pleased to have so distinguished a visitor. My yarns with Tim, too, relieved the monotony of the time. The murders were often talked over, and from what I could understand, they were the outcome of the native lust for blood—that and nothing more. Tim also explained how it came about that the Australians could make themselves understood by the Malays. The Malay proas, he said, came from Macassar every year with the nor'-west monsoon, generally making Melville Island, or the coast near Port Essington, about Christmas. They were then in the habit of working along the coast right to the bottom of the Gulf of Carpentaria, stopping at various regular camping places, and there fishing for trepang. A considerable trade was done between the coast natives and the proa men in pearls and tortoiseshell. Long before white people settled at Port Darwin these sailors from Macassar had visited the Australian coast, and the Australian blacks had thus acquired a knowledge of Malayan. In fact, any one who spoke Macassar, right from Port Essington to the Pellew Group, had a good chance of making friends with the blacks of Australia. The whole of the coast had been named by the Malays. Port Essington was known to them as Limba Caraja, and the Pellew Group as Dena Seedi. I subsequently ascertained there was evidence showing that nearly a century and a half had elapsed since the first Macassar men reached Australia. The proas returned home with the south-east monsoon. During their absence the blacks collected pearls, pearl shell and tortoiseshell, which they bartered to the Malays for tobacco, rice and arrack. Tim



ROB'S CAMP, PORT ESSINGTON.

Paul Focishte.



BLACKS' CAMP ON BEACH, PORT ESSINGTON.

Paul Foclsche.

remarked that arrack was bad stuff, and made "black-fellows mad." Tim did not drink, and was the only black I ever met who would refuse a nobbler. Nearly every year great and bloody fights took place between the Malays and Australian aborigines at the coast camps. Tim also informed me the last of the proas for that season had left for home a few weeks previously; but I was destined to have plenty to do with the Malays.

By this time all fear had left me, and when my feet grew hard enough to move about freely I enjoyed the life, which presented many unique attractions. Talking of feet reminds me of the wonderful hides the blacks have on the soles of theirs. Once I was entrusted with the surgical operation of extracting a piece of coral from a young fellow's heel, and found that I had to sink quite a deep shaft before I struck the lode!

My friend Tim could not explain why I had not been murdered when the Malays were done to death. Perhaps, he said, Mangerippy and Arranboom saved me; possibly I was spared because I had come by sea, for white people so arriving were more in favour with the blacks than those who came from inland, although this was not always the case. Mercy was not a virtue they made a hobby of.

Being young and active, and besides being desirous of seeing and learning as much as possible of the hunting habits of the natives, I accompanied them on their expeditions, and became fairly expert in the use of their weapons and modes. The blacks use two kinds of spears, thrown by sticks called wommeras. Of these there were also two kinds. One was about three feet in length, two inches broad and fairly thick. At one end a kangaroo's tooth was fixed, and the other cut to admit of a firm grip being taken. The other wommera was about four feet

long, shaped like a scimitar and very thin. It, too, had a tooth at the end, and where the hand gripped was thick so as to afford a firm hold. This second one was so pliant and so beautifully and strangely made that with a quick jerky turn of the wrist it gave out a sound similar to the crack of a stockwhip. Doing this afforded the blacks amusement, and they were not a little proud of their skill. The spears are of two kinds, the most formidable being about eight feet long, the point of some being smooth and of others forked with one or more prongs. The points of the barbs are hardened by fire and very sharp. This kind of spear can be thrown, with the aid of its wommera, about forty yards, and with wonderful precision.

The others are made of reeds, with wooden or bone points, and can be thrown about two hundred and fifty yards. Each spear is scooped out at the end to admit of the wommera's point being inserted. It took a deal of practice to get into the knack of throwing them, but I attained to a fair proficiency.

The darkies had a rather dangerous way of amusing themselves with the eight-foot weapon. An exhibition of their skill as spear-throwers was given me, which also served as an illustration of the quickness of vision possessed by them. One of the men volunteered to act as a target for the others to throw at, the points and barbs of the spears being sheathed in mud and grass to prevent serious injury to the "target," if struck. The exhibition of precision on the one part and agility on the other was nothing less than wonderful. The entertainment closed when a stalwart native, poising his spear with the greatest calmness, and making it quiver with the skill of an expert, launched it into the air, using the full weight of his body in doing so. The target meanwhile had crouched ready for his spring at the psychological moment, but he

was an instant behind his time, and thud went the point against his chest. Then loud applause rose from the spectators for the spearman, followed by many good-natured jeers for the target.

The black women were very skilful in making baskets and mats, which they wove from split palm leaves. Small bags were made in which they carried their treasures, some of which were often little bones from the bodies of defunct relatives. Baskets they also made from the same material, which, folded and sewn tightly together and provided with handles, were used to carry water in.

Early in the morning and at evening buffaloes frequented the watercourse. They were evidently fond of mud baths, for they never failed to wallow in the shallow and muddy places. With the cows there were always a fair number of calves, and one of these would occasionally be run down, thus providing the camp with a chance for the "table." Kangaroo were numerous in the jungle, and many were speared after merry hunts. The flesh of the north coast kangaroo I found excellent despite the primitive way in which it was served up. Often they were baked whole, or rather, I should say, warmed, for when hungry the natives never brooked delay, and being very much underdone was a mere detail with them.

Besides other accomplishments I gained during my enforced stay at the odoriferous Wark was that of tracking, although compared with the native proficiency I remained to the last a "duffer." I was continually astonished by the way in which the natives followed up their game. The leader would halt at times and, addressing me, say, "Him stop here," "Him sit down," or "Him turn," as the case might be, but look as keenly as I might no proof was visible to me of anything having

passed that way. But of all native arts I tried to master, that of making a fire by the friction of two pieces of wood gave most trouble for the least result. Still I accomplished the feat.

CHAPTER

Off to Port Essington

MANY and long were the talks the blacks now held and from what I could learn a number were smitten with a recurrence of the "wander-lust," and had decided to go to the trepang camp at Port Essington. Arranboom, Mangerippy, Big Jack and Tim Finnigan were to be of the party, and I learned with infinite delight that they had decided to take me with them.

Early on the morning following this, to me, glorious prospect, a start was made. All were in extremely light marching order, the native outfits consisting of spears and wommeras, and in my case of a palm-leaf hat and the remains of a sarong.

The women and children made, as usual, the air dolorous with their lamentations, but the fact that these were in part for me in no way marred the pleasure I felt in closing this chapter of my wanderings. True, the time I had spent at Wark had not been without its pleasures, and the kindness I had received atoned somewhat for its seamy side.

After good going for about five hours through country similar to that already seen, we reached Mount Norris Bay, and a sight of the sea brought back vividly the horrors enacted when I was last near its margin. We called a halt on a white sandy beach, and without loss of time the darkies cast about for the wherewithal for a meal. Some took to the water to spear fish, while others

wandered along the beach above high-water mark, gazing intently at the sand, and these I followed. Suddenly one of them drove a spear down about two feet, then fell on his knees and began vigorously to scoop away the sand with his hands. Presently he laid bare dozens of round creamy-coloured balls, about the size of billiard balls, with an outer covering like parchment. They were turtle eggs, deposited there to be hatched by natural heat. On breaking the shells we found the young ones were already formed. This in no way discounted the eggs as edibles with the darkies, who simply flicked out the little reptiles and swallowed what remained with great gusto. Although pressed to follow suit, I "passed" until further search disclosed a fresh lot, when I took my share and found them first-class. I followed this up by roasting others in the hot ashes, as well as having my share of the fish caught. I was making rapid strides in securing that strength of stomach so characteristic of the native, and so valuable when travelling without a commissariat through the wilds. We got a very early start on the following morning, and a stout march was maintained all day, the blacks being desirous of reaching their destination before nightfall.

During our journey plenty of game was met with—fowl of all kinds and herds of buffaloes. After a time we came to a fine level beach, which was followed for some two miles, passing on our way many clumps of casuarina trees. Just before dusk we struck into the bush again, and, after crossing a belt of timber, came to one of the prettiest scenes that I had encountered. From the bush stretched before us a clearing several acres in extent, covered in parts with short herbage and in others bananas, pappas, pine apples, tomatoes, onions and sweet potatoes were growing. To the left of this clearing stood

the forest, to the right a sloping sandy beach, near which was erected a boat shed and numerous humpies—the blacks' encampment. At the side opposite to us was a bluff with buildings in ruins, and in the centre of the clearing grew four large tamarind trees, under which stood a small galvanized iron hut with several bark erections at its rear, the whole being enclosed within a low stockade formed of posts.

Our advent was hailed by a reception committee of men, women and children of all ages, headed by a great brawny man of much lighter colour than his following. His clothing consisted of a small towel tied round his waist, which was so bulky that the towel stood out like an all-round "improver." A great mass of hair indicated where his head was, and showed him to be a South Sea Islander. He carried a revolver suspended by a strap from his waist. He did not wait for an introduction, but coming up boldly, put out his hand, saying—

"My word, I am glad to see you at last."

"At last!" said I. "Why, did you know anything before about me, and that I was coming here?"

"Oh, yes. Very soon after the blacks killed the Macassar men we heard of it; and that a white man, who was on the proa when she was wrecked, was at Wark. The niggers made a big smoke and so sent the news; and we knew you were coming to-day in the same way."

"From what I've been told I guess I'm in the Northern Territory?"

"Yes, Port Darwin lies about a hundred and fifty miles to the westward. But you've no chance of getting there for a long time, as the Boss left only a little time before the news of the murders was sent, and he won't be back for some months. But you come along to my camp and have some tucker. I'll tell you all you want

to know by and by. My name is Billy ; I look after the camp for my boss, Rob."

I readily accepted Billy's invitation, and so began my long stay at Port Essington.

The hut under the trees to which Billy led me consisted of two rooms with a low verandah running round it, and was a choice sample of unpretentious Australian architecture. But I shall never forget with what satisfaction I entered it or the first meal with Billy beneath its roof. What a splendid reality met my vision on entering ! There on the table was an array consisting of pint mugs full of steaming tea, sugar, damper, cold roast buffalo meat, cold sweet potatoes, cabbage palm, butter and jam, the last two items having been raided from the Boss's private store in honour of the occasion.

Billy viewed me with satisfaction as my eager eyes surveyed the spread, and then said in an insinuating tone—

" Like some oysters ? "

I looked at him as reproachfully as my satisfaction would admit of, and drawled—

" Wish you meant it."

Billy smiled expansively, and at once made off to a canoe on the beach, from which he took a bucket of prime oysters. The bay, I ascertained, was famous for the succulent bivalve. He, assisted by his " boys," was soon opening the shells, but not quicker than I could dispose of their contents. And then followed the other good things, to which full justice was done. Surely never was king better provided for nor gourmand in a greater state of felicity than I when finished with Billy's splendid hospitality.

After a rest my host introduced me to soap, water and a towel ! What enjoyment ! What luxuries ! Next came a comb, Billy acting from the kindest motives. But

the ordeal was great, and drew tears from my eyes as well as hair from my head. However, I could spare more of my locks than I lost, being sadly in need of tonsorial abridgement ; and so was grateful for the comb, too.

This punishment was speedily forgotten when, seated under the verandah in an arm-chair (for which Billy's master was entitled to take out a patent), my host provided me with a new clay pipe, a stick of negro-head and a box of matches ! My pipe going nicely, I reclined and listened to what Billy had to tell me about his Boss. He had come with stores, had taken away all the trepang and buffalo hides they had, and would not come again till more were gathered. "And, my word," continued my host, "I don't savee why Wandi Wandi did not break your head as he did those of the Macassar men. He's a bad lot, and long ago killed my Boss's mate on Crocker Island."

By this time I was conscious of being somewhat hazy, and as he talked I must have fallen asleep. I opened my eyes with the morning light to find I was in a room, on a stretcher, and covered with a blanket ! Where was I ? Oh, yes, I was in Rob's camp and evidently on his bed, but I had no recollection of getting there. Billy and his friends had placed me in bed while asleep ! Good Billy ! Most excellent friends !

The sun was well up and the sea inviting, so I decided on a swim. Without delay I got into deep water, and was having a rare time of it, when Big Jack, who was watching me, cried—

"Look out, Captain, big fellow shark sit down," pointing to the sea beyond. A glance showed the ominous dorsal fin rising and disappearing at no great distance. Putting out my best strokes I made for the shallow water, impelled to the greatest exertion by the cries of the blacks.

It was a race for life, and I won with nothing to spare, the rush of the monster bringing him quite near to me. Fortunately the brute had grounded in his eagerness for a meal, and before he could sway himself off, Billy had bounded in, and, with a well-placed shot from his revolver in the sea-tiger's snout, dispatched him. He was drawn in triumph up the sand by the full masculine force of the camp, and great was the glee at my escape. I was a bit shaken, and it did not steady my nerves when I saw in the cruel eyes of the monster replicas of Wandi Wandi's.

"Come and have a shower-bath, no sharks there," said Billy with a grin. The rotund manager then conducted me to Rob's bathroom, a little shanty at the back of the house. Fixed on the rafters was a twenty-gallon cask, with a tap at the bottom, to which hung a two-pound perforated meat-tin. When set working the occupant had to watch which way the shower fell, and get in its way. This was another of Rob's patents. Having been sufficiently sprinkled, Billy cut my hair, which operation added to my comfort and considerably removed my Wark-like appearance. A breakfast of fresh fish, eggs, damper and coffee followed, my enjoyment concluding with a smoke; and while I gave this finishing touch to a good meal, I was informed as to the doings of Wandi Wandi, who had worked some years previously for Rob and his mate at Crocker Island.

One day the mate gave one of his niggers a hiding for some delinquency, and later lay down for a sleep. Wandi Wandi, waiting his chance, crept up, brained him with a tomahawk and buried the body. A gruesome sight met Rob's eyes on his return, several days later. When walking round the camp he noticed the fowls scratching away the sand from something, at which they were pecking. An examination revealed the disfigured face of his late

mate. Wandi Wandi was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for the crime. After his release he was taken over by a Mission Station, and a very good fellow he proved so long as he obtained plenty tucker and tobacco and had not much to do; but he grew tired of leading a useful life, and returned to his own country, where I and the poor Malays had the misfortune to meet him. Billy wound up his sketch of this bloodthirsty savage by predicting that if he fell into the hands of Inspector Paul, the chief of police, he would for certain be hanged.

It was at this stage of our friendship that Billy broached the subject of clothes. He had some with which he adorned himself when at Port Darwin, and these I was at liberty to use; but I elected to adhere to my get-up as more comfortable, and in keeping with the fashion of the camp, though, truth to tell, our approach to nudity seemed a "bit off" when we sat down to dine.

I asked if Rob had trouble with the blacks.

"No fear," quickly retorted Billy. "He knows how to manage them. Suppose he says he will growl, my word he does growl; suppose he promises a man a stick of tobacco, he gives it to him; suppose he says he will break his head, he breaks it all right!"

It appeared, in short, that Rob, when at home, was "monarch of all he surveyed," kept a very stiff upper lip as well as a look out for strange blacks, who, if they proved troublesome, were made to understand the powers of a revolver. The inference to be drawn from Billy's talk was that "firmness" on the part of a white man was a quality admired by his coloured brother.

The Malays and blacks, he said, were not always good friends. They sometimes followed up a "big growl" by killing each other; but that climax had not been reached

at Port Essington for a long time. Where no white men were it still happened, generally as the outcome of drink.

Recently I chanced on an account of the search along the North Coast in 1851 by Captain Simpson, in the barque *General Palmer*, for traces of Leichardt. This is what the Captain in his report says about the relations of the Malays and Australian natives, which, as it bears on Billy's conversation, I quote :—

“The Macassar proas had left about two months ago. The season before a collision had taken place between the Malays and the natives, in consequence of some dispute arising in trading for tortoiseshell ; ten of the Malays were killed and four or five of the natives of Port Essington. One of the latter was a well-known character named Jack White, with whom the dispute began. The Malays went immediately to Port Bremer. The natives there, not being aware of what had taken place, went alongside the proas in their canoes, when eight of them were killed. During the last season the Malays had agreed better with the natives, and no fighting had taken place.”

CHAPTER VI

Life at Port Essington

ONE day Billy called out gleefully—
“Here come the canoes!” They were the camp boats returning from a trepang expedition; and for those who do not know it may be worth while to say a little about the product so highly valued by the Chinese, and to gain which so many risks are taken and discomforts endured alike by white men and black.

Well, *bêche-de-mer*, or trepang, is a sea-slug measuring about twelve inches in length, found along the coast of tropical Australia, and in greatest quantities and best quality on the Great Barrier Reef.

It is secured by the blacks at dead low water, when the spring tides prevail. They then pick up the slugs from the reefs by means of sharp spears, or dive to a depth of five or six fathoms for them. The Macassar men also use dredgers, by which they get large hauls. To fit trepang for the market it is first boiled a little, then gutted and cleaned; again boiled with mangrove bark, which imparts to it a red colour; then dried in the sun, smoked, dried again and bagged, care being taken that damp does not get to it.

Billy volunteered the supposition that the trepang were made red to cause the Chinese to imagine they were buying the best kind; so it appeared there were tricks even in the trepang trade.

Lighting our pipes we went to the beach, where the fires were already burning beneath the cauldrons (purchased from the Malays), in which the trepang was to be cooked, and which had a capacity of from fifteen to twenty gallons. The take had been a good one. The cauldrons were soon boiling, and the trepang fit for cleaning, which was not a task a fastidious man would choose, though the blacks took to it kindly enough. The odour rising from the stuff reminded me of cooked cockles and my younger days.

While the boiling was proceeding, Billy put some new cotton fishing lines into a cauldron. The bark, he explained, tanned them, and the fat from the slugs made them waterproof, smooth, and less liable to "kink."

The smoke house was a long shed with a framework of bamboo covered with palm leaves. It contained a shelf of split bamboos placed an inch or two apart, so as to allow free passage for the smoke from a fire in a hole in the floor. The shelf extended the length and breadth of the structure, and was also used for giving the dried trepang its final treatment. It appeared to me that the business was a tedious one.

While watching these proceedings I made the acquaintance of an ancient dame known as "Flash Poll," her native name being Munjarie. Poll remembered, as a woman, when the soldiers were stationed at Port Essington; yet, despite her advanced age, she was active and sprightly, with a good figure. Poll took a great fancy to me, promising that I should have her skull when she died, and in her last moments she gave instructions to the white man in charge of the camp that this was to be done. Twenty-five years after the grim relic reached me through the post.

Poor old Poll. How the dear old girl could swear! and how fond she was of a nobbler! And then, generally

at the most inopportune times, she would say the Lord's Prayer and sing odd fragments of the Psalms!

After telling me much of the history of the old days she said—

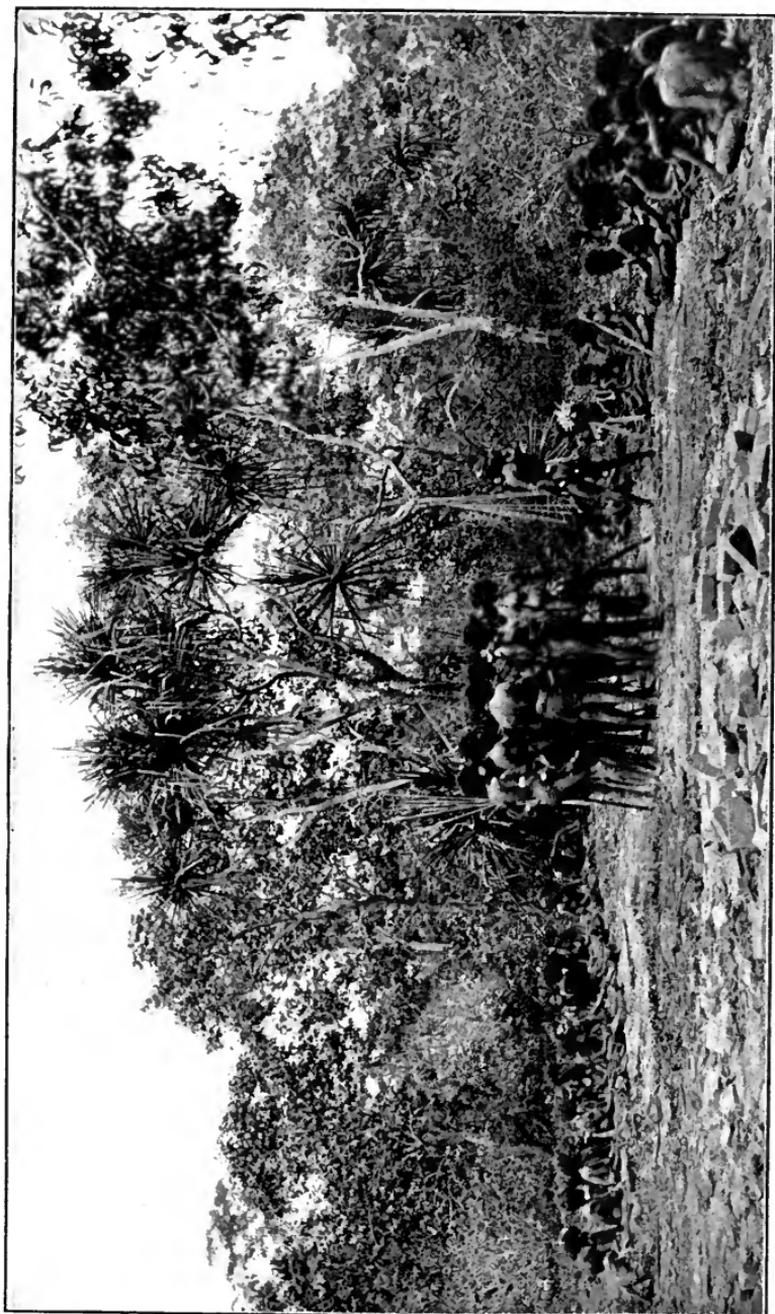
“You come, Captain, me show you round,” which invitation I accepted for after dinner. I took Billy's gun for some pigeon and dove shooting among the bamboo, which was in seed, and in which condition, so far as Billy knew, no white man had seen it. Poll and I had a look at the ruins, which were neither ivy-clad nor crumbling with decay, but owed their disfigurement to the wasting hand of man. Parts of the old jetty were still standing, as well as some of the fence posts erected in the old days. As I stood by these monuments of a former time I thought of the old song, “Backward, turn backward, O Time, in thy flight.” I was fain to realize the past, see the red-coated sentries going their rounds, and have the joy of yarns with “The Boys of the Old Brigade.”

From the ruins we walked to the cemetery, a little distance inland, and found it overgrown with dense tropical vegetation. Several headstones were still standing, and a large monument to the memory of a Sergeant of Marines. Though the graves were thus neglected, it seemed no more fitting guardians for the dead could be found than the beautiful flowers, plants and trees that enveloped the resting-place of those who had died while helping to build up the empire of which the world is proud. If the dead know aught, mused I, they must rest content here—here in this land of gleaming sunlight and dewy moonlit nights, with the innumerable company of stars keeping silent watch till morning wakes the joyful songs of birds, and its golden rays again convert the dew-drops into glittering jewels. Surely no one could view this quiet home in the wilderness and pass it by with an indifferent mind. Here,

remote from the din of tumultuous life, in the midst of a spaciousness so great that enthusiasm and depression by turn control the mind, sleep on the brave men of the past. What temple erected by man, be it never so imposing, could compare in impressiveness with this lonely spot of earth that holds the dead of our courageous pioneers? I stood with uncovered head. The light that illumined these forgotten graves seemed richer than that suffusing aught else; and when the eye sought the depths of the luxurious foliage that swayed above them there was discerned a luminous obscurity that begot sacred fear and a mind-eclipse for all save that which springs from the noblest in us. I pictured to myself the deep silence and midnight mystery of this home of the Australian dead when the whisperings of the grass and the sighs of the jungle seemed expressions of sorrow for loss beyond recall. I pictured the season of rain and flood, and saw in the red bolts of heaven and heard in the deafening thunder-crash fitting martial honours for them all.

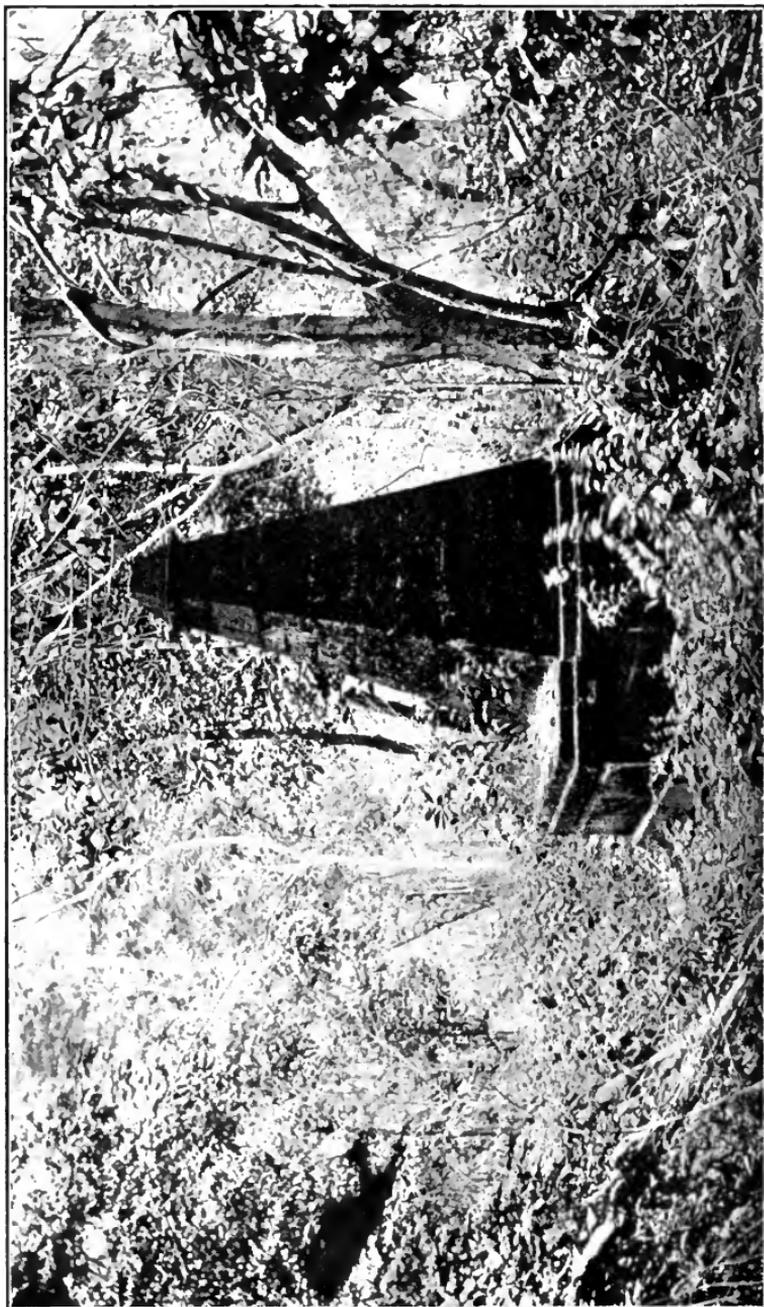
My reverie was broken by Poll, who started off in the direction of the old garden and spring. On the way we had to pass close to the bamboo jungle in seed, and I had thus the honour of being the first white man to witness this rare occurrence.

Beautiful doves and pigeons in great numbers flitted in and out among the slender stalks, and of these I bagged three dozen with the aid of Billy's gun, which looked old and patched enough to have had a place in Noah's ark. From the bamboos to the spring was only a short distance. The water, which was of the best and icy cold, bubbled up under a thick growth which crowned a bank close to the sea, the overflow finding its way there. The garden was a garden no longer, a few young mango trees alone marking the spot. At one time a mango tree in it yielded tons of



BLACKS NEAR OLD RUINS, PORT ESSINGTON.

Paul Focische.



IN THE OLD CEMETERY, PORT ESSINGTON.

Faut Fautsche.

fruit each year, but it succumbed to the ravages of white ants.¹

While Poll and I were at the spring, the sun suddenly

¹ Captain Simpson visited the Settlement in 1857, and the following from his report in reference to the ruins and garden will be of interest:—"At 11 a.m. landed at Victoria" (the name given to the Settlement by the authorities); "the stone pier had sustained little damage; all the houses at Barrack Square were destroyed; the well in the centre, which used to yield an abundant supply of excellent water, I found in a very bad state; the Malays had taken away the bucket and winch; the new hospital had been burnt; in fact all the buildings excepting the Commandant's house (which was gutted) and the officers' cook house had also been destroyed; the Fort was overrun with high weeds, and the various roads and pathways through the Settlement were scarcely discernible. At Armstrong's and in the new garden at St. Paul's well, all the beautiful cocoa-nut palms had been recently cut down, and, upon examination, I found that there was not a single plant left to propagate from. The natives stated that they had been cut down by the Malays when last here for the purpose of obtaining the young shoots of the palm, which is a very delicious vegetable; but I imagine revenge for their countrymen, killed the season before, accounted for the loss. Whatever the cause, this work of destruction was a disastrous one, for the trees were nearly in full bearing, and had they been spared would have been the means of introducing this graceful and very valuable tree along the whole of the North Coast of Australia, proving eventually a great boon to the aborigines. The garden had become a wilderness, and the paths could scarcely be distinguished. The durian or Jack fruit, of which there were several, showed indications of bearing fruit. There were plenty of pineapple trees, but, although this was the season for bearing, there was no fruit; there were also numerous plantain suckers, but none bearing fruit. I saw also one bread-fruit (the *Acto Carpus*) in anything but a healthy state. The bamboo was flourishing, and arrowroot growing wild. The cotton bushes (*Gossyperium Hebarum*) were healthy and producing a very fine cotton; formerly there was a fine collection of flowers and flowering shrubs, but all that remained was a miserable plant of the Pomicana. I visited the burying ground; the tombs were all in a good state and had not been disturbed by the natives."

D

went down, and we beat a hasty retreat, before the legions of sandflies that then made their appearance. We had the pigeons for supper, and this is how they were cooked ; I can recommend the method. After being plucked the birds were split down the back, cleaned and put on the coals breast down for a few minutes to harden the skin, then turned over and finished from the inside. If you have never tried the dodge, do so, and you will say I have let you in for a good thing.

Perhaps I should have given some account of Port Essington as a military settlement at the beginning of this chapter instead of at the end, but as it is valuable, I'll not omit it.

In 1820, Captain King, in a cutter of eighty tons, boldly explored the North Coast, and on his recommendation efforts were made to form settlements as ports of refuge for shipping and for the opening up of trade with the East, the presence of the Malays on the coast being probably the cause of the latter idea.

Melville Island was the first spot chosen for a settlement, which was formed in Apsley Straits. It was named Port Dundas, was occupied by a company of marines and a number of convicts from Sydney, and abandoned in 1827. Another trial was made at Raffles Bay with fair success ; and in 1838 Port Essington was chosen. In 1849 this, too, was abandoned, H.M.S. *Meander* removing the garrison to Sydney. The soldiers left behind the buffalo, which had been procured from Timor. These spread all along the North Coast, and have even been seen in Queensland. Some ponies left have also greatly increased, but have kept to the country on the other side of the harbour. The few English cattle did well, their camp being the country near Vashon Head, on the west side of the entrance of the Port. Pigs, likewise, were sent adrift,

but were soon exterminated by the blacks, who had no idea of providing for the future.

It has been stated that Port Essington was abandoned on account of its unhealthy climate, and the unproductiveness of the soil. This in a measure may have been so, but I suspect it was discovered that the time was not ripe for the formation of settlements. As for its climate, I do not think it worse than that of other tropical localities, and, speaking for myself, beyond one attack of fever I had excellent health during the time I was there. And as to the soil, I am certain there are considerable areas suitable for the growth of tropical products. That the climate was all that could be desired for such was instanced by the results seen in the garden planted in the old days; while the cotton bushes, which had spread all over the country, had thriven excellently. We had ample proof that the North Coast is suited to buffalo; and that English cattle and horses also thrive in parts was sufficiently shown by the beasts themselves.

CHAPTER VII

After Buffalo

BEFORE turning in that night it was arranged to cross the harbour early next morning and have a shot at buffalo. We were soon astir, and, after a good meal, took to the canoes with a number of blacks and dogs, and a couple of Snider carbines. It was a perfect morning—cool, bright and calm, with a heavy dew. We passed several turtles on the way, and saw a lot of trepang when crossing the reefs. We landed on a small belt of sandy beach, Billy leading the way from this up a gentle slope. Suddenly he dropped down and signalled to us to crawl quietly up. Reaching his side I peeped over the bushes to see as pretty a sight as one could desire. In a glade surrounded by fine trees and covered with short grass were a mob of some fifty wild ponies feeding. Suddenly one of them scented us, the others quickly doing the same. They snorted with fear, faced us for a moment, and then, like a flash, disappeared within the forest. Billy informed me that efforts had been made to capture them by means of an immense race leading to a stockyard, but the experiment failed, only one being secured, and that by a shot through the neck. It was taken to Port Darwin, and eventually became so tame that its owner could do anything he liked with it.

We were soon clear of the forest, and into the tall grass country where we were speedily wet all over by the heavy dew, which I also found very cold. Very soon crashes

through the grass told us that the dogs had disturbed buffalo, but not even a glimpse did we get of them. At last we reached the open, and there, straight in front of us, was a great animal peacefully sleeping, with nose extended and immense horns lying well along its back.

Instead of doing what Billy advised, and firing at a spot about six inches behind the shoulders, I, in my amateur wisdom, aimed at the centre of the forehead, but the ball, missing the animal's head, struck its hump. Whether caused by pain or sudden fear I cannot tell, but without doubt that buffalo was annoyed, and rose for instant business. Ignorant of my danger, I stood quietly, thinking it would tumble down again, when, lowering its head, it charged at me with the speed of an express train. I was distant from the animal about forty yards when the race began. I had not gone far, however, when I tripped and rolled over, and before I could recover myself the buffalo was standing over me trying to pin me to the earth with one of its horns. Fortunately its aim was more defective than mine had been, for instead of digging it through my body, it went into the earth alongside of me. Instinctively I clutched the horn, and when the powerful brute raised its head for a third prod, I was drawn up, and managed to vault over its back, landing on my feet on the other side. At once I sped off, running for dear life, the buffalo after me, when crack went the rifle and down went my pursuer. Billy had given him his quietus before he could get the pace on.

All this occupied but a few seconds, but it was long enough to knock all the spare energy out of me, so a rest and smoke followed. Now that the danger was over the blacks seemed to regard the event as a great bit of fun, every now and then saying—

“My word, Captain, buffalo close up killem.”

The blacks speedily flayed and cut him up. I then saw by the state of the bones struck that the Snider was a regular bone-crusher, and calculated to drop an animal in its tracks, provided it were struck in a vital spot—a very desirable thing when dealing with this kind of game.

To our surprise the sky suddenly became overcast, and a squall followed with heavy rain. It being very cold, a fire was started, at which we cooked some liver, and thus warmed ourselves inside and out. With the buffalo meat for a load, we started on our return journey, but had not gone far when we saw a half-grown calf, which was bowled over in fine style. More cargo to carry! I took possession of the brains, having previously wrapped them up in leaves. Fried brains for tea that night, after which I was precious glad to turn in. The horns, which we brought with us, measured six feet across.

A day or two after our hunt we had a visitor from Bowen Straits, a regular buffalo-hunter, known as "Stickleg," who had walked overland to the other side of the harbour, and finished his journey by canoe. This man had a wonderful reputation as a shot and runner. From what I saw, he well deserved it. Bullet after bullet from a Martini-Henri rifle has he put through a two-pound builli tin held by a man at arm's length at about sixty yards. A yarn is told of him that once at Port Darwin, being annoyed by the irritating and monotonous noise of a Chinese kite, he cut it adrift with a revolver shot, and that at a distance from the string which enabled him barely to see it!

The blacks having reported that buffalo were plentiful some little distance to the south-west of the camp, Stickleg proposed we should have a turn at them, and I was only too happy to share the company of such a redoubtable

Nimrod. He was after hides and horns, to be exported to England or the Continent. Beyond the two mentioned items he only took the tongues and an odd joint, the blacks being allowed as much as they could carry. They also brought the hides and horns to the camp.

As we had some distance to go, packhorses were sent to carry our blankets and provisions, and it was evening before we arrived at our destination. On the following morning, after travelling some two or three miles, we sighted a mob of about fifteen buffalo, quietly grazing. We got fairly close to them, when Stickleg started business by bowling over a beast; while Billy and I, firing almost simultaneously, brought down two more fine animals. I was proud!

The shots sent the remainder of the mob off at a great pace, but Stickleg was after them like an arrow from a bow. Can you picture to yourself the scene? The great lumbering, yet active beasts, with heads extended and massed together, thundering through the open forest country; the hunter, naked save for a nargar (waist-cloth), speeding on the outskirts of the mob. Every now and then up would go his rifle, a bang, and a struggling animal dropped in the wake of its terrified companions. Seven times he performed this feat before he cried a "go."

My four pals had a keen sense of humour, and were not behindhand in showing it. They frequently advised me not to get in front of the buffalo, saying: "Captain, you see buffalo, you more better shoot alonga tail; no good killem alonga head, too much bone all same wood sit down." They ignored the side position, and I guessed the rascals were "taking a rise" out of me. How they did laugh. When we got within range of one, Boom said: "Captain, you killem dead, good fellow," and so I did.

The boys were delighted, and yelled with one accord, "Captain killem dead!"

It proved to be a great bull, with a magnificent and massive pair of horns. These I made up my mind to secure, and if opportunity offered, send them to my dad as a little souvenir of a buffalo hunt in which I had taken part.

The butchering business then commenced. The blacks were clever at the work, plying their flaying knives with the skill of experienced fleshers. We camped there that night, and had undercut steak galore, cooked on the coals.

In the morning an early start was made to enable us to get back to Port Essington in good time, resting content with the game secured. The hides and horns were a good load in themselves, but the boys supplemented their task by adding a lot of the meat. Stickleg, Billy and I appropriated the tongues as our share. We were back home by sundown, well satisfied with our outing. Billy agreed to my having the horns of the buffalo which had tried so hard to make me pass in the number of my mess, as well as those of the big bull I had brought to earth.

At different times efforts had been made to catch and tame wild buffalo, with a view to utilizing them for domestic purposes, but without success. There were a dozen half-grown animals about the camp, having been run down when calves; but they had proved of no use. The only people who could do anything with them were two old gins, who shepherded them by day, and drove them into a stockyard some little distance from the camp each night.

This stockyard, by the way, was very strongly built, and capable of withstanding great pressure. On each side of the entrance and extending into the bush about a hundred yards, were two wings, of post-and-rail, gradually

opening out so as to form a race, or lead, to the gate. This work had been done with the idea of running in wild buffalo, and the camp animals were yarded there so that they might become accustomed to the place and eventually act as decoys. When talking over matters one night, Stickleg having ascertained that a trial had not yet been made to run the wild ones in, proposed we should try our luck, to which Billy agreed. Next day a big crowd of blacks were mustered and instructed to go "out bush" in parties, make a long round, and if any buffalo were seen to try and head them towards the stockyard during the day, and camp out that night. On the following day, when smoke went up, they were to make straight for the stockyard, driving the game before them.

On the morning following their departure the signal was sent up early, and the camp animals driven out to feed at the entrance of the race. I went on horseback to see the fun. Towards evening we could hear the blacks cooeing and yelling, with an occasional crash in the timber, and then came twenty or thirty of our buffalo friends. They immediately joined the camp lot, and at a signal the blacks closed in quickly on the wings. The decoys made for the entrance to the yard, the others following, a final rush and fierce yell followed, the gate was swung to and made fast, and the huge beasts were fairly in limbo.

Some of the take tried their strength against that of the posts and rails in a manner which made the whole fabric shake, but it stood the test, and eventually they quietened down.

Now comes the joke! The artist or architect who designed the yard had forgotten to make provision for watering the animals when caught. That fact dawned upon us when smoking our pipes after supper. The diffi-

culty was well discussed, and it was decided to drive our captives to a small lagoon not far from the yard. Great preparations were made for this the next day. The blacks received strict instructions what to do : two whites were mounted, the better to boss the situation, and away we went, full of confidence. Everything was fixed up, in our opinion, so admirably that we thought failure impossible. It was evident the animals were very thirsty, and could smell the water. The gates were gently opened, and the buffalo moved towards the opening as if they knew what we desired, and were anxious to second our efforts. Another little move, and then—away they went like the wind, the blacks clearing out of their way with surprising agility. To stop a cyclone would have been just as easy. We had a momentary glimpse through the trees of heaving sterns ; and that was the last we saw of our haul, decoys included. We gazed for a time in the direction taken by the animals, then at each other, and burst into laughter.

So ended our great experiment. It was probably the best pantomime the blacks had ever seen, and they enjoyed it immensely ; while the old gins did not seem deeply grieved that their charges had taken a jaunt.

Next day Stickleg departed for Bowen Straits, and I was not sorry, for I did not like him, and this feeling was intensified by what Billy told me afterwards. He said that some time before white teamsters in Port Darwin had sold a number of horses to Chinese, with which to do their carting to up-country reefs. This they were doing with great satisfaction to themselves, but to the discontent of various bad whites, who seized a favourable opportunity to drive twenty-eight of the horses out back a bit where they hamstrung and shot them. Our fleet-footed visitor was supposed to have been one of the

diabolical gang who perpetrated this cruel work, which, however, was never sheeted home to any one.

I saw him again, as the principal in a horrible tragedy.

CHAPTER VIII

Amongst the Birds, etc.

SOME little distance inland there was a swamp, where I often went when desirous of securing birds for the table, and where black and white geese were numerous. So great at times our "bag" was that we in the "saloon" selected the breasts only, the rest being boiled down for soup.

The blacks were clever in calling these birds. A black and I would lie hidden in a clump of bushes near the margin of the swamp, and the native would then talk "all same old man" (meaning an imitation of the gander's cry). Thus lured, the flying birds would gradually work their way to our shelter with fatal results to themselves. These birds lodged in the shade of lofty trees during the heat of the day, and many were then secured. If they hung in the branches, my companion, who scaled the most difficult boles with the ease of a monkey, speedily dislodged them.

Near the margin of swamps, where the grass was burnt off, we often saw Native Companions bowing and scraping to each other, as if dancing a set of quadrilles or a minuet. With their long legs, slate-coloured bodies, long curved necks and red bills, they made a picture worth seeing; and had I been an artist I might have anticipated Sid Long's "Spirit of the Plains." There were also Jabaroo, Spoonbill, Ibis and Spur-wing Plover, the last-named

often giving annoyance with their warning cries as I was taking trouble to get some particular bird.

The bird most valued that this swamp afforded was pigmy goose. It is the bird of birds for the table, but like most other good things, difficult to secure, being scarce and shy. This goose is about the size of a common duck, with a white breast, dark top-side, and dark wings, tinted with a sheeny green. Whenever procurable other birds were ignored; and Billy and I never failed to agree that pigmy was not good tucker for black men, while excellent for those of the "cabin."

I often gave the old blacks a treat of flying foxes—secured in the garden, where they displayed a partiality for pappas, never failing to select the best. The pappas, or paw-paw apple, as it is commonly called, is an excellent edible. It is sometimes quite nine inches in length and four or five in breadth, is yellow when ripe, and with a flavour akin to that of the apricot. It is rich in pepsine, and is highly valued as an aid to digestion. I have heard it stated that if you hang a tough piece of meat among the leaves, or wrap the meat up in them for a few hours, it will become tender. Having a set of grinders that met all requirements, I never put this statement to the test. In the evening you might notice a fine large pappas and say to yourself, "I'll break my fast with that in the morning," for to eat it fresh from the tree in the cool of a new day is the way to enjoy it to the full. But it often happened that Mr. Fox had come to a like decision, and not infrequently the morning had nothing better to show than the rind.

No young blacks were allowed to eat the foxes, which, as a great luxury, were reserved for the old men.

We often happened on the camping places of this pest in the mangrove creeks. You did not require to see them

to know that they were near, for they had an aroma all their own, and as objectionable as it was original. When asleep they hang, head down, in bunches; and a new chum could be readily pardoned for thinking them some peculiar kind of fruit. But a charge of shot sent amongst them would change the scene from one of perfect silence to a pandemonium of swishing wings and terror-screams as the air became literally black with them. In some of the creeks the clusters met with must have represented tens of thousands of this combination of bird and animal; and as they measured some four or five feet from wing to wing tip, you can understand what sort of commotion they produced and the shadow they cast.

One day we had sent flying a great flock of these foxes, when an eagle appeared on the scene. The emperor of birds swooped for a plump one, which, however, was not to be easily caught. Screaming all the time, it dodged among its mates seeking to elude its pursuer; but its efforts only prolonged the inevitable end. With wonderful generalship the eagle cut it out from the flock, and darting on it like a flash of light, bore it aloft into the blue.

I suspect I shall have been credited ere this with a keen eye for those things excellent for the inner man. Well, I'll own up to the soft impeachment; and let me tell, in case any of my readers get into a position like to mine, of the other good things we enjoyed.

Sometimes the boys speared a turtle. It was turned on its back, and had its throat cut, after which the knife was passed round near the shell, and the body torn out from its bony covering, on which there was left a thick layer of green fat. I wonder what London's festive old aldermen would have thought or said if they had seen the naked feasters indulging their appetite for this green lining. With avidity they scooped up the soft, warm stuff in

handfuls and swallowed it with the greatest relish. That was one of the good things I resisted, but made amends for loss in this direction by turtle soup, turtle steaks fried with onions, and turtle in every way that the culinary art of Billy could devise.

Then again, we had dugong—a great, innocent-looking, grass-eating fish—which was our substitute for fresh pork. No one, I venture to say, could tell it when cooked from the flesh of the alleged unclean beast. Ah, and did any one say “Crabs” ? Yes, we had them, too ; fellows as big as soup plates, and with such claws ! Billy, whose ocean experience had been wide, knew exactly how to make the most of them. This was his method : Boil, pick out the flesh, chop up with crumbs and onions ; add a dash of salt and pepper ; replace in the shell with a lump of buffalo fat on top, or better still, butter if you have it ; then place in the oven to brown. When you have a chance try it, and I’ll be bound you’ll say, “It was a lucky chance that cast that chap away on the North Coast of Australia !”

When we wanted oysters for stewing, the lubras brought them from the rocks in baskets, minus their shells. We had fish whenever we desired them, speared in the shallows, or caught with hook and line from a canoe ; and if a stew was the order of the day, and we wanted it to be extra good, why there was trepang to boil down for stock. Our vegetables, besides tomatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and cabbage palm, occasionally included young pappas, which, when boiled, reminded one of vegetable marrow ; and for fruit we had bananas and pine apples. The latter were a never-failing source of satisfaction, and I believe those travellers who say that the pine apple of the Northern Territory has the finest flavour of any in the world.

There were a large number of domestic fowls belonging to the camp ; and here, again, we had much to be thankful for. Being fond of raw eggs, I invented a drink for the early morning, which I named "A fair start." Recipe : Put into a bottle a tea-spoonful of sugar, break into it half a dozen eggs, and a little water, then shake well, pour into a pannikin, and imbibe. Billy thought a little rum would have improved it ; but there was none, and if there had been I for one would not have tried it. I am not a teetotaller, but I know the less alcohol one takes in the tropics the better. The drug is beneficial there as elsewhere, when taken in moderation ; but the trouble is to determine moderation in a climate where a masterful thirst is so easily acquired. Before leaving the important matter of eggs, let me tell of a new method I evolved for beating them up. It may be useful where the usual appliances are not to hand, or it is desired to observe silence. Pour out the ingredients before mentioned into your vessel, cover with paper, place a cloth over the paper, draw the edges together underneath and twist until tight over the top. Be careful not to put too much vigour into the twisting operation, or you will break something. Clutch and shake for about a minute, and you will find you have done the trick to a nicety. Billy, I may add here, was a great hand at pancake-making. What towers of them this Kanaka chef built ! And how the structures, with the aid of vinegar and sugar, were demolished !

As you can imagine, youngsters were numerous in our large camp. Don't be frightened : I am not going to tell you that we devoured them, too, although it would be excusable if you thought so after all I have said of our capacities in the eating line. I was fond of playing with the little chaps, running races, jumping and throwing

spears. They were so easily pleased, and so merry that one could not help joining in their fun. Little, pot-bellied imps they were; and what gluttons they proved when a chance was given them! I was often responsible for an exhibition of this kind. All the blacks were fond of rice, which formed the bulk of their pay for work done in the way of trepaning, etc. This Rob purchased from the Malays. It came from Bali, and though inferior to that used by Europeans, being small in grain and much broken, was still excellent as food. When the fancy took me I would obtain a supply from Billy, have it cooked, and mix with it buffalo meat or fowl. Then I would call the little ebonies and solemnly introduce them to it. My reward was watching the little beggars getting broader and broader, until unable to swallow another grain! In a few hours, however, they would "bob up serenely," ready for another "tuck in" if a supply were forthcoming.

Poor little chaps, they had their troubles, too, like other children. One day I heard an unusual commotion on the beach—women screaming and children crying pitifully. I ran down to find two little fellows sitting on the beach. Lubras were pouring water over them and rubbing their bodies with sand, which were covered with welts as if they had been lashed with a pliant whip. How they did cry; and how pathetic the look in their staring, brown-black eyes! After some trouble I found out the cause. The two little fellows had been playing in the water, and had been stung by something, raising the marks I have mentioned. It was some time before the pain, which at first must have been very great, eased off. I can even now see those poor little eyes staring into mine. Later on I had an experience, and saw another instance of the same poisoning, but then the ending was more terrible.

An amusement all the blacks were fond of was throwing a stick, about four feet in length, on to a tuft of grass or bush in a slanting direction, so that it would ricochet, the object being to make it travel as far as possible. The thrower would give a short run, a "whoop," and then dash the stick down. When an excellent shot was made, it would be greeted with cheers; these would follow a bad one, too, but the cheers then had a different meaning. The blacks have a keen sense of ridicule.

CHAPTER IX

A Bad Time

TH**ERE** were at the camp two old horses upon which I occasionally had a "cruise round." One day it was found that the supply of cabbage palm was exhausted, so I volunteered to ride out to the forest, six miles away, and procure some. Though excellent as a vegetable, it seemed a wrong thing to do, for that required for a meal meant the life of a tree. Removing the cabbage-top killed it; but I salved my conscience with the excuse that if I did not go some one else would. I was accompanied by Boom to do the climbing. Arrived at our destination, we soon procured our vegetable, and then sat down for a smoke, after which Boom and I parted, he to go a "piceaninny way" for a supply of wild honey, I to return to camp on my own tracks, where we hoped to meet about sundown. Having fixed up my cargo, held in a bag, to the front of what was once a saddle, I made a start, but had not covered a couple of hundred yards when from behind a clump of timber to my right, rushed an immense buffalo, making straight for me, head down! I cannot say if his action was the result of malice aforethought, playfulness, or mad impulse; but at us he came! It is hard to say what the result would have been if my nag had received the enemy broadside on; but on seeing the buffalo he stopped short, wheeled round and received the charge full in the chest. Away I went in one direction, gun in hand, the horse toppled over in another,

while our assailant continued right ahead and disappeared in the forest ! This I noted while in the air—and then a blank. My head must have struck a dead tree on reaching earth, rendering me unconscious, for when I again opened my eyes it was night. I lay some time looking up at the stars, with which the heavens were thickly studded, before I remembered what had happened. I was cold and dazed, and got up and walked, I knew not whither, using my gun as a support. Suddenly I collapsed and must again have become unconscious, for when I recovered, the hot sun was blazing in my face. I was parched with thirst. Then I lost my head entirely, and wandered on and on, my one desire being to reach water. Had I been in my normal state, the sun would have served as a guide to the camp ; but as matters stood, I was hopelessly bushed. After what appeared to me hours of wandering, I came to a dense mangrove swamp, and, not having the sense to keep out of it, went straight on. At first I found it beautifully cool, but soon became terrified with the gloomy, ominous silence of the Dantesque scene. Of all the fear-producing, awesome places to be found on earth, surely a mangrove swamp is the most potent ! I waded through the soft mud and toiled over greasy roots which projected feet out of the slime, looking like coils of knotted serpents, or the gnarled interlaced fingers of giant hands thrust up in despair. At times I sank to my knees in the ooze, my legs and naked feet being wounded at every step by the dead shells embedded in the mud, and by the spike-like lungs of a peculiar mangrove that showed above the surface. Now sinking down through sheer exhaustion, now struggling on again in the gloom, at last I caught sight of a strip of blue—a ribbon of sky—that told me, half-crazed though I was, that at last the open land was near.

Clear of the mangroves, I crawled towards a depression, which gave promise of the water for which I was famishing. The bank reached, judge of my despair when I found the water that of a tidal creek. With a cry of disappointment bordering on despair, I collapsed, flinging my gun from me as I did so, fortunately in the direction of the mangroves. I remember a sensation as if falling an immense distance, then a bellow, a snap like the sound of a great steel trap closing, a rush of air like that caused by the arms of a windmill, and then—I was conscious of being on my back in soft, evil-smelling mud.

As I lay a splash attracted my attention, and I turned to see an immense alligator disappearing round a bend in the creek! I had fallen down the steep bank, and on to the back of the saurian while he slept. Fortunately for me it had made off in fear, and beyond a scratch across the forehead, from which blood flowed freely, caused doubtless by one of the monster's claws, I was none the worse for thus making its acquaintance. Still my fear produced acute nausea; and, as quickly as possible, I scrambled up the bank.

Collecting my thoughts, I secured my gun and had sense enough to make for the head of the creek, being guided in the proper direction by the ebbing of the stream. I knew that there I would have a chance of finding a soakage, provided my waning strength held out. At sunset, after a weary struggle, I came to a fresh water swamp. For a moment I hesitated, half doubting my eyes, and then I fairly flung myself amongst the reeds and lilies, and drank and drank until I could drink no longer.

Before leaving the water the wisdom of securing a supply in case I moved on occurred to me, so I filled the gun barrels and plugged the muzzles up with grass. I crawled to a dry piece of ground, lay down, closed my

eyes, and tried to determine what was best to do. When I opened them again the sun was just appearing over the horizon.

A heavy dew had fallen, and I was naked save for my loin cloth. I was icy cold, almost rigid, and strangely ill. The consuming thirst had returned, and with it a burning heat. The feverish heat then gave place to cold shivers; and so the heat and cold came and went, and with them strange fancies, the creation of delirium.

Just as the sun was setting I fancied I heard a faint cooee, and soon after the sound of voices. Was I dreaming? No, help had come. Next moment Boom was at my side, his eyes full of tears and saying—

“Captain, what for you get em lost alonga bush and no take me?”

Then came Tim Finnigan, Rippy and Big Jack, all showing the deepest concern, mingled with expressions of delight at having found me. As I realized my safety my overstrung nerves gave way, and I found relief in tears, sobs shaking me from head to foot. Thus to weep may seem an unmanly thing to have done, but let those who think so go through a like ordeal before they say so. This hysterical condition, which soon passed, gave place to one of lethargy. My chums quickly brewed a billy of tea, and after a deep, deep draught of the delicious beverage I was carried close to the fire, and there, wrapped in a blanket, fell into a sound sleep.

I learned that Boom had arrived at the camp about sundown. My non-arrival did not at first cause alarm, but when night came, and still I was absent, the matter was taken seriously. As there is virtually no twilight in the tropics, darkness following quickly on the setting of the sun, nothing could be done till the morning. But at peep of day a search party set out, provided by Billy with

a can, tea and blanket. At the cabbage-palm forest the horse was found. The natives quickly divined from the tracks what had happened, picked up my trail and ran it to the mangrove swamp. There they were baffled, for the tide had been up and obliterated it. The absence of indications on the outside satisfied them that I had entered the swamp. So in they went, and coming out near where I had made the acquaintance of the alligator, found where I had scrambled up the bank, and followed my dragging tracks to the fresh water.

I have not mentioned the sufferings inflicted by insects. During the day flies were almost unbearable, and at night the mosquitoes were as bad, not to mention the sandflies at sunrise and sunset. During the long hours of night I was haunted by mysterious noises from the jungle; from the swamp came the monotonous croakings of great frogs, which sounded like thousands of voices saying: "Hot water! Hot water! Quart pot! Quart pot!" and from the creek came the bellowing of alligators.

Although very ill, I slept fairly well that night. At daybreak a start was made for the camp. I, being too weak to walk, was placed on the old horse with a boy on each side to hold me in the saddle. The pace was slow, for my mount had been lamed by the buffalo's charge. By making a detour the mangrove swamp was avoided, and, after many rests, the camp was reached at sundown.

I must not omit to mention that when the blacks found the gun barrels contained water they were greatly puzzled, but when they divined how and why this had come about, they simply roared with delight, crying, when they recovered their breath—

"My word, Captain, that fellow good!"

As soon as Billy saw me he decided I had a bad attack of fever, and at once despatched one of the blacks into the

bush for bark from what he called the Quinine tree. This he boiled and strained. When cool he gave me frequent doses of the liquid, and wrapped me up in blankets. My thirst was great, and for this my medical adviser mixed with cold water the inside of the pods of the tamarind tree. This treatment was continued till the evening of the next day, when I broke into a profuse perspiration. A little broth was then allowed, and a sleep of many hours followed. Next morning I was a new man, though a very weak one ; and it was some time before I was free from the white man's tropical enemy.

CHAPTER X

A Turn with Alligators

IT has been stated, and perhaps with truth, that alligators are only found in America, and that the reptiles so called in the Northern Territory are crocodiles. Be that as it may, we knew them as alligators, and I'll continue to call them such. The alligator differs from the crocodile in the shorter and flatter head, and the existence of cavities or pits in the upper jaw; but for all "practical" purposes there is little, if anything, to choose between them.

One morning, while at breakfast, a black boy ran in crying, "Billy, my word big fellow alligator killem buffalo down alonga creek."

The meal was instantly forsaken and a rush made for the creek, about a mile away. Sure enough there lay a dead buffalo in about three feet of water. It had evidently been seized by the head while drinking, and drowned, but not without a hard struggle for life. The alligator, which must have been a large one, had disappeared. We of the saloon were disappointed, but the blacks considered it fortunate, for the dead buffalo meant a feast for them. The animal was soon flayed and cut up, the hide being appropriated by Billy.

Early the following morning Boom came to me in a greatly excited state and announced, "Alligator alonga creek killem horse." Away we hurried again with our carbines to find one of our old friends about eighty yards

from the water, with the near shoulder terribly torn. It, too, had been seized while drinking, and in its efforts to escape had drawn the alligator to where it had fallen and expired. As in the case of the buffalo, the reptile had then beaten a retreat.

As it was necessary to put a stop to these depredations, a council of war was held, and means devised for the raider's destruction. To this end a crowd of blacks drew the dead horse into the creek and towed it by means of canoes to a point off Adam Head, where it was anchored. A watch was then set, and it was not long before the blacks were calling: "Him come!" Billy and I went to the Head, and there, sure enough, was the monster, cruising round the carcass. We waited a favourable opportunity, and, at a signal from my companion, our carbines rang out together. For a minute or so the 'gator threw itself about in a frantic manner, its tail churning up the water like the propeller of a steamer in ballast, when it disappeared, leaving the water tinged with blood. Arrived at the spot, we were rejoiced to see the marauder lying at the bottom, to all appearance dead. As none of the boys displayed anxiety to go through the two fathoms that covered it, and inquire after its health, we used a grapnel and thus raised it to the surface. Once there, a rope was passed round its neck, and amid great laughing and cheering the horse-killer was towed to the beach and drawn high up on the sand. It measured sixteen feet in length. The blacks held a great feast, and on the recommendation of Boom, who declared its flesh was "good fellow tucker," I swallowed some by sheer force of will, but immediately afterwards sought a retired spot in the bush. My advice, based on the half-hour that followed is: Unless you are copper-lined, with a digestion like that of an ostrich, do not try alligator!

Our catch proved to be a female, and some forty eggs were secured. Poor old Boom, wishing to do me a substantial kindness, cooked and offered some, with the high recommendation, "All same hen eggs, Captain." I admitted they looked like hen eggs, but pleaded that as I was feeling somewhat delicate that morning he would have to excuse me. Boom gave me a look that clearly asked: "What are you giving us?" squatted down, and disposed of them himself.

I appropriated some of the teeth and paws of the reptile. Of the teeth match boxes were made for my dad and brothers, and scent bottles for my mother and sisters, and they looked very handsome when mounted in silver. The paws I converted into satchels, removing all the flesh and bones by carefully turning them inside out.

As all know, alligator hides are used for the making of dressing-cases, boots, etc., and it struck me then as a pity that such fine skins should be wasted. If a demand arises for these hides the Northern Territory could supply the market for a considerable time, without the necessity of "farming" the reptiles, as they do in Florida.

A morning or two after the disposal of the buffalo and horse-killer, Boom said to me: "Captain, you come along Mangrove Creek and see me catch em crab," adding, "More better bring gun, big fellow alligator sit down."

Acting on the hint, I took a carbine and a handful of cartridges, and it was fortunate for Boom that I did. The creek was a tidal one, and about three miles from the camp. On our way my companion cut from a bush several forked sticks about two feet in length, the fork being the longest portion. Feeling curious, I asked, "What that fellow for, Boom?"

"By-em-by catchem crab, stick him alonga bank. You see?"

I did not inquire further, as I was keeping a sharp look out in the hope of securing a buffalo, but fresh tracks were all I saw. When we arrived at the creek, Boom remarked, "Good fellow water, plenty walk," which meant that the tide was well out ; and between the sloping banks was left what appeared to be a stream of soft, black, disgusting mud. In Boom went, sinking to his waist before he found a firm footing. He waded close to the bank, peering into holes, into one of which he presently thrust the short stick he carried. Drawing it out gradually, I saw that an immense crab had gripped it with its forceps. Then, dropping the stick, with a quick movement, Boom clutched the great arms of the crab, and at his request I passed down one of the forked sticks. Catching the two arms of the crab in one hand, Boom stood it on end, jammed the fork over it and into the soft earth on the bank, and let go. What a comical, helpless idiot that crab looked, perched upright on the narrowest part of its shell and waving its great claws and legs about.

Although the crabbing was very exciting, especially the mud portion of it, I resisted Boom's repeated invitations to join in the sport. Having thus secured some half-dozen, he decided to try his luck on the opposite bank, about ten yards away. I was watching my companion struggling across when I heard a commotion in the mangroves above me, and turned to see an immense alligator rushing down the bank and straight towards me. For an instant I was useless with fear, then bounded away, the brute almost grazing my legs as it dashed into the mud, covering me from head to foot with the filthy stuff. The speed at which it had descended the bank caused it to shoot out some distance, and in a direct line for poor old Boom. He yelled, "Shootem, Captain, shootem," and then stood staring at the advancing alligator. In-

stantly I clapped the carbine to my shoulder and fired without, in my excitement, aiming at any particular spot. The bullet struck the brute's head, glanced off, and threw up the mud a short distance away. The shot caused the brute to stop and half turn round, thus exposing its side to me. I had reloaded, but as there was not a second to lose, I discharged my piece from the hip. The alligator sprang almost clear of the mud, and fell on its back. Boom, who would have been white with fear were that possible, lost no time in getting to my side. Our enemy lay motionless and seemingly dead, but to make sure doubly so, I presented it with an additional brace of bullets. As these caused no movement, I waded in and satisfied myself that nothing more was to be feared from our visitor. Being determined to land the carcase, I sent Boom back to camp for some boys. In the meantime I sought a shady spot, lit my pipe and fell to speculating. Supposing I had been seized by the brute, what could I have done? Would I have had the presence of mind to poke my fingers into its eyes, as the blacks assured me was done by any one of them if seized? Billy had told me of a black doing this and so escaping. Alligators, I was also informed, have quite an aristocratic palate in that they like their game "high." To secure the desired flavour they deposit their prey in some quiet place, under water, where it is left until it reaches the required putrescence. That at any rate is what the people on the coast believed. Billy also informed me of a man who had been seized by an alligator and had a wonderful escape. This miracle-worker, not having the opportunity of performing the finger-and-eye trick, was carried down to the bottom and there deposited to await the condition just mentioned. But he reached the surface, dodged the alligator, and got ashore with his right thigh terribly torn and crushed. Some

time afterwards, when on Crocker Island, the man who it was alleged had gone through this ordeal was pointed out to me. Whatever the cause, his right thigh was certainly terribly scarred and twisted.

I doubted if our friend in the mud intended mischief. I rather fancied it had been suddenly awakened and was rushing for its home. But even if that were so, Boom would probably have met his fate, for once in the mud the alligator was in its element, and Boom at its mercy; and the mercy of the alligator, like that of the wicked, is cruel.

By the time I reached this stage in my cogitations the boys had put in an appearance. With the usual laughter and fun the carcass was drawn to and up to bank. It measured sixteen feet, and I scoured a number of its terrible teeth. The blacks soon had a fire going and alligator steak cooking. As Boom knew I was "off" alligator, he roasted a couple of crabs for me, and very fine they proved. The blacks having cut off a supply of flesh for their friends at the camp, the carcass was left for the four-footed friends of the deceased to sharpen their teeth on.

Now that all was over, Boom thanked me in his own laconic fashion for his escape. We were now equally indebted. He had helped to save my life, and I had saved his. The sun was low in the west as we wended our way back to the camp, all hands being satisfied that the crabbing expedition had "panned out" in rare style.

CHAPTER XI

A Good Time

I WONDER if my readers are growing weary of me and my adventures, or wishing they had been sharers in the wild and fascinating life I have tried to depict. The latter I would say, judging from my own enjoyment of the same, although my ultimate return to civilization was never long out of my mind. This adventurous existence, however, suited me—so well, indeed, that I had almost lost count of time, though I imagined that some four or five months must have elapsed since the wreck of the proa and the subsequent horrors. The jungle with its mystery, its silence and shade was a favourite resort for me. There I reflected on the past, and from out its hushed depths came a power that directed my thoughts homeward—home to my kith and kin. A choking feeling would rise in my throat when I thought of the time I would be able to send word of my safety, at the same time being thankful that they could not see me as I was, for during all these months I had been without covering beyond my loin cloth and makeshift hat ; and, being constantly exposed to the sun and wind, had become not unlike the black men around me.

But to return to the narrative of my enforced wanderings.

The principal reason of Stickleg's visit to our camp was to secure rice for his men. Billy had plenty in the store, and, as this hunter was shooting buffalo for his master,

agreed to send round a supply to Bowen Straits in an old two-ended ship's boat which, decked and rigged as a cutter, was kept on the beach, covered with bark as a protection against the weather. I volunteered to make the trip with my boys, one of whom, Tim Finnigan, was an expert boatman, and knew the coast thoroughly. Before the voyage could be undertaken, the cutter needed repairing and caulking, so Billy suggested that while he attended to these matters I should make a canoe trip to Vashon Head with my chums and there have a shot at the English cattle—in short, spend a week doing what I liked. Being “on my own” was what I wanted, and Billy indulged in an all-embracing grin of satisfaction at my ready acquiescence. What a mouth he had. I verily believe he could have whispered into his own ear.

I was provided with a carbine, the old shot gun, a revolver, a good sheath knife, and plenty of ammunition. I declined a revolver out of consideration for my companions, who might have suspected I distrusted them. But they heard of the offer and thought I ought to take it with me, Boom remarking, “Captain, you take piccanniny gun, good fellow killem dead!” That settled the matter.

My chaps were in great glee over the proposed trip, and soon had their primitive arrangements made. Their gear consisted of baskets, their ordinary spears and wommeras, with others used for turtle and dugong capture, lines, and a few sheets of bark with which to cover themselves. Billy handed as necessaries, a billy for tea and another for cooking in, a tomahawk, three big knives for butchering purposes, a five-gallon drum of fresh water, with as much in the way of provisions as was deemed necessary.

The canoe was one that had been procured from the

Malays. It was twenty feet long, three feet six inches beam, and two feet six inches deep, cut out of a solid log, and perfectly modelled. In the nose was sand on which to make a fire. Our anchor consisted of a large stone, to which was attached about fifteen fathoms of coir line. In case we had a fair wind we had a piece of matting for a sail, and a big fishing spear for a mast. The morning of our departure was perfect. The air, owing to the heavy dew, was keen and fresh, and rich with the perfumes from forest and jungle; while the sea spread out like a plain of crystal, reflecting the columns of smoke from the numerous camp fires, as they lazily circled upward to the blue.

At the order "All aboard," the four boys seized their paddles and I the steer oar. The united camp gave us a hearty send-off, with many wishes for good luck. Thus commenced as jolly a time as I ever had.

Making good speed we had soon rounded a headland that shut the camp from view. I then told Boom to boil the billy for breakfast, the wood used being mangrove chips from a variety that makes no sparks nor smoke, but throws out great heat. In a short time we were soon enjoying our first meal, the canoe the while drifting out with the tide. After paddling for a couple of hours we came to Oyster Point. I, perched on a rock in the water, was served by the boys with a number (I'll not say how many) of the bivalves to act as a topping to the morning meal. They also relished the succulent dainties, judging from the number consumed. I had one of the baskets filled, clean and ready for the stew I had decided to prepare for supper. From this point we continued our journey to Knocker Bay, distant a couple of miles, and there camped for the night.

Having hauled the canoe up on the sandy beach and made all snug, we had a quiet spell under some casurina

trees. A walk followed ; but before setting out I cut up some potatoes and onions and put them in the billy, adding water drained from the oysters. The blend was then left to stew gently by the fire. Away I went, carrying the old shot gun, and followed by my bodyguard. At no great distance from the beach was a paper-bark tree swamp of great extent, all the reeds and tall grass in which were as dry as tinder.

A fire was suggested to let the good folk know how we were getting along. No sooner said than done. The boys lit torches of grass and running with them in all directions left trails of fire in the bleached herbage. Then a scene of terrific grandeur followed. A great line of lapping tongues of flame, shooting at times twenty feet into the air, raced before the breeze, which had sprung up, and licked the great trunks and branches of the paper-bark forest, leaving them as black as ebony save for the topmost foliage ; through clumps of corkscrew palms it sped ; then, as if a power demented, leapt and roared within a great bamboo jungle ! Have you ever, reader, listened to the thundering of heavy guns and the rattle of musketry ? If so you can form a faint idea of the din produced. The thunder of heavy ordnance was given by the roar of the flames, the rattle of small arms by the exploding bamboos, every section of which, as the air in them became heated, were rent open, thousands bursting simultaneously. At times one could hear what sounded like a *feu de joie*, then a volley, then a dropping fire. The flames passed on, leaving the plains black, with scorched sago palm stumps standing like grim sentinels. In front of the conflagration rolled dense clouds of smoke, thick with ashes and burning leaves. Thousands of birds darted ahead, and swooped down on the insect and reptile life endeavouring to escape, till all was lost to view save, in

the distance, a long line of dense smoke, as if an army of destruction had passed, or some cyclonic force was rearing vapour-mountains for a deluge. Nature may seem as if entranced, the stillness be unbroken by even the chirp of a bird, but start a fire and winged life gathers from all quarters as if by magic. Such was the case that day.

This burning of the country may seem a vandal-like proceeding—a brutal destroying of Nature's beautiful handiwork. But it is not so. No time is lost by her—she who in turn succours and annihilates—in making the loss good. The grass springs up sweeter, more juicy and better suited for the life that lives by it; the trees put forth fresh leaves, the palms new fronds, and everywhere additional strength and beauty emerge from the ashes.

One of the most effective scenes that I witnessed was some acres of sago palms, which had been through the fire ordeal only a few months previously. The palms were crowned anew with waving plumes of bright green, which contrasted with their black boles, threw each into stereoscopic relief.

On our return to the beach I bagged a dozen pigeons for breakfast, and could have secured hundreds. By the time the camp was reached the potatoes and onions were nearly cooked, so in went as many oysters as the billy would hold, to which a sprinkling of pepper was added, and then it was again placed near the fire to effect a satisfactory combine. The result was a record stew, and the big can was drained of every drop.

The inner man being thus gloriously satisfied, I lay back with my pipe, drew the blanket over me, shut my eyes as I thought for a minute or so, and—woke to find the blanket wet through with dew, and the sun just beginning his task of warming our side of the globe again.

On the second day we contented ourselves with dodging along the coast and fishing from the canoe with fair success. When near our destination for the day, Turtle Point, a fair-sized reptile—they deserve a better name—was espied asleep on the surface, and preparations were at once made to capture the “sleeping beauty.” Tim crept up till within throwing distance, when he let fly his spear, which came down almost perpendicularly, burying the iron spike deep in the back of the sleeper, the shaft dropping away. The turtle struggled, but the iron held, and our prize was soon on board. Before going ashore we again laid in a stock of oysters, which we roasted in their shells for supper.

In the morning it was decided to visit Smith Point, the headland on the eastern side of the bay. There was a favourable light south-west wind, so we fixed our sail and had a pleasant run at three knots an hour. I had with me a Malay towing line, and decided to try our luck. The line was some thirty fathoms in length, with fifteen feet of fine brass wire to which was attached a brass hook covered by a feather bait. The line was paid out, the rate at which we were travelling being the correct pace for our purpose. Soon I felt a strong tug, then the line went with a swish through the water until nearly at right angles to the canoe. I hauled in and eased off until the fish was tired, when it was drawn alongside, and one of the boys, hooking his fingers into its gills, assisted it on board. The beauty weighed quite twenty pounds, and was shaped like a barracouta. Tim declared it was a good sort to salt and dry in the sun. So out went the line again, the boys being in high feather over the sport. Swish went the line, another catch. We now took it in turns to haul in, and before arriving at our destination had secured twenty.

Having had breakfast and set the boys getting our take ready for curing, I took the shot gun and wandered around. I first visited the mound at the extreme point, erected by the old-time settlers ; then struck inland. Noticing some birds flitting about in an unusual way among the bushes I investigated, and found a bower bird's nest, or playground. It was strewn with the white stones and shells with which these birds (so it is stated) play lawn tennis and croquet.

CHAPTER XII

The Good Time Continued

A LOFTY tree at no great distance then attracted my attention. When near it I noticed it bore, at some distance from the ground, what appeared to be a small shed. This struck me as strange, certainly unusual; but concluded it had been built by blacks desirous of being high and dry. Noting the tree was an easy one to climb, I determined to go aloft and have a look around, so leaving my gun and game secured in a shady place, up I went, and was rewarded by an imposing view. My eye travelled over many miles of country, some of it open and beautifully grassed, some dark with the green of matted jungle, and some again where stately trees gave to it a parklike appearance. Beautiful, but intensely lonely. Far away there glittered the silver surface of a lagoon so calm and clear that in it I could see repeated the little clouds of a windless sky, like pearly sails of fairy boats. A turn of the head disclosed the curvings of the coast, with its thread of foam, the rich and solemn wilderness beyond, and nearer the blue of the ocean depths against which circled a curl of yellow smoke from the fire of our camp. Then I chanced to look beneath me, and there on the top of what I had deemed was the roof of a shelter shed lay the sun-dried corpse of a black, staring at me with eyeless sockets. I lost no time in descending, for the sight was an uncanny one. The little shed was a dead man's home.

Securing my gun and game I returned to the canoe to

find that my companions had finished cleaning the fish, and were all fast asleep. They awoke, but I said nothing about the dead man, fearing that would unsettle them.

"Captain," said Boom to me, "you like to see way blackfellow catchem fish, no line, no more spear?"

"Certainly, my lad," answered I, "anything for a new experience."

"All right, we been go longa jungle first time."

I would rather have rested and thought over what I had seen, but I wished to humour my mate, so away we went, Boom walking just before me with the tomahawk in his hand, I carrying the gun. Suddenly he gave a leap into the air, dashed down the tomahawk, and yelled out—

"Look out, Captain, him bite you dead."

Then I saw if Boom had taken his step forward instead of upward, he would have been on the top of an immense yellowish snake. I introduced myself by blowing its head off. Boom said—

"Him very bad fellow, him bite, tumble down, quick fellow." Boom having seen it killed, and ever with an eye to the larder, decided it would make "good tucker."

At the jungle, after a little search, my guide found the creeper he required, and from this he cut several pieces. We then returned. When close to the beach Boom caught sight of Big Jack standing with his back towards us, looking intently at something. Boom made a sign for me to stop. He crept forward without a sound, taking the snake with him, and when close to Big Jack, whirled the reptile around the poor old chap's bare legs. Jack gave a leap and a yell, knocked the snake clear, and hit out for the canoe. How the others did laugh when they saw it was a joke; Jack, when over his fright, joining in without the least ill-will.

I gave Boom a growling for his practical joke, but my feigned anger had as much effect on him as water on a duck, for while I was delivering my speech he was bruising the pieces of creeper between two stones. He then tied the creeper to a stick, and going to a large rock hole full of water, in which were large fish, he thrust it in. From the crushed creeper thus submerged there was emitted a little whitish cloud, which gradually spread, and then, to my astonishment, several of the fish came to the surface and turned over. These the boys picked out, explaining that they were only asleep, and if left in the water would soon recover. I suppose the plant contained a strong narcotic. The snake was cooked, and looked like fish, but tasted like chicken, so they said. I dined on the fish which Boom had so easily secured.

Having decided to cross to Vashon Head next morning, the headland on the western side of the Bay—we made a very early start, to dodge the wind and escape hard work. We were lucky in having calm weather. The tide was low when we arrived, leaving a large expanse of reef bare. From this I viewed the covered portions, upon which were corals of varied colours and shape, and about which beautiful fish swam, the whole seeming like a transformation scene. Pearl shell I was told was often found on the reef, so we went in search, for I was most anxious to find a “pearl of great price.” It was far from easy walking, and I had to proceed gingerly on account of the sharp coral, for the soles of my feet were not hardened like those of the blacks. We were fortunate in picking up a dozen pairs of shells, two of them particularly fine specimens, as large as a soup plate. We saw many trepang, but did not collect any.

When at the canoe, Boom showed me how the shells were opened, and judge of my delight when, as the reward

of patience and care, I secured four pearls nearly the size of swan shot. I annexed the large shells and pearls for my collection. The pearl oyster being excellent bait, we next tried for fish. Paddling out some distance, we made a start in about five fathoms of water. Either the bait was extra good or the fish unusually plentiful, for we soon had over two dozen fine schnapper, red and grey, ranging from three to ten pounds.

When on the point of returning we heard a grating sound at the bottom of the canoe, and then felt a slight heave, as if she had grounded. We looked at each other, then Big Jack, pointing, whispered—

“Look, Captain!”

Look I did, and never again do I want to meet such a challenge from man, beast, reptile or fish! Just below the surface of the water was an immense shark, with its greedy deadly-treacherous eyes staring straight into mine. We were breathless as our enemy ranged alongside, and we saw he was nearly as long as the canoe. Our chances we knew would be small if the monster attacked us, for he could have capsized us in a moment. While our fate was thus in the balance, Rippy seized a schnapper and threw it well away from the canoe. After it went the shark, and that broke the spell. The boys seized their paddles and sent the canoe in double quick time towards the shore, the shark following us.

“Givem more fish, Captain,” cried Rippy.

In my anxiety to be on friendly terms, I dashed over a piece of matting. The shark put his snout to it, and then turned for us. Like a flash over went two of the best fish, whereupon the sea seemed to be alive, great dorsal fins showing everywhere. We were evidently in for a bad time, and our escape depended on the discretion observed in handing out food to our ravenous foes, for deep

water extended almost to the edge of the exposed reef.

All the fresh fish and two geese I had shot during my walk were now inside the sharks, the big fellow having secured most, still they circled round us, so out went our salted fish in small lots to give us as much time as possible, and before it was exhausted we had shot into shallow water and were safe. Outside we could see the company we had been entertaining. It was a close call, and we were rejoiced when, by paddling in shoal water, we reached a sandy beach and there camped. A good rest and a billy of tea made us feel better, and put an end to the silence that nearly always accompanies great danger.

Boom, after a time, told me he knew where there was a great jungle fowl's nest not far away, so I determined to see it. I took the gun for luck. We walked inland some little distance, and when near a clump of trees, Boom said, "Jungle fowl sit down there." He had hardly spoken when there was a discordant screech and cackle. "My word, old man sit down," was Boom's explanation. We crept up quietly, and saw two brown birds sitting on a branch together, about the size of ordinary barn-door fowls. Crawling up under cover of some bushes, I fired and got the brace. Among the trees stood the nest—a mound about thirteen feet high, and nearly one hundred and fifty yards in circumference. The top of the mound was flat, and about seven feet in diameter. Boom commenced to look round this edge of the nest, and scratching away a quantity of leaves and earth exposed some eggs. We broke one, but as it contained a young bird, the others were replaced. Another search by my companion resulted in fresh ones being discovered. They were of a brownish colour, and about the size of a

goose egg. From Boom I learned the birds always deposit their eggs on the edge of the flat top. When building, the pair go back some fifty yards, and with a backward jumping movement rake up the leaves, etc., with their powerful claws to the top of the mound. The eggs are hatched by the heat of the soil and decaying vegetation.

While away a turtle's nest with a lot of fresh eggs had been found. The jungle fowl's eggs and the fowl itself were delicious. I must be thought somewhat of a glutton in that I have so much to tell about what we ate, but living in the open air gave us splendid appetites, and so our menu made an important item in our studies. That evening we went quietly along the beach and saw a turtle depositing its eggs in a hole in the sand. Despite its efforts to gain the sea, we succeeded in turning it over, and took it home alive.

With day-dawn we started on our return journey, putting into Coral Bay, six miles from Vashon Head, to secure some of the English cattle. I took the carbine and a few cartridges, one of the boys having a reserve supply.

We had not proceeded far when we saw two cows coming towards us, and before they saw or scented danger I fired and one of them dropped, the other disappearing. The boys set to work at the butchering, and I started off to secure another shot. It came in a way I little expected, and as suddenly as unexpected, for, without warning save for the thud of its hoofs, I saw to my consternation a great bull bearing down on me at dangerously close quarters. I fired and missed, then dodged behind a tree. The shot stopped the onrush for a moment, which gave me time to slip in another cartridge and fire, but being excited I missed my mark, although the bullet smashed my assailant's near foreleg. The

poor beast showed its rage and pain by bellowing and rushing about, giving me a chance of escape, but I was anxious to put him out of his misery. To this end I sought to reload, when I found the brace of bullets I had used were the only ones I had. I still had my loaded revolver, and with this I ventured to give him the *coup de grace*. Stealing up fairly close, for I thought two legs would prove swifter than three in case I failed in my purpose, I took steady aim for the curl in the centre of his forehead, and fired. A sudden rush beyond the smoke told me I had failed, and sent me sprinting instanter at my top speed. But the bull, I found, was fleeter, and when almost on me, and going his best, I again dodged behind a tree, while he swept on for a short distance, turned and charged again. Then began a game of hide and seek, the like of which will never become popular, and while this was going on, Boom, who had heard the firing, and wanted to be in the fun, put in an appearance. If I had proved too agile for my infuriated partner, what shall I say of Boom? Surely never toreador played with his rival more skilfully, and at his earnest request I allowed him to take the carbine, for which he had brought the cartridges, and try his fortune. To attract the bull to him he ran into an open space, and while the animal stood undecided, and perhaps astonished at his foe's temerity, Boom, with the coolness of a seasoned veteran, raised the rifle and took deliberate aim. A flash, a ringing sound, and the brave brute fell to earth, its head bent beneath its brisket. The ball had reached the curl.

The bull proved to be young and evidently of the Hereford breed. His excellent flesh was carried to our camp, where it was cut into thin strips, sprinkled with salt and packed in the canoe. At Oyster Point we again laid in a stock of our favourite fish, and had just got a start

with our final homeward paddle, when Rippy espied a monster dugong, which he dispatched with his spear. It measured ten feet in length, and was proportionately broad. Its size necessitated its being cut up, so we towed it ashore. The capture was well worth the trouble the dissecting entailed. The dugong, I may here add, is much like a porpoise without the dorsal fin, the nose and mouth resembling those of the horse. Except when old the tusks do not protrude, those of the male being chisel-shaped and the female's round. With old fish the tusks sometimes show to a length of nine inches, and are three-quarters of an inch thick. On the skin are patches of short, stubby bristles. The dugong is warm-blooded and suckles its young, which, in time of peril, it seizes by the pectoral fin and makes off. Dugong oil is prized as a cure for rheumatism and other aches, while its flesh, as already mentioned, is much like pork.

We had a most enthusiastic reception on reaching home, the prospective "blow out" doubtless being responsible for some of its verve. So far as I was concerned it had, in the matter of fun, surpassed my most sanguine expectations.

CHAPTER XIII

A Trip in the *Roaring Gimlet*

IN the relation of my experiences I may have conveyed the idea that the weather was always pleasant, and caused my readers to forget that we were in the tropics, little less than twelve degrees south of the line. Though I found the climate, taken all the year round, was one that suited me well, still it must not be forgotten that the heat at times was very great and moist at that, producing inertia and a thirst that even a cellerman would have found wellnigh impossible to quench. The most trying times during the day in the hot weather were just after sunrise, if it chanced the preceding night had been dewless and there was no wind, and at midday. Again we had, for days together, strong south-easters—a dry, parching wind that still made us feel cold. If the wind blew up from the nor'-west, after a hot, sweltering morning, the invigoration that came with it was a perfect delight, almost making the previous discomfort worth enduring for the sake of the pleasure that followed. Experience is necessary fully to realize the sensation.

We had been fortunate during our trip to the Heads, for, while it was red hot at times, we had experienced the deliciousness of cool, dewy nights. But now "Old Sol" had evidently made up his mind to show what he could do. Each day it grew hotter and more steamy, the south-easters had just about left us, and there were significant signs that a change was approaching. We

thought, however, we could depend on the weather holding good till we reached Bowen Straits, and determined to up sail as soon as possible.

Upon my return I found that Billy had been working hard while I had been pleasuring, for the old boat—which, by the way, was named the *Roaring Gimlet*—was as spruce as scraping and tar could make her. The standing rigging and sails did not impress me favourably ; still, given ordinary conditions, I concluded they would serve our turn. Having been afloat for several days the seams had taken up a lot, and she made but little water.

During our absence a black named Moyaut and his lubra had come across from Bowen Straits, with a message to Billy from Stickleleg. This native reported that a number of Alligator blacks had been lurking about the Straits, and had threatened to kill the Chinese timber cutters at Mount Norris Bay.

Before leaving I said farewell to Big Jack, one of my faithful bodyguard, who had decided to return to Wark in the company of several natives bound for that camp. I was sorry to part with him, for he had proved a devoted friend and a fine fellow. At his earnest request I agreed to give Moyaut and his lubra a passage to our destination.

We shipped about a ton of rice, and took in fresh water and the provisions Billy could spare, as well as a carbine, the old shot gun and a revolver, with plenty of ammunition in case we fell in with blacks who would consider they had a better right to the boat and cargo than we had. All in the camp gathered on the beach to say good-bye. Flash Poll was very much "cut up," perhaps divining that the voyage would not be all that could be desired, and kept crying out, "Captain go away, give it knife, it cutem head"; but I cannot say that she resorted to this peculiar way of showing grief.

As we drifted out with the tide the heat was blistering, and although the deck was constantly wetted down, little was gained thereby, for the water simply went off in clouds of steam. All hands sought the shade thrown by our windless sails. I had occasion to go aft into a little cabin or locker, when I heard, as if coming from beneath the boat, the sounds of music. Being curious to discover the source, I looked over the stern, and saw a number of yellow-and-black striped fish resting in the shade just under the stern post. It was all very well for them to indulge in a "sing-song," for it must have been deliciously cool where they were, but what I wanted was the music of the wind in the cordage. Although I had voyaged about the Bay a great deal, I had never before noticed sea snakes, but that morning many were asleep on the surface, perhaps as a result of the peculiarly oppressive weather.

At last we got the passing breath of a south-easter, which took us outside Smith Point, when it died completely away. Finding the current was setting the boat to the westward, we cast loose the two long oars lashed to the gunwale, and gradually worked the boat into four fathoms off the Point, where we anchored. The dead calm lasted through the night. A haze still veiled the sky, and the sweltering heat continued; yet for all that we had a fear that dangerous weather was brewing. At daybreak a light breeze sprang up from the nor'-west, and we at once shaped a course to clear the reefs, the set of the current assisting us. There was a nasty bank of cloud in the wind quarter that might hold a gale, but I decided to proceed instead of running back. Had I come to the opposite decision it would have proved too late to act, for while easing the boat off there came from the cloud-bank a terrific squall, racing with velocity towards



BUFFALO HORNS.

H. W. Christie.



MANGROVE SWAMP.

H. W. Christie.

us. The wind howled and screamed, and literally levelled the waves as it came. Not a moment was to be lost, and as I shoved the boat's nose into the wind the gale struck us, ripping our sails to shreds. I yelled to Boom to let the anchor go, for we were now driving fast to the reef; and to our joy the old *Gimlet* brought up in four fathoms and held. The squall was accompanied by alarmingly vivid lightning, followed by deafening peals of thunder, which, with the roaring of the wind, reduced us for a time to the condition of mutes.

The boat rolled and wallowed to such an extent that I expected every minute to see her go to pieces or our anchor chain part. The rain then descended in sheets, and our naked bodies were sorely punished by this and the biting wind. The gale continued thus for about an hour, when the wind suddenly jumped into the west and blew with increased fury. Snap went our chain! I jammed the helm over in the hope of getting our craft clear, but I do not think she could have paid off if Tim had not run out an oar through the rowlock near the stern, and added the timely assistance of his powerful strokes. He and I then crouched down, doing our best to keep her before the wind, while the others sat on the deck and clasped the mast, their bodies acting as a sort of sail. The lubra had crawled into the little cabin for shelter.

Away we went, past Port Bremer, where, could we have but run in, we would have found the refuge we so sorely needed, and had just cleared a low-lying sandy island on the other side of the port when Tim, who was looking astern, cried, "Captain, look, look!" Glancing behind I saw a gigantic wave at no great distance from us, and growing in immensity as it approached. Up went the boat's stern—up, up, until almost perpendicular, when,

with a swoop, our craft dashed down the declivity and disappeared in the depths of the sea !

It seemed an impossible time before I came to the surface and saw, from the crest of a wave, my comrades ; but there was no sign of the lubra. I swam to the others, and for some time we sought for her, but in vain. The poor girl had gone down with the boat, not being able to get clear of the cabin. While searching for her we secured two small hatches, and two oars, which probably enabled us to save our lives.

When the waves lifted us we could discern land on the horizon about four miles away. To reach it in such a sea seemed a forlorn hope, but a man can do much for his life, so we struck out, keeping company as well as we could, and taking our supports with us. Again the rain came, calming the sea somewhat. The struggle for life went on for hours, and we were badly tossed about and beaten by the waves. We exchanged supports at times, and when any one of us needed special assistance, all these were brought together for the purpose. Though a powerful swimmer, I yet found it prudent to cast off my loin cloth, for every ounce would tell. As we drew nearer the land the waves were not so vicious, and although the wind was cuttingly cold the water was warm. We were by this time feeling weary, but each tried to be brave and hearten his comrades with hope.

Now that there seemed a fair chance of reaching land, judging our strength against the distance, I began to have a fear of sharks, and the memory of Vashon Head was vivid. But none appeared. On we struggled till near sundown, when we approached the breakers. To get through these meant a hard fight, but there was no choice, so we joined the wild sea horses for the grand finale ! I managed very well till I touched the sand, when I was

suddenly lifted and swept away like a chip, and I remembered no more.

When I regained consciousness my first thought was, "Where are my blankets?" I groped round for them, and touching the wet grass, opened my eyes. Where was I? In the dim light of breaking day I made out the beach, lined with foam; and, lying close to me, were my four sleeping companions. I was cold, very cold, and then I again became unconscious.

The next thing I knew was feeling myself being violently shaken. It was dear old Boom trying to rouse me. With great difficulty I managed to sit up—cold, stiff, and weak. Oh, how sore and utterly miserable I felt; and my brave mates, judging from their appearance, were not feeling much better. Boom, who was wanting to be plucky, asked if I was hungry? I had not eaten anything for twenty-four hours, nor did I want to, still wishing to play up to my mate, I declared I could eat an alligator! That made Boom laugh.

It then transpired that the good fellow had been along the beach and brought back a number of oysters—a kind that grew on the mangrove trees. They were irregular in form, and looked as if shaped by the growth of the trunk or branch to which they had adhered. The boys had tried to start a fire, but as everything was saturated with moisture, had failed; and I had no flint and steel now. The shells were opened with stones; but we all found the contents cold comfort.

Reflecting on the loss of the poor lubra, the boat and its contents, firearms and ammunition included, I made inquiry as to how I had got ashore. Boom explained, that he and Rippy were close to me when I went under being dashed against their legs. They clutched me, and after a desperate struggle with the back-wash, had man-

aged to drag me beyond it. I was then carried to a bush, and all hands lay down with me, thoroughly exhausted. It was not possible to have a greater affection for these brave and loyal men than I had ; and all I could do by way of thanking them was to clasp their hands. They understood. Poor Moyaut was very sad for the loss of his lubra, but said little.

In our desperate condition, it was necessary to do something, and that something at once, so it was decided to try and reach the Bowen Straits settlement, distant, so far as I could estimate, some forty miles. Moyaut took the lead, and we toiled all day through wet bush, jungle, and swamps, heavy rain falling at intervals, until we came to a deserted native camp at Raffles Bay. We here made a meagre meal of young cabbage palm, and lay down for the night with sheets of bark as a covering.

The second day of our journey was a repetition of the miserable conditions of the first. We reached the west side of Buffalo Bay, where we had to remain, having no means by which to cross to the camp on the other side, or to attract the attention of those there. The mosquitoes were in myriads, and tormented us all night ; and although an iguana, an opossum, and a large crab had been captured, we had no fire with which to cook them.

We left our uncomfortable quarters at a very early hour, and arrived at the camp on the opposite shore after a four hours' tramp.

CHAPTER XIV

Further Tragedies

OUR arrival in such a manner and condition caused great stir among the natives. In a few words, Moyaut told what had happened, and when the natives heard of the loss of the lubra they immediately gave vent to their sorrow in howls and cries.

Our great necessity was food, and Stickleg's cook, a Cingalese, soon had plenty of hot tea, damper and cold beef before us. How delicious it all tasted, and what meals we made! This over, a great weariness came over me. Every bone and muscle of my body ached, yet kindly Morpheus was closing my eyes, so I procured a blanket from the cook and tumbled into a hammock slung in a little lean-to, where soon, until the next morning, I was "dead to the world." When I awoke from a dreamless sleep I remembered with shame that I had neglected to render thanks to the Father of all Mercies for my miraculous escape from a watery grave, for the strength which had enabled me to reach safety once more, and for the service rendered me by my devoted friends. Then and there, alongside the hammock, I knelt in sincere prayer.

I felt much improved, though still very stiff and jaded. I had a good wash, and was rubbed down, after which, as nature abhors a vacuum, I made inquiries *re* breakfast. This was soon forthcoming. Hunger once

more appeased, the cook gave me a pipe and tobacco, with which I was speedily at peace with the whole world.

I now remembered that I had not seen Stickleg, the boss. I asked for him, and was informed he had left the previous morning on a hunting expedition, and would not be back for several days. This, as I did not like the fellow, was good news. As I smoked we talked. There was truth in the story told by Moyaut about the Alligator blacks wanting to get a chance at the Chinese woodcutters, but he did not think anything would come of it, as there were about a dozen Chinese working together. These Alligator fellows had always been bad, but had become more dangerous since the Malay proas became fewer, as a result of the Customs dues they had to pay. This, he explained, prevented the blacks from getting as much rice, as they used to, and they, holding the whites responsible, were prepared to take revenge whenever or wherever an opportunity presented itself.

In reply to how Stickleg got on with the Alligator men, and his own crowd, the Cingalese smiled, and said there was no fear of the Alligators tackling him. He was, he said, too good a shot, adding with a significant look, that if the bush could talk it could tell many a story. As to his own crowd, he gave them plenty of tobacco and rice, if they pleased him when buffalo hunting and attended to his trepang; and they knew better than "go crooked" with him. Just then, went on my chatty companion, Stickleg was in a bad humour. Some of their niggers, he said, had been stealing his rice, and the boss was a bad man to annoy.

If all went well we would be on our way to Wark before Stickleg returned, for my chums were anxious to get back to their old camp, and I had decided to accompany

them, and arrange for smoke signals to be made when Rob's boat again visited Port Essington or Bowen Straits. I could then join it, and meantime Stickleleg could send a message to Billy about the loss of the boat. We took a rest of four full days before we made a start, and during that time I got into fairly good form again, having been rubbed down twice a day with dugong oil, which I found did me a lot of good.

Again on the tramp! The boys had procured some spears and wommeras, and the cook had supplied a billy, tea and sugar, and a box of matches, which you may be sure we took precautions to keep dry. I carried a staff—a piece of fishing spear—to help me along. We left at mid-day, our idea being to reach the Chinese cutters' camp that night. We had proceeded some four miles when I remembered I had forgotten to arrange for the smoke signals, so there was nothing for it but to return to the camp and fix things up. As it would be impossible, in consequence of the delay, to reach the Chinese place that night, I told the chaps to camp at a clump of casuarinas, about three miles away, and I would join them later. It was hot work walking back, and when about half-way I sat down in the shade of a tree for a rest and smoke. It was so pleasant that I fell asleep, and darkness had come before I awoke. No use being annoyed, so I consoled myself with the reflection that my walk now would be a cooler one. I had reason to remember that sleep.

When approaching the camp I noticed signs of great excitement, and when on the edge of the clearing, about fifty yards away from the hut, I stopped with a view to finding out what was going on. A strange scene met my eyes! Was it a tragedy or a comedy that was being enacted? I was soon to know. The hunter's iron hut

was thrown into strong relief against the forest background by the glare from torches held aloft by many blacks, who were standing in a semi-circle, facing the hut. But for their gleaming eyes and glistening teeth the nude bodies might have been taken for so many black marble statues, having as a foil the white beach and the torch-lit water beyond. Near a fire in the centre of the semi-circle were three struggling black men, and the deep breathing which came to me between the pauses of the lapping tide told me a tragedy was being enacted—a struggle for life. At last one of the men was forced to his knees, the other two holding him firmly in that position. The kneeling one seemed as if he knew the futility of further resistance, and that his life was forfeit. A cry rang out, the voice being that of an angry, excited, yet fearful man—

“Boss, quick ; Manialucum, me been catch ’em ; quick, boss.”

Out of the hut rushed Stickleg, the hunter, revolver in hand. Darting at the kneeling man, he clutched him by the hair, placed a revolver to his head, a report, and Manialucum lay motionless on the sand.

Was it a bad dream ? No, there lay the body of the murdered man, there stood the merciless hunter, and there were the black witnesses to the cold-blooded crime !

For a moment I stood, not knowing what to do. Then I turned and fled into the gloom of the forest—ran, heedless of everything, tripping over roots, crashing through bushes, striking myself many blows against trees, but never stopping till I had reached the beach and left the hateful glare of the torches far behind me. Thoroughly exhausted I sank down on the sand.

Rousing myself, for I felt my strength was rapidly

leaving me, I pushed on, and with joy caught sight of my chums' camp. A final effort, and I fell prone at the fire, scared and trembling. The boys sprang in amazement at my arrival and appearance; but hearing my story were almost as agitated as I. Tim threw light on the deed by remarking, "Stickleg say Manialucum steal rice. Stickleg say Manialucum say he will kill him."

Perhaps some may think I showed the white feather, but the deadly play passed so quickly that I had not time to grasp its meaning before it was over. Had I protested after the deed the chances are I should have followed poor Manialucum to the world of shades, for a white witness would have been regarded by Stickleg as an enemy to be silenced at all risks. As it was, I lost my head, owing no doubt to my then weak condition, and for once in my life knew what panic meant.

It goes without saying that we were thankful when day dawned, and we were once more on our journey, although the shocks my weakened nerves had received were telling strongly against me, and more were in reserve. After tramping about four miles, and when approaching the timber cutters' camp, Boom whispered, "Captain, blackfellow, Alligator, me think it!" About a quarter of a mile away I caught sight of a dozen men or more carrying spears. As soon as they saw the boys they commenced to make signs, but when they caught sight of me they disappeared in the bush. The appearance of a white man, although a naked and sun-burnt one, was too much for them; besides they may have caught a glimpse of the stick I was carrying and mistook it for a rifle. Tim said—

"They're Alligator blackfellow all right. I think they have been killing Chinamen. They run away because they think you Stickleg."

Tim was right. We had not gone far when we came

upon a dead Chinaman, who had been done to death with spears some hours before. We covered up the corpse with boughs to keep off the carrion birds, and made all the speed we could to the camp, anticipating the worst. Near it we found a second victim, terribly mutilated. Having covered this up also, we entered the rough bark hut, hoping to find the balance of the party alive; but the camp was deserted, and had been ransacked. The boys had a look round, and from indications concluded the survivors had started for the camp at Bowen Straits, making a straight course through the bush, and probably passing us in the night.

We were powerless to do anything, and were only too glad to get away from the dangerous neighbourhood. As we travelled we kept a sharp look out; but, to our great relief, saw nothing of the Alligator men.

I was now very ill indeed, and it was with the utmost difficulty that I dragged along. Indeed if it had not been for the great devotion of my three companions I certainly must have left my bones in the forest; and, had I consulted my own feelings, that might have happened. But they urged me on, and more as the result of sympathy for them than a desire to live, I did what I could to pull through the weary four days that it took us to reach Wark.

Everybody was delighted to see me again—no, not everybody, for to my great disgust I saw that Wandi Wandi and his following were back again, and that they regarded me with anything but friendly feelings, their leader especially. But I had no fear, for I knew my chums would see that no harm came my way from them. I was made as comfortable as possible in my old humpy, although I knew from my former experience that I had again contracted fever, if not something worse. I was consumed

with thirst, and Boom promised to procure quinine bark in the morning and make a mixture "All same Billy." Meantime exhausted nature conquered, and I fell asleep in spite of my aches and pains.

CHAPTER XV

At Last

A SOUND like that of rifle shots startled me from sleep. Had I been dreaming ?

Then Bang ! Bang ! again, followed by screams ! I crawled out of my humpy in dread lest some new misfortune was about to happen to me. A glance, however, brought reassurance, for near the humpies stood two white men with smoking rifles in their hands. The women and children were huddled together on one side, and on the other were several black men chained together. What ? Yes, they were the murderers of the Malays, and for a certainty the white men were policemen ! Nemesis at last ! But where was the ringleader, Wandi Wandi ? Surely he had not escaped. No, he was being dragged towards the white men by several natives ! It was clear what had occurred. The police, guided by friendly blacks, had crawled into the camp at daybreak and secured all save Wandi Wandi without creating a disturbance. That wily brute, suspecting danger, had made a dash for liberty with several blacks in chase. As he was approaching the thick timber, bullets from the rifles had caused him to stop. The fiend was soon securely chained to his mates.

The police had been so intently watching the prisoners and the chase that they had not noticed me, and when they did, stared in astonishment, showing that my presence in the proa was not known to them. One of them at last said—

“ Who are you, and what are you doing here ? ”

I was too weak to reply, and for answer sank to the ground and sobbed. Tim and the others then spoke for me, whereupon one of the troopers summed up the position in a nutshell.

“ Well, this beats cock-fighting ! ”

Both then shook me heartily by the hand, and one clapped me on the shoulder saying—

“ Buck up, old man ; you are all right now.”

I was made to lie down on one of the policemen's blankets, and after breakfast given an outline of how the capture had come about. Rumours had reached Port Darwin of the massacre, some of them coming from the gold-fields, hundreds of miles away. Articles belonging to the Malays had been passed on and on, until they came into the possession of the blacks knocking about the gold reefs, when inquiries were made as to where they were obtained.

Reliable information having at last been received from the coast, investigation was decided upon, and a small steamer named the *Port Darwin* was chartered to convey the party representing law and order. This was under the command of Inspector Paul, and he had with him two troopers and several black trackers. The Customs Commandant was also on board. The steamer had stopped at Crocker Island, on the east side of Bowen Straits, and had picked up some of the blacks who were “ in the know.”

At Cape Brogden the party landed at almost the very spot where the proa was wrecked and, although fine weather at the time, found difficulty in getting through the surf. They were then led to the jungle, where the poor fellows had been buried. As it was necessary to take the skulls as evidence, the question arose as to how they could be carried. The Customs Commandant (whom in future I shall call the “ C. C.”) settled the difficulty.

Noticing that one of the Crocker Island boys had on a pair of old trousers, he made him take them off, and having tied up the bottoms, put three skulls in each leg and slung them round the boy's neck. The other blacks thought this a great joke, and chaffed the lad unmercifully. But I suspect the boy there and then made up his mind that if ever he had to go on such another jaunt he would leave his dress suit at home. The policemen had then been instructed to proceed to Wark with their black contingent in search of the murderers, the Crocker Island natives having reported they were there. "And now," continued Hold, "our instructions are to make for Malay Bay, just this side of Bowen Straits, where the steamer will meet us, and as that means a tramp of some seventeen miles, we must get away with our prisoners as soon as possible, so as to get them on board before dark."

I wanted to go with them, but could not walk. Hold consulted with his fellow-trooper Bent, as to what was best to be done. While thus engaged, Hold suddenly asked me my name. I complied with his request, when he exclaimed—

"Great Scott! I served under your father before coming north. I guess your people will rejoice at the good news when we get back, for I'm thinking they consider you as good as dead."

"Well," I replied, "if I was further from that condition I would like it better. Do you think you can take me with you?"

"Don't you trouble about that, my boy. Bent, here, will knock up a stretcher and the niggers will be only too pleased to carry you."

This handy man of the party, who had been an old sailor, lost no time in providing the stretcher, the wood-work of which was fashioned together with thongs from a

kangaroo's hide, and to this a blanket was securely lashed.

When I crawled into the contrivance there were quite a number of blacks who wanted to be my bearers, but of course Boom and Rippy came before all others. I found the motion delightfully easy, and was soon asleep, hardly waking when the men changed places. Just before sunset we came to the beach off which the steamer was anchored. Those on board gave me a great welcome, and were not a little astonished when they heard the details of my adventures and wanderings. At the time I was too ill and weak to do more than tender my thanks for the kindness shown me.

The prisoners and witnesses having been shipped, a course was shaped for Port Darwin, which we reached next day. During the voyage I had become much worse, and was at once taken to the Hospital, where I remained between two and three months suffering from malarial and brain fevers, the combination nearly ending my score. But a good constitution, supplemented by the skill and attention of the Doctor and Matron, pulled me through.

I was relieved to learn that the trial of the murderers had taken place during my illness, my evidence not being required. All were condemned to death, but the only one to suffer the extreme penalty was Wandi Wandi, who was executed at Malay Bay in the presence of a large number of blacks brought there for the purpose of giving them an object lesson and deterring them from following Wandi Wandi's example.

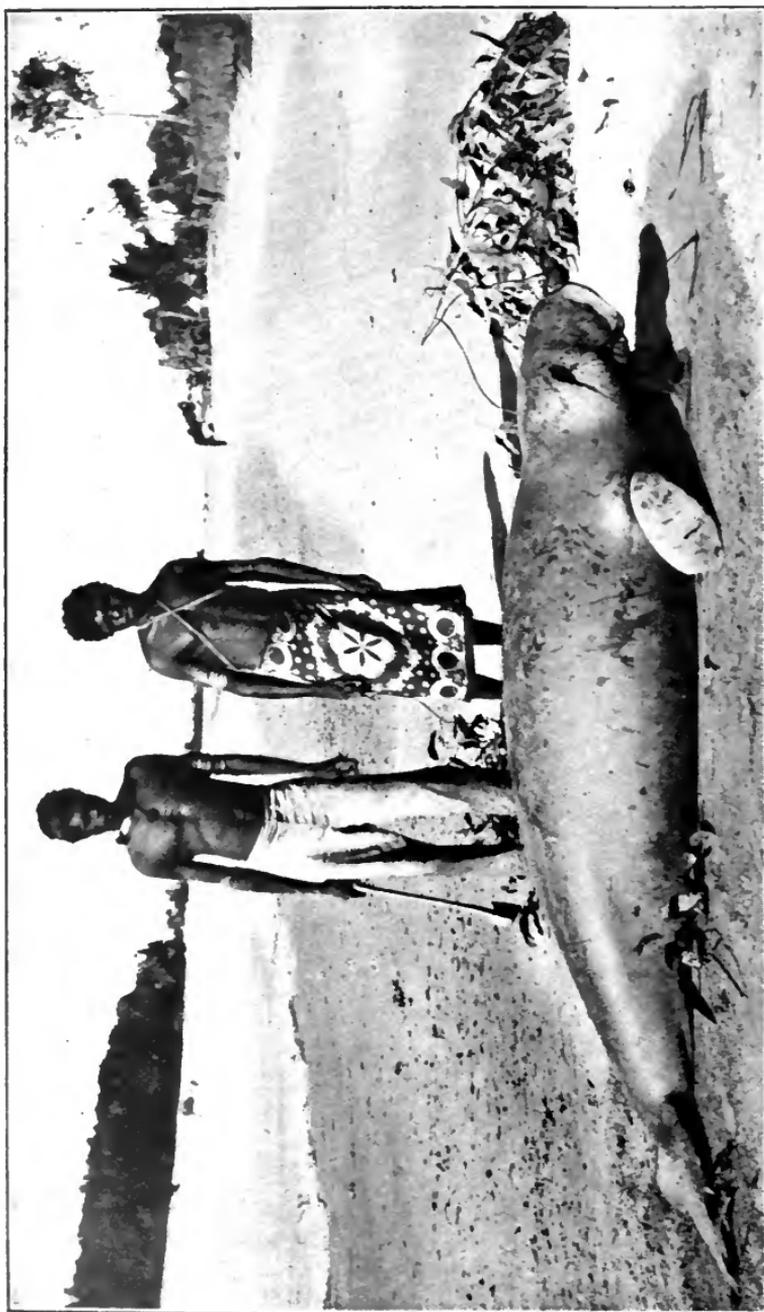
During the excitement and subsequent rush to get the murderers away from Wark, I had forgotten the tragedy at Bowen Straits; and it was not until after their arrival in Port Darwin that my chums mentioned it to Inspector Paul. He immediately sent his second in command, Ser-

geant Ackwah, down in the steamer to investigate. Having satisfied himself of the truth of the story told by my mates, Stickleg was arrested. He was condemned to death, but the sentence was afterwards commuted to ten years' penal servitude. In his case also my evidence was dispensed with. The last scene in Stickleg's career came later.



JUNGLE FOWL NEST.

H. W. Christie.



DUGONG (BLACK ON RIGHT WEARING MALAY SAARONG).

H. W. Christie.

CHAPTER XVI

Life at Port Darwin

WITH my advent at Port Darwin began a new chapter in my existence. I had left behind the wilds with their freedom, fascinating dangers, and primitive pleasures for the more respectable, responsible and tamer life of a settlement which, contrasted with that of Wark and Port Essington, seemed the essence of civilization itself. So thorough indeed had been my training in the "simple life" during the nine months spent with the "sons of the soil," that the habits, manners and bearing of the denizens of this seat of justice and society were almost felt to be a new experience, instead of a return to the old; and (may I confess it?) a little irksome at that.

I was still an inmate of the Hospital when I said good-bye to my friends, Boom, Rippy and Tim. They had visited me whenever permitted; and their grief at parting from me was beyond hiding. I felt the farewell keenly, for they had been staunch friends; and I promised, if opportunity offered, to run down the coast and see them. On more than one occasion they had saved my life at the risk of losing their own; and darkskins though they were, had proved themselves possessed of those qualities that are displayed only by heroic and fair-dealing men. This is high praise, but not exaggerated, and the memory of their loyalty and courage must ever remain with me a most valued moral asset.

When I received my discharge from the Hospital, "clad and in my right mind" (the phrase fitted my case, for the skill of the doctor had been more than a match for the evils of brain fever, and my long confinement to bed had prepared my body for the items of a wardrobe and my feet for approved covering), I was taken over by the good people of the Port, who gave me a joyous time. Indeed so whole-hearted was the hospitality tendered me that I was forced to admit that while the "simple life" had its charms, civilization was a powerful rival.

But, as the most frivolous will admit, life is not intended wholly for beer and skittles; and the day came when more serious things had to be thought of than parties, picnics, etc. Having resisted the anxious solitudes of my family to go south (in which connection I had eased my conscience by reading and answering the piles of letters sent by them), I entered the Customs House as a temporary officer, taking up my quarters at "the Camp," close to the beach, near Fort Hill, where the bachelor Government officers lived. I found "sitting at the receipt of custom" meant a busy life, varied by visits, still on business bent, to incoming and outgoing steamers. The work at the vessels had to be closely watched, for there were two articles easy of concealment and difficult to detect that had to be seen to. One of these was opium, upon which there was a heavy import duty; the other was gold, which carried an export duty.

Those moral receipt-makers for success emphasize the necessity of a man doing his best in that sphere to which choice, circumstances or his fellow-men have called him, so I threw myself whole-heartedly into the duties of my office, by doing which I speedily obtained an insight into the methods of the bland and persistent Chinese smugglers who infested the Port.

It was not long before I scored my first success as a thwarter of this class. One night, while watching for suspects on the jetty, I saw three Chinamen coming towards me, and as one of them was surprisingly bulky I caught hold of his coat to detain him, when he threw back his arms, slipped out of the garment, and darted over the side, taking a dive of twenty feet into three feet of water above a rocky bottom. The coat was well lined with tins of opium. Seizing the other men, who were too astonished to run away, I found they also carried quantities of the drug. In a moment of inspiration I saw how pigtailed could be made to do good service for the state, and grasping my prisoners by theirs, I took a double twist of the appendages round my left hand and, with my revolver (drawn in case of need, for Chinamen can be dangerous customers), prodded them in the back as a hint to march, and so drove them to the Police Station. Search was made for the fellow who had jumped into the sea, but several opium tins found in the water where he had fallen was our only reward.

My second experience with these offenders was on the beach. While on patrol I noticed a boat making for the shore, so planted myself behind the wreck of an old junk, where I could see without being seen. The boat grounded close to my hiding-place, and two Chinamen landed, one with a large crate of fowls. Covering the pair with my revolver, I ordered them to bail up, which they did without even a protest, having probably noticed the glint of my "persuader." In the crate, beneath the fowls, were hidden many boxes of cigars. The pigtailed again came in handy, so to the Station we went, the fellows carrying the crate between them. When in the lamplight it struck me that one of my nocturnal voyagers had remarkably fine legs, and I expressed a keen desire to see them ; but he

was bashful and objected. However, he was "induced" to remove his "bags," when instead of bare legs appearing, another pair was disclosed, securely tied at the ankles. I cut the lashings, when out tumbled hundreds of cigars! John tried to look astonished; he certainly looked foolish, and must have felt so, for, in addition to losing his cigars, he had to pay a substantial fine.

Some little time after this victory I had an adventure in which Chinese and opium again played a part, and in which I might easily have lost my life. I was walking through the Railway Station yard on my way to relieve a brother officer at the midnight hour, and when near the large Customs Bond heard a dull, thumping noise coming from the shed. Without attaching much importance to the sounds, I was yet curious to know the cause, and proceeded in a leisurely, unsuspecting way to the building. As I neared an end the noise ceased, and before I could speak a bag was thrown over my head and I was forced to the ground by several men, who tied my hands behind me and bound my ankles securely. I struggled and cried out, but my voice was smothered by the bag. I felt a prick or two as from a sharp instrument, and some one whispered: "Allee same shut up! Savee? Allee samee dead pig!" As this, without doubt, meant that if I did not "shut up" as ordered I would in all probability have my throat cut, I decided without further remonstrance to obey. I was then carried into the shed and thrown on a heap of bags of rice. The thumping noise was then resumed, and I heard grating sounds as if cases were being removed. I understood. It was opium the thieves were handling, to get at which they had broken open the big iron chest. Then presently all was hushed, and I was left to my own reflections. I was more than uncomfortable. My ankles and wrists gave me great pain, and I was parched and

hot; but these were small matters compared with the dread of what they could do, and, on second thoughts, might do. But as time passed, and the thieves did not further molest me, I began to feel safe, and put all my strength into a struggle for freedom. This but added to my punishment without bringing me any hope of success, so I decided to wait for some one to release me. With a view of making myself as comfortable as possible I wriggled into one of the grooves between the bags, and having further succeeded in turning on my side, soon fell asleep.

The next thing I knew was feeling myself being shaken and some one calling out—

“What the deuce are you doing here?”

I replied in muffled tones, “Set me free and I’ll tell you,” when the sack was quickly ripped open and the ropes that bound me cut. I was then greeted by three of my brother officers and several policemen, to whom I told my story. Early in the morning a railway man had seen the Bond door open and informed the officers, who had released me none the worse for my experience beyond being stiff and sore.

When the opium chest was examined ten cases of Chinese delight were missing, which meant to the thieves a saving of over seven hundred pounds in duty alone. The C.C. made matters lively all round; but he might as well have taken it quietly, for none of the drug was ever recovered, nor was any trace of the guilty ones discovered, although large monetary rewards were offered.

Effecting an entrance into the Bond, and then into the chest, meant the bursting of six or seven immense patent locks; but with the usual Celestial perseverance my assailants had succeeded.

An incident connected with the search that followed is

worth relating. The C.C., having reason to believe that some of the stolen opium was to be taken down the coast in a large trading junk, decided to intercept her at the heads. So one evening we dropped down the harbour in the launch, and brought up outside the heads to await the morning, when we were to overhaul the boats coming out with the ebb tide. One of the crew was named Pat, a small, skinny, shrivelled, sun-dried piece of humanity, remarkable for doing those things he should not do, and leaving undone those things he should do, although he looked as wise as if he were the lineal descendant of Solomon, and as trustworthy as he was the reverse. Well, to this popular but erratic Hibernian was entrusted the most important watch of all, that before daybreak. His duty was to call all hands at day-dawn ; and, true to his reputation, he did nothing of the kind. As good fortune would have it, I awoke early and, as was my wont, had a look round, when I saw the big junk coming out with the wind, and making great headway, for the spring tide was running like a mill race. I gave the alarm, and away we went after her with every pound of steam up, the Chinese engineer shovelling in the coal as hard as he was able. We gradually overhauled her, but the crew of the junk would not heave to when ordered, whereupon the C.C. fired a couple of shots from his revolver into the air, as an earnest of favours to come. The hint had the desired effect, for the junk folk at once made preparations to stop, but not before they had thrown three boxes overboard, which disappeared like stones. We boarded the junk, but the crew of course "no saveed" anything about the cases. The C.C. did not say much, but his looks were eloquent. A search revealed nothing contraband, and as throwing boxes into the sea was not a punishable offence, the junk was allowed to proceed on its way.

It is hardly necessary to state that the Chinese were experts at every possible trick by which the Customs dues could be evaded. This applies more particularly to the coolies, for I found the Chinese merchants, as a rule, satisfactory men to do business with. And it must not be supposed that artful smuggling dodges were confined to the Chinese, for many Europeans were in every way their equals at that kind of work. I could give many instances in proof of this statement, but they can be taken as read. I may add, however, that the C.C. was inflexible in the discharge of his duties, and no one on account of his business or social position or his colour could hope for leniency from him if proved guilty of an infraction of the Customs laws. This Spartan-like impartiality caused bitterness at times; but in the end those most "offended" admitted that what they objected to was really what they should have praised, and made friends with the man who had the courage to carry out his duties fearlessly with all.

I have mentioned that there was an export duty on gold; but I am persuaded that a tithe of the sum *not paid*, yet owing to the country, would have made me a rich man, and this despite the strictest vigilance and search. Scrutiny even went so far as the slicing open of melons, pumpkins, etc., taken on shipboard by the Chinese hawkers.

It being the ambition of every Chinaman to have his remains returned to his native land for burial, the sending away of skeletons, either as cargo or passenger luggage, was continually going on; and I have seen as many as thirty of these grim relics laid out on the Customs House floor for purposes of search, for John was not above getting a friend, even when reduced to grim bones, to do him a service. The export duty was subsequently abolished, and the Customs officers relieved of a very unpleasant duty.

The precious metal, however, had to be registered at the Customs House; and an avaricious man would there have had fitting punishment in handling the fine parcels submitted while debarred from retaining a grain.

Presence of mind is too valuable not to be admired, and as the following instance of this mental quality was shown by a Customs officer, it finds a fitting place here. A steamer was leaving for the south, and on the jetty were many people assembled to see their friends off, in addition to the usual crowd of curious onlookers. A lady in the throng became excited and fell into the water. Did the Customs officer with the presence of mind, who was standing near, lose his head? Not in the least. Did he plunge into the sea to save the fair one? Not he. Being a big strong fellow, he seized a black boy, and with a great heave sent him flying after the lady with the order, "You catchem white fella lubra, quilebeck (quick)!" The animated life-buoy reached the water in a heap, and when he had pulled himself together, promptly struck out for the jetty, leaving the woman to float out with the tide, which was running strongly. As soon as it was seen the boy had not grasped the situation (or the lady), a blackfellow named Dummy and myself sprang from the jetty and made for the unfortunate woman, who had had the sense not to struggle and in consequence was floating nicely, and looking fairly comfortable. I was defeated in the race by a neck, but we shared the honour of keeping the fair one in safety till a boat arrived, and we were rescued, none of us the worse for our ducking. The officer who by deputy had attempted to rescue the lady received many congratulations on the wonderful presence of mind he had displayed!

Port Darwin had its Chinatown, for there was a large Chinese population. No one whose olfactory nerves were in working order could fail in locating it. There were

as sure guides the odours arising from Joss sticks, dried fish, the various condiments and spices used by Celestials, the subtly-sweet yet sickly perfume of opium, and the aroma from their detestable tobacco ! Then, again, many were always to be seen sitting on the long, narrow stools ranged along the footpaths ; while others, squatting on their heels, chewed sugar cane or shovelled chow (food) into their mouths with chopsticks.

The vessels used by the Chinese fishermen, traders and timber carriers were similar in all respects to those used for like purposes on the waters of their own country. Many of the junks had great eyes painted on their bows, giving them a comical or grim appearance ; and if a Chinaman were asked why this was done he would answer, " Eye no have got, no can see." One always knew when a junk was about putting out to sea, for it was then a case of " Chin Chin " to Joss, otherwise a propitiation of their god by a salvo of crackers with a view to ensuring a favourable voyage.

The Chinese were not without their strange characters, and original methods. One night I was smoking on the jetty, when I saw two Chinamen coming, dragging a third by means of a rope round his neck. When near I further saw that the man thus being conducted had his hands tied behind him, and that the poor wretch was hanging back as much as possible. He was making no noise, having apparently concluded there was no use fighting against fate, yet determined to make his last earthly journey occupy as much time as his ruthless companions would allow. As the proceedings had an ugly look I thought I would interfere, so demanded what the procession meant. Then the bound man showed some spirit. He said his companions, actuated by revenge, were leading him to the end of the jetty, where they intended to throw

him into the sea. Without waiting to hear anything from the others I brought my right bunch of fives into violent collision with the jaw of the leader nearest me, sending him sprawling, whereat the other dashed for safety, leaving their prisoner in my hands. This intended victim was named Low Coon, a small, wizened, round-shouldered creature who, it was generally believed by his countrymen, did not belie his name. Having received a good English education he was often in Court as an interpreter, and the Chinese credited him with being unfair as such, which fact or prejudice had doubtless found expression in the summary way I have told. I escorted my charge to his camp, and there the matter ended.

When interpreting, Low Coon often created merriment by his fondness for using words known as "three deckers" and giving his answers in these. The Magistrate would sometimes object, saying—

"Interpreter, the witness did not say that ; now, what did he say ? "

Low Coon would bow and say—

"Well, your Honour, if you will have it, you shall."

Then would come the exact words of the witness, which were often much more expressive than polite. Having no roof to his mouth he spoke through his nose, and this drawback added to the ludicrousness of his high-flown language. His attitude towards the different sections of the Christian Church was most tolerant, accommodating, and in keeping with his moral attitude generally. One day when talking about religion and the sects, he smiled and said—

"You see, when I am with an Episcopalian, I am an Episcopalian ; when with a Presbyterian, I am a Presbyterian ; and when with a Roman Catholic, I am a Roman Catholic."

This funny fellow was in the habit of fishing from the rocks near our quarters. I was watching him one day at his favourite pastime, when I saw him make fast the heavy line he was using to one of his big toes, to allow him to smoke and fish with the least possible trouble. I was thinking what fun it would be if a big fish hooked on, when I saw him shoot into the water and begin yelling and throwing himself about frantically. Seeing he was being towed to sea, I jumped in after him, and the additional weight parted the line. I dragged the old fellow ashore and laid him out on the rocks to dry, while I indulged my mirth, much to the disgust of poor old "Nosey," who thought the mishap had been quite a tragic one. I had thus twice saved him from a watery grave.

There was another strange Chinese character who gave the Customs Officers a lot of trouble, and at the same time considerable amusement. He was known as "Whampoa," alias "the Wharf Rat." It was said, and generally believed, that he had been a river pirate in his own country. He owned an ancient boat, in which he virtually lived. When a steamer was in he could be seen flitting about in his craft at all hours; and while we never caught him smuggling, that was our misfortune, not his fault. He often looked in at the Customs House, and as he entered would haul off his old tattered hat, lower what remained of his pigtail, and say—

"You makee write chit along steamer, Wharfy go look see one piece blanket all samee from flend. He! He!! He!!!"

The C.C. generally saluted him with, "Well, you old rascal, what do you want?"

Then the "Rat" would whine—"Whafor Custom House man say one piece old wharfy man lascal. No more lascal, welly good man." Then he would grin at the boss,

go away shaking his head and mumbling, "Welly bad man, welly bad man," but I never knew whether he referred to the C.C. or himself.

If Wharfy persisted in disobeying orders, his old boat was seized and hauled high up on the beach. This used to nearly break the ex-pirate's heart. He would cover the boat up carefully with bags and mats and dejectedly sit beside it. I have seen him thus sitting with tears running down his cheeks, and muttering, "Wharfor Custom House man take old Wharfy's boat? Welly bad, welly bad, makee makee finish." Whatever he was, or had been, he had a most sincere affection for his leaky old tub.

It was not often that a Chinaman, single handed, would show fight with his fists, but one of them marked me once. A party of us were at the Lagoons when two black ducks settled on open water. I was creeping up for a shot as they rose, when bang went a gun in the scrub near me. I looked round and saw a Chinaman grinning. He had frightened the birds to prevent my getting them. This was more than I could stand, so I dropped my gun and rushed at him. He swung round his weapon, but I dodged, caught it, and wrenched it from him. He then came at me, his arms swinging like a windmill and managed to get "home," scratching my face. It was now time for business, so I gave him a couple of black eyes as satisfaction for the loss of my black ducks, and knocked him down. As he began to cry, I considered it a knock-out. My honour being satisfied, I at once made reparation by presenting him with a bad Mexican dollar.

I was separated from my companions when this "fall in China" took place, and explained the scratch by telling them I had run into a bush. They laughed, and one of them said—

"And you apologized to the bush by giving it a spurious

dollar, eh? Better than losing good money, any way!" They had seen the fracas.

The allusion to giving away good money was a delicate one. A few days before I had dropped a parcel of ten one-pound notes when pulling out my handkerchief as I passed through Chinatown, none of which I ever saw again.

CHAPTER XVII

Life at Port Darwin (*continued*)

WHENEVER time and opportunity allowed, I made a habit of attending the Police Court proceedings, where amusing incidents often relieved the formalities of justice, especially when Chinese and blacks were at variance. The Chinese had two methods of binding themselves to tell the truth. One of these was by blowing a match out, and the other cutting the head off a white cock. One day a witness whose conscience or dignity ranged beyond match extinguishing, demanded the alternative. There being no suitable bird handy, the presiding Magistrate, who even respected the conscience of a Chinese coolie, adjourned the proceedings to allow of the sacrificial chanticleer being found. After tiffin the case was again called, when the Chinese interested appeared smiling, with two very fine white birds. These were duly dispatched, and the case disposed of. But imagine the indignation and disgust of the Magistrate when he discovered that this very scrupulous Chinaman had stolen two of his best cockerels with which to clinch his promise. And to think their heads were cut off before the representative of the Law while he smilingly administered the oath! Even the cool impudence of a Chinaman could not further go.

Sometimes it happened that tragedy and comedy were strangely blended within the Temple of Justice. A black-fellow from near the Gulf of Carpentaria was being tried for

the murder of a Chinaman. He was found guilty, but how to convey to the unfortunate black the dread sentence was another matter. No one knew his language, and he only understood a few words of English. The gaoler having had a great deal to do with the natives, and, moreover, being credited with unrivalled skill at pidgeon English, was instructed by the Judge to interpret the sentence to the prisoner, and this is how he did it—

“ You see em that big fella white man ? ” (pointing to the Judge).

The prisoner said “ Hum.”

“ Him say you big killem dead alonga Chinaman.”

“ Hum,” repeated the prisoner.

“ Him big fella man him say by-em-by plenty fella policeman takem one piecee black fella alonga bush long way (poking out his chin in a south-westerly direction), then one fella white man putem rope alonga blackfella’s neck, him been throwem rope alonga tree, pull-em blackfella up, blackfella by-em-by tumble down dead.”

The Court simply roared, while the usher cried “ Silence ! ”

It was impossible to know whether the unfortunate fellow understood what was said or not ; but he found out in time, for he was taken to a spot near where the murder was committed, and there hanged in the manner so realistically described by the gaoler, in the presence of as many of his tribe as could be collected.

One day I was the innocent cause of a burst of hilarity in Court. A smuggling case was proceeding, and I was seated in a chair giving evidence when, leaning back, its legs went through the floor, and I was thrown full length on my back. My uniform when I sat down to pour out the truth was without spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but when I rose, alas the change ! All dignity was removed

from the proceedings for a time, and while my presence was needed many smiles were exchanged at my expense.

On another occasion, four white men—save the mark—were arraigned for a cruel and cowardly crime at the expense of a number of Chinamen. Every one knew the prisoners were guilty, and supposed there could be only one result. But trial by jury, while excellent in theory, does not always prove so in practice. The presiding Judge, a keen, cynical man, in a cool, judicial manner summed up strongly against the prisoners; but the jury, after a short retirement, brought in a verdict of “Not Guilty.” Every one present expected an explosion from the Judge. He, however, looked the jury up and down through his glasses for several seconds, and then broke the silence thus:—

“Well, gentlemen of the jury, you have delivered your verdict, and I can only say that I am thankful to my Maker that the verdict is yours and not mine. You may go.” They went, and so did the prisoners.

That this same Judge was equal to prompt action was clearly shown at an official dinner given by him while acting as Government Resident. The Governor of the gaol, who was sitting next the Judge, drew his attention to one of the Chinese boys waiting at table who had just been released from prison, after serving three months for theft awarded him by the host. “Indeed, kindly point him out to me,” said the Judge. Upon this being done he rose quietly from his chair, and in a cold-blooded manner caught hold of the boy’s pigtail and calmly booted him through the door with, “How dare you, you scoundrel? The next time you come before me I’ll give you three years!” And then the feast went on merrily again.

I had to thank the white ants¹ for my Court House fall,

¹ An authority on white ants says:—“The white ant, by

these pests having riddled the floor. Like other portions of the tropical world the Northern Territory is infested with this destructive nuisance; and were a naturalist to inform me that they made Port Darwin their headquarters I would confess my faith in his statement. They would eat anything but the Northern Territory Cypress pine and, say, a bar of iron. They certainly could find their way through a roll of sheet lead as readily as through one of paper.

Still they had their uses. There was an enterprising Chinaman at the Port who kept a large number of fowls, and farmed white ants as a fodder for them. His method was simplicity itself, and consisted in covering his yard in the evening with deal boards from packing cases, and in the morning turning them over again, when they would be thickly covered by the ants. The fowls then attended to business. Living plants and trees were also attacked unless the soil at the roots was constantly stirred up.

In my time there was no railway from Port Darwin to the reefs, and all stores and machinery for up-country were lightered to South Port, a small settlement some twenty-six miles up an arm of the sea known as the Blackmore River, where the teams were loaded. On several occasions I was sent up this river to tally and examine cargo, a change I was glad to secure, although it was infested with mosquitoes and sandflies. The water was fringed with mangroves its entire length, and at low

the way, is not an ant at all, but a termite, and belongs to the order Neuroptera, which includes dragon flies and lion ants (another misnomer), while the true ants belong to the more extensive family of Hymenoptera, the most familiar types of which are wasps, bees and ants." The above may be quite correct, still these little workers of evil, who love the darkness, will continue to be known to the average mortal as white ants,

water alligators were often on the mud banks. I always took a carbine with me for attention to these "baskers," and many a pleasant snooze I spoiled with my leaden pills. Then, again, at the entrance to the stream there was splendid fishing to be had at a narrow race near its mouth, when the dead neap tides allowed.

There was plenty of "life" at Southport when the teams were loading, but as it was not the kind that suited my taste, I generally spent my evenings with the master of the Telegraph Station, who played an excellent game of cards. My last contest in this way with my friend had a sequel which is worth telling.

Four took hands in the game, one being the police trooper. At about 11 o'clock this worthy said, "Good night," and the game ended, after which we were soon in bed. Next morning the station master rushed into my room, his face streaming with perspiration, and in a state of acute excitement.

"What on earth is the matter?" I inquired.

"All the gold that came down-country yesterday has been taken out of the safe. Somebody secured my keys during the night, for the safe key is still in the lock. Before turning in I made certain they were secure in my trousers pocket, and the trousers I threw on the end of my bed."

The news of the robbery created a great stir, and the police were speedily on the job, our visitor of the previous night being most active. In a day or two the trooper arrested a Chinaman, in whose hut he had discovered the wrappers torn from the parcels of gold, but none of the metal had been found. Suspicion being aroused, another policeman searched the trooper's boxes, and there the gold was found! He was arrested and confessed to the theft.

Having made certain the station master was asleep, he had climbed over a partition and secured the keys. The further steps in the enterprise were easy, and without risk. It was a good thing for that trooper that he did not awaken the master, for he would have found him one in a way little expected.

This enterprising trooper was a clever financier as well as a bold thief. He attended to the burial of pauper Chinamen, being allowed three pounds for each interment; and it subsequently transpired he had buried many who had never existed.

He was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. During his incarceration he mastered the Chinese language, and when he regained his liberty, received a very responsible position where many Chinese were employed. He proved a faithful steward and redeemed his past.

At times trouble was experienced with the blacks at Southport, especially when the Woolnas came in from their own country, the Adelaide River. This tribe had an intense hatred of the local natives, of whom they were jealous owing to the kindness shown them by the settlers. Once while I was on duty there a terrible massacre took place, as the result of this ill-will.

One morning a Southport boy came with the cry: "Woolnas all about killem alonga camp." The Europeans rushed to the spot, where an awful sight met their gaze. Seven men were stretched out dead, one of whom had six spears in his body. A woman and child were also missing. It was at first thought the lubra had fled to another camp, but such was not the case. She, too, had been speared, and had crawled into the mangroves, where we found her body next day, with her baby boy, about six months old, trying to draw nourishment from her breast. The poor creature had been dead about

twenty-four hours. Many of those present were hard, grim men to whom the sight of death by violence was common enough, but their eyes were full of tears as they looked on the pitiful sight. Though nearly spent, the little fellow recovered.

In the tropics one has varied experiences during the wet season. The air is then laden with moisture which penetrates everywhere and affects everything. Your clothes become mouldy, if not constantly attended to ; boots taken off at night are green with mildew in the morning ; damp matches are a source of continual annoyance ; and tobacco becomes sodden. Objectionable insect life, such as centipedes, scorpions, mosquitoes, beetles, flying ants and other abominations take up their abode in dwellings to escape from the rain, and some of them are not without danger to the householders. The two first-named loathsome visitors have a habit of crawling on the rafters and dropping to the floor, or on to anything or any one happening to be in the line of their descent.

I was reading one night when I felt something fall on my neck ; next moment it was inside my shirt, and then followed a nip which caused me to spring to my feet with a yell. With a wrench I tore my shirt in halves, when out rolled a great, green centipede. The China boy rushed in to see who was being murdered, but all he found was a lifeless and misshapen member of the twenty-one legged family. He at once rubbed the bitten part with spirits, which speedily removed the burning pain, and as my blood was in good order I escaped further trouble. Before dressing in the morning it was wise to thoroughly shake clothes and boots, for the centipede was fond of taking up its quarters in them.

At night we always kept a hurricane lamp burning on

the verandah table in case a light was quickly needed. Once on going for this lamp I found a large snake wound round it. The reptile had paid us a visit in quest of greater comfort than the rain-soaked earth afforded, and had found it in the warmth-giving illuminator around which it had coiled. That snake's light went out promptly.

I have already mentioned the tropical frogs and the joyful song they sing. In the wet season they migrate everywhere, and seem to have a partiality for camping in hollow trees and down pipes. The frog's merry call about "a quart pot" and "hot water" was all very well at a distance; but when hurled at you from a pipe adjacent to your pillow when about to fall asleep on a sweltering night, after hours of restlessness, there was no humour left in it. At our quarters we had a long, thin spear with which we persuaded them to keep quiet on such occasions. To open one's eyes in the morning and see a row of these tailless amphibians on the edge of the water jug or basin, looking not unlike a bench of solemn jurymen, was indeed ludicrous, made all the more so by the suggestion of a wink that possibly you might observe now and again.

The picture I have drawn of the discomforts that came with the rain is not an exaggerated one; yet I delighted in the wet season, for it was then the Nor'-westers blew and the impressive thunderstorms seemed to shake earth and sky.

We indulged freely in sea bathing, but not as a rule in the open, there being too many sharks and alligators for that, but at a spot, not far from our quarters, encircled with heavy piles and cross pieces sufficiently close to keep out these undesirables. But there were unwelcome visitors which could not be excluded. You will remember

my telling of the black children being stung at Port Essington while playing in the water? I then referred to another case. It was this: One afternoon I was in the baths with a lad about two years younger than myself. We had waded into about four feet of water, when my companion gave a cry of pain and disappeared. I rushed to him, and as I plunged to pick him up, the whole of the upper part of my body seemed as if it were being seared with red-hot irons. I kept my head, however, and struggled ashore with him. He was insensible, and to all appearance dead. My cries brought a black boy, who promptly ran for the doctor. Looking at my companion the medico pronounced life extinct, and upon hearing my statement said the cause of death was no doubt due to the stings of a poisonous jelly-fish! My body and arms were covered with stripes of a vivid colour, the result of the stings. The doctor gave me a lotion which deadened the pain, but it was several days before I was free from suffering and the repulsive marks. I used the baths often afterwards, but never again suffered, nor did I hear of any one else doing so.

When the weather was favourable plenty of fish were procurable in the harbour; and after the country had dried game was abundant in the belts of jungle and lagoons within reasonable distance of the town. Pedestrians had the attraction of the Botanic Gardens, about two miles out—a charming place in which to rest after a hot walk. The Curator was known as “Puppa,” his charming wife as “Mumma,” and a more hospitable couple one could not hope to meet. The Cable Company’s quarters, too, were a great boon to residents and visitors alike, for the officers were a merry band, hospitable to a fault, and ever ready for fun.

Speaking of diversion reminds me of an experience in

which I came off second best. A number of Indian buffalo roamed round the town, so tame that they would lie in the roadway, a nuisance and sometimes a danger to pedestrians. One evening a party of us was abroad on visiting bent, when we chanced on one of these animals with a neck-rope on. Some one suggested a ride, and without further ado I jumped on the animal's back and away we went right merrily. Suddenly the buffalo stopped and I—well, I was on the broad of my back on the dusty road. How the fellows laughed when I stood up, for my immaculately white suit had been transformed into an inartistic arrangement of endless shades caused by the dust from the road and greasy filth from the buffalo's back. To proceed with the rest was impossible, and they kindly promised to make excuses for me. This they did in a manner that made my buffalo ride a jest of long standing.

A second meeting with these tame buffaloes was more exciting. I joined a friend in his buckboard for a day's shooting at a jungle creek, some twelve miles from the port. When a couple of miles on our way, and when rounding a sharp corner, we encountered our friends wallowing in a pool of water. The horse shied at them and then made a bound, throwing my companion into the air. He landed on his feet, still holding the reins, and being a cool customer, managed to prevent the frightened brute from making off with me. Before us there was a rocky gully, and had the horse gone into this—well, my mate would have been left to tell the tale. This bad beginning had a great ending, for never before had I seen game so plentiful. We camped in a stockman's hut, and at early morn worked our way through the jungle to a spot, several acres in extent, around part of which the little jungle creek ran. This patch was known as the

island, and was a famous place for game. It reminded me of my days out bush, for while a mere miniature compared with the jungles there, its steamy damp atmosphere and perfumes were strongly reminiscent of the past.

The island was literally covered with fowl, indeed so plentiful were they that a few minutes sufficed to give us all we wanted ; and a few days afterwards a brother sport dropped no fewer than thirty-eight geese in two shots.

When we made a move for home we found our horse had cleared. A good-natured stockman came to our rescue, however, with the framework of what had possibly been a noble steed in its day, and thus aided we reached home ; but my chum did not see his horse again.

Even in a place like Port Darwin there seemed to be a desire to retain old customs and habits, but only once did I see the fifth of November commemorated. Early in the morning a company of us were starting for a day's shooting at the lagoons, when an immense barrow came along containing a small stuffed figure, the motive power being a little white kiddie, about seven years of age. How the tiny fellow managed to push his barrow I cannot say ; but I noted determination in his anxious face as he ranged up alongside of us. He said nothing, but gave us a pleading look. We knew him then. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, so we gave him what he wanted ; and we felt happier for having done so. To this day when I see the boys trundling their effigies, the little pinched white face rises up before me.

A fleet of pearling luggers was at one time located off Melville Island some forty miles from Darwin, and the manager of the company invited me to put in a week-end

on the grounds. I jumped at the chance of getting another taste of the open sea, and so took my place on the storeship, which had come to Darwin to be replenished. Upon our arrival nearly all the crews came on board to have a dip in the "slop chest," alias the ship's shop; but the dips were by no means free ones. Land shopkeepers would have leaped for joy could they have procured for their goods the prices given on board. There was also a great demand for medicine to combat complaints, internal and external. The manager did not wait to diagnose, but dosed each patient from the same bottle. At any rate the doctoring was a splendid exhibition of simple faith and high fees.

One of the divers suggested my taking a turn in the diving dress. I was glad of the chance, for a new experience was always welcome. I stipulated, however, that the first trial was to be in shoal water. Having put on the heavy underclothing, suit, and ponderous boots and helmet, I scrambled over the side, dropped into the water, and was at the bottom of about three fathoms in double-quick time. As soon as I had collected my wits I glanced around and was simply delighted with the coral and seaweeds. In between two lumps of the secretion I saw a large crayfish, and my desire for pearl shell at once gave place to a wish to secure the superb crustacean. I reached forward, and secured my prize, but I had hardly raised it from the bottom, when it disappeared—a shark had flashed by and snapped it from me! I did not wait to see what became of the shark or its prey, but signalled to be hauled up as quickly as possible. Upon my satisfying the curiosity of the crew, they had the laugh of me. The diver said they rarely picked up crayfish, for as surely as they lifted one a shark put in an appearance, it being a favourite food with them; but the crayfish,

if left alone, rarely gave their enemies a chance. So ended my first and only experience as a diver.

In closing my rambling recollections of life at Port Darwin, I may be permitted to say a few words about death there. God's Acre—the most impressive and beautiful name given to man's last resting-place, is about two miles from the Port, and at a desolate spot. This is not as it should be, for a cemetery should be a place of floral and monumental beauty, as it is one of perfect peace. The poet Lee says—

“The dead are only happy, and the dying :
The dead are still, and lasting slumbers hold them.
He who is near his death, but turns about,
Shuffles awhile to make his pillow easy,
Then slips into his shroud, and rests for ever.”

Sometimes the hurried burials took place in the morning when earth was refreshed with dew, the birds carolled their welcomes to a new day. It was then difficult to believe that those who had “slipt into their shrouds,” knew nothing of this—more easy to imagine that the unseen ones slept, and that the joyousness surrounding the living brought them pleasant dreams. Then again, the day might be waning when the solemn cortège, arrayed in white, arrived at its destination, there to leave the loved one beneath the innumerable stars.

Many brave men rest in the Port Darwin Cemetery, far away from kith and kin, far away from the land of their birth—men who did good service for their country, and who, nothing daunted, took the hand of Death.

Perhaps the most impressive funeral I there witnessed was that of a naval officer, who met his death in a singular manner. He was one of the officers on an Imperial surveying vessel engaged on our coast, and at the time of the accident that caused his death was in charge of a

boat's crew landing on Melville Island. As the natives were dangerous he carried his revolver, and this, as he stepped ashore, fell from the pouch at his waist. The weapon struck the boat, with the result that one of the cartridges was discharged, the bullet entering his head near one of his eyes. All haste was made for Port Darwin, but he died as the vessel was anchoring. I shall never forget the procession of officers, blue-jackets and marines as it wended its way along the bush tracks and tree-lined roads to the humble cemetery, where he was laid to rest with military honours. He had made himself a great favourite with the Port Darwin folk, and he was mourned for as a friend.

There was another interment I would like to mention, that of an old Northern Territory Government servant. Owing to the ravages of malarial fever, contracted during a prolonged stay in the country, he was known to his friends as Corpse. He was an exceptional man in many ways, perfectly fearless, always to the front in time of danger, cool and collected, a fine rider, and as good a shot—in short an ideal man for the country. His end came suddenly while talking to friends. At the grave I noticed that a pair of stirrup leathers had been strapped around the coffin, a parting gift from his closest friend.

CHAPTER XVIII

Down the Coast

I WAS called one day by the C.C. into his office, and informed that I was to accompany him down the coast as far as the McArthur River, at the bottom of the Gulf of Carpentaria, where smuggling was going on. On the way down some of the rivers were to be visited, and the coast searched for those Malay proas whose masters had failed to procure licences. I was entranced! That is the only word to describe my feelings. "Now clear out," said he, "and get your gear ready, for we leave in two days in the *Nawogneleh*."

This did not take me long to put together, and included as items of vital importance a Martini-Henri carbine, a revolver, and a fowling piece, with plenty of ammunition.

The *Nawog*, as she was called, was an iron steamer of some eighty tons burthen—an old rattle-trap with a varied history. She had been used as a trader in the South Sea Islands, and then purchased by a company in Port Darwin. On her first voyage she struck a rock when ascending one of the rivers, and promptly settled down in the mud, where she remained for years. She was raised, brought back to Port Darwin, and repaired, her machinery, though thickly coated with mud, being found when cleaned as bright as when she went down. Our trip along the coast was to be her first voyage after her overhaul. There were ugly rumours circulating about her state generally, and many in the Port were prepared

to swear they would not send a cat to sea in her. But she had been passed as seaworthy by the proper authorities, and "ours not to reason why." Advantage was to be taken of her visiting the rivers and other portions of the coast to send stores there, which suited all parties and reduced the expenses for Customs purposes.

The *Nawog* was to take twenty-four passengers, including the C.C., and the captain and crew brought the total to thirty-seven. We were a mixed lot in point of colour and country—English, Irish, Scotch, Australians, Malays, Chinese and a Cingalese. Every man was his own doctor, and as the cabin was small, the majority had to choose deck-planks on which to camp.

A crowd gathered to see us steam away, and as the boat looked like a half-tide rock, owing to her weight of cargo, many were the prognostications voiced as to our probable fate and that of our questionable craft.

Before a strong south-east wind we had a glorious run to the Vernon Islands, some twenty-eight miles from Darwin, where we caught the flood tide and went through Clarence Straits at racing speed. Some idea can be formed of how the tide runs there from the fact that a ten-knot boat has been known to fail in stemming it.

From the Vernons we shaped a course to the Adelaide River. Some sixty miles up this stream we were to land cargo, and we entered just before dark, and anchored off a clump of large mangroves. The Adelaide is a finer river. A steamer drawing thirteen feet can ascend seventy miles, and on either side there is a vast area suited to the growth of rice and other tropical products. Noticing a flock of ducks making for the mangroves I obtained permission to secure if possible a bag of them at daylight.

I shall ever remember this my first night on a tropical river. There was a glorious moon, giving such a clear,

yet mellow light that the finest print could have been read by its aid. The river near was fringed with mangroves, at the back of which stretched open country, and beyond that dense jungle. The dew soon began to fall; and where the moonlight shone on them, the wet trees and bushes glistened as if frosted, against a gloom that seemed the blackness of darkness itself. The cries of the many birds feeding in the adjacent swamps, the eternal song of the frogs, the occasional bellow of an alligator, and ever and anon a great splash as some monster launched itself into the unseen water, added to the gurgle of the tide lapping the sides of our vessel as it held its rapid way were in perfect harmony with the mysterious, solemn, yet beautiful scene. The mystery of jungle and river was repeated in the sky. It held a subtle grandeur in its blue depths that I had never seen before. The larger orbs and constellations seemed near. The evasive nebulae, like clouds of silver dust, advanced to the clear blue or faded into the blue-black depths as my inadequate vision suggested, the fascinations of the fields of space holding me in thrall until called back to the mundane world by the keen cold of the heavy dew.

Then I turned to my blanket and was soon dreaming of the fun in store for me on the morrow.

It was barely light next morning when I was near the mangroves in the dinghy, with a companion paddling. My first shot acted like magic, for out of the trees poured the rudely-awakened birds in clouds. They flew a little distance then swept back again, and circled round and round. I kept them on the wing, and the swish of these with the whistling of the ducks made music that only a sportsman can understand to the full. I had soon procured what I wanted, so began collecting our bag. The birds had fallen on the banks and in the water, and

when picking up some of the latter, an alligator rose at the boat's side. On the impulse of the moment I discharged one barrel at its eyes, which caused it to open its mouth, into which I sent the other charge. The No. 4 shot must have annoyed it considerably, for the brute gave its tail a violent swish, catching my shoulder with its tip and sending me spinning into the bottom of the boat. If the monster's tail had struck the boat with full force there would have been two men and a lot of ducks available for its meal. We did not wait to pick up more birds, but pulled to the steamer as hard as we could, thankful when once more on her deck. The episode had been witnessed by those there, and a boat was about putting off to our assistance when it was seen we had made our escape.

We then steamed to Beatrice Hills, where cargo was to be landed for the station there. The journey up the river was a succession of beautiful pictures. The long reaches were bordered by sombre jungle, relieved here and there with patches of open country; and flying ahead of the steamer, the whole way up, were flocks of Nankeen, birds, ducks and cockatoos, scared from the trees and bushes, the "cockies" screeching all the time.

At Beatrice Hills we lay close to the bank at a little landing stage. I was sitting aft with my carbine handy, on the look out for an alligator, when I heard a noise in the bush close by, and next instant a great beast came tearing down the bank. There was no time to raise my gun, so I fired from my hip, with a "Take that, you sardine, and let your relatives know." Great was my astonishment when the ugly brute turned on its back and lay perfectly still. I got the boat and pulled towards it a bit cannily in case it was "foxing," but I might have known that an alligator does not "fox" in that way. It proved to be as dead as

Pharaoh, my bullet having struck a vital spot under the forearm. I was proud of that shot—I suppose I should say lucky shot. At all events there was one fifteen-footer the less.

Having landed our cargo, and filled our tanks with the fine, fresh water of the upper reaches, the return trip was begun at daybreak to enable the bar being crossed in daylight. At any rate that was the skipper's idea ; but the C.C. having heard from the blacks at the landing that half-way down there was a lagoon where pigmy geese were plentiful, made up his mind to secure some. Well, away we went as arranged, everything going on swimmingly, until near the lagoon in question, when the C.C. offered to take a turn at the wheel. We had three blacks going to the Alligator River, and having learned from them where the lagoon was, at a favourable spot the C.C. gave the boat a sheer in towards the bank, and then tried to straighten her up ; but it was too late, and she grounded in the mud near the bank. The C.C. said awful things about himself, but with one eye shut ; while the skipper would like to have added many more with both eyes very wide open.

And here let me give a word or two about this same skipper. Well, he was a peculiar brand of mortal, short and stout, and with a grand lower chest. He was nearly bald, had a great, round, red face which stood out well from a framework of white hair commencing at one ear, going under a heavy jaw, and finishing at the other ear. He was a good seaman, but no "sport," except when armed with a knife and fork, and then he was nothing less than heroic. He had a peculiarity that was rather annoying. If he wanted a tooth-brush, the first to hand was good enough for him, no matter to whom it belonged ; and the same applied to hair-brushes, razors, or anything

else. When he had finished with an article thus "borrowed," he would throw it into his bunk with the air of a man who believes in there being a place for everything and everything in its place. And so it came about that when property was missed a look into the skipper's bunk was first taken, and it was seldom that the search went further, for mixed up with sea boots, oilskins, dirty blankets, dungaree pants, patent medicines, revolvers, cartridges, and other things too numerous to mention, the article sought for would invariably be found.

The skipper thought we would be stuck fast for some time. If any one wished to go ashore they could, so those with shot guns embraced the opportunity to get some birds. The blacks were questioned as to our prospects, and although they told us no more than we knew, the C.C., in a hypocritical way, said he was greatly pleased to hear about the pigmies. The boat took the party as near the bank as the blue mud would allow. I led the way through this, and sunk to my waist before finding anything like a firm footing; but by dint of heaving out a leg at a time and throwing it in front of me, the solid land was reached, the others following my example. The C.C., surveyor and myself then went with our guides to the small lagoon, about a mile distant, and there found pigmies enough to satisfy the greediest sportsman. We separated so as to surround the lagoon as much as possible, and then the fun began, the firing from the three sides keeping the birds flying round and round, until fifty plump birds had fallen.

The C.C. and two of the blacks went back to the steamer with the game, but the surveyor and I decided to have a look at a big swamp further down the river, taking one black with us. Suddenly the native, who was walking ahead, dropped down and pointed to two birds' heads showing

above the grass. My mate and I fired together, and to our delight found we had knocked over two fine turkeys. The black having slung these round his neck, we went on. Then came a flock of black cockatoos, and I killed one and wounded another. The wounded bird made a great outcry, which brought back its companions, and we took a mean advantage of its loyal mates by blazing away while they were within range. I secured the tail feathers with which to make fans, giving the birds to the black. We had a look at the swamp, but refrained from further shooting. The surveyor, however, suggested that we should go through it, and thus shorten our tramp to the steamer.

“Right ho!” said I. “Go ahead, you can lead,” and I winked the other eye. He thought I was politely yielding him pride of place. It pays thus to be good-mannered when going through a swamp! The leader, by forcing his way through the reeds and rushes, makes the task of the second man much easier, and as it was very hot, I did not see why my companion should not acquire a little bush experience. He was plucky, and stuck to his work like a man, although getting more than he had bargained for.

When we reached the other side he was fairly baked, and during a smoke I pointed out to him what a valuable service he had done me. He looked as if he would like to punch my head, then laughed and said, “All right, old man, you can lead this time; there lies our way to the steamer,” pointing to a belt of dead grass and reeds some twelve feet high. If there had been a breeze from us I would have fired it, but as matters stood it had to be faced. It was awful work, for what with want of air, steam rising from the damp ground, and dust from the dead stems, the exertion of forcing a way through was

almost overpowering. My companion now and then wasted breath in praise of the excellent path I was making, but I had no wind for replies.

When through we rested under the shade of a clump of corkscrew palms, and I celebrated the event by putting a torch into the brake. The flames spread rapidly, and there rushed from the brake, not more than a hundred yards from us, some twenty buffaloes, and swept across the plain. We thoroughly enjoyed a bath and refresher on our return.

Soon after daybreak the following morning we left the river and passed Escape Cliffs. It was here the South Australian Government tried, in 1864, to form a settlement, but owing to the incompetency of some and insubordination of others, it proved a failure. Captain Stokes so named the cliffs to commemorate an adventure two of his officers had while taking observations on the sandy beach below. Looking up from their work, they saw a crowd of blacks staring down at them, and with spears poised for launching. Fortunately for them they thought of doing something that would amuse the blacks till assistance came, for they were without firearms. Their novel idea was to dance, and dance they did, throwing their arms and legs about like a pair of madmen. By this trick they engrossed the attention of the blacks, their predicament was seen, and a rescue effected without bloodshed on either side.

In due time we entered the South Alligator River, where we had stores for the buffalo hunters' camp. We steamed up some ten miles and brought up for the night. As the skipper wanted to go with the flood tide, which meant that we would not get under weigh at daybreak, I got permission to go ashore and see if I could secure a buffalo. The still, early morning saw the two troopers,

the surveyor, the three blacks and myself scrambling through a thin fringe of mangroves on to the bank beyond, from which stretched an extensive plain. Beyond this again was the inevitable jungle, in this instance almost impenetrable, composed of large trees with thick undergrowth, the whole interlaced with creepers. It was indeed a delectable morning. Everything glittered with dew, and the moist ripe grass gave the perfume of a hay-field after rain. A light misty haze hung over the plain, making it appear like another river with the mighty jungle for a bank. I wish I could put in words the exhilaration felt during an early morning tramp in virtually new country, far away from the turmoil and the artificiality of cities. Avon's bard recalled this feeling when he wrote :—

“ Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.”

We had not journeyed far when we saw a mob of buffalo quietly feeding. Unobserved we dropped on our knees and crawled through the wet grass towards them, when we came upon two large calves and a half-grown beast between the herd and ourselves. Fearing that all would escape if we did not get these, each animal was covered, at a word we fired, and they dropped without a struggle. Away went the others without giving us another chance, and were speedily lost to sight. Two of the blacks were soon at work on the carcasses, the other fellow being sent back for assistance to carry the meat on board.

We then strolled on towards the jungle. Noticing a patch of tall dry grass and reeds, I, after a little trouble, set fire to it, and we were walking to the other side of the patch, where it was a little swampy, when we heard a

rushing sound. Then out bounded, and coming straight for us, an immense old buffalo bull, looking a perfect demon as he emerged from the fire and smoke. The rifles rang out simultaneously, but without effect, and then it was a case of each man for himself. All save the trooper and surveyor managed to get out of his way, but these the bull ran right into, sending them flying into a swamp. This gift of a morning plunge bath was not seemingly intentional on the part of the buffalo, for he held his way. My mate and I had reloaded, and as the animal raced by we fired together, and he rolled over. In a moment, however, he was on his feet again, and this time ready for battle, although one of the bullets had smashed his off foreleg high up. An opportunity presenting itself almost immediately, the poor old fellow was put out of his misery.

We now turned back to ascertain how the trooper and surveyor had fared, and were in time to see them crawling out of the swamp. They presented such a woefully comical appearance that I collapsed on the grass in a fit of laughter. There they were, doleful, bent figures, working towards dry land, their thin garments clinging to them, covered with mud and slime, and decorated with strings of green weed. Each was holding up his carbine, ornamented in the same way. They had escaped with a bruise or two.

An examination showed the old bull had been the recipient of attention from other hunters, several bullets being embedded in its hide. The thickness of this will be understood by its weight—one hundred and sixty-eight pounds. The hide, horns, tongue and brains were alone taken, and by the time we got these on board the skipper was ready to start. The hunting party were regaled with fried brains and bacon for breakfast.

The journey was continued for another fifty miles, there being plenty of water beneath our keel the whole distance. Herds of buffalo were seen on the plains, proof they had not been troubled for a considerable time. The jungle, which extended the whole way, contained many palms and orchids; but the birds, while plentiful, were not nearly so numerous as on the Adelaide.

We received a great welcome from the hunters, who were nearly out of necessaries. The camp consisted of three white men and the usual crowd of blacks. They had twenty horses at their settlement which, though located near the river, was above the reach of the highest floods.

"How did you manage with your horses when hemmed in by the flood-waters?" I inquired of the boss. "On such a limited piece of ground I suppose they were a bit starved?"

"Starved?" laughed Dennis. "Look at them; do they look starved? Why, Sonny, they have been living on eggs!"

"Eggs be hanged," I said.

"Not hanged, but eaten," replied Dennis. "You see the blacks go to the breeding grounds and bring back canoe loads. We break them into buckets so that the horses can get 'a willing go'; and you bet, they do take them in. They then top up with a little bit of hard stuff."

"How do you hunt, on horseback or on foot?" I inquired.

"On horseback, of course. Hold on and I'll show you my pet moke."

With that this true son of the wilds gave a whistle, when up came a beautiful brown horse. The animal stopped in front of his master.

"Good lad!" said Dennis, patting him. "He is our

policeman, and his name is St. John. Would you like to see him turn a man out of the camp ? ”

“ Do what ? ” I asked.

Dennis smiled and said, “ There is a black I don’t like. I told him not to come here again. Now, you watch.”

He walked a little way towards the disliked one, the horse following, then stopped, and pointing at the black, said : “ After him, boy ! ”

Away went the man, who evidently knew what was coming, and after him the horse at top speed, head stretched out, teeth showing and with an ugly grin on his face. The black had a good start, but the horse was rapidly overtaking his terrified game, who was yelling as he ran. When the horse was perilously near to the flying native Dennis gave a shrill whistle, and back came the obedient animal.

I remonstrated, “ Isn’t that rather tropical ? ”

“ Tropical be blowed,” said Dennis, “ the fellow is a great thief. Perhaps he’ll keep away now.”

“ I guess you haven’t much trouble with the natives with this fellow at your call,” said I as I patted the Saint.

“ No fear : they know my ways. I treat them well if they behave ; but if they want punishment, they get it sharp and business-like. I’m like that fellow Rob at Port Essington. Whatever I promise I do or give. By the way, have you seen him yet ? ”

I replied that while I had not seen the redoubtable Rob, I had been at his camp. Then my story came out. It made us friends then and there, and we remained so ever after.

I was telling Dennis of the number of buffalo we had seen on the plains, when he said he purposed going out hunting in the morning, suggesting that I accompany

him, and join the steamer lower down. I welcomed the chance, and the C.C. readily granted me leave.

While smoking after tea Dennis told my chief that he thought Stuart's tree had been discovered by some blacks who had arrived at the camp within the past day or two. They told him they had seen a tree with marks on it, and the locality indicated by them warranted the supposition that it was Stuart's. A chart was produced, and it was concluded the tree was at, or near, Cape Stuart.

As the natives who had reported the finding of the tree were in camp, the C.C. decided to take them with him, and make an effort if possible to test the worth of their story. In case the search could not be made the blacks were to be landed on the mainland, anywhere outside the river, and Dennis was to send word of the alleged discovery to the Government Resident in Port Darwin.

Long before daybreak Dennis and I had started for the hunting grounds. Not being a first-class horseman, I was thankful for a quiet animal, and when I had got the sleep out of my eyes enjoyed the ride. The first light of day was showing as we reached the plain and there, too, were the buffalo. Having settled preliminaries a start was made. I followed Dennis as best I could, but did not attempt any shooting, concluding I would do very well if I kept in the saddle and followed the fun. Away went Dennis on St John, straight towards the mob of animals. They, in turn, were soon in full retreat; but the fleet Saint was speedily alongside a big fellow. Then up went Dennis' arm, bang went the Winchester, and down went the immense beast. Away again, the same thing repeated, and so on until pursuer and pursued were lost to sight. It was buffalo hunting with a vengeance!

Travelling in the direction this prince of hunters had taken, I at last found him seated on a dead buffalo,

enjoying a smoke, his splendid horse munching a handful of corn. Dennis explained that he always carried a small bag of corn, and gave the horse a handful when they came to a dead beast. When I asked the reason, he simply replied: "Hold on, and you will see."

Black boys, who had been sent out overnight, then came up and secured the skin, horns and tongue, whereupon Dennis jumped into the saddle, dropped the reins, and let his horse take his own course. We were soon at another carcase, when a handful of corn was again produced, and so it went on until the whole of the forty-five animals shot had been attended to.

It was "retrieving" on a big scale, and I ventured the opinion that the sensible beast could even be taught to skin a buffalo, with which Dennis laughingly agreed. The animal was invaluable to the hunters, for the long grass hid many of the bodies, and without him they would have had weary searching over the many miles traversed.

The steamer was now whistling off the plain, so I bade good-bye to Dennis with thanks for the jolly time he had given me and, accompanied by the black boys loaded with a buffalo meat present for those on board, made off to the steamer. When the fellows heard of my luck they were simply green with envy.

CHAPTER XIX

Amongst the Proas

WITH a farewell whistle to Dennis and his crowd, we steamed off and reached the river's mouth at dusk, where we anchored for the night. The skipper was opposed to the delay a visit to Point Stuart would involve ; and as the C.C. was also anxious to proceed, the search for the tree was abandoned. At daybreak we cleared the river, rounded the islands at the entrance, and steamed on towards the mainland, intending to land the black boys.

Up to this stage the ship's machinery had been running very well ; but now matters were taking a different turn. A strong south-easter had sprung up, and the thumping the old boat received did not agree with her vitals, so the skipper, at the request of the engineer, headed for the nearest land. The engines sufficed to dodge her into calm water, when they stopped of their own accord, and the anchor was let go.

All sorts of things had gone wrong in the engine-room. Bolts had come loose, portions of the machinery had shifted, and the general state of affairs was bad. From the start the boat had leaked, and when she commenced to tumble about in the fresh weather the water had increased so much that the pumps had to be kept continually going. As overhauling the machinery and having the same fixed up securely would take an indefinite time, the C.C. reconsidered the question of the tree, and decided to try and find it. The party chosen consisted of himself,

the surveyor, myself and the three natives ; and as the spot where we were to land was some distance away the dinghy was used. It was fitted with a large sail, and we were soon running before a fair wind. In a couple of hours the blacks thought we ought to land, and so the boat was beached and hauled well up on the sand. The boys leading, we tramped across a plain covered with coarse grass and intersected at many places by mangrove creeks. At the end of this we were confronted by a belt of jungle, in front of which, in a prominent position, was a tree some thirty feet in height. This the blacks informed us was the one with the marks on. It was surrounded by thick undergrowth, some seven feet high, which was speedily pulled aside, and then, to our infinite satisfaction and delight, we beheld the letters "J.M.D.S."¹

Although indistinct, there was the proof that gave the lie to the would-be detractors of the brave man who had cut them. It was with feelings of pride that we found ourselves the first to look upon a discovery which bore such important testimony to the feat performed by the intrepid explorer and his gallant band, and we were agreed

¹ John McDougall Stuart, in the year 1861, essayed to cross the then unknown Continent of Australia. He took as companions men of like courage and determination with himself, and on July 25, 1862, planted the Union Jack on the shore of the Indian Ocean. On January 21, 1863, he was back in Adelaide, where he and his brave band received an ovation in recognition of this, the greatest feat among the many notable triumphs of human wisdom, courage and endurance, to be found in the history of Australian exploration. Stuart stated that he had marked a tree with his initials near where he had reached the ocean. As searching failed to corroborate the statement his word was called in question by some, and he died in 1866 before his tree was discovered. A fine marble monument stands to his memory in Victoria Square, Adelaide, while his detractors could not be more forgotten."

that this was indeed the event of the voyage. Our only regret was that we could not let the world of civilization know there and then.

Other natives must have found the tree and reported the discovery at Port Darwin, for it transpired subsequently that the Government Resident had dispatched a party to investigate the worth of a story he had received about the time we were on the spot. This party had instructions to search also for the box buried by Stuart on the coast, a little to the westward. This, however, was never found, possibly through having been unearthed by the blacks, but more likely in consequence of alterations in the coast line.

For a time, whenever Stuart's tree was visited, the undergrowth was cleared away ; but, sad to relate, a fire swept the plain and destroyed it, not, however, before a photograph had been secured. All previous search for the tree had been made from seaward, but as it stood on the land side of the jungle, between which and the ocean there was a great growth of mangroves, its non-discovery by the parties so operating was not to be wondered at.

Before the blacks left us, the C.C. gave each several sticks of tobacco. One of them placed a couple in the branch of a tree, and a little from it drew a sort of alligator in the sand. I asked what it meant, and was told : " By-cm-by another fella blackfella walk along, him been see em alligator, him been catchem tobacco all about." This son of nature evidently had his heart in the right place.

It was dusk before we reached the steamer. The engineers were still hard at work lashing machinery together and screwing in bolts, which task lasted well through the night. From that date, until we reached the McArthur, we rarely ran half a dozen hours without having to stop for repairs. The skipper said something

about returning to Port Darwin; but the C.C. would have none of it, and after a fairly warm discussion it was decided to continue the voyage.

At daybreak we were on our way to Cape Don, doing very well with a south-easter on the starboard quarter. When rounding the Cape about midday, two large canoes were sighted, full of men, paddling to the eastward. Our course was altered to allow of our speaking them. They proved to be the crew of the *Erang Polea*, a Malay proa, which had been wrecked on the west end of Melville Island. The poor fellows were in a bad way, having been paddling for days, and were almost without food and water. Oesing, the master, gave, through Pedro our interpreter, the story of their misfortunes, to the effect that on the way from Macassar they had been cast away on the Island during a terrible gale from the north-west. The blacks had proved hostile, the Malays having to defend themselves for a long period before the weather permitted of their leaving; and whenever they landed in search of water and food, they had fared no better, and had been compelled to fight their way right along. Several Malays and two Australian black boys had been killed. The crew informed Pedro that the Malay skipper had done deadly work with his old flint-lock gun, which, with their powder, were the only things saved from the wreck; and, judging from the appearance of their chief, the story could be taken as true.

Their pressing needs having been attended to, they were taken in tow, and we steered for Vashon Head, which we rounded at dusk. The skipper was averse to trying to make the camp at night; but the C.C. having put it to him that not only had I a good knowledge of the harbour, but that the headlands could be easily picked up in the clear moonlight we would have, agreed to my acting as

pilot. I was somewhat nervous at my post, for the steamer was a very different charge to that of the *Roaring Gimlet*; but I brought the old rattletrap safely to anchor off the camp at Port Essington.

We were soon overrun by the blacks, who were astonished and not a little concerned to see a steamer in their waters. When it became known that the Captain (for so they had always called me) was on board, the excitement ran high; and when I made my appearance the genuineness of their pleasure was unmistakable, and the friendly feeling was not all on their side.

My delight at again meeting Boom and Rippy was nothing less than great, and the welcome I gave them was fully reciprocated. And then there was a rare piece of news for them. It had been decided to take them down the coast, if we were lucky enough to meet them, to assist if necessary in establishing friendly relations with the coast natives by means of their knowledge of the Macassar tongue. The news completed their happiness.

Poor old Flash Poll, too, made a great display of affection, especially when informed I had a parcel of tobacco, pipes, and a piece of turkey red (a red cotton stuff which the lubras used as nargars, or loin cloths) for her.

Billy had lost no time in coming aboard, and mighty was the yarn that followed. He had brought off my buffalo horns, alligator claws, and the pearls and pearl shell; but owing to the uncertainty caused by the recent performances of the steamer, which I felt might never reach her destination, I arranged with him to send them on to Port Darwin by the first good opportunity, so they went back to the trepang station. Boom and Rippy meantime had brought their swags on board, consisting of spears and wommeras, and the suits of old clothes given to them when in Port Darwin.

The Malays whom we had taken in tow elected to remain at Port Essington and chance being picked up by a proa running in on its way back to Macassar. At one time this port was a favourite camping place with these people, but since the advent of Europeans they had simply called there to secure a final drying for their trepang before sailing for home.

Having discharged the stores for Billy, and promising if possible to call in on our way home, the vessel was cleared and we sought our respective planks.

Point Smith was rounded early next morning, and I reflected under what different circumstances it was negotiated, when in the *Roaring Gimlet*. I was lost in reverie—sad at the moment, for I was thinking of the fate of the poor lubra—when Boom touched me on the arm remarking, “My word, Captain, big one fight here longa *Gimlet*,” and showed his rows of ivories.

As we were approaching Crocker Island a proa flying Dutch colours came bowling down before the strong South-Easter, the great mat sail bulging out as if it would lift the craft out of the water—a strange sight to be met with off our shores. The customs flag was hoisted, and we stopped. As the proa gave no sign of heaving to, the C.C., who was not taking any bluff, fired a couple of shots from his carbine across her bows. Seeing “business” was meant by us the sail was lowered smartly, a canoe launched, and the master came on board the steamer with his papers. He had evidently put on his best clothes, and made a picturesque figure. A gorgeous silk sarong was slung over his right shoulder, his short pants were many-coloured, a variegated handkerchief was bound round his head, his red lips contrasted well with his black teeth, which showed freely as he smiled, and altogether he made a subject fit for the brush of a Brangwyn. He fairly

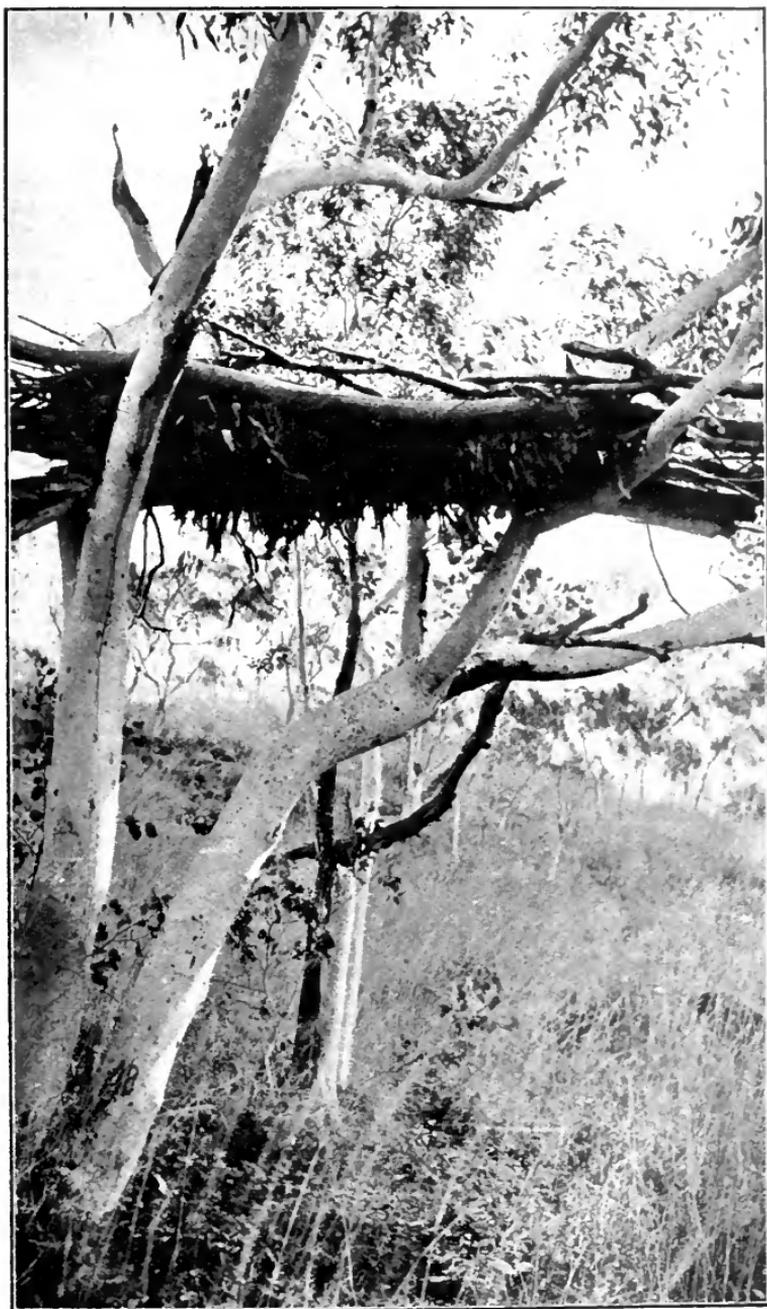
crawled up to the C.C., who, arrayed in his uniform gay with brass buttons and gold braid, was a close second to his visitor in point of effective colour.

Nothing like the brass buttons and braid to inspire the Eastern mind with that respect which is found so handy at times. The Malay evidently thought he was in for a bad time, for he told Pedro that if he got him clear he would give him some big pearls. Pedro did not get his riches, as the gay one's papers were in order, and the proa was allowed to proceed. She was named the *Samberie Djeme*, and her destination Limba Caraja (Port Essington). The master, Ban Kasing, was known as a trickster by the Revenue Officers on the coast; and, as he generally managed to get to windward of them, the "old man" was keen to euchre him. But *Djeme* held the joker.

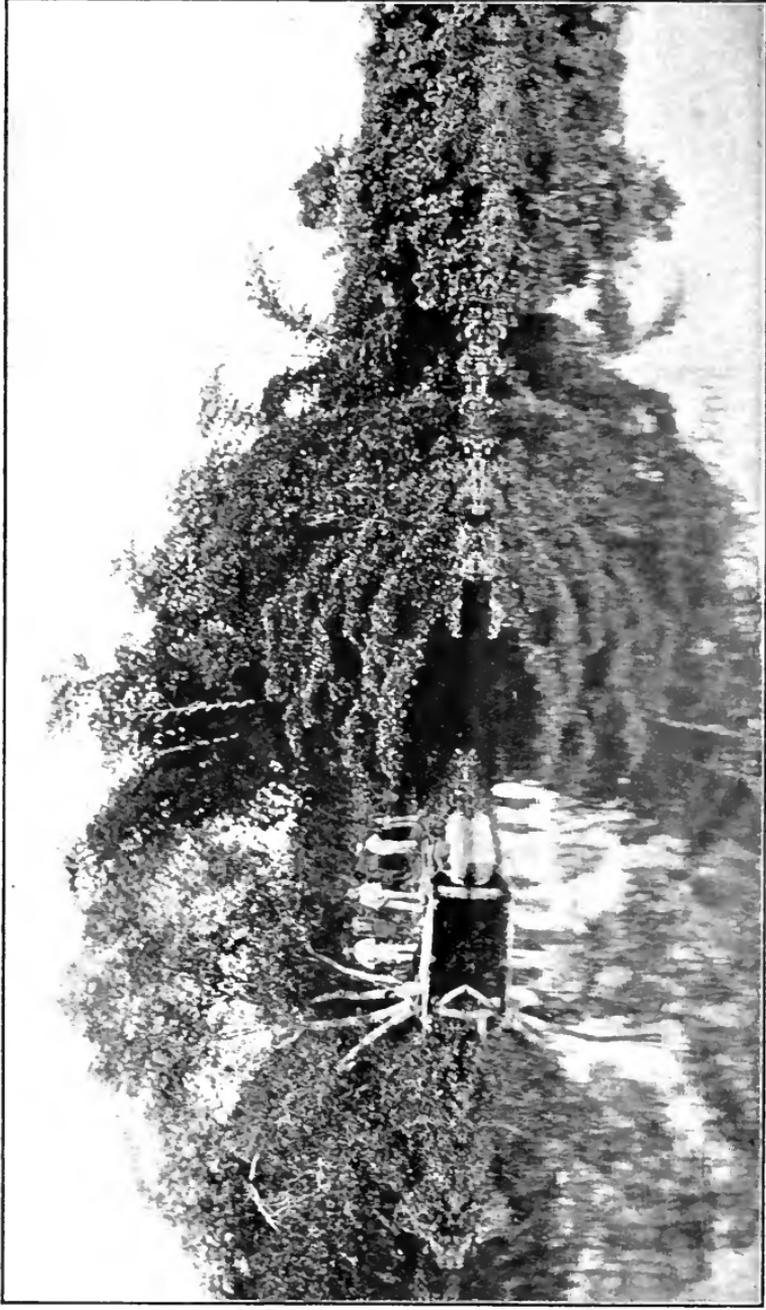
We then entered the Straits and anchored off the buffalo hunters' camp, where stores were to be landed. This was the place, now in charge of Tingha, the Manila man who had succeeded Stickleg. He was a fine well-educated fellow, admired by the blacks as much as Stickleg had been dreaded and detested. Tingha had a remarkably handsome native wife, a half-caste Malay girl named Maryanageene, full of fun and frolic.

According to the blacks at the camp several proas had passed down the coast without reporting at Bowen Straits, and paying the licence fees and duties, so there was a chance of fun in the near future. The Malays had at one time two camps on Crocker Island as well as Oonjount-ambanoonoo on the mainland. They were named Batueja and Oojouncaroronggo. To secure the full euphony of these names it is necessary to pronounce them slowly.

Having finished our work we got out of the Straits,



NATIVE GRAVE.



LANDING, ADELAIDE RIVER.

Paul Foclsche.

passing the trepang camp on Copeland Island (Cara Peepeepee), and anchored for the night off that in Malay Bay named Limba Rajaing. It was inland from this point where Wandi Wandi paid the penalty for the part he took in the murder of the wrecked Malays. By daybreak we were well round De Courcey Head, and steering for the Goulburn Islands. We sighted Brogden Point, which was quite enough for me. At midday we brought up off Mungarooda, the Malay camp in the Islands, where we found four proas, the *Sakorinlong*, *Tjiem Mataya*, *Bonding Patola* and *Samberie Svergga* anchored close to the beach, on which stood several smoke houses. In the bay, running before the wind, were sixteen large outrigger canoes with masts somewhat similar to those of the proas, dredging for trepang; and a fine sight they made as they came towards us, almost in line, gliding gently over the rippling water, with their great mat-sails full of wind. When they had run a certain distance, the sails were lowered, and they were paddled away to windward, the paddles making an awful squeaking noise in the rattan beekets, to again come down with the wind. And this was repeated until necessary to take the catch to the smoke house.

Not far from the steamer were a number of Malay swimming divers at work in six fathoms, or thereabouts, searching for the great sea slug. I saw two or three come to the surface with their arms full. The masters of the proas, all in gorgeous array, were speedily on board with their papers, which showed that so far as these proas were concerned they had paid up certain amounts to Her Majesty's Customs; but as to that being all they should have paid—well, that was quite another matter.

We then went ashore to the smoke houses, and saw an

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example of the effects of Malay grog on the blacks, of whom there was a big crowd. Many had been drinking freely, judging from their antics—yelling, dancing and clawing at and tumbling over each other. Suddenly a different note was sounded, and a real quarrel began. One fellow wildly flourished a great club and brought it down with tremendous force on the head of another black. From the sound made I thought his skull had been smashed in, but not a bit of it! Up he jumped, blood running from his head, glared round, seized a spear and went for his assailant, who made for the bush as fast as his drunken legs could carry him! How the chase and the dispute ended did not transpire. It was a disgusting sight, but we could do nothing; for as long as the drunken creatures did not molest us, we could not interfere with them.

The incident I have just narrated aside, the tableau as seen from the smoke houses was well worth studying, and one could hardly realize that the picture was an Australian one. The scenically effective smoke houses of bamboo matting and palm leaves; the gaudily-apparelled Malays, their black teeth showing as they laughed; their red lips; the great knife or chopper hanging at the waist of each; the natives in a state of nature, some working under Malay direction; the quaint-looking craft at anchor in the offing, and further away the big-sailed dredging canoes ploughing through the blue water! The *tout ensemble* made a picture full of variety and range; while the details would have provided a dexterous draughtsman and brilliant colourist with a portfolio of choice studies.

When the dredging canoes were brought ashore to discharge their cargo of trepang, I noticed a small cannon slung in the bows of each, and that when unloading each

canoe's bow pointed towards the steamer. This may have been accidental.

We went aboard the *Sakorinlong*, the master of which was in command of the fleet, and found him an excellent fellow. He showed us several bottles of beautiful pearls he had procured from the blacks ; but I am certain he did not produce the best, no doubt thinking the temptation would be too great for us. Although an admiral in his way, he was not above accepting a few sticks of black tobacco !

Many of the Malays I noted had ringworms and other skin diseases, one cooking rice on the proa being pre-eminent in this respect. His skin seemed to be in flakes, and, as he was constantly scratching himself, there was a shower of dry particles flying about and around him the whole time. But the Malays never dreamed of the necessity for a Health Board.

As our coal was getting low, we took in a supply of wood, procured from a mangrove swamp ; and a hard and disagreeable task it proved to be. Just to show our friendship for the Malays, we annexed some of the wood they had collected for use in the smoke houses. It was dry, and when mixed with the green mangrove made excellent fuel for steam purposes. A bit unfair, perhaps, but as it was a matter of necessity we readily forgave ourselves. The Malays made no protest, and probably felt honoured by the "uniform."

CHAPTER XX

A Cannibal Feast Interrupted

WE passed the night off Mungarooda, and what would have been a peaceful night was made the reverse by the yelling and quarrelling of the drunken blacks.

Next day we visited two other camping places, Marago Chukee (King River) and Limba Luchumbo (Junction Bay), bringing up at the latter place for the night, without having seen any proas. It was dark when we anchored, and as there was a fire some little way back from the beach, the C.C. determined to land and get information from the blacks about the Malays.

Half a dozen of us, well armed, proceeded on shore, and as we approached the fire we heard a frightened yell and then the sound of a stampede through the bush. We had evidently given the blacks a fright, yet we were alert in case some had stood their ground and would attack us. None of them appearing, we went on towards the fire, and as we did so found the air was heavy with the odour from burnt flesh. I felt sorry that the poor niggers had been scared from their evening meal; but judge of our horror when, on reaching the fire, it was discovered a cannibal feast had been interrupted. I leave details for the imagination of the reader. We were filled with loathing for the brutes who had escaped us, and with pity for their victims, the remains of whom were scattered around. Had it been in our power, swift retribution would have

fallen on the guilty, but we were powerless to do more than send bullets in the direction the cannibals had taken in the hope that some at least of our messengers would reach the desired marks. We then returned on board as quickly as we could.

I had often heard that cannibalism was indulged in by the aborigines of the Northern Territory ; but fortunately this was the only proof I had. Some time after this, when on the Roper River, a black came into the camp as I was finishing cutting up ham. He picked up a piece, smelt it and said, with evident appreciation, " My word, all same Chinaman." I could never decide whether his remark was a compliment to the ham or the Chinaman.

We delayed for some time next day on the off chance of seeing the cannibals, but none showed out, though they were doubtless keeping watch over us. We then steamed to the entrance of the Liverpool River, and anchored under Haul Round Island.

After supper several of us obtained leave to go ashore and look for turtle, and we were rewarded at once by seeing a number just above high water, for which they made when disturbed. Rushing them, amid showers of sand, and with yells and laughter, we managed to turn some, three being very large. The spot where the turtle were first seen was then searched, with the result that many dozens of eggs were uncovered. It was a lovely moonlight night, and before returning on board we made up our minds to explore the Island, which was of sand and covered with coarse grass. Away we went, as merry as sandboys, playing leapfrog, and acting to the full the rôle of school urchins. Boom, who was leading, suddenly sprinted and then fell flat ; but he was up again in a moment with a bird in his hand. We then saw many more of the same kind in the short grass, so all hands began

catching them, and as the birds had to make a short run before they could rise on the wing, we had little trouble in securing all we wanted. They proved to be a small species of gull, which, when skinned, were excellent for the table, as the contented looks of the ship's crowd next day amply proved. Our turtle catch was much admired—and then enjoyed.

Before the C.C. retired that night he told me, if I so desired, I could take the dinghy and my two chums and pay a visit to Entrance Island while the steamer went up the river and returned, a matter of a few hours. I might secure some good shooting and take a note if the Malays had camped there lately. I readily accepted his offer—indeed I was so full of expectations as to what my jaunt would bring me that it was long before I slept. My experiences went far beyond expectation; but not in the way anticipated.

Long before daybreak I had the boys out and everything ready. The everything consisted of a billy, tea, sugar, biscuits, a small cask of water, my revolver and fowling piece, plenty of cartridges, and last, but not least, my superb hunting knife. This may seem an unnecessary cargo for the time, but experience had made me careful to provide for contingencies whenever possible.

Entrance Island is small and wooded and lies closer to the mouth of the Liverpool than Haul Round Island. The Malays call it Lee Monie Monie, and it was a favourite camping place with them. As the steamer passed the Island we were dropped at the south side, and pulled to a lovely sandy beach, carrying deep water right in. Where we landed there had been a Malay camping place. The fireplaces were there, the remains of smoke houses, and near at hand great stacks of timber all ready for use. From signs, we concluded the place had been

abandoned in a hurry; and Boom, after a good look round, said "Macassar man go away quick fella. Big fella growl alonga black me think it. Bad fella sit down," indicating the main land with his chin. As far as we could see there were not any of the bad fellows on the Island, but it behoved us to be careful.

A little distance up the beach were two masses of rock about six feet apart, with trees overhanging them, making a sort of cave. At this spot we decided to camp, and at once the boat and gear were hauled up and stowed away out of sight.

CHAPTER XXI

Fight with a Python

LIKE another Alexander Selkirk, I stood on my island, fowling piece in hand and revolver in belt, gazing upon the varied beauty that made up the resplendent scene. This new day was superb. Around me sparkled dew-besprent foliage, the gentle air was laden with perfume wafted from the jungle, and the sea lay motionless and soundless save for the shore waves that babbled like a brook as they lapped the land. Earth, sea and sky conspired to satisfy each sense, making the joy of life a splendid reality. Yet withal there came a hint of possible danger. What had been might be; and the verdict of Boom about the remains of the camp was probably correct. This possibility, however, did not discount my pleasure to any appreciable extent.

At the back of this island beach was a grassy glade, several acres in extent, in shape almost a semicircle, and beyond this the gloom of the jungle. While surveying our surroundings several red-bills—a bird which is fond of oysters—alighted on the beach, some fifty yards from us, and without thinking of the risk I was incurring I fired at them. The discharge made an awful din, echoing and re-echoing in the depths of the forest. It was a foolhardy proceeding, and with suppressed breathing we gazed in the direction of the jungle expecting to see a crowd of blacks issue therefrom. But none came, and we laughed; but the quality of our laughter proved our fears. Being

in time reassured, we turned to the beach for the birds I had thus procured for breakfast, of which we were beginning to feel the need. While Boom lit a fire and I plucked the four birds, Rippy, spear in hand, cautiously entered the water from which he soon emerged with a fine fish. The birds we roasted on the coals while the piscatorial course was baked in the ashes.

As the cooking proceeded I lay back on the beach, looking over the silvery sea towards the mainland, and caught a glimpse of the steamer as she disappeared round a bend in the river. Never in my life before, it seemed, had I felt so contented ; and then there was the fascination of being almost alone on an island that was next to unknown. As fitting friends of my mood there trooped into my mind bedizened characters from the many books of adventure I had read, chief among these being the captains of Spanish galleons and treasure ships who, with their untold wealth, had been cast away in ocean rage, nevermore to be heard of. What if on this island I came across a treasure trove ! No, the Malays, those scavengers of the sea, had found and taken it away long ago. And then I went on dreaming about their gain and my irredeemable loss, till Boom put an end to my phantasies by calling : "Captain, all about ready, me been makem tea."

Ah ! First a slab of fish, in a broad leaf from an adjacent bush ; then a red-bill, cooked to a turn, juicy and sweet ; some ship's biscuits and a pint of tea ! It was a meal fit for the gods !

"Plenty of water sit down," said Rippy, pointing to a damp spot in the sand a few yards away from where we were camped.

"Thanks, I can see," said I, thinking he referred to the ocean.

"No more sea, good fella drink."

With that he scratched away the sand till he had a hole a foot deep, which was very soon half full of water, clear as crystal, and beautifully fresh and cool. It was an ideal spot for a camp.

Our smoke over, we made a start to spy out the land. First we visited the stacks of wood, which we decided would prove a valuable asset for the steamer. The logs, of which there were quite ten tons, only required cutting in halves to be handy for shipment. We then entered the jungle. Here I suddenly remembered that I had left my big knife on the beach, so I handed my gun to one of the boys and told them to go ahead. Having secured my treasure (of which more anon) I started after my companions.

There was a narrow opening through the undergrowth which I followed, and called out that I was coming. The vegetation on either side and overhead was dense, interlaced with creepers, the great ropes of which hung in festoons, in loops, and straight down from the lofty trees, in some of which I noted beautiful orchids. Numerous varieties of ferns and quantities of beautiful moss lent variety, while the gleams of sunlight which perforated the canopy of leaves gave wonderful colour schemes as they suffused the growths of this cool retreat. The familiar soft, dank heat, the solemn silence, the deep mystery—all the jungle charms were there.

I stopped to fill my pipe, and while doing so leaned against one of the trees round which the path wound, when the pipe fell from my hand as a spasm of terror shot through me! Something had darted in front of my face with a hiss! Then came a sensation of powerlessness, with the feeling that my legs were being bound. I glanced down, and then up.

Horror of horrors! An immense python was encircling

my limbs and had reared its head level with my face. For a moment I felt as if frozen. Then, as the serpent's mailed head swayed towards me, I involuntarily grasped the monster round the neck with both hands and, with the strength of desperation, held the loathsome thing at arm's length. This action restored me to my senses, and I gave an agonizing cry for help. A desperate struggle followed. The contortions of the python threw the upper portion of my body about freely, but I had the sense to keep my arms rigid, and fortunately for me the position in which I stood did not admit of the full crushing powers of my enemy's coils being used. The eyes of the monster, like furnace coals, glared at me, and I found the strain of the battle for life testing my powers to the uttermost. It was then that I remembered my knife. On the impulse of the moment I let go with my left hand, and before the serpent could gain advantage by the lessening of the pressure on its throat, the knife was out and its long, keen blade driven with a downward stroke through the swaying body. A pain as if being crushed to death, a gathering darkness, and then I opened my eyes to find my two faithful mates moaning over me. Boom was saying—

“What for Captain you been catchem big fella snake and no more have blackfella with you? Him been killem Captain.”

Their tears of sorrow turned to joy as soon as they discovered that I was alive. I was no longer in the jungle, but on the grass near its margin.

Trembling violently, I cried, “Is it dead?”

“Dead,” cried Boom, “my word, Captain, big fella kill him all about.”

Then they laughed and laughed, as though something really funny had happened, and their merriment did me a lot of good.

Disappearing for a few moments, out of the jungle they came, dragging my late foe, which they stretched out to its full fifteen feet, its circumference at the thickest part being sixteen inches.

The boys had heard my cry and rushed to my aid. They found me lying on my face, my right hand still grasping the dead serpent's throat and in my left the knife with which I had made a gash in its body about a foot in length, at the same time splitting its backbone. They had then carried me to where I regained consciousness. Still fearful and desperately exhausted I said: "Perhaps there are more, Boom?"

"No more, me think it," was Boom's reply. "That fella snake been piccaninny, him been come alonga wood from over there," pointing to the mainland. "Black-fella alonga Port Essington say Macassar man have to catchem wood, no more good fella sit down alonga island," from which I understood that suitable wood for trepang smoking purposes could not be obtained on the island. As to the presence of the python I dare say the explanation given by Boom was the correct one. I wondered if the trepang fishers had seen it and fled; but subsequent events showed this had not been the case.

No more island exploring for me—I was too weak and shaken for that; so the boys helped me back to camp, where I lay down in the boat, determined to remain there till the steamer's return.

My companions then left me, and when they came back I attempted a feeble joke with—

"Good fella tucker that big fella snake, Boom!"

With a look of disgust he replied, "No more, Captain, me been chuck him alonga sea."

"The best place for it," said I.

I tried to get sleep, but could not, and so the day

dragged on. We saw nothing of the steamer, and it looked as if we would have to spend the night on the island. Towards evening I was feeling better and ate some baked fish and turtle eggs that my boys had found. After the meal I noticed several columns of smoke on the mainland, and asked Boom what they meant.

“My word,” he replied, “blackfella sit down all about. Him been yabber another fella blackfella long way. Sun sit down piccaninny time, no more blackfella walk.”

That, at least, was consoling.

At sundown the casuarina trees and mangroves became alive with large parrots, pigeons, and doves from the mainland. The sight put new life into me and banished all fear of the blacks and discretion as to my ammunition, thinking of nothing but a good treat for those on the steamer. So I blazed away until only a few cartridges were left. Then my unwisdom struck me, for if we were attacked our chances of escape would be small. As compensation for my folly we got a fine lot of large parrots, pigeons and doves for the ship's galley.

There was still no sign of the steamer, and no hope then of her coming, so we returned to the camp and by the light of our fire (which we screened from the mainland) we cleaned the birds and hung them in the branches of our humpy.

While having a smoke after supper, Boom, who was playing with a pearl shell he had picked up, said—

“Captain, you been hear how pearl shell been killem two men?”

“No, Boom, did they try to eat it?”

“No more, all about like this.”

Then came the following story, which I give in my own way, for it would be impossible to relate it as he did.

A long time ago, during one of the Malay visits to the island, a serious quarrel had arisen with the natives. The latter demanded more than the usual payment for trepang they had gathered, which the Malays refused to pay. High words ensued, and these led to blows. The Malays were armed, and so the encounter was an unequal one. One of the natives killed was a warrior named Makan Yarrie. He wore a small pearl shell round his neck, placed there by his young wife, who regarded it as a mascotte. After the fight was ended, Makan Yarrie's widow and their young son, four years old, were seen alongside the body, the widow being inconsolable. It was at first thought that the lamentations were wholly for the death of her young husband, but it transpired that a share of her grief was occasioned by the loss of the pearl shell, which the widow feared had been taken by the Malays. Years passed away, when a report reached the widow that the Malays had again quarrelled with the natives, and Makan Yarrie's son—then a young man—engaged with others to fight the common foe. On passing along the foreshore, the natives at a deserted Malay trepang camp picked up a rice mat with several trinkets in it. This was handed to young Makan Yarrie, who on looking at the contents saw a pearl shell, from which a piece of cord depended from a hole at the top. This he hung round his neck and went on with the others. In the fight which ensued he, like his father, lost his life. His mother was informed of his death, and when she went to the spot where her dead son lay, there saw the very pearl shell that had been worn by his father. The poor old soul was so overcome by the sight of this ill-starred token that she lost her reason, and when the bones of her son had become bleached and dry she carried them wherever she went. At last, unscen, she crept into a cave, where

her bones, with those of her son, were subsequently discovered, and with them the fatal pearl shell.

And now I must give the particulars promised about the hunting knife with which I dispatched the python. Well, it was a present from Kriss, the head keeper of the Point Charles Lighthouse, and was his own work. The blade, made from an old sword bayonet, was twelve inches long and would go through anything; the handle was of buffalo horn, from an animal he had shot, inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl; while the sheath was of shark skin. I carried the weapon in all my wanderings, and many a time it proved a good friend.

CHAPTER XXII

Vengeance

TO escape the dew we crawled under the bushes of our half-formed humpy. The boys were soon asleep, but it seemed hours before I could follow their example ; and when I did so my rest was a disturbed one, full of dreams of the jungle, where I was again in deadly combat with the serpent, a coil of which was round my throat, choking me. Struggling I awoke to find it broad daylight, and Boom hanging over me, holding me down with one hand while the other was over my mouth. Heavens, I thought, had my chums turned traitors ? But in a moment I was reassured, for he whispered to me in frightened tones—

“ No more jump up, Captain, no more sing out. Two fella proas sit down ! Macassar man, me think it, big fella growl alonga blackfella. Him been killem all about.”

“ What are you talking about ? ” said I, excitedly, for I was dazed.

“ Two fella proas been come piccaninny daylight. Two fella canoe plenty blackfella been walk along. Plenty big fella noise. Plenty growl me think it.”

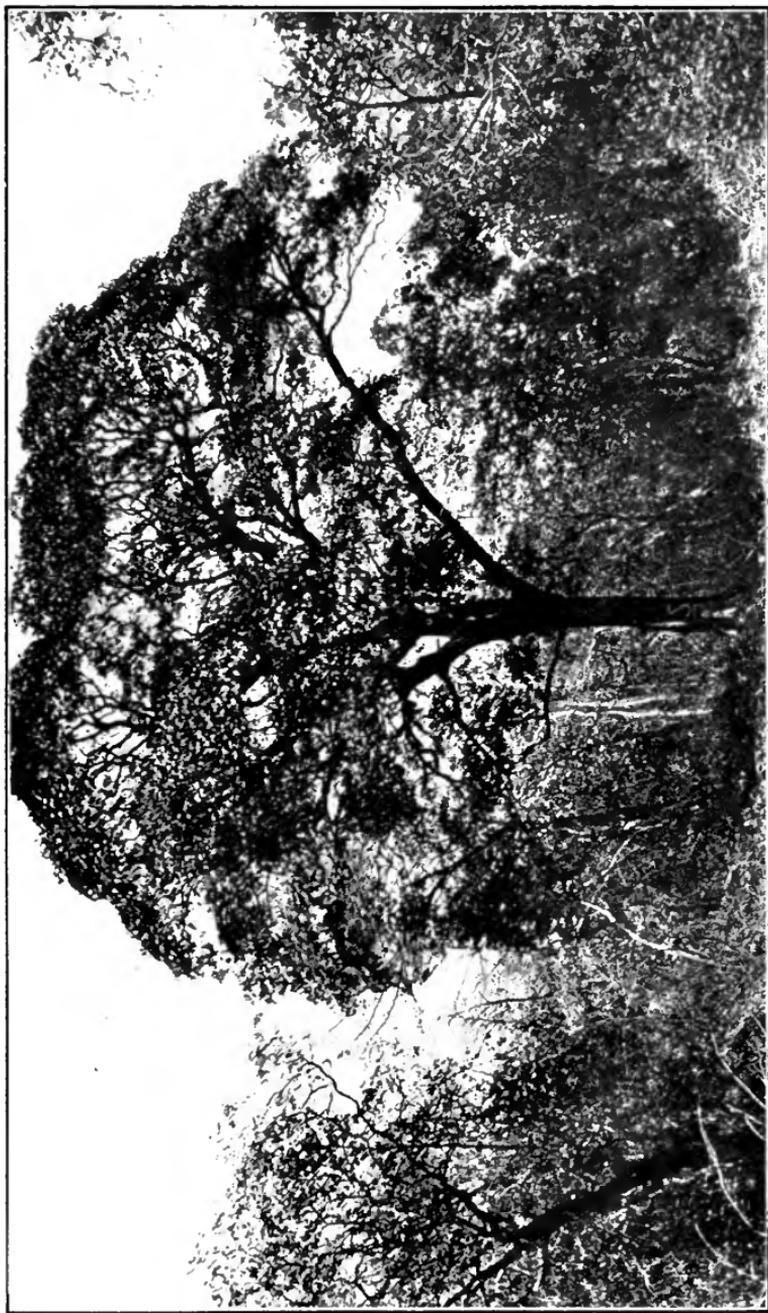
Then came the report of firearms, and I sprang to my feet.

Rippy, who was peering through the bushes, made signs to us to crawl up to him.

It seemed my fate to be confronted with imminent danger or sudden death, and here were both in all their grimness and awfulness.



BUFFALO HUNTER.



STUART'S TREE.

Paul Foelsche.

About a quarter of a mile from the shore were two proas, only a short distance apart, and alongside one of them were two canoes in which were struggling blackfellows. On board the proas desperate encounters were evidently proceeding, for I could see the gleam of steel, and blood-curdling cries came to us in rapid succession. At intervals a black body tumbled into the sea from the proa or canoe, preceded by a report, the sound of which there could be no mistaking—that of the flint-lock used by the Malays. We had not before noticed several canoes lying a little distance from the large vessels, and our curiosity now centred on these, for it was evident they were there by design. Several black forms suddenly darted into the water from the canoe alongside the proa, and made for the island, when they immediately became marks for those on the proa to fire at. Then the outlying canoes, manned by Malays, dashed towards the swimmers and with their choppers and knives completed the bloody work, after which they returned to the proas.

We were powerless to aid the poor blacks, and the quieter we kept the better for ourselves. If the Malays had chanced to discover our presence without doubt we too would have been dispatched, since we had witnessed their crimes; besides, I had a notion they would have enjoyed giving a white fellow his quietus out of revenge for the interference of the authorities with them, in respect to duties and licences, after nearly two hundred years of freedom on the coast.

The cause of the tragedy it was impossible to say, and we could only surmise that it was an act of revenge.

It was not until the canoes were hauled on board the proas and their sails hoisted that we felt safe, for this was proof the occupants were satisfied they had finished their evil work. Then straight out to sea they sped,

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bowling along before a strong south-easter, the two canoes in which the blacks had come being sent adrift.

So intent had I been in watching the movements of the Malays that a thought of the steamer had never entered my head. There was no sign of her yet, and I began to fear that something serious must have happened. How I wished that she had arrived in time to prevent what I had seen.

While thus thinking, I heard a commotion in the water at the scene of the late strife, and looking saw the sharks were at their dread work of feasting on the dead. Soon their banquet was over, and the wavelets rippled as clearly as if nothing had ever marred their purity.

It occurred to me that in spite of the vigilance of the Malays, some of the natives might have escaped to the island, so we deemed it wise to be careful; for, while the poor fellows, if any, would not be likely to give us trouble, we could not be quite certain even of that. To put our position beyond doubt we decided to walk round the island, but had not proceeded more than three or four hundred yards when we heard moans. Search was made, and under a bush lay a fine blackfellow, desperately wounded.

When he saw us a look of amazement, followed by that of terror, appeared on his face. He tried to rise, as if to escape, but sank back with a groan. The boys spoke to him in Macassar, in which language he gasped out a few words, one of which I recognized as meaning water. Back to the camp I sent Boom, who quickly returned with a billy full. Rippy supported the wounded man while I held the vessel to his lips. He drank greedily, and then lay back quietly for a time. At length he spoke to the boys again, and I told them to find out the cause of the massacre. The wounded man could only utter a few

words at a time, his voice gradually growing weaker and weaker until, about an hour afterwards, it ceased, and all was over. We scraped a grave in the soft sand in which we laid him to continue his long sleep.

From the first it was seen that his wounds were too terrible to admit of his recovery, even if the means of treating them had been to hand. How he managed to escape, under the circumstances, was nothing short of marvellous. I could only suppose that the Malays had thought he was disposed of, and being so intent on their bloody work had not noticed him make his way to the beach and crawl into cover.

When we had finished our work, Boom told me what the dead man had said. Two seasons before the blacks from the mainland had a great dispute with the Macassar men, during which several blacks were killed. When the next proa came along the blacks were very friendly with the crew, working with them until they saw their chance. They then killed the captain and several of the crew, the remainder making good their escape, when the blacks completed their revenge by burning down the smoke house.

All the proas had avoided the place during the run down that season; but the murdered captain's brother had arranged with another proa to visit the island, when the south-east monsoon set in, and assist in taking revenge.

Once, while telling the story, I saw the dying man's eyes light up with a triumphant gleam, and upon my asking the reason, Boom said: "Him been say blackfella been killem Malay all about all same Malay killem blackfella."

When the blacks first sighted the proas in the early morning a large number went off in the two canoes to meet them, no doubt thinking that as the Malays had not called there during the nor'-west monsoon, they had forgotten all about their murdered countrymen, and that

the two boats coming with the south-easter were returning home, and would be anxious to trade in pearls and tortoise-shell. The blacks had been invited on board, and then dispatched as stated. Neither the blacks nor Malays discriminate when taking revenge; so long as they kill some one they are satisfied. A life for a life—"first come first served"—was evidently the motto of both parties.

CHAPTER XXIII

In a Terrible Plight

STILL no sign of the steamer. Matters were becoming serious with us whatever had happened to her, for if the blacks on the mainland crossed to see why their friends had not returned—well, then, we would be in for a cheerful time, so I made up my mind then and there that as soon as dark, if not blowing too hard, we would make for the river. It was a case of discretion being the better part of valour.

During the afternoon it became quite calm, and when night had shut the eye of day we took a star to steer by and left the island behind us. After about two hours pulling the loom of the land on each side indicated that we were well in the river. Keeping to the centre as much as possible we continued at the oars for another hour, when we sighted the steamer's lights. I hailed and was answered by the C.C., who had evidently grown uneasy on our account. On clambering to the deck he saw by my face that I had a story to tell; but it sounded all so unreal that I noticed incredulous glances exchanged. When, however, Boom and Rippy confirmed my tale they all professed regret that they had not been there, to which I replied that I would most willingly have foregone my experiences for any one of them.

The steamer's delay had been caused by her running on to a sandbank, and only being floated off with the tide of the night preceding that on which we left the island.

When the steamer left us at the island and was approaching the Liverpool,¹ two canoes full of blacks had been sighted, but they had cleared off and disappeared in the mangroves. These were evidently the natives murdered by the Malays, in reference to which the C.C. thought nothing could be done beyond reporting the outrage in the proper quarter. I may state here that the murderers were never heard of, and, I think, must have perished on their homeward journey.

I took my chief's advice, and retired for the rest I needed, and I was dozing off, when I sprang up at the sound of what seemed the discharge of all the firearms on the ship. The skipper was roaring out—

“What on earth is the matter? What does it all mean?” when the gentle voice of the Chinese cook was heard—

“Allee samee me, me allee samee Chin Chin Joss.”

“Chin Chin Joss, be hanged,” yelled the old man. “What the devil do you mean by frightening the lives out of us like this? Here, pass up your crackers, you almond-eyed heathen!”

Johnnie's grins changed to down-drawn lines as the skipper shot his treasures into the river.

He had placed a large number of crackers in a kerosene tin, and then applied a light to them. If any of my readers desire to commemorate an event by making an unrivalled din, they have the recipe.

Soon all was quiet again, and I awoke at peep of day to find we were steaming down the river, bound for Entrance

¹ The Liverpool at ordinary tides is navigable for vessels drawing twelve feet, and at springs fourteen or fifteen feet, for a distance of thirty miles. Shallow vessels can go another seven miles to the Tomkinson, up which they can proceed for yet another thirty miles. The sand banks are shifting ones, and a sharp look-out has to be kept.

Island, to secure the wood and take in a supply of fresh water. We were at the island by breakfast-time, and no delay took place in getting the wood and water on board.

The C.C. accompanied me to the spot in the jungle where the python met its end. The broken undergrowth bore testimony to the fierceness of the struggle. We also visited the blackfellow's grave.

I was both sorry and glad when Entrance Island showed at the steamer's stern—sorry to leave a spot where Nature had been so lavish with her charms, and glad because of my horrible experience and the no less horrible deeds witnessed there.

We would make the Crocodile Islands by night, and as the waters between these and the mainland were unsurveyed, it was determined to go outside, and so reach the Goyder at break of day. All went well until midnight, when we rounded the Islands and shaped a course for the river. Then a strong gale sprang up right in our teeth, quickly raising a nasty sea, which caused the old boat to rattle in an alarming manner. After threshing away for about an hour the skipper sent for the C.C., whom I accompanied on deck. When we got clear of the companion we had to hang on to save ourselves from being blown overboard. It was intensely dark, and the fierce wind was accompanied by cold, stinging rain. All that could be seen was a mass of snow-white foam, caused by the wallowing of the steamer and the waves dashing against and over her, in a setting of black, angry water.

The skipper, who now joined us, reported the ship in a bad way. The machinery was going to pieces, she was leaking badly, and he didn't think we could make the land.

"And what's to be done?" asked the C.C.

"What's to be done? Why, take to the boats, of course, if the worst comes to the worst. Meantime I'd like you

and the youngster here to slip on your revolvers quietly in case there is a skin-saving rush by the fellows below. Throw them off the scent, and I'll let you know the chances in good time."

The anxious crowd in the cabin wanted to know what was "up," and they were told that if the gale did not abate it would be necessary to let the steamer run before it.

Under cover of our blankets we strapped our belts on and awaited developments.

We were not long in suspense, for the engines suddenly refused duty, and the ship fell into the trough of the sea rolling as if her place would soon be at the bottom.

Then the captain called us. Would we take a couple of men and help the engineers—two to hold the lamps and two to hold the engineers while an effort was made by them to save the situation?

Then began a task that lasted till daybreak, by which time the storm had abated, and we were able, by dint of continual pumping and careful nursing of the dilapidated mechanism to pick up Elcho Island by midday, and make the Goyder. As we got into quieter water the engines did better, and it was with the greatest relief that the immense banyan tree at the mouth of the river was sighted and ultimately reached.

CHAPTER XXIV

Trouble with the Blacks and Malays

BY dusk we were safely anchored in the river. All hands, the engineers in particular, were badly in need of rest, so nothing was done in the way of machinery repairing till the next morning, when the engine was taken to pieces, and many and serious were the defects disclosed. The shaft had been bent, and bolts had to be cut away to give it clear going, a bunker lid when removed revealed a crack about eighteen inches long, and wide enough to admit a sheaf knife. For this seam a wooden trough was made fast and filled with cement, making it probably the strongest part of the vessel ; while repairs were needed that only an engineer could name.

While this work was going on the cutter was hoisted over the side and filled with stores, the ship's boat taking the balance. The landing party, manning two boats, then went some miles further up the river to form a timber camp.

The C.C., surveyor and myself landed at a point not far from the steamer to have a look at a " kitchen midden," an immense heap of cockle shells. While standing before it we heard a swish, and four spears, thrown from a bush near by, came hurtling towards us, fortunately without any ill effect, although too near us to be comfortable. We saw no blacks, but emptied our revolvers in the direction the weapons had come from, and then got away to the steamer as fast as we could.

In our absence the manager of the Florida Station, situated at the head of Glyde's Inlet, a stream a few miles to the eastward, had arrived in a canoe to get his stores. When informed of the spear-throwing he smilingly said—

“That's a little way they have down this way. We don't allow them on our side of the stream, and if any venture across we simply fire and ask no questions.”

“Poor beggars!” I said.

“Oh, yes,” replied the manager, “that's what we all say. But hang it all, when one carries his life in say his left hand it's only fair that he should be allowed to carry his revolver in his right!”

As he paddled away from the steamer we wished him good luck, the C.C. advising him to take care of his left-hand article.

“You bet I'll try,” were the parting words of this free and easy out-back boy, whose bark was a great deal worse than his bite.

A number of the party returned shortly after with good loads of wood, but had no tales of adventure to give.

By the following day the machinery had been put together again, and proving in a good humour, we left the river for Cadell Straits. As we entered we detected three proas, the crews of which were engaged in frantically hauling up their great sails; and, with a fair wind to assist them, they were soon flying before us, hoping to escape.

On the beach a large number of blacks of both sexes were yelling and crying out in a violent manner, no doubt showing their annoyance at the sudden departure of the Malays.

We were not to be beaten by our friends the proa men in this way, so after them we went with our colours flying, firing shots from our carbines now and again, as a gentle

reminder to heave to. This, however, they declined to do, and just as they disappeared round the point we came to a sudden stop on the top of a sandbank. I omit the remarks made by the C.C., who promptly ordered the boat to be launched with which to continue the race. It was manned by four of the crew, the Chief, a trooper, the interpreter and myself, and away we went. By thunder, that boat did shoot through the water, each oar double-banked! It was a good mile to the point, and when that was reached it was to see our quarry a mile further on. The wind favoured us, for it had fallen, and the proas were making little progress.

“Lay your ears back, we’ll get them yet!” jerked out the Chief.

We did as ordered, soon overhauled the last proa, and made a dash for the leader, ranging up alongside in a style that I fancy astonished her skipper. It was then the C.C. made a fine study; and he looked as if he intended to play havoc with his would-be evaders. Notwithstanding this fine display of authority the skipper of the proa warned us off in a contemptuous manner. Then, revolver in hand, the C.C. jumped on board, and we followed. He rushed at the master, gripped him by the throat, and clapping his shooting iron close to his head, said things in unparliamentary language. The rest of us covered the crew with our revolvers. They looked a dangerous lot, and some were fingering the creases and choppers hanging at their sides.

“If there’s the least show of attack let ’em have it,” sang out the C.C., an order that each had mentally anticipated. It was a cheeky undertaking, for there were one hundred and five Malays, all told, to our five white men and a mixed boat’s crew of four.

The only sounds for a minute or so were those from the

rippling water, and the rudders in the becketts. Then the skipper spoke, the sail was lowered and the anchor went down.

Business began—

“Why did you not report at Ojountambanoonoo?”

“The weather was too bad; had no money to pay fees and duties; knew nothing about it.”

“Therefore you will pay fifty pounds for fees and duties, and one hundred pounds fine, to teach you something. You say you have no money, so pay up in goods. We will look and see what we can find.”

We did, and came across several pickle bottles full of pearls, mostly small, but containing others that would bring good prices; also a bag of splendid tortoiseshell. The value of the latter commodity varies according to the size and colour, realizing as high as forty-nine shillings a pound.

The Malays, judging from our haul, had been trading with the blacks to some purpose; but it struck me as strange that the master of the proa had not hidden his treasure. While at the search a keen watch was kept on the crew, and if a member approached with a jacket on, he had to throw it open to show he had no weapon concealed.

As the master of our prize was in command of the fleet, it was decided to see what the other proas would yield in the way of fees and duties. The masters of these nearly prostrated themselves before the Chief when we boarded. The excuses made by them for not calling at the Revenue Station were on a par with those of the first. They had no money and no pearls. If they had, they had acted more cunningly than their leader, for none were found. From each we took a bag of tortoiseshell, and each skipper was fined the same as the first.

Having considered matters, the C.C. thought the pearls, tortoiseshell, with a ton of rice from each proa thrown in would about square matters. The Malays warmed up at that, and did a lot of arguing, but as the steamer came up and anchored to leeward, they gave up the game and handed over the rice.

Their licences were then handed to them, and they were told to go to Halifax if they liked. They did not lose any time in getting under weigh, no doubt thinking that delays were dangerous.

The proas were the *Lasa Lasaya*, Soelman master; *Samberie Sverga*, Roaing master; and *Samalawaya*, Halakalve master.

We had boarded the proas close to a camping place called Oojounlamburon, where a large number of blacks had assembled, evidently thinking the Malays would remain, and with the expectation of a good time. But when they saw the proas leave they looked as mad as they felt. As there was good timber adjacent to the beach, we risked their rage and went on shore to replenish our stock, as well as get a supply of water. On our way through the straits we also passed the camping places of Morrungo, and Sallalaboo.

When ashore, Boom warned us to be careful, but the blacks did not try conclusions with us, concluding no doubt that we were too many and too well armed. One, at least, understood all about firearms. This big fellow walked slowly round and examined me carefully, and when he caught sight of the revolver in my belt he touched it and threw his arm about, crying, "Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!" He was evidently a gentleman of experience.

We became so friendly that I engaged a number to carry wood to the boat, paying each man with a stick of

tobacco, but keeping a keen eye on my dutiful servants the while.

With a farewell to our disappointed friends we passed out of the Straits, through an unsurveyed passage with nasty-looking rocks on each side, into Buckingham Bay, where we visited the camping place Paringa; thence into a splendid bay not shown on the chart, but known to the Malays as Bier. There were no signs of our friends at either place. We brought up for the night at a little island on the west side of Arnheim Bay. This bay was discovered by the Dutch in 1605 or thereabouts, and was named by the voyagers after their vessel.

From the island came a rich aroma, something akin to that of orange blossom, which roused our curiosity considerably. It being too late that night to investigate, we waited till the morning, and at peep of day pulled to a small sandy beach between tall mangroves. As we neared the island the perfume grew stronger, which we found came from a whitish, wax-like flower, the blossoms of a small tree that grew in profusion. I had not before seen the flower, and regret I cannot name it.

On the beach were signs that at one time trepang curing had been carried on, but it must have been long before. We forced our way through the growth to a tall tree which stood in the centre of the island. This proved to be a tamarind; which, judging its age by those at Port Essington, must have been seventy or eighty years old. At the foot of the tree was a mound, which at one time had been fenced in. We were speculating as to whose grave it was when Boom said—

“Macassar Captain sit down. Moyaut him been tellem me. Long time him walk alonga proa. Him camp here. Blackfella growl and killem Captain and cook. Him take all about tucker and run alonga bush. Malay man then put Captain alonga hole.”

From appearance it seemed that since the murder the place had not been used as a camp, but that it had been recently visited was evidenced by the large mangroves cut down with a sharp instrument. This clearly showed that there was a proa or proas in the vicinity, and as we steamed across Arnheim Bay towards the English Company's Islands, Rippy was kept aloft in a boatswain's chair with orders to keep a sharp look out, as it was difficult to pick up a proa at anchor, lying, as they did when at work, close inshore with the mast down. When well across he sang out, "Me see em one fella proa," and then pointed towards Mallison Island. We steamed in and soon picked up the craft, which looked like a big rock. We did not go close to it on account of the ugly-looking rocks, and not knowing the passage, but were quickly in our boat and pulling for the proa. A fine, stately-looking chap, in brilliant sarong, was aboard watching us. When the C.C. caught sight of him he cried out joyfully—

"Great Scott! Why, I'll be hanged if it's not Babo Paloe, and of course that is the Padowakong Sakaringlong. The old scoundrel, I'll make him sweat if he can't explain things. I have a set on the old beggar, besides which he is a bad egg. When I went down the coast last year to warn these Johnnies, Babo Paloe came aboard the cutter to see me, and wishing to be hospitable I asked him to have a drink. The China boy, instead of helping Mr. Babo Paloe, left a full bottle of 'square' with him. I was at tea at the time, and when finished to my disgust found that he had nearly emptied the bottle, and that without turning a hair. I said to myself, all right, B.P., if ever I get the chance you will be b.p."

"Eh, what?" queried we.

"Badly punished, of course," was the solemn reply; and we all laughed, as in duty bound.

Next moment the gay Babo was bowing most humbly before the brass buttons. Poor chap, he had no licence, whereupon he was asked for one hundred and fifty pounds fees and fine, and this, as he had no money, was liquidated by seizing his trepang and tortoiseshell, cleaning him out of both.

The name of the camp was Limba Cheepa, and a large number of blacks were working at the smoke houses. When Babo came to the steamer for his licence the C.C. gave him a stiff glass of square (to remind him, probably, of past joys), and several sticks of black tobacco. I felt sorry for the old pirate and his crew (who shared in the loss). He had been specially warned to call at the Station; but having been his own master on the coast for half a century, no doubt found it hard to relinquish the habit of doing as he pleased.

Having wished him and his crew a happy and prosperous cruise, we steamed to Malay Roads, in the English Company's Islands, so named by Flinders, who, in 1803, first discovered the proas on the coast, although he had previously found indications of the visitations of some Eastern race. When first he saw these boats he was under the impression that they were those of pirates and beat to quarters with a view to giving them a warm time. He subsequently ascertained that sixty proas had traded on the coast that year.

CHAPTER XXV

The Belle of the *Dawn*

AS soon as we anchored I threw out a line and quickly caught some catfish, and with this for bait secured a fine haul of schnapper, the proceedings ending by a shark clearing off with the line.

That evening the engineer made the rather alarming discovery that the supply of oil for use in the engine-room was nearly exhausted ; also that there was only about a pint of kerosene left. It seems that during the "dusting" we had off the Crocodiles, the tins must have become leaky, and this was not discovered until a further quantity was required for the machinery. It was at once decided that the butter on board should be diverted from its proper "channels," and used on the engines, also that all tinned meats were to be made hot, and the fat drained off the contents before being served up. I innocently asked if there was anything the matter with turtle fat.

"Don't care what it is so long as it's grease of some sort," was the growling reply.

The C.C. decided we would try for some. As soon as we landed we were fortunate in locating a number above high-water mark, and quickly had six good-sized fellows on the broad of their backs. They were all green-backs. Then we went in for some athletic exercise. Up and down the beautiful beach we raced, played leap frog and

yelled and sang until we were exhausted. I don't suppose such a performance ever took place on the island before, unless indulged in by some of the ancient mariners who knocked about the North Coast hundreds of years ago, and who when ashore thus shook up their livers and worked off exuberance of spirits.

It was subsequently found that turtle fat mixed with butter and the drainings from tinned meats suited the complexions of our engines to a nicety.

When we rounded Cape Wilberforce and entered the Gulf of Carpentaria, it was a dead calm, a state of things which agreed with our engines, then working famously. Some five miles to the eastward, lying becalmed, was a large, topsail schooner, and we steamed to her in the hope of getting oil. The schooner proved to be the *Dawn*, Milligan master, from Sydney to Cambridge Gulf, with passengers and stores for the goldfields; and I was instructed to board her for the purpose named. She had called at Thursday Island. I refrained from asking why she was so far south, and out of her course, and her skipper did not volunteer the information.

Among the passengers was a middle-aged man, of sturdy build, named Steele, with four boys and two girls, the eldest of whom was a pretty girl of sixteen. I was soon chatting away with her, her blue eyes fairly sparkling with excitement at meeting a stranger after being so long at sea. When she opened her rather large mouth, which often gave vent to a merry laugh, she displayed white even teeth. I was greatly impressed by her, and truth to tell, I got the notion that she was favourably struck with me. I was at that age when it is so easy and perhaps pardonable to draw conclusions of that kind. Mary's—yes, Mary was her name—father had been a successful New South Wales farmer, but having contracted the

gold fever, had sold out to try his luck on the Kimberley fields. Poor old chap! poor kiddies! I was afraid they were in for a bad time.

A sharp whistle from the steamer reminded me I had other things to do than talk to a pretty girl, so, quite as an afterthought, I inquired about oil. No, there was none to spare. I then bade Mary farewell, and she with a sweet smile answered "Until we meet again!" With a press of the hand and, "I hope so, too," I was over the side and away.

Limba Pandria, the camp in Melville Bay, was next called at. Three proas were at work. Two had reported and received their licences, but the third had passed without doing so. The old excuse of bad weather was pleaded, and as he had not been on the coast for several seasons he was let off with fees and a fine of twenty pounds. He had a few pounds in Dutch money, and the balance was made up with rice, trepang and tortoiseshell.

I went on board to see that the goods were duly delivered, and when rounding under her stern saw three ropes hanging overboard, evidently made fast to something in the water. Curiosity prompted me to catch hold of one and haul that something to the surface. It proved to be two cases of arrack, each containing about four gallons; and the other lines were similarly weighted. This spirit had not been declared, and was promptly confiscated, a further fine of twenty-five pounds being imposed, which we took out in trepang. The master submitted so quietly that he gave me the impression that somehow he still held the trump card.

The Customs business being finished, the three Malay masters had a yarn with the C.C. about the free and easy way in which the blacks treated them, making particular mention of Cadado, a fine stalwart chief who "bossed

the native show." This dusky gentleman and his friends had developed the playful habit of boarding proas and helping themselves to provisions, which was certainly rough on the crews. Upon being told that Mr. Cadado was ashore at the smoke house, he was interviewed by the C.C., our respect for the savage being shown by the weapons we carried. The chief, who had a number of men of fine physique with him, immediately came forward, and threw his arms around my principal. I kept in the background lest in the exuberance of his monarchical affection he might treat me similarly. Although in the presence of royalty, I never felt more democratic in my life, for even at my respectful distance I detected that "attar of roses" was not the perfume of his court.

Then in Macassar, through Pedro, Cadado was advised to cultivate the virtue of honesty, set an example of self-denial, and do everything necessary to avoid the possibility of having his royal brains knocked out by his longsuffering friends the Malays. He expressed regret if he had in any way done wrong, and promised not to offend again.

The Malays, on the other hand, were told they must protect themselves, it not being possible for the authorities always to do so.

The conferences having ended, we proceeded to the next camping place, Limba Jona, where we anchored for the night. In the morning we landed to have a look round, but had barely done so, when out of the jungle at the back of the beach came about twenty black men waving their arms and singing out in Macassar.

Boom gave warning: "Look out, Captain, him big fella growl. Him killem all about, me think it. Him got spear alonga toe."

The blacks, recognizing we were suspicious, suddenly bent down, each man rising with his spear, which without

hesitation, they launched at us, and then made off for the jungle.

“Let them have it,” was the order, and we opened fire on the retreating figures. One man fell, and an examination showed he had been stunned by a revolver bullet furrowing the top of his head ; but it was not a dangerous wound. We dragged him to the beach, and tied his hands and feet in case he wished to leave us in a hurry when he “came round.”

When he opened his wild eyes Boom and Rippy plied him with questions in Macassar, and ascertained that no sooner had we cleared out than Cadado and his men felt the need of light refreshment, and had proceeded to one of the proas and helped themselves to all the food they could lay hands on. The worm turned—the Malays would have no more free feeding, and in a moment Cadado and two of the men were dispatched.

The others, fully understanding that “when things are different they are not the same,” jumped into the water and escaped to the bush. A big yabber had followed, the outcome of which was to try and get even with us, whom they blamed for the whole business. Knowing we intended to remain the night at Limba Jona, they—hoping to catch us on the hop when we landed—had made across country and waited for us.

As we could not be hampered with a prisoner, summary punishment was decided upon, so he was lashed to a tree and given the rope's end by one of the crew. At the first stroke he looked amazed, but when the rope continued to bite the poor beggar howled. The C.C., having talked to him like a father through Boom (but goodness knows how Boom put it), he was cast adrift and told to get. As he disappeared in the jungle he gave a parting salute, which nearly caused a few bullets to follow him.

It is a custom with the blacks to gash their bodies in parts and then rub in sand and ashes, the result being excrescences which are regarded with pride. Perhaps our friend had his back and head treated in the approved manner, and so turned his "furrow" and stripes into things of beauty.

CHAPTER XXVI

Seizure of the *Good Resolve*

IN the face of a light south-caster we rounded Cape Arnheim in fear and trembling lest the little sea on would shake our machinery to pieces. It, however, seemed to have taken a new lease of life, perhaps due to turtle fat.

We followed the coast as far as a fine unsurveyed bay, inside Sir Roderick Rocks (Carra Carringa), which we examined for proas; but neither there nor in Caledon Bay (Mungoola) or Blue Mud Bay (Churapee), were any found. This running along the coast, and in and out of bays and inlets about which next to nothing was known to white men, was most interesting. There was an element of romance in it, with that spice of danger which is ever dear to the British heart.

We examined the north end of Groote Island for a camp known as Dylompo, but our quest was in vain—a disappointment, for it was reported famous for pearls. When at the south end of the island, as more fresh water was required, a party of us went ashore at a likely-looking place, where we could also obtain a supply of wood. The spot selected was at the end of a gully opening on the beach; but before reaching it we had to cross a stretch of coral reef. When we had satisfied ourselves with Adam's ale we put in a couple of hours at wood cutting, and then came the task of carrying the wood and water across the coral. What with the sharp coral beneath our feet and a

blazing sun above our heads, the work was nothing less than a hardship. But once done, a long drink and a quiet smoke in the shade made up for it all.

The Scotch Engineer, as the outcome of the satisfaction this brought us, was prepared to expound the law of compensation; but as we were anchored on a lovely bottom, I asked to be excused while I tried for some fish. For bait, I hooked on a piece of tinned meat, which operation had to be repeated several times before I had the pleasure of hauling in a fine schnapper. This was cut up for bait, when a number of red and grey specimens of this fine fish were soon flopping on the deck.

Groote Island, which was discovered and named by Tasman in 1644, is a large island, forty miles by forty. Judging from the view we had it is covered with dense jungle. In the centre is a hill of considerable height. This island is a veritable terra incognita, never having been explored. That it was inhabited we knew, for we heard blacks in the distance cooeing, but passed without seeing any.

Maria Island at the mouth of the Roper River, where we hoped to find a quantity of coal left by a vessel many years before, was the next place called at. This island was named by Tasman after his sweetheart, Maria van Dieman. When we entered the bay on the west side, that is facing the Roper, there were many blacks on the beach; but as soon as we approached in the boat they cleared into the bush. This was disappointing, as we wanted to learn from them where the coal was. Boom and Rippy sang out in Macassar and made signs in case the fellows were within earshot or were watching us, but to no purpose.

We started inland, and came to what was evidently a sacred spot. On a grassy flat of considerable extent were

a large number of squares outlined with stones and with hollow logs set upright at intervals. These logs, which were decorated with different colours and feathers, contained skeletons, which had been placed therein after having been exposed for a long time in the branches of trees, as is the native custom with the dead. I wanted to annex two or three skulls, but was not allowed to interfere with the bones. In this I now think my chief was right, for the more one respects the customs of the natives the better chance there is of getting on friendly terms with them. As compensation I secured a number of the beautiful bronze-wing pigeon.

We had been fossicking about for an hour or so when a peculiar-looking rise, covered with bushes and creepers, attracted our attention. It was near the beach and its unusual appearance led to its examination. Eureka! The coal! Speedily the creepers were cleared away, snakes and numerous centipedes enlivening the proceedings. Taking several large pieces to test its worth, we returned to the boat. Close to the beach, near two canoes, was a large native well with plenty of water in it, from which we further replenished our supply. One of the canoes was of Malay manufacture; and the other native handiwork. The last-named was of bark, and beautifully made. Half a dozen sticks of tobacco were left in each.

Although the coal had been there for many years exposed to the weather, it proved first-class. I cannot say much in favour of lumping coal, especially when carried in cases; but "willing hands make light work," and before sunset we had shipped about seven tons free of charge.

Maria Island, which is heavily timbered, will, I think, be of importance some day. Situated as it is at the mouth of that fine river, the Roper, a big shipping trade is bound

eventually to be done there; and then the splendid anchorage under the Island will be appreciated. It is six miles long and five broad. Adjacent to the mouth of the river was a Malay camping place called Wakea, but all thoughts of proas were knocked out of our heads by seeing a ketch of fifty tons coming out of the river. Up went our flag, and we steamed towards the craft. The C.C. ordered her to heave to. The man in charge hesitated for a moment, then obeyed, and we boarded her. !

"What craft is this?" asked the C.C.

"The *Good Resolve* of Normanton."

"What are you doing here?"

"Been up the river to land stores for the stations."

"Where from?"

"Bourketown."

"Where are your papers?"

The man handed the boss a clearance, who, when he had examined it, smiled sweetly.

"I see you cleared for Port Darwin; this is not Port Darwin."

"Can't help that, sir. The owner, Grass by name, who was on board when we left, would first put into the McArthur, where he and his wife landed with all the material required to build and stock a shanty. He then told me to go to the Roper, discharge the balance of the cargo, and then go back to Bourketown for more stuff for himself."

"Then you have landed all the goods shown on the clearance?"

"Yes," said the chap.

"Thanks," said the C.C., who walked to the mainmast and with his knife cut on it a broad arrow, saying, "I seize this vessel in the Queen's name, and you are my prisoners."

The two men forming the crew did not appear to be very much concerned, and took it quite as a matter of course when told they would remain with me in charge.

The steamer, with the ketch in tow, then headed for the river, and we were no sooner inside than the engines refused duty. The engineer popped his head up and gave us the pleasing intelligence that some dashed thing had "gone bung," and it would take, he thought, several days to fix things up again. The C.C. tore his hair; but as that in no way affected the machinery, the anchor was let go and the ketch hauled alongside and made fast.

CHAPTER XXVII

A Fearful Death—A Boat Burnt

THE C.C., having decided to make a hundred-mile boat journey up the river as a preliminary to the landing of stores from the steamer, which he had deferred till her return from the McArthur, no time was lost in getting the mails and all required for the trip aboard our little craft. The party consisted of the C.C., myself, two troopers, a Malay named Salim, Boom and Rippy, and the two men from the captured ketch, from against whom the chief had wisely withdrawn the charge of smuggling and taken them into his employ.

I looked forward to the journey with the keenest interest, for the Roper was a notable river, and I was longing to make its acquaintance. For ninety miles or so of its course, vessels drawing fourteen feet can ascend; and, as far as Leichhardt's Bar, a few miles further on, vessels of a shallower draught can proceed; while above this again are many navigable reaches. Thirty miles from its mouth to its extreme head—a distance, say, of three hundred miles—it runs through a succession of splendid agricultural belts, extending, approximately, for five hundred miles. It has numerous tributaries (great waterways in themselves), such as the Hodgson, Wilton, Strangways, Waterhouse, Elsey and Chambers. Along the course of these also are many thousands of square miles of country suitable for agricultural purposes.

All being ready, we were soon merrily sailing up the

great reaches of this splendid stream before a fair wind. This pleasant travelling lasted for some time and until we rounded a point where the wind headed us, when we took to the oars. Thus rowing or sailing, as circumstances ordered, we journeyed all day. By sunset we had left the mangroves behind us for banks high and well wooded, beyond which stretched prairie-like plains. Here we landed. The trip so far had been uneventful. All along, till the high banks were reached, the river had run between mangroves and great mud flats, on which many alligators were seen basking.

A good meal disposed of, all hands were ready for rest; but the mosquitoes soon made it clear that not on the banks could this be secured; so, as an experiment, we anchored well out in the stream, rigging up the sail as a cover. Here our musical enemies were not nearly so troublesome, and before long we were all in the land of Nod—all except myself, for the fascinations of the night kept sleep at abeyance till long after my mates had found it. The moonlight was of the clearest, tipping the rippling water with silver-like bars as it passed on its way to the sea; and the banks on either hand were repeated in quivering-edged shadows, from the inner gloom of which came ever and anon mysterious whisperings and eerie sounds. Then I, too, slept.

It must have been midnight when all were startled out of sleep by a heart-rending cry. For a moment we were silent, dazed with fear. Then someone asked—

“What was that?”

One of the men forward, noticing a blanket hanging over the side, looked closer, and cried—

“Good God, Salim has gone!”

Glancing over the boat's side we saw that the water was greatly agitated, and at the same instant up through

its swirling, glittering surface shot our comrade as far as his waist. He gave an appealing cry, his eyes dilated with terror; then, throwing up his hands, uttered a blood-curdling scream—the anguish of death—and was seen no more.

The tragedy had taken less than a minute's time. Silenced with horror we stared at the fatal spot; then, in whispers, spoke of the dead.

In his sleep the poor fellow must have thrown one of his legs over the side of the boat, which had been seized by the alligator, and by it he had been dragged into the river. So swiftly his end had come that we were powerless to render aid, and the commotion in the water showed that not one, but many of these awful brutes, had played a part in the tragedy.

Soon after this a fog gathered, so dense that one could hardly see his hand before him, and we had an anxious time until it lifted, soon after daybreak. There was no wind, so it was out oars, at which we worked in turns until nature called for sustenance. This partaken of, followed by a rest, we pulled well on into the night, and camped on the bank. Another hard day's work under the blazing sun brought us to the Bar, where we received a hearty welcome.

All were glad the mails had arrived, but bitterly disappointed that the steamer was not coming up at once with the stores.

The story of the loss of our man drew forth expressions of sympathy from most, but some received the news with disgusting callousness. A great many men formed the camp; and while the majority were honest Australian bushmen, whose very faults leaned to virtue's side, it was not without its blacklegs. In consequence of its isolated position, with no police or telegraph station

within hundreds of miles, the Bar had become an asylum for "undesirables" of all sorts from every part of Australia and beyond.

When it became known who we were and what we had done, it was clear the lawless element at the shanty would have given us a warm time if they had been strong enough. But we had the necessary advantage; and judging from what I saw of the troopers in our party, the gentlemen "on the cross" would find their enterprises fearlessly interfered with, and a "move in" ordered if the slightest chance were given.

Baptismal names with this class appeared to have entirely given place to such substitutes as "Gutter Snipe," "The Orphan," "Peter the Saint," "Sam the Poet," "Mountain Duck," "Green Ant," "Alligator," "Bony Brim," "Dirty Dick," "Billy the Priest," and such like; and to these names their owners answered as a matter of course.

The C.C. "tabooed" all the cargo landed by the *Good Resolve*. As none of the owners were at the Bar, the shanty keeper, who was a good fellow, although a rough diamond, agreed to pay dues and fines, taking possession of the stores as security for the money advanced.

Having fixed up our business we snuggled down under a lean-to, intending to make a start at peep of day. Early in the morning one of the troopers roused me up, saying that our boat with all its gear had been burnt!

I rushed to where we had hauled it up to find nothing but the ironwork left. I thought my rage had carried me to the limits of vehemence, but it was as a gentle zephyr to a cyclone when the Chief came sweeping along with his. It was not the loss of the boat alone that almost choked him with passion. That was bad enough, but overnight he had learned that a schooner was in the

McArthur landing stores, and he swore to " nab " her if all the boats in the Territory had been burned ! Some of the swabs loafing around had evidently got to know that he had wind of the McArthur vessel, and had burnt the boat to prevent his reaching her.

When his rage-eruption had subsided somewhat, he asked if I could suggest anything—how could we get down the river to the steamer ?

I tried my best to look as if " thinking hard," when my eye took in the body of an old wagon lying on the bank and near it a bundle of bullock hides. Then a notion jumped into my head, and I smacked my thigh saying—

" By the hook-block, Sir, I think I have it ! "

I explained. The C.C. gripped me by the shoulder and cried—

" Right you are, my boy, we will do them yet ! But mum's the word ! "

Meanwhile no chances were to be taken, so the two seamen and Boom and Rippy were told to keep an eye quietly on the articles while he saw to making them his own. The wagon-body was anybody's property, and the hides were secured for a song. Talking with the storekeeper, the C.C. pointed to them in a casual way, and said—

" Pity to see good hides going to waste like that. "

" Care for a spec. ? You can have the whole boiling of fifty for a bob a-piece, " replied the storekeeper.

" Done, and there's your money, " and, before the astonished man could say a word, he turned to me with—

" Take possession. "

The shanty man was asked to send a number of blacks to carry the hides to the water and put them in soak, and a guard was set over them. The mob was then informed

of the enterprise on foot and warned that the first man who sought to interfere would receive prompt payment in lead.

A number of fellows, recommended by the shanty keeper, offered to assist, among them a carpenter; and the work of constructing *The Ark* (for we christened her before she was built) was begun at once.

Several fresh hides that did not require soaking were cut into strips with which to sew the others together, and while this was being done the carpenter made four paddles and one fairly long oar from saplings, and strengthened the framework of our ship with battens. By noon on the following day sufficient hides had been sewn together, so the wagon was turned over and the sheet of hides well stretched over the bottom, tucked and folded in neatly at the corners, and nailed, battens being fastened on the bottom, fore and aft, so as to give additional protection. Our "hide-clad" was then turned over again, and the sheet fastened inside with battens; and holes were made in the side top-rails and the end ones for thole pins. It was dark when we had finished, yet some suggested an immediate trial; but "Not till the morning" was the law.

We then fixed up the tackle and water bags, and the full force of the party camped that night by the side of our *magnum opus*.

Before "Old Jamaica" had wakened up the punt was afloat on the Roper, willing hands having helped to carry her down the sloping bank. She floated all right and presented rather an imposing appearance. The weight of eight men tested her waterproof qualities, and the test was deemed satisfactory. The slight leakage could easily be kept down.

When it was seen that *The Ark* was a success, the riff-raff showed their chagrin by venturing coarse personal

remarks, but some "capable" fellows of the better class shut them up by saying if they did not close their ugly traps they would get "a swat on the jaw"; and the C.C. followed up this artistic rebuke by liberally rewarding the hands who had so ably assisted us.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Perilous Trip

“**I**N with your gear, lads; we’ll chance it,” and promptly with our goods and chattels, we stepped into our novel craft. Pushing her gently from the bank we got our paddles going and glided away from the Bar to the music of a hearty send-off. An extra sharp look-out for snags and rocks was kept until we reached the deeper water near the Wilton, when we put more energy into our work and sent the old craft along at fairly good speed. On some of the reaches a fair light wind greatly aided us; and so the hours passed. Barring accidents, we now had every hope of completing our voyage in safety. Now and again we gave her a list to allow of the bailers being used; and while the odoriferous hides attracted the alligators, a bullet met those whose attentions became too pressing. Thus we continued as long as daylight lasted, when we grounded *The Ark* on a sandbank in the centre of the stream, having covered upwards of thirty miles.

Removing our gear, we hauled her up as high as possible, and then, with the drift wood on the bank, soon had a fire blazing. The flames lit up the surrounding water, enabling those on guard to see that nothing approached our treasure; while the smoke helped to keep the mosquitoes at bay. Alligators commenced to reconnoitre, but they were kept at a distance with occasional shots.

The evening meal disposed of, pipes were lit, and as the

smoke circled up and disappeared in the clear air, we yarned about a thousand things. We thought the C.C. should consider himself as Father Noah during the trip, and we his devoted family. While our fooling was proceeding a large alligator pushed its snout as near *The Ark* as possible, whereupon it was dispatched by a well placed ball.

“Good boy,” cried the C.C. Then he gave us a conundrum: “What is the difference between old Noah of the past and the old Noah of the present?”

We were silent without being studious for not one of us would have dreamed of robbing the old boy of his reply:

“Well, then,” said he, “Old Noah’s duty was to get the alligators into the ark, and mine is to keep them out.”

Of course there was a big laugh, and we wished him luck, after which we rolled ourselves up for rest.

I was in a beautiful sleep, when I was aroused by my blanket being pulled away from me. Thinking it a hint from one of my comrades to go on watch, I jumped up with a “Right ho!” when I was astonished to see my covering making for the water on the other side of the bank. For a moment I thought I was dreaming of poor Salim, but quickly understood that a fate similar to his had nearly been mine. I snatched up my carbine and began to send lead in the direction of the thief, but I fear without result. The experience was not lost, for a stricter watch was at once set and continued.

As soon as the light permitted we were on our way again, and making better progress, the result no doubt of our having mastered the peculiarities of our original craft. The leaking did not increase, and we thought ourselves lucky. When the time again came to camp we made fast

to the river bank, which had not slope enough to admit of *The Ark* being pulled up, and two hands were again placed on watch. Ascending the bank we found we were not far from a considerable camp of natives. We gave a cooec, and the place which was so quiet a moment before became alive with yelling men, screaming women and children, and barking dogs.

The C.C., accompanied by Boom, walked towards the camp with his hands above his head, which was intended as a friendly advance. The noise ceased and several of the men made signs for them to approach, at the same time singing out "Bungawah," which we knew meant Chief. Boom replied in Macassar, but no answer coming proved they were inland blacks, and knew nothing of Malayan. I had taken up my stand on the bank, fowling piece in hand, which I had brought from *The Ark* on the off-chance of getting a turkey or jungle fowl, when I saw a movement which caused me to sing out—

"Look out, sir, I fancy they mean mischief!"

The next moment they were racing back, the blacks after them. Three or four spears fell short of them, but seeing matters were getting somewhat critical, I, aiming low, gave them two charges of No. 3 shot. Then there was a yell, and a scamper, and next moment we were all safe enough.

"The brutes!" gasped the C.C. "Just as you spoke, by the light of the camp fire I saw they were dragging spears with their toes. Thanks, my boy. Jolly good thing you had your shot gun. Fine thing with which to stop a rush. That was a close call," said he, as he picked up a spear that had struck the ground too near him to be pleasant. It was about nine feet long, of lancee wood made heavy by having been soaked in sea water for some time. Its barbs were ugly, and it had a point as sharp as

a needle's. The Chief kept it as a memento of what had been and might have been. I was not a little amused at his solicitude for the black wretches, and his relief when I assured him that beyond some pellets in their shanks they had sustained no harm from the double charge. The incident had been enough for him, and he immediately decided to risk a drift in the dark. All hands were glad enough to hear this, and we put off again at once, keeping a close watch for snags.

We had been paddling for about two hours, when I noticed a difference in the appearance of the banks, and drew the C.C.'s attention to it.

"By Jove," said he, "we are as far as the mangroves; that's splendid. We have done better than I thought. A few miles further on is a small island right in the middle of the river. If we can make that, we'll camp for a few hours in safety; then, with an early start, and all going well, we'll be aboard the steamer in good time to-morrow."

It was with a feeling of relief that we realized we had passed the spot where poor Salim had met his tragic death. After an hour's paddling we reached the island, and the craft was made fast, two men watching as usual. The others climbed to the top, and soon had the billy boiling, and were indulging in the great drink of the Australian bushman—tea. What on earth would the fellows out back do without it?

We were certain of being safe for the balance of the night, for even if the blacks had canoes they would not come off in the dark. But the mosquitoes had evidently unani- mously decided to have a gay time, and inured though we were they made us squirm. The only relief was to get in the thick of the smoke, where we were nearly suffocated. We were "between the devil and the deep sea." The

tiresome alligators, too, demanded a lot of attention. Two or three got a real good sniff of the hides, for they poked their noses right against the side of the craft, for which impertinence they received "rebukes" at close range.

We made a very early start, determined to get as far as possible before "Sol" came out in all his glory, or the breeze came up from the sea. We had only gone a short distance when we divined there was something radically wrong with *The Ark*, for the little leak had increased to a big one, and the constant bailing of two was required to keep the water down. Truth to tell, I was astonished that we had been so free from mishap. It was an anxious time, and to make matters worse the alligators seemed to understand that all was not well with us. They grew bdd, and yet bolder, notwithstanding the constant peppering they were receiving, and now and then a shark fin rose above the surface, showing they, too, were ready for a share in any fun that might turn up.

It is easy to write lightly now of the affair, but it was a time of dreadful suspense. The points, as we went on slowly towards them, were eagerly longed for in the hope of seeing the steamer, but with each came disappointment, and we were beginning to feel that heart-sickness that arises from hope deferred.

"Look here, my boy," said the C.C., to me, "if we do not see the steamer from the next point we will have to take to the mangroves, and then the Lord only knows what will be before us."

We were about done up. Tough though most of us were, we could not stand the strain much longer, and our looks showed what we would not admit.

"Never say die, boys," said the C.C. "Lay your ears

back. We will—Good God!” cried he, “Look at that!”

Ranged alongside was an alligator of huge proportions. Judging by the length of our craft it could not have been less than twenty-eight feet, the great curved scales on the edge of its back standing out like fins. The brute gave a sort of yawn, and slid beneath the surface.

“Bail! bail!” urged the C.C., “or we will be after that chap! Pull! Pull!! Another one, just another . . .” when through the bottom of *The Ark* shot the sharp end of a snag—but we were alongside the mud bank.

“Steady, chaps,” said the C.C., “throw out the tackle and water bags. Collar your arms. Now out of her into the mangroves as quick as you can.”

And it was high time to vacate. The poor old boat swayed violently, the stump acting as a sort of anchor. Rip went the hide from one side, the leviathan we had just seen having it in his jaws. Sharks and other alligators then joined in the work of destruction, and soon every bit of hide had disappeared, while the woodwork was splintered in places by the snapping of great jaws. The water was churned into foam by the fighting, greedy brutes, and a sight of the struggle emphasized our narrow escape from a disgusting and terrible death.

The feasting over, the scavengers disappeared from sight, but I suspect many had their merciless eyes upon us as we clung to the swaying mangroves close to the water's edge. We did not stand on the order of our going, but as quickly as we could sought safety.

Rippy, acting under orders, then climbed up the tallest mangrove to have a look round, and what a sigh of relief went up as he sang out, “I see steamer,” pointing down to the next reach. But we were not yet “out of the wood.”

Yes, out of the wood, for what forest was ever a match for a mangrove jungle! We had to get to the steamer or get them to come for us.

Rippy was provided with my gun and cartridges, and told to blaze away; and as I wore the lightest-coloured shirt, that had to go up to serve as a flag. I suppose he must have used a dozen charges when he yelled, "All right, him been see em, boat all about come."

We devoutly thanked God, and sat down to await deliverance. The skipper and two men soon appeared, and it would be impossible to tell how rejoiced we were to feel something substantial beneath us, as we stepped into the boat.

The skipper of course was curious to know how we had got there.

"We came down in a wagon, and there she is," said the C.C., pointing to the remains of the craft.

Then he gave a full explanation, crediting me with the idea, whereupon the rotund one said such nice things about my brain box that had I possessed the power of blushing my face must have become as florid as his own.

"That's enough about the wagon," remarked the C.C. "Is the machinery fixed up, and when can we get to sea?"

"The engineers have done everything possible," replied the skipper, "and if we do not get heavy weather I fancy the "innards" of the old slouch will see us through. We tried the engines this morning and they went bully, and a start can be made in a couple of hours at the outside."

"That's grand," said the Chief. "You will have plenty of time to get clear of the bar, and then let her rip on the clear run for the McArthur. We will have to tow the ketch,

so, Alf, you go on board and give the fellows a hand.”

I took my place as ordered, and within the time mentioned we were on our way to the McArthur, ninety miles distant, and with every prospect of a fine night.

CHAPTER XXIX

Meet a Hard Citizen

AT noon next day we were running through the Pellew Group of islands, at the mouth of the McArthur, when we sighted a number of large dredging canoes at work, and three proas anchored close to the beach in a small bay, with the usual smoke houses ashore. We had hardly discerned these, when out came, before a stiff breeze, three large canoes under full sail to meet us. On each of the outriggers several men were perched, and the boats were brought alongside in rattling style. Then out hopped the three skippers of the anchored proas with their papers. These were in order, they having reported themselves and come on to this distant camping-place, which, by the way, was called Deena Seeda. The masters wanted something, and after a good deal of beating about the bush, out it came. Would the Commandant, if he had any rice to spare, sell it ?

“Certainly, but what makes you short ?”

“Customs officer take it for duty.”

“Did you not have any money ?”

“We paid some Dutch money.”

“Well, how are you going to pay me for the rice ; with pearls ?”

“No, Commandant, with English money.” And they each produced some sovereigns.

Then the C.C. “opened out,” as he could on occasion, for when paying up in the first instance these fellows

denied having gold with which to settle the fees, etc. He wound up his tirade with—

“ Oh, certainly, you shall have rice, and, by the piper, you shall pay for it ! ” And they did !

By the time the canoes were loaded we had much less rice on board, but an ample equivalent in good English sovereigns. It was bad luck for the Macassar men, for gold is worth more in their own country than out of it.

By evening we were twelve miles up the river, where we made fast, as that was the limit considered wise to take our festive steamer. To facilitate matters, the ketch was to be worked up a bit further, and the balance of the cargo was boated to Borroloola, the settlement at the head of navigation. We lost no time, but it took a good day and a half to cover the twenty-seven miles to the spot where the trading schooners discharged their cargoes.

All the way up the C.C. had kept a sharp look-out for contraband cargo, but it was not until approaching the usual landing place that he sighted anything suspicious.

“ By Jove,” he exclaimed, “ there is a heap of stuff on the left-hand bank. That must have been discharged from the schooner, but, hang it, where is the vessel ? At any rate, we’ll collar the cargo.”

When Jack, who was in charge of the camp, was informed who we were, he produced receipts for duties paid to the Queensland Government on behalf of our Customs. The C.C. looked disappointed as he said—

“ I was not advised of this before I left ; I thought there was something wrong.”

“ I reckon,” said Jack, in a drawling voice, “ the captain will get fits when he fetches Thursday Island again, for he got tight and cleared out without his papers. I suppose my stuff will be all right ? ”

“ If I had caught the schooner before the goods had been

discharged, you might have had trouble ; as it is, after I have had a look through your invoices I'll not interfere with them. I would have seized the schooner if here."

"It's just as well," replied Jack, "for she's chock-a-block with poor devils down with the fever who want to reach the nearest port for medical assistance. A woman died just before they left, and was buried on the bank there."

"If that is the case I'm glad I had not the responsibility of deciding what to do. But look here, Jack," continued the C.C., "what on earth are you going to do with all that spirits, tobacco, and other stuff?"

"Why, open a store at Borroloola, in opposition to Grass, as soon as I can get there with them. He's a bad egg from all I hear."

"Oh, Grass is still carrying on, is he?" said the C.C., with a peculiar smile. "Perhaps you may not have opposition for long. I'll get on, I think. Alf here can stop and check your invoices." Then to Jack, "You have no objection?"

"Oh, no," replied Jack, "he seems a decent sort of a chap; I'll be glad of his company."

"Get your swag ashore," was the C.C.'s order to me. "I'll send the boat down in a day or two. Meantime I'll take the ketch further up the river."

"You ought to get up another fifteen miles with that packet," volunteered Jack.

In a short time I was alone with the old man in the camp. Boom and Rippy were anxious to land with me, but the Boss wanted all available hands to work the boats to the settlement.

I certainly made a show of checking some of Jack's cargo, but I found his yarns about out-back life so interesting that I forgot everything else. Jack had been everywhere,

had discovered gold fields, had rows with the blacks times without number, and altogether he was a cyclopedia of Never-Never lore.

I afterwards verified what he told me, and found he was regarded as one of the finest bushmen in the North. I do not remember ever having had a more enjoyable evening. There was just enough bite in the air to make warmth acceptable, and lying on a blanket alongside his fire listening to the old chap was both amusing and instructive.

Just before "roost time," Jack said, "Well, let's have a nightcap."

I cried off.

"Good enough, lad," said he, "stick to it. Rum thing for me to say, seeing I'm going to sell the stuff. But y' see, my young covey, I'm on for making money, and whoever wants liquor can hev it, and good stuff at that—no doctoring the article with me. As I'm under the doctor's orders (here an atrocious wink) I'll take a 'gum tickler.'"

With this he moved off to open a case, the schooner boys having used up all the loose stuff, when half the lid came away without trouble.

"Here, lad, quick," cried Jack, pointing to something in the case.

It was a black snake coiled up in the corner. Some of the schooner fellows had "made" a couple of bottles and had placed the lid back in a way that had enabled the reptile to slip in. I dispatched it, and my mate was evidently much relieved to find it was a real snake. He opened a bottle, deliberated for a minute, and then poured out a "second maté's nip." When he had swallowed it with evident relish, and stroked his mouth with the back of his hand, he remarked, "My Gad, covey, I thought I had 'em. It gave me a turn, boy; yes, I feel it yet, and fancy

another 'smile' won't hurt," whereupon he helped himself to a second dram.

I had a glorious night's sleep, the sun being well up before I roused out and took a header in the river—in and out smartly, you may guess, after what I had witnessed on the Roper. I returned to camp as hungry as a hunter, my desire for food being intensified by the smell of toasted bacon.

It always seemed to me that to appreciate toasted bacon it must be prepared at a camp fire; and I found my host was a master hand at the business. Let me have but a whiff of it now, and I can picture in every detail that lonely camp on the McArthur.

Years afterwards I read an account of a hunting trip in Canada from the pen of Henry Van Dyke, and as he was evidently dining under conditions similar to those at the McArthur camp, I make no apology for taking over an extract here. He thus eulogizes broiled bacon:—

“Do you remember what Charles Lamb says about roast pig? How he falls into an ecstasy of laudation, spelling the very name with small capitals, as if the lower case were too mean for such a delicacy, and breaking away from the cheap encomiums of the vulgar tongue to hail it in sonorous Latin '*princeps obsonicrum.*' There is some truth in his compliments, no doubt, but they are wasteful, excessive, imprudent. For if all this praise is to be lavished on plain, fresh, immature roast pig, what adjectives shall we find to do justice to that riper, richer, more subtle and sustaining viand broiled bacon? On roast pig a man cannot work: Often he cannot sleep, if he have partaken of it immoderately. But bacon brings to its sweetness no satiety. It strengthens the arm while it satisfies the palate. Crisp, juicy, savoury, delicately salt as the breeze that blows from the sea; faintly pungent

as the blue smoke of incense wafted from a clean wood fire, aromatic, appetizing, nourishing, a stimulant to the hunger which it appeases. 'Tis the matured bloom and consummation of the mild little pig, spared by foresight for a nobler fare than juvenile roasting, and brought by art and man's device to a perfection surpassing nature. All the problems of woodland cookery are best solved by the Baconian method. And when we say of one escaping great disaster that he has 'saved his bacon,' we say that the physical basis and the quintessential comfort of his life are still untouched and secure."

What a breakfast that was : bacon, damper and tea ! No time for conversation. I noticed, however, that Jack did not seem altogether pleased, and that he often glanced across a great plain on which grew numerous clumps of bushes and small trees. At last I asked him what he was looking at.

"See them crows, lad," said he. "They show that blacks are coming this way. Crows always follow the blackskins. I don't like it. I've warned several parties away already. Now I fancy a big crowd is coming, and that they mean business : they think that I'm alone. Well, if they're looking for trouble, they'll get it. Let's see to our 'irons' and have 'em handy."

He laid out a couple of Winchesters fully charged ; two revolvers, and plenty of ammunition, and I gave the same attention to my carbine and revolver.

"There's lots of 'em," said Jack at last, "working their way through the bushes. You'll see that several 'll come out in the open presently and pretend to be friendly like. You be ready to let them have 'what for' when I tell yer."

Sure enough several appeared, and walked slowly towards us through the grass, making signs as if they desired to speak.

Jack waved them away, saying, " Good-day ! Good-day ! " Then out rushed about twenty others from the bushes, with spears in their hands, and joined those on the plain, who now stooped down and picked up the spears they had been dragging along. They then advanced in a body towards us.

Out rang the shots fast and furious, and several of our assailants fell. The others, panic-stricken had made off to the bush, being urged thereto by a round from the revolvers. After waiting a few minutes Jack said—

" I'll go and see to those chaps on the ground," pointing to the motionless figures. " You make up the fire and have a smoke. I'm more used to this sort of thing than you are."

I was thankful, and obeyed his instructions, not even glancing where our enemies had fallen until the old man had returned. There was nothing then to be seen. Jack helped himself to another stiff glass of whisky, remarking, " It's all right, lad, they're snug in the river."

The cupidity of the blacks had been excited by seeing so much cargo lying about, and in charge as they thought of one man only. They evidently thought it was their opportunity, but they had reckoned without their host.

Some three hours after this encounter a roughly-made punt, in charge of three men, came down stream to the camp for a load of Jack's goods. The men brought word that the C.C. was not going to the Settlement until the next day, so I arranged for one of the men to take me up stream in a flat-bottomed boat they had with them. I was glad to get away, now that Jack had company.

Taking turn about, after some hours of paddling we arrived at the ketch. The C.C. was pleased that I had turned up, as he was particularly anxious I should go to the settlement with him.

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When I told him of the attack he simply shrugged his shoulders and remarked that it was only what could be expected. Jack was evidently a hard old citizen, able to take care of himself.

CHAPTER XXX

Wild Life on the McArthur

BY noon next day we were at Borroloola. Before landing the C.C. indicated his programme, which he thought, as it included the arresting of Grass and his wife and the seizure of his goods, might cause trouble with the shanty customers, especially when they found their grog supply had suddenly terminated; and he wanted the assistance of the surveyor and his party, if necessary. This was readily promised, and with a certain amount of satisfaction at the prospect of having a "set to" with the McArthur "blokes."

Up the bank we went, with hands on revolvers in case of emergency; but by good fortune the only occupants of the shanty were the owner and his wife. In a few moments they found themselves prisoners for being concerned in smuggling from the *Good Resolve*, and their goods and store seized. I was put in charge, with several of the surveyor's men to keep me company, and with strict orders that nothing was to be interfered with. Then the C.C. turned to the prisoners, with the curt remark: "You'll accompany me to the ketch and remain there."

'Twas then the heathen Grass "raged and imagined a vain thing"; but a pair of bright bracelets drawn from the Chief's pocket acted as a potent sedative. The brute (for he was nothing less) and his wife, bag and baggage,

were soon on the ketch and out of harm's way. The wife I felt sorry for. She was a fine woman, and as good a "bushman" as any one around.

Soon after the boat left a crowd of fellows came in from the cattle camp for their lubricant, and their disgust at the state of affairs found vent in language the most florid and in threats of the goriest kind. I ventured to remark—

"When you fellows have quite finished, I'd like to say a word."

"Well, out with it," cried half a dozen. I then explained that they would soon have plenty of stuff with which to cure themselves of "dry throat" for Jack would be with them in a day or so with a copious supply of the best material. Considerably mollified, they then took themselves off.

Not so easily did we get rid of three scoundrels who came later for grog. After threatening language they proceeded to put their threats into execution by blazing away at the shanty with their carbines. My mates and I had just time to throw ourselves down behind some cases, when the bullets came rattling through the galvanized iron and played havoc with the bottled and tinned goods; and before we could reply with the same arguments they had disappeared.

A strict watch was maintained throughout the night, and we were relieved when morning came, and with it the boat from the ketch. I lost no time in getting it loaded with goods from the store, and was thinking it would take several days to clear the shanty in that way, when up came the punt with a load of Jack's stores, to my satisfaction and the immense joy of his many drought-stricken customers. The punt was loaded with seized goods for her return trip; and as our boat came back in the evening a clearance of the late property of Grass was effected

This included a quarter of beef for the steamer's cook, and a kerosene tin full of fat for the steamer's engineer.

The only touch of humour the trip provided was given by the surveyor, who one evening endeavoured to shoot stars with the aid of an artificial horizon. The experiment was a failure, for no sooner had he got an orb nicely in position than an insect would dart into his eye, up his nose, or down his back ; and his language was far from that of the calm, calculating scientist.

Having said good-bye to him and his party, who were bound inland, we left Borroloola, precious glad to see the last of it, and never dreaming that a future day would find me stationed there. By midnight we were alongside the ketch and immediately dropped down steam, bringing up at Jack's camp to say farewell. This "matured" party provided a superb breakfast, and as a parting keepsake gave me a lovely little Winchester carbine and two hundred rounds of ammunition. I was delighted with the gift, and treasure it as a valued memento to this day.

On the way down, Grass made so many threats and protests in language so abominable that the C.C. swore he would have him gagged if he did not shut up and keep quiet.

We found the steamer ready for sea, the McArthur portion of her cargo having been taken by those concerned. Grass and his wife were taken to the steamer, and I remained in charge of the ketch.

Leaving the river, we had a splendid run until some twenty miles south of Groote Island, when a strong southeaster sprang up and the short nasty seas of the Gulf of Carpentaria made the steamer shake and the machinery kick. Suddenly the engines raced for a moment, then came an ominous rattle, and all was still. The engineers

rushed up with the news that the shaft had broken and that an immense hole had been torn in the steamer's bottom through which the water was pouring. A glance was sufficient to show that there was no hope of saving her. The old craft began to settle down, and it was a case of taking to the boats without loss of time.

The skipper yelled to bring the ketch as close as I could with safety, and this I did. But first I launched her boat, and lucky it was that I did, for the fellows on the steamer in their hurry let one of the falls go with a run, and next moment the boat was smashed in against the sinking steamer's side. A scramble followed to get into the only available boat (that from the ketch), and all with the exception of the C.C. and the skipper managed it. They sprang over the side and struck out for her, into which they were hauled. They had not made their escape a moment too soon, for the steamer's bows shot into the air, and she went down, stern first, in some twenty fathoms. As she did so I cut the tow line, for which I stood ready if the worst came.

Poor old *Nawog*—at the bottom at last, and with her all our belongings as well as the tortoiseshell, trepang, rice and pearls, to gain which we had taken so much trouble!

I was bewailing it all when the C.C. cut me short with "But we have saved our skins; isn't that enough?"

It was a bad business, but could have been much worse. We had a sound keel under us, and the whole of Grass's stores with which to keep the wolf at bay; and this worthy's ravings at us as a lot of thieves did not impair our appetites in the slightest. Nevertheless he grew wearisome, so much so that the Chief threatened to put him in his own irons. That silenced him. When mention was made of the irons he had kept among his household

ornaments, he closed like an oyster. He knew all about them, and so did we.

The skipper, who had taken charge, had shaped a course with all sail up for the Goyder River, when it was discovered that our water supply was not sufficient for the run, so her bows were turned for Groote Island, at the South-west corner of which we found a well-sheltered bay, and the anchor was dropped. Next morning the ketch was shifted close to the beach, and we opened a snug little corner in which there was a cutter at anchor.

"Why, that's the Polly, the boat Tim bought to take stores to the Robinson," said the C.C. "He's making a long trip of it; better see what's up." There was nobody on board, so I landed. At the back of the beach I surprised a camp of blacks, and from their midst, hobbling with the aid of two sticks came Tim, looking pale and thin, and followed by a crowd of men, women and children.

"Hulloa!" said he, "what brings you here?"

I explained what had happened, and turned his question on himself with: "And what are *you* doing here? You look as if you had been in the wars."

"And so I have," he replied, "if eleven spear-wounds mean anything," and then over a pannikin of tea he told his yarn.

After quitting Port Darwin, three months before, he had had a capital run to the Gulf. After passing Blue Mud Bay he landed to procure firewood, and while so engaged had been attacked, receiving eleven spear wounds before he fell, but not before he had emptied his Winchester and revolver. Fortunately his two boys were at the cutter with a load of wood, and hearing the shots went to the assistance of their master. When close in they opened fire on the savages, who took to the bush.

The boys broke the spears off short and took their boss,

who was unconscious, to the cutter, where spirits were poured down his throat, which revived him ; and when he had somewhat recovered from the shock to his cast-iron system the spear points were drawn, and his wounds dressed with Friar's Balsam.

With the intention of getting medical aid, Tim had then stood away for Normanton, but on anchoring where we found him was too ill to go further. The camp of blacks, with whom he was able to converse in Malayan, having shown no inclination to make him look like a porcupine, as the others had done, he had remained. They had done more than refrain from attacking, for they had provided him with game, fish, turtle and turtle eggs galore, and he was then nearly ready to continue his voyage.

Tim was a bad man to annoy, and I knew he would supplement his late performances if the blacks ever gave him a chance. One look at this piratical-looking old seadog was sufficient guarantee on that score and others. He was going to open a shanty at the Robinson, some miles to the southward of the McArthur, and was delighted to hear of the downfall of Grass, principally, no doubt, because one less would give him a better chance. There was one thing about Tim that I admired, and only one—that was his indomitable will—he was “gritty” to a degree. In this he was like Grass. But as for morals—well, he had lost all he ever had ; and they hadn't been found by Grass.

And while I was having my yarn with Tim, Boom and Rippy were having a high old time with their fellow-countrymen, making them laugh with stories, told in the Malayan tongue, at the expense probably of the white fellows. This storytelling the blacks are in the habit of doing, and it does not take much to amuse them, being in many ways nothing more than big children.

No proas had called there that season. When they heard that three were at Deena Seeda they brightened up. The news meant a probable visit—it was a case of with all their faults they loved them still.

We ascertained that there were several camping places on the island. The blacks had seen pearls and tortoise-shell, and told us that at Dylompo a lot of each were awaiting the Malays.

Having procured some turtle, turtle eggs and a number of geese from the blacks, we took our leave, and before a nice south-easter were soon bowling on our way to the Goyder River.

Tim, I may tell, lived to set up his shanty; but more of him anon.

CHAPTER XXXI

A Desperate Fight for Life

FOUR days from the time of leaving Tim's camp, and after a lovely run through the islands, we anchored in the Goyder, near where we had previously brought up in the steamer. Next day the cutter with the two Malays and the Port Essington boy came alongside, bound from the station on Goyder Inlet, with fresh meat for the men at the timber camp. The C.C. wanted badly to go to the camp, but having a touch of fever let me go in his stead, with instructions to be back the same night, as we were to sail in the morning.

As the crew of the cutter was armed and game was plentiful, I only took the fowling piece. You may be sure I had my chums Boom and Rippy with me. We had run up the river about four miles, when, on rounding a point, a strong puff of wind capsized our boat, which settled down in eight feet, leaving six of us struggling in the water. We struck out for the nearest point, but before reaching it a dozen blacks made their appearance, and in Macassar invited us to come in out of the wet. The Malays, who were nearest to them, were soon wading ashore, when four or five of the treacherous blacks rushed at them with clubs and smashed in their heads; and at the same moment the others snatched up spears and hurled them at us. We dived and struck out for the middle of the stream.

When we came to the surface we were out of range of their spears, but while some made us targets for further practice others hauled the bodies of the Malays out of the water. The river was notorious for alligators and sharks, and at the spot where our boat went over was three-quarters of a mile wide. In addition to these dangers the opposite bank was fringed with forbidding mangroves, so that our dilemma was a desperate one.

It seemed about slack water, and I followed the example of my companions and armed myself with a piece of drift-wood some four feet in length, the idea being that if an alligator became inquisitive, instead of the jaws closing on the holder, they would on the stick. All went well until we were nearly across, when an immense alligator appeared close to the Port Essington boy, one of the cutter's crew, and before he had time to use his stick the fearful jaws had closed with a snap on his head, and he was drawn beneath the surface. For a moment we ceased to move, then each redoubled his efforts to reach the shore. We could not have covered more than a dozen yards when another of our enemies rose and made for Boom. Into the jagged cavern went his stick, snap went the jaws, and then began a battle for life, my faithful chum keeping the monster at bay as best he could. The contest, however, was fast nearing a tragic end, for even as I watched Boom was being forced under the water. Almost beside myself at the bare thought of losing him, I drew my hunting knife, dived under his assailant, and drove the long, keen blade two or three times into its stomach, dived again and came to the surface a few yards from the edge of the stream.

When I had cleared the water from my eyes it was to see the wounded reptile, mad with pain and rage, swimming round and round, the great jaws snapping, and the

immense tail beating the water into red foam. Rippy was giving Boom a hand to climb into the mangroves, when the former cried, "Look out, Captain."

I did, and saw, not many yards away, another brute coming my way at top speed. Never before did I swim as I did then, beating my opponent by a hair's breadth as I swung myself into a mangrove. My pursuer then turned and joined the other alligators and sharks that had made an attack upon their wounded relative. An unequal and grim struggle ensued for a brief time, then Boom's assailant disappeared, and all that remained to be seen was bloodstained water.

So acute had been the excitement, that it was only when danger was past that I found I still grasped my knife. Though removed from seen danger, we were yet in a serious predicament. The only thing possible was to make for the timber camp, and that meant miles of toiling through the mangroves. Still the task had to be faced, so at it we went. For hours we floundered through reeking mud and crawled over or under slippery claw-like roots, the steamy, oppressive atmosphere half choking us the while. The open country near the camp was reached at last. Our feet and legs were badly scratched, and we were parched with thirst. A final effort brought us to the tents; but, to our dismay, there was no sign of life. What did it mean—had there been treachery there, too?

Then we noticed a tree with a square of bark removed and the word "DIG" cut in the wood. Scratching away the earth, I found a tin containing a piece of paper, and on this was written: "Gone to Station, blacks bad." It was evident the wood cutters had cleared out in a great hurry, for the tents and gear were intact—proof, too, that the blacks did not know of their departure.

"It's an ill wind that blows no good," and we, thanks

to their panic, were able to obtain a delicious drink from one of their water-bags. How delightful it was, and what a text that water-bag would have afforded a temperance orator.

As I ventured a rest for a little time, trying to solve the problem of how we were to reach the ketch, I noticed that the camp commanded a view of the river, now lit by the setting sun. My first idea was to try and build a raft, but this was abandoned as there was no wood suitable; besides the darkness would soon follow, and we were very weary.

Rippy, who with eyes shaded had been scanning the far-off opposite bank, suddenly said; "Canoe sit down, me think it."

Boom had a look and he said, "Me think it."

"Too far away for me to see," I said, "but if a canoe is there how are we to get to it? I'm afraid of alligators now."

"Piccaninny time him get dark, me swim. No been see em more alligator."

We were hungry, and having to wait for darkness, made an examination of the camp and chanced on a lump of stale damper, which we ate with rare relish. When the time was ripe Rippy made for the river, Boom and I following with the water-bag.

Rippy moved into the stream so gently that there was not the least sound or ripple, and disappeared beneath its surface in the same quiet manner. We were waiting in painful anxiety for his return when, without warning and in a remarkably short space of time, he appeared beneath us, saying, "Me been got em"; and there sure enough was the great swimmer, with a canoe of about twelve feet long of Macassar build, without doubt the property of the timber men, and used by them to cross the river.

However, it was our property now, and a perfect God-send we thought it.

We at once embarked, my chums setting to work with the canoe paddles. We hugged the mangrove side of the creek, and it would have required sharp eyes indeed to have detected us when once in the deep shadow thrown by the jungle.

We glided stealthily down until the point where we had been capsized was passed, and then the lads put their best energy into the work until the ketch was reached.

As I slipped over the rail I was greeted by the C.C., who with the manager of the Florida Station, had been discussing our absence and the chances of bad luck we may have fallen in with. As briefly as possible I told them of our loss and how badly we had fared.

“There’s no doubt about it,” said Jenkins, the manager, “the niggers are fairly on the job these days. The wood-cutters turned up yesterday in a blue funk. You see the fellows had never been in the bush before; and their boss, who could have dealt with the darkies to a nicety, was away.”

He then asked the C.C. to delay long enough to get the camp stuff removed before the blacks interfered with it. Besides, there might be a chance of getting level with the Malay killers—a very necessary thing to do if the balance of power was to be maintained.

To this the C.C. readily assented, and he, Jenkins, myself and chums, and two of the crew were away betimes in the morning and with plenty of ammunition.

We landed opposite the camp without getting a glimpse of blacks, loaded up, and were near the fatal point of the day before when several blacks came into the open, holding up large fish and beckoning to us to come ashore, so the boat was headed in accordingly. Boom and Rippy

became much excited, saying, "Them fella black all about killem Malay."

"Are you sure?" said the C.C.

"My word, they been killem all right."

The movements of the blacks became more suspicious, when Jenkins said—

"I'm sure they're the fellows. Let 'em have it."

With that out rang the music of his carbine, and I, following suit, let Jack's carbine speak.

The C.C. tried to stop us, but our blood was up. As the boat touched the bank, Jenkins and I jumped ashore together, and made after the retreating blacks. Their camp, just inside the bank, was strewn with the blood-stained clothing of the Malays and gear from the cutter. Then the C.C., satisfied we were making no mistake, "saw red," followed us into the bush, and let fly at every black he saw. Of these three were dead on the bank, two of whom Boom and Rippy identified as among those concerned in the killing of the Malays.

Not far from the camp lay the remains of the cutter, which had been raised and nearly hacked to pieces.

Before putting a match to the camp, I secured several native mosquito nets made of plaited grass, which will convey some idea of the punishment this pest inflicted in that locality when the blacks found it necessary to protect themselves.

We also obtained a number of spears in the grass where the blacks first stood.

These retaliative measures had delayed our camp-shifting operations, so another day was granted by the Chief in which to complete the task.

We saw nothing more of the natives, though they must have returned, as the bodies were not there when next we passed, and there were no alligator tracks showing.

Having completed the assistance asked for, we took in wood and water, the kellick was hove up, and before a light south-easter we gently drifted out of the river and dropped the Station Manager at the mouth with a hearty adieu.

Bound for home ! Fond of wild life and adventure as I was, I had begun to feel that a rest ashore in civilization for a little time at any rate would be acceptable. The south-easter remained steady, and in five days we beat into Port Darwin after three months' absence. The authorities not having heard of us for so long, and presuming we had been cast away, were in the act, when we arrived, of fitting out an expedition to look for us.

After a rest, I settled down in the office—that is, I went there ; settling down, I felt, was quite another thing and would take some time.



Nicholas Holze.

IN THE JUNGLE.



BIG BANYAN TREE.

CHAPTER XXXII

I Join the Police Force

THE best of friends must part! The time had arrived when I had to say good-bye to my chums Boom and Rippy. A lugger was about to voyage to Port Essington, and they desired to return to their own country—at any rate for a time. I think I could have persuaded them to remain in Port Darwin, but as I had nothing for them to do, I loaded them instead with those things dear to the native mind. The parting was a wrench, for we had genuine affection for each other, and I had proved their devotion to the full. With a promise that I would never forget them, and, if possible, would meet them again before long, they went off to their packet quietly piping their sorrow.

A budget of letters, one of them from Mary Steele, from Wyndham, awaited my arrival from the coast. Mary's told a sad tale. As soon as they left shipboard her father had contracted fever, and there was little prospect of his even attempting to reach the goldfields, some three hundred miles distant. They were living miserably in a small tent, and the heat was described as intense. Mary hoped her father would dispose of his stores and take them back to civilization again.

Would I write to her? Would I? Rather! Straight away I penned a letter, putting in my best work, and saying what I could to cheer her up. I trusted if they did go south that their boat would call at Port Darwin; and

if I could be of service I begged her to let me know. I then addressed the envelope, folded the letter neatly, and put it in, placed a stamp on it with the air of a man who had done his duty, brought down my fist to make it stick, slipped it into the inside pocket of my jacket, and—thought no more about it.

A few days after our return Grass was prosecuted for smuggling and fined. His goods and ketch were confiscated and subsequently sold. In spite of what I knew of the fellow I could not help admiring him for his pluck and determination, for once clear of the clutch of the law he purchased a small cutter, loaded her with stores, and with his wife started back to the McArthur, a distance of nine hundred miles, there to begin business again. You must understand there was money in shanty-keeping, particularly when the Grass method was followed.

At this time I commenced to feel quite a millionaire, for with my share of fines and seizures, together with my pay, I had banked one hundred and fifty pounds. Billy had sent up the pearls, horns, etc. The former I deposited in the Bank for safety, and the latter my old friend Kris undertook to polish, at which operation he was nothing less than an artist. I had now fairly settled down to clerical work, and though I found it decidedly dull, determined to make the best of it.

But the office was not destined to be my "abiding place." One morning our boy messenger put his head in at the door and said, "The C.C. wants you at once, sir."

As soon as I entered the room of the Chief, he, without preamble, said: "Inspector Paul wants a man to go with Trooper O'Donohue to the McArthur. They are short-handed, and have to take somebody on at once. The Inspector, I fancy, has taken a liking to you, so if you think you would like to enter the force you had better

see him immediately. I told him the kind of fellow I have found you, and I think that is good enough. Besides your father and the Inspector were comrades, and he has a 'soft side' for your family."

I replied that I would jump at the chance if he would not think me ungrateful in leaving his service. He put me at my ease on that score, and off I went.

The Inspector, who was a bit of a martinet, but a good fellow at heart, wasn't second to the C.C. in making a short cut to business, so got to it with, "Would you care to go to the McArthur as a trooper with O'Donohue? The report made by your Chief as to the 'lovely' state of matters there has decided the authorities to send police protection without delay. You know something of police life, have been to sea, know a good deal about the blacks and the bush, besides I understand you have the 'old chap's' luck at getting out of scrapes, so you ought to make a good chum for O'Donohue. What do you say?"

Knowing my man I simply said, "Yes." Thereupon I was sworn in, and asked to take up my quarters at the barracks without delay.

The boss of the room in which I worked wished me, on behalf of himself and the others, the best of luck, giving O'Donohue a great name as a plucky trooper and a tip-top mate, statements I was to have the good fortune to verify to the full.

Trooper O'Donohue, with whom I was to be associated, was a typical Irishman in manner and proclivities—always ready for a row, and fond of a good bit of horse-flesh. He was about five feet eleven and sturdily built, with a soft, melodious voice. We became chums at once.

Since leaving home I had done very little riding, but O'Donohue took me in hand, and kept me in the saddle for three days, during which time we ran in the horses

from which those for the journey were chosen. They numbered eight, four packs and two each for riding, in addition to which my mate had one of his own, "Coronation," a bit of a racer. We took of our outfit only those things essential to the road, the balance going by steamer to Southport and thence to Burrundie by road.

It was a beautiful morning when we cleared out of Darwin for Southport, a distance of some fifty miles. We made good travelling till the heat had a sting in it, when we rested for the cool of the afternoon. We did not hurry ourselves, and it was the evening of the second day before the settlement mentioned was reached. Our nags were a bit troublesome at first, but when they were a little distance from their usual run, and had become chummy, driving troubles ceased.¹ One of our "packs" was a fine black horse called Blackthorn, but a thorough outlaw. In the morning, if not handled first, nothing could be done with him for that day; and at no time would he allow a stranger near him.

Our track took us close to the route of the Pine Creek Railway, then in course of construction, and the first mild diversion came as we approached a ganger's tent. To the door came the frowsy spouse of the official, who cried out to O'Donohue—

"Stop, stop, are you the red-headed Sergeant from Darwin?"

"Yes, Mrs. O'Brien," he replied (he was no Sergeant, but it was not worth while arguing the point).

¹ The usual custom when travelling with pack and spare horses is for the boss man to ride along in front, and the black boys to drive them after him. If two white men are on the road, and no black boy, after the first few days they both ride along in front and the spare horses follow on. The same, if only one is travelling. Horses, like people, have their peculiarities. There is in every lot of horses one with a master mind, and this leader the others will follow anywhere

"Oh, God bless you."

"Amen," replied my mate.

"It's a fine morning, thank God!"

"It is indeed, Mrs. O'Brien."

"Do you know my son Johnnie?"

"I do, Mrs. O'Brien."

"Well, he is a terrible boy, I can do nothing wid him. He'll not do anything but drink, gamble and fight."

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. O'Brien, but I fear I can do nothing for you."

"I say, do you know what I have been thinking of, Sergeant?"

"I don't, indeed."

"Well, it is this. He is good for nothing, as I told you, so I thought I would stick him into the police force."

"It is about the best thing you can do with him, Mrs. O'Brien. He possesses all the necessary qualifications for a good trooper. Good morning!"

"Ha, Ha!"—this from Mrs. O'Brien.

"Well, what's the matter now?"

"Oh, nothing, but I hope, Sergeant, you'll put in a good word for Johnnie. I know he would look well in your clothes, and maybe you will be proud of him yet."

"I may, indeed, Mrs. O'Brien. Good-bye."

When we had proceeded a little way, O'Donohue turned to me and said—

"You see, you have something to learn yet before you become a good trooper. I'm sorry to say I indulge a little in all the qualifications. But never mind, lad, from what I hear you are all there when a fight is on, so you help me in that and I'll do the other two for both of us."

When at Southport I shared a room at the hotel with O'Donohue, and on turning in put my boots outside the

door for the morning "brush." In the morning, however, they were nowhere to be found. The blacks had cleared off with them, and I had to purchase another pair at the store. The chaps in the settlement bounced the fact round with great merriment.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Fun at the Adelaide River

AFTER a day's spell we continued our journey as far as the Adelaide River, a distance of sixty miles.

Judging by the crowd at the Crossing Hotel something important had happened, or was about to happen. Ah, next day there was to be a race meeting! What *more* important?

I agreed with O'Donohue that our horses would be all the better of a rest, besides, it would give him a chance to show what his "Coronation" could do. Alas, the Carbine of our contingent was nowhere in the race! Now, as my mate had been most careful of the animal, and, moreover, had been flatteringly prophetic as to what he would do, he considered the result nothing short of base ingratitude, and at once changed the brute's name to "Ruinatio," declaring at the same time that racing was no game for a wise man.

I enjoyed the day immensely. For pure, unadulterated fun, a Chinaman's race eclipses everything. Every man rides his own horse; and the Celestials, with their waving arms and legs, fluttering clothes, and pigtailed extended, did not seem to care where they sat—anywhere between the ears and tail was equally good for them. Then their screeching was of the loudest and shrillest, for a Chinaman

can beat a river boat's siren when making for a winning post.

This over, a man named Bob backed himself to race (on foot) a very smart pony named "Duke." When the starter jerked his revolver off all that could be seen was a cloud of dust, and then a riderless horse disappearing in the bush. In a few minutes up trotted Bob, somewhat damaged, rounded the post, and was declared the winner. In the meantime Duke's rider had been picked up, badly shaken, but with no bones broken. It seemed that Bob—a Herculean mass of good nature—stood close to the horse when awaiting the start, and as soon as he heard the shot put his leg in front of the horse and his shoulder to the horse's shoulder and threw him, sharing in the fall that followed. Bob declared he had only done it for a "lark," and would not touch the stakes.

There was an up-country doctor present, a man of ability, but who allowed the "wet damnation to run through him." Now, when this healer reached a certain grog-stage, he always started to sing "Boyne Water," so when he met O'Donohue, whom he knew well, his first words were—

"O'Donohue, when I begin to sing 'Boyne Water' to-day, will you knock me down?"

"I will that, my lad," replied O'Donohue. But my mate was not given the chance, for another fellow stepped in, and "Boyne Water" was not heard again.

Just after tea we were sitting in a little outhouse facing the river, having a quiet smoke, when the report of a rifle brought us to the perpendicular.

"I'll bet that's the doctor," said O'Donohue. "He has got over the effect of the late 'interview,' and is trying a new rifle."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when smash

went the glass in the door before us, and a bullet passed uncomfortably near our heads, burying itself in the wall above us. Out we rushed, and there, sure enough, was the doctor with a Winchester rifle.

"Get behind the verandah post, O'Donohue, or I will shoot you," he yelled.

O'Donohue did as he was told, when crash went a bullet into the post just above his head.

"This is a bit too thick," said O'Donohue as he rushed at the doctor and clutched the rifle before he had time to reload. After a few moments' furious struggle O'Donohue obtained possession of the weapon, which he threw away, and the two then went at each other with their fists. My mate would not allow of any interference, for he was about to experience something he dearly loved. At last O'Donohue got in a blow that settled the business, and the doctor was made secure for the night. Both men suffered severely, and the camp fellows thought it the best fun they had had for a long time.

All the doctor knew in the morning was that he was badly bruised and very sore, but as to how this had come about he had not the least recollection. When informed he departed at once for Pine Creek.

As the local policeman was absent on duty, it was decided that nothing more should be said about the matter; besides the doctor was too useful a man to be locked up. He was not only clever at his profession, but was a great swimmer and tennis player, and, when sober, a good fellow.

It may strike you that we had a free and easy way of carrying out our police duties, but we could not act out-bush in a manner befitting more advanced civilization; and events often occurred that it was best not to see. Then, again, as O'Donohue pointed out, we had a long

journey before us, and he did not want to be detained.

Just as we were thinking of making a start a young fellow reported that his horse had been stolen during the night.

“Horse stolen, that’s serious, and must be looked into,” said O’Donohue.

It was clearly not a difficult matter to persuade my mate to delay longer. Suspicion rested on a man who had been knocking about at the race meeting, and who was then missing; and tracks showed that horses had crossed the river during the night. The publican said he would supply horses if we could ride them, and so save our own animals. We thanked him and accepted. These up country fellows are a merry lot and dearly love a joke, and it afterwards transpired that few cared to touch the pair we were introduced to.

After a lot of trouble they were saddled and led into the open, all the chaps camped in the vicinity putting in an appearance to watch the result. I could not get my reins in proper position. I fumbled with them, twisted and untwisted them, but they would not come right. Truth to tell I was in a mortal funk, and was wasting time deliberately in the hope that something would happen by which I would get out of my awkward fix. My strategy, at the same time, had to be concealed, for I knew it would be better to be killed off a buckjumper than be branded as a coward in that country.

At last the pantomime began.

O’Donohue was in the saddle. For a moment the brute stood still, and then “went to market” in a way I had never seen before. It was simply the genius of bucking. Failing to unseat his rider, the savage bolted into the scrub. We heard the cracking of timber, and I thought, “Poor old O’Donohue! No need for me to mount now.”

Out of the scrub came my mate, minus his hat, with shirt and pants in ribbons, but still in the saddle, and with his horse thoroughly subdued, trembling and flecked with foam. His conquest was much to the taste of the crowd, and he was cheered lustily.

There was no escape for me now, so into the saddle I climbed, fully expecting the next moment would see me flying through the air; but whether my alleged rebel felt he could not come up to the standard of bucking set by his mate, or was too loyal to enter into competition, I cannot say. Whatever the cause, I was as thankful as the onlookers were disgusted when he contented himself with a couple of "pigs," and then walked quietly away.

The funny feeling I had at the pit of my stomach disappeared, and into the river we rode. The horses had soon to swim. When near the centre my mount caught in something and went under. I slid off and managed to grab his tail as he came to the surface, and, as he followed his mate, we landed safely on the other side. Thereupon the crowd again cheered.

We continued our chase, ran our man down, and were back at the river the same evening. The local policeman had returned, so the prisoner was handed over to him, and we were free to pursue our journey, which we did next morning.

The settlement had its particular characters and attractions. *The* man at the Adelaide River was Charley, the publican, and this identity had an able second in a white cockatoo. This bird was so wonderfully trained that one could almost hold a conversation with it; and were I to relate one tithe of what I saw it do and heard it say my shoulders would be credited with the mantle of Baron Munchausen. It was allowed perfect liberty, and flew for miles round the country. Its favourite amuse-

ment, however, was to perch itself on the telegraph wire in front of the hotel and start the teams while the owners were refreshing themselves at the bar. No doubt you are aware that teamsters have a vocabulary peculiarly their own, and this the bird had at command. When Cockey saw the coast clear he issued his florid orders, when off would go the teams on their own account. Out the voluble drivers would rush while Charley's pet executed the giant swing on the wire, all the time indulging in hilarious laughter.

The owner of Cockey subsequently settled in Adelaide, taking, of course, his feathered friend with him. Cockey died first, and his master had him stuffed, stipulating that when he reached his end the bird was to be buried with him. This wish was given effect to.

Another river "character" was Jimmy Ah Pow, whom we met shortly after leaving. The settlers with one accord voted Jimmy "a real white man." He was looking despondent, so O'Donohue said:—

"Well, James, you look down in the dumps; not making enough money?"

"No, no," Jimmy answered. "Hang the money—it's not money that's worrying me. The country is no good—no society, no ladies, no place for a gentleman like me!"

Poor old Jimmy! He evidently had a soul that hungered for more than mining and trading; and had there been more men of Jimmy's stamp in the Territory, well, it would have been better for the Territory.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A Death and a Burglary

IN due time we arrived at Burrundie, where we were to pick up our bulk stores. We put up at the empty police station, the man in charge being absent on duty.

The day after our arrival a white man died, and it fell to our lot to bury him. Had he been a black fellow we would have laid him to rest "with his martial cloak around him," in the shape of an old blanket; if a Chinaman, his countrymen would have attended to matters; but being a white man—well, a white man must have decent burial; and so terms were come to with a Chinaman to act as undertaker and sexton. The coffin was made from the cases which had contained our goods; and, as no plane was procurable, it was in all conscience a humble casket.

O'Donohue having selected a spot for the grave not likely to be required as a villa site in the near future, the wanderer was carried to his last camp, where O'Donohue reverently read a few prayers over him.

As the earth was being filled in, this worthy scratched his head, remarking—

"Begorra, if any one digs this chap up they'll think it's me!"

The rough boards had "M. O'Donohue" writ large all over them!

One of the Darwin Banks had a branch at Burrundie, in charge of a fine little fellow, whose duty it was to buy gold from the Chinamen and send it on to headquarters

by mail, which left once a week. On off days the manager was in the habit of visiting the adjacent stations, and if he intended staying for the night the key was left with the policeman. Now, one day he and O'Donohue arranged to ride to a store some twelve miles distant and spend the night there, the key of the Bank, in the absence of the man in charge, being left with me, with a request to keep an eye on the premises.

The Bank, which was about sixty yards from the Police Station, was a two-roomed iron shanty only requiring a vigorous shake to open it ; and on the night in question I was suddenly aroused out of sleep by hearing a noise at the building, and concluded the Chinamen were breaking into it. The robbers, thought I, were sure to have an armed guard watching my door, and I deemed it safer to lie in bed than take the risk of bullets. No one would know that I had heard the thieves, and I could discover the burglary next morning and display a keen sense of duty. But such a course, thought I again, would be cowardly ; and how courageous I would be considered if I arrested the burglars. Still, what if I received a bullet, a death-wound perhaps, as soon as I opened my door ? What of fame and promotion then ? However, I got up, took my revolver—which I had placed fully loaded under my pillow when turning in—and crawled on my hands and knees to the door, keeping as low as possible, so that if fired at the charge would enter too high to injure me. I trembled as with revolver at full cock I gradually opened the door, expecting every moment to hear the “ ping ” of a bullet, but, to my surprise and relief, none came. I crawled out and found I could see the Bank clearly in the moonlight. It was enclosed with bamboo lattice, and through this I saw a man moving about with a light. I then crawled on my hands and knees towards the Bank,

and the nearer I approached it the more I trembled. I could feel and hear my heart thumping! Still I crawled on, and saw the man enter the Bank, leaving the door open. I now made haste to reach the gate of the lattice-work, and just as I noiselessly opened it the burglar stepped out of the Bank. It was my chance. I sprang on him like a tiger, seizing him by the throat, and at the same moment my revolver went off. The man struggled, but could not cry out. We both fell to the ground, I on top, and retaining my grip. Then suddenly the life seemed to leave the burglar. Rising, I drew him into the Bank for examination, when to my horror I saw my captive was none other than the Bank Manager himself!

He had returned unexpectedly, leaving O'Donohue at the store, and not wishing to disturb my slumbers, had entered the premises by a shake at the door, intending to see me in the morning, and no doubt surprise me by telling me he had entered without my being any the wiser. In return for his consideration I had nearly throttled him, to say nothing of the fright both of us had experienced. When we recovered our equanimity, we hugged each other with delight.

How O'Donohue did laugh when I reported the matter to him. At last I grew angry, when he said, jocosely—

“Call him a burglar” (pointing to the Bank Manager).
“Why, half an eye would show you he is a gentleman put up in a small parcel.”

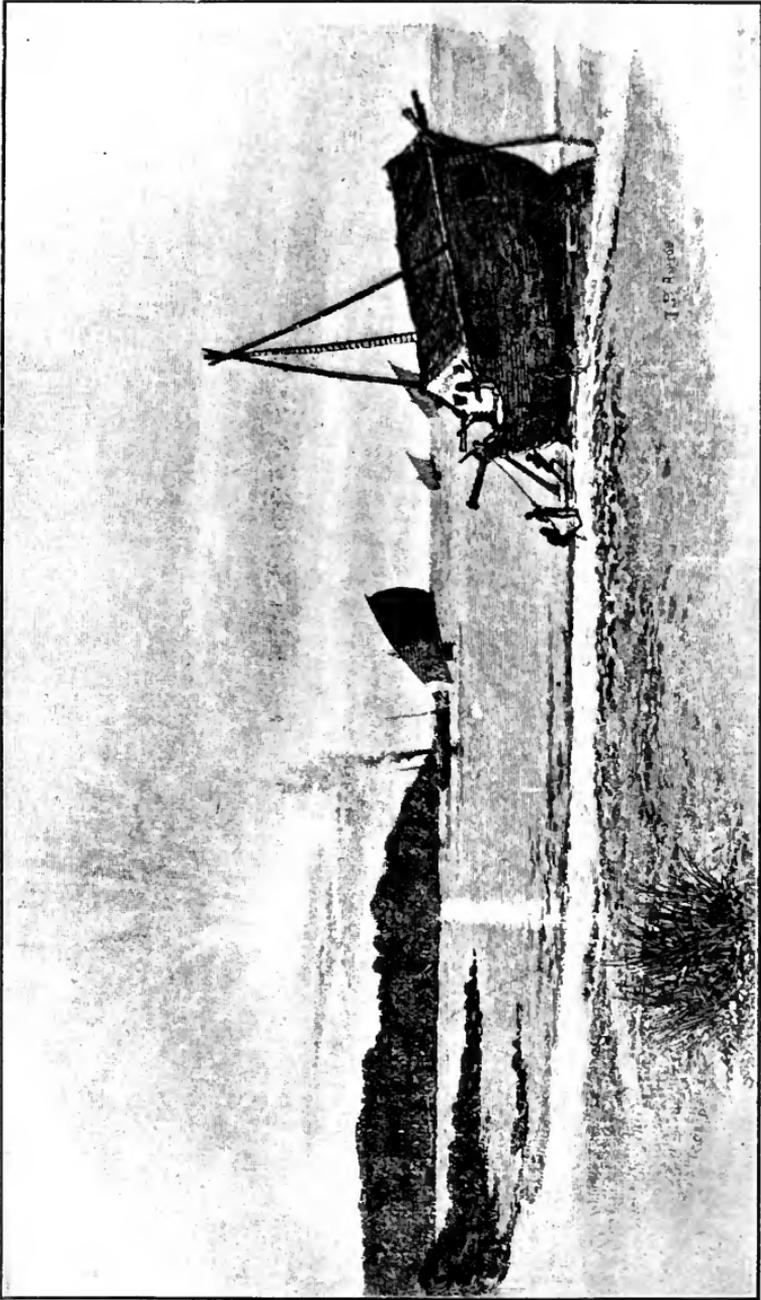
“Now look here, O'Donohue, I'm getting tired, so if you like to fancy me the doctor for a spell, I'm your man.” Then the wretch began laughing again, and, catching me round the waist, waltzed round the room with me in his arms. When he stopped he put both hands on my shoulders and said—

“My dear boy, I'm proud of you. You did splendidly,

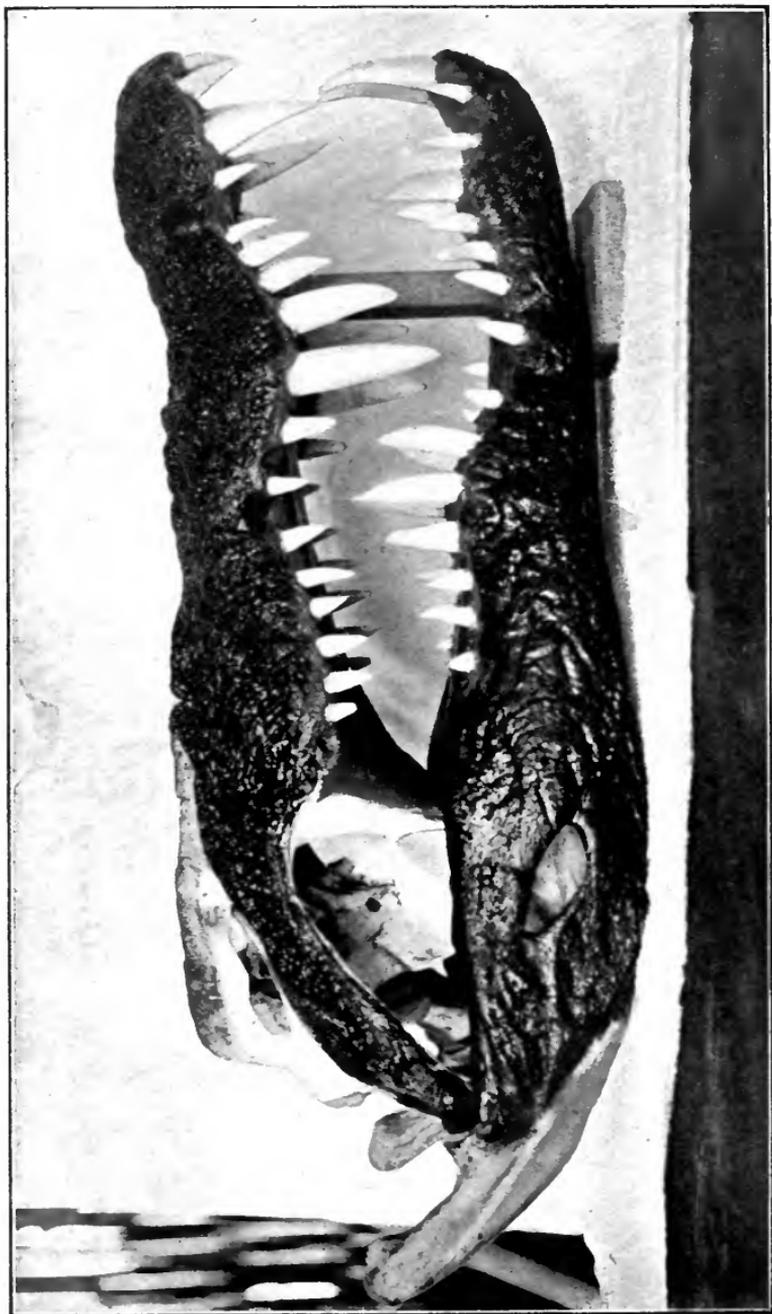
old man ; and I'm sorry if I said anything to annoy you. But, oh Lord, what would I not have given to have seen the encounter ! ”

Then he threw himself down, kicked up his heels, and screamed all the louder. At this stage the funny side of the affair struck the Manager and myself, and we added our mirth to that of the idiot on the stretcher.

Dear old O'Donohue ! Dear old Bill (the Manager) ! I often wonder if they remember the great burglary at the Bank at Burrundie.



MALAY PROAS ON COAST.



ALLIGATOR HEAD.

H. W. Christie.

CHAPTER XXXV

Outback Inconsistencies

WITH a hearty good-bye to "Bill," we left Burrundie for Pine Creek, where we arrived in due course, with our horses fit, and with all stores necessary for the long journey before us.

The first man we met was the Doctor, who was more than ordinarily pleased to see us, for he was about to perform an operation and required an assistant. I had never acted in such a capacity, but that, perhaps, was the best reason for my consenting to do so. The patient was a miner known as "Old Dick," who had come in with one of his arms in a terrible condition; and if gangrene was to be forestalled, the surgeon's knife would have to find immediate use.

The doctor performed his task splendidly; but I'll admit I felt queer when I realized that I was holding the severed limb. The poor chap did very well for a fortnight, with every chance of ultimate recovery, when an unexpected event took place. The patient, evidently allowing his mind to dwell on his great loss, had grown despondent, and, in a moment of hopelessness, had torn the bandages off, and allowed himself to bleed to death.

When the news went round there was not a man probably to whom the sad story did not give pause. But the rallying powers of the mind outbush are equal to all emergencies; and when a few thoughtful moments had

passed and grief had found expression in such exclamations and assertions as "Poor old Dick, so he's gone;" "Jolly hard luck for the old chap"; "Not a bad sort," etc., curiosity wanted to know where and when he was to be "planted," as burying the dead was familiarly called. This was to take place in the afternoon, when all hands turned out to show respect for "a good man gone where we all must go."

At the grave it was discovered that a wild cat had taken refuge in it. The Warden of the Goldfields, who was to conduct the service, requested the removal of the animal, but this was objected to by the owner of a terrier with a reputation. This "sport" thought the opportunity to see a fight too good to be lost, and the majority of those present quite agreed. Moreover, as one "auld gintleman" remarked, "I'm sure Dick won't mind waiting a bit. Indade it's himself would like to be standing up to see the fun, God bless him!" As he uttered what was intended as a compliment to the deceased the terrier saw the cat, and in a moment flying hair attested the reality of the battle. Both animals had their backers, and numerous bets were made by the crowd as it surged round the grave. The contest was short, sharp and decisive, the cat "going under," but not until it had inflicted severe punishment on its adversary. The dog was then hoisted out of the grave, the fellows immediately became fittingly solemn, and the burial of poor old Dick was proceeded with.

The gentleman who filled the position of Warden was of a kind not easily forgotten. He was a little learned in medical science, and acted in the absence of the "duly qualified." He was often called upon to use his knowledge in malarial fever cases, especially, that form of ill being the most prevalent. As soon as a fever patient went to the "Doctor" he received a strong emetic, with instruc-

tions to camp under a shady bush until—well, until it was time to return, when a fever mixture, powerfully potent also, would be handed over to the trusting victim. Still this strange and heroic treatment generally proved efficacious. I know it, for I “lay under the bush.”

This amateur servant of Æsculapius was a great believer in mud baths, and every morning went to the creek and wallowed in its soft black earth. He was low of stature and very fat, and when he emerged in his “suit of sable” he was really a wonderful work of art, a remarkable black-and-white creation.

I’ll wedge in here an instance of how not to do it. When talking to one of the Creek miners, I inquired if the Company for whom he worked sent them plenty of stores. “Oh, rather,” he replied. “Look at that lot (pointing to some cases). They contain many a gross of paper collars and dozens of sunshades for us to use, and we do. Kind of them,” he continued; “them’s the sort of things to get gold with, ain’t ’em?”

On the night before we left Pine Creek we experienced a terrific storm, with nerve-straining thunder and lightning. The trees were shattered like matchwood, and limbs were hurled through the roof and sides of the house and carried high in the air like dead leaves in a whirlwind. We took refuge under our stretchers, and were thankful when the storm gave place to a pleasant dawn.

The Doctor (not the amateur, his day had passed), whose camp was close to ours, came in looking as if he had suffered from a series of nightmares. Though a professed atheist, he said he had been so terrified that he threw himself on his knees to pray, but for the life of him he could not think of one.

“Well, you had better learn a few now,” said O’Donohue, producing his book.

“Oh, no, it’s a thousand to one against another such a night,” replied the Doctor. His answer reminded me of the old rhyme—

“When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be;
When the devil was well, the devil a saint was he.”

Our inconsistent visitor, who was by no means a bad fellow, owned a nose to which, metaphorically speaking, a story was attached. He owned a horse which, while quiet, had a just appreciation of decorum. The “doc.,” who had never been a rabid teetotaler, one night hitched his steed to a sapling while he refreshed the inner man within the smoky atmosphere of a shanty bar. There he met congenial company, had a good time, and then made for his patient beast. The night was dark, and, all things considered, it was not surprising that he ran up against the animal’s tail instead of its head. Confident that he had a firm grip of the mane, he reached out into empty space for the stirrup. He poked his leg out until he lost his temper, and with a remark highly uncomplimentary to the stirrup, started to climb the animal’s hind leg. This was too much for the steed, and it let fly—one, two. The first kick threw the owner on his back, and the second landed on his nose, with the result that the organ wasn’t worth a cent for beauty afterwards. He had different stories to tell as to how the accident happened, but none of them tallied with this, the true one.

Before we left my mate was to experience the sobering effects of being “taken down.” A party of drovers and he were having a little game, when O’Donohue, jokingly pointing to a horse at the hotel door, which didn’t belong to him, said he would put it up. The cards were dealt, and O’Donohue came off second best. The other men

knew how things stood exactly, and O'Donohue had to pay up twenty-five pounds for an animal worth twelve.

“Just take a lesson from that, and don't gamble, my boy,” said he to me. “But if you must, don't play the silly ox as I did.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

On the Road

I WAS glad when we said good-bye to Pine Creek, and were again on our way to the Roper.

Seated by the camp fire, I felt for the first time since leaving Port Darwin that I was getting back to the wilds, with their fascinations and dangers—to the life that I found had become a part of myself. Near at hand the hobbled horses cropped the sweet grass, their Texas bell-music breaking the stillness; the star-studded sky made our canopy; while the fresh, buoyant air, invigorating as wine of rare vintage, fanned the flames of our camp fire. Obsessed by the spirit of the hour and scene, I asked O'Donohue if he had done much camping out, and if he had ever found it lonely.

“I have, in bad country at that; and very lonely too,” was his reply. Then he repeated the word “lonely” with slow emphasis, and continued, “I’ll never forget the first night I camped alone. The terrible thoughts, fears and feelings of its seemingly endless hours are with me still. I was far, very far away from any one, except savage blacks, who might, I thought, at the very moment of my thinking be planning my murder, and smacking their lips in anticipation of the delicious meal they would take from my mangled body. But what could I do? The darkness of night had set in, and the country was new to me. I dismounted, and listened and looked for sounds or signs of blacks, but heard nothing save the bush

whispers, that served to but emphasize the silence and the eeriness of the scene. As quietly as possible I unsaddled and hobbled my horses, omitting the bells lest the tinkling of these would be heard by the natives. It was what bushmen called a 'dry' camp—no water. But that want did not trouble me; it was the mystery, the haunting dreariness that made my ill. I lay down, with my saddle for a pillow, and gazed at the stars and into the wonderful and endless space beyond. I thought as I had never thought before—of the land of my birth, my parents, sisters and brothers, and of my friends. I journeyed even to the old burial ground and held unanswered converse with those who slept therein. I wondered why I had strayed, speculated on my future fate, and then I prayed, as man ought to pray, with all my heart. Fear had banished sleep from my eyes, and I lay alert for danger. An hour may have passed in this way, when I heard the loud yabbering and laughing of blacks not more than a mile away, and this was followed by the monotonous music of a corroboree. Instead of soothing my nerves, this but stimulated them, and I rose. As I looked into the darkness every bush, stump and anthill took human form; my disordered imagination conjured up forms stealthily moving with spears and other weapons; and there were evil faces with half-shut eyes peering at me. So passed the time till, near the dawning, I lay down exhausted, and when I opened my eyes the sun was high in the heavens."

"By Jingo, O'Donohue," said I, "you are quite poetic."

"Good-night," was his reply as he rolled himself in his blanket.

There was one important duty to be seen to before turning in, and that was charging the pipe for the early-

morning smoke. When finished with for the night this bush friend was cleaned out thoroughly and refilled with carefully-cut tobacco, the first portion being pressed in gently and the top more firmly, and a live coal (the very best igniter) held over it and two or three whiffs taken. It was then covered from the dew to await the dawn. A stir among the ashes on rising would disclose a live coal, and then came the matutinal luxury. There is a bite in the morning air that makes tobacco an additional comfort ; and if you happen to be the one who has to run in the horses, you will find the pipe a congenial companion, as you pass through the dew-besprent grass.¹

After throwing some more wood on the fire, I followed O'Donohue's example and turned in, but it was a long time before I could get to sleep, for my mate's account of his experience had recalled my first adventure with the blacks. Feeling something touch my ribs, I opened my eyes to find it was O'Donohue rousing me with the toe of his boot. The day was just dawning.

Two of our horses had broken their hobbles, but I was speedily on their tracks, and back with them at the camp within a couple of hours.

¹ I'll tell you of two or three things that may be useful to you while out camping. Lea & Perrin's Sauce and plum-jam make excellent chutney, and when you are living on salt beef or tinned meats, something to tickle the palate is rather good at times. Treacle and salt beef are not bad. Eno's Fruit Salt makes an excellent baking powder, rather expensive for general use, but when you are out of the one and have the other, well use it. Always keep your matches dry.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A Shot at a "Trap"

ON we went, having a good time, but nothing of any note occurred until we arrived at a sly grog shanty at Abraham's Billabong, on the Roper. We thought we might be able to purchase stores there, but the shanty had been burnt down a few days before; the principal thing saved (in the owner's opinion) being a cask of rum, and that we didn't want.

At the make-shift shanty were two travellers and the owner, an ex-Bank Manager. The travellers, who were typical bushmen, O'Donohue recognized as notorious members of the "cross" fraternity. We had a pleasant evening with them, one proving himself well educated and a good entertainer. We had intended remaining at the Billabong a couple of days, but O'Donohue having observed the men looking greedily at our horses, decided to proceed to Elsey Creek, about eighteen miles further on.

Next morning we missed "Ruinaton," and one of the other horses. We failed to find their tracks, and continued our journey. When some hours on the road O'Donohue was suddenly seized with a strategic notion. He was convinced that our two travelling companions of the previous evening had stolen the horses, and concluded they would probably by that time have them handy. I was to return, look quietly round, and if

they were not there explain my presence by stating we had discovered our tea supply had run out.

It was late in the afternoon when I arrived, saw nothing of our animals, and found the supposed thieves smoking and drinking with the shanty men. I joined them, and managed to ascertain that the fellows had not been away from the place.

When rising to leave, the well-educated vagabond insisted on riding part of the way with me. He was decidedly under the influence of the ex-Manager's questionable rum, and I did not fail to note a sinister smile on his hardened face. This, however, gave me no concern.

Reaching a bit of thick scrub, he said, "Well, old man, I'll get back. Good-bye." Thus we parted, apparently on the best of terms; but I had not gone twenty yards when two bullets whizzed past my head.

"You infernal trap, did you think we had your horses?" yelled my late companion, and then put spurs to his horse and disappeared in the bush. It was too dark to do more than send a bullet in reply.

As we had to push on, we had to console ourselves with the hope that a chance to get even with the ruffian and his companion would turn up, and O'Donohue's rage was soon lost in thankfulness for my escape.

Next day the two missing horses came up with us. They had missed their mates, and made off as soon as free. We now journeyed on in much better heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Dug His Own Grave

SOON after leaving one of our mid-day meal places we came across a poor old fellow, nearly naked, crawling round a hole like a grave, and moaning the while. He was literally a bag of bones. We spoke to him several times, but beyond a vacant stare he took no notice, and continued his crawling and moaning. We boiled the billy and fed him with damper, soaked in tea, after which we laid him on a blanket under a shady tree, and he fell asleep.

The little property lying about indicated that he was a prospector—alone, without food and beyond hope or fear. Was the hole his last miner's test, or had something prompted him to dig his grave? There was no telling. Suddenly the poor fellow started out of sleep, waved his hand, and cried, "Good-bye, mates," fell back and died.

After searching his body, from which we removed a heavy belt with many pockets, we rolled him in a blanket, and buried him in the grave which his own hands had prepared.

The few things strewn about gave no clue to the poor fellow's identity. The belt contained a number of nuggets of gold, and some small pieces of quartz, thickly studded with the precious metal. O'Donohue thought he had been a "hatter," prospecting up towards Blue Mud Bay, where it was generally supposed gold existed, and

that he had struck it rich. The belt of gold we eventually handed to the police trooper at the Roper ; but up to the time of our leaving the Gulf country, no evidence was forthcoming as to his identity.

O'Donohue suggested that we should put up a rough fence around the unknown one. As we sat down for a rest after the completion of this task, O'Donohue made the trite remark that history often repeated itself, and went on, while I filled my pipe, to give an instance from his experience.

I was stationed at Brock's Creek, began my mate, when one day up came a big fellow named Jim Sinclair on one of his team horses. He had ridden thirty miles for my services, which meant that I had to accompany him to an outlying station camp, and satisfy myself that the neck of a horsebreaker named Paddy Hyde had been broken through a visitation of God, while in the discharge of his duty—at any rate that was the way Jim put it.

This statement was corroborated—that is to say, Paddy had been thrown, and it was found, when picked up, that his neck was broken ; so I gave the order for burial asked for. As there was nothing better for a coffin than a sheet of galvanized iron which helped to make the roof of the one hut at the camp, this was bent over, Paddy was laid within and made secure by a rope passed around it several times. A grave was then dug, and the late plucky rider laid to rest. We farewelled each other and took our respective ways.

It was about a year after this that I chanced to pass the camp in question, when who should I encounter but Jim and his mates, putting up just such a fence as we have completed. I said—

“Hallo, Jim, what are you up to ?”

“Oh, putting a few sticks round Paddy,” replied Jim.

"Paddy isn't buried there," I said.

"Well, I ought to know. You remember I dug his grave," was Jim's reply.

"All the same, old man, he sleeps a half-dozen yards this side of that sapling," said I, pointing to the spot.

Jim straightened himself, flicked the sweat from his eyebrows with his index finger, told the men in a casual way to knock off, and opened up a conversation on other matters.

Some time after this I again chanced on my worthy, when I asked him if he had completed his fence or had taken my tip.

"Took your tip," said Jim. "We did no more that day. Next morning I was up in good time, ran a shaft down at the spot you mentioned, and struck the lode all right. You'll see the fence when you pass that way."

"Jim was a hard case," added O'Donohue as he lit his pipe.

CHAPTER XXXIX

“The Ragged Thirteen”

WHEN at the shanty at Abraham's Billabong, the keeper informed us that word had come from the Bar (Roper) that a gang of cowardly ruffians, known as “The Ragged Thirteen,” were making their way to Kimberley “on the nod,” that is, helping themselves to cattle from the stations, food from travellers and shanties, and used their revolvers when resisted. He greatly feared a visit, which he subsequently received, the scoundrels leaving him nothing but what he stood up in, and that, in the tropics, is precious little.

All went well with us until within about ten miles of the Bar, which we hoped to make after our midday camp, when we encountered a number of villainous-looking creatures, travelling on foot.

“The Ragged Thirteen, by Jingo,” whispered O'Donohue. Then “Good day, mates,” in his hearty, Irish way.

“Good day,” growled one of the men, who appeared to be the leader. “Who are you fellows, and where are you bound for? Long journey, by the looks of it. You've a nice lot of horses.”

These remarks were sandwiched with language that proved the speaker an adept in the use of oaths.

O'Donohue simply said, “Free country, chaps, isn't it? A fellow can travel where he likes, can't he?”

“Don’t know so much about that. But who and what are you?” again asked the leader.

“Well, if you are really anxious to know, we are policemen, bound for the McArthur.”

“Oh, so you are traps, are you?” sneered he. “Traps going to the McArthur? Oh, what a choice time you will have!”

“Guess we can take care of ourselves,” said O’Donohue.

“Do you think you could collar us fellars?”

“Well, if it were necessary, I dare say I could manage,” said O’Donohue in a casual way. “But come, mates, let’s have a billy of tea and some tucker. You’ll find it better than talking tommy-rot. I want to get to the Bar this evening.”

The saddles and packs were then taken off the horses, and they were allowed to browse around. The billy was soon boiling and all busy with tea, salt meat and damper, when O’Donohue muttered (loud enough to be heard by all): “Where the deuce is my tobacco?” at the same time looking around. “Oh, yes, I must have left it in my saddle pouch.”

With that he got up and moved towards the saddle, but quickly wheeling round, revolver in hand, commanded the crowd to hold up their hands, which order made them gape in astonishment. However, they reluctantly obeyed; and what paws they were! I then disarmed them, and stepped to my mate’s side with revolver drawn.

The man who had spoken wanted to know what it all meant. For answer O’Donohue told him to shut his mouth, or he would find a gag would prevent him from doing so. He then ordered them to rise and form into line, at the same time informing them that he was going to take them to the Bar on the off chance of friends there

wanting to see them. Some looked sick at the news, while others laughed at the idea of "two traps collaring the whole bloomin' lot of 'em."

I certainly thought my mate had taken on a big contract, and was wondering how he proposed preventing them from bolting, when, as if divining my thoughts, he told me to cut off their braces, straps and buttons.

For the life of me I couldn't help laughing outright when their breeches began to slip; and, while it would probably have given them the greatest pleasure to have cut the throats of the pair of us, they laughed too.

"All done?" inquired O'Donohue.

"All adrift," I replied.

"Now, chaps," said he, "you may use your hands, for I guess you will need them. I fancy you'll find it dashed poor business trying to bolt with your bags round your heels; and if any refuse to move on or give trouble I'll have their boots off and leave them here."

O'Donohue then asked for his horse, and while he mounted I was in evidence with my "little orator." When nicely seated he gave the order to march, and away went the miserable devils in the direction of the Bar.

When I joined my mate he said that as the gang evidently meant mischief he thought he would have the first say. He expected he would have to release them at the Bar as none of those robbed would spare the time that would be necessary for their trial.

"But I guess," he went on, "the Bar beauties will see that we have some grit in us; and the game is worth while as an object lesson."

Just before sundown we arrived at our destination. There were many drovers, overlanders, and others in camp, and our procession created much excitement as it

passed along, many inquiries being made as to what the “pinks” had been up to.

The police troopers soon joined us, giving us a hearty welcome. When O’Donohue explained matters they looked serious, then annoyed, and finally burst out laughing as if it were the greatest joke in the world. Then the crowd grasped the situation and joined in the laugh, which continued until O’Donohue’s Irish blood was up, and in a tone that I had never before noted, asked what the joke was, and where the fun came in. This started the crowd off again, when one of the Roper troopers stepped into the breach with—

“All right, old chap, don’t get your wool off. You see, we have no charge against these fellows, as we have not been able to catch them red-handed. They had been hanging round here for two or three days, so the camp fellows ran them out yesterday, with threats that if they showed up again they would get ‘what for’; and now you quietly waltz the whole ‘push’ back again!”

There was danger, nevertheless, in O’Donohue’s eye as he told the crowd to stand back. Then he asked the shanty keeper to give his prisoners a good supply of tucker at his own cost, and when that was done he ordered “The Ragged Thirteen” to right about face, and marched them over two miles of the road we had just come. Here he took his farewell of them, warning them that as he had a good memory for faces they had better refrain from troubling that part of the country again.

Although our performance was very like that of the good old Duke of York, who “marched his men to the top of the hill, and marched them down again,” it nevertheless did a deal of good, and long after the laugh was forgotten the pluck of O’Donohue was remembered.

CHAPTER XL

We Journey to the McArthur

O'DONOHUE had brought an order for the Roper police to hand over a black tracker named Jimmy, and precious glad I was, for it would be his work to run in the horses in the morning and track any that might stray.

Having had a few days' rest at the Bar, and put all our gear in order, we made tracks for the McArthur—a distance of something like two hundred miles, which took us nearly a fortnight. We came across a varied assortment "swagging it" to the Kimberley Diggings, some quite young, others sixty years of age if a day.

We crossed the path of a man in charge of a mob of horses from Queensland, bound for the Victoria River. He had a sorry tale to tell, and one that gave us further proof of the quality of the crowd we would have to deal with in our district. When at Borroloola, all his broken-in riding horses had been stolen, so he had to continue his journey with unbroken ones. From what this drover told us, he, like many another in Australia, was paying the penalty for past follies, having held a commission in the British army, and "run through" a fortune before finding a refuge in the land of the Never Never.

Another day we chanced on a little fellow camped on the track, who some time before had left one of the outbush stations with a mate. They had lost themselves, and the mate had not been heard of again. The hardships this

wanderer had experienced had evidently affected his brain, for he was sitting in his camp, looking at himself in a small mirror and saying, "Teddy, Teddy, you scoundrel, what would your dear sister think of you now?" Before we left him he fixed the glass to a tree, and after performing before it for a time let out at the reflection of his face, smashing it to atoms.

In due time we arrived at our destination to find that my old friend Grass, hearing that the police were on the road, had sold out to Jack, with whom I had camped on the McArthur. It seemed that Grass had just started business again, but as the presence of officers of law and order did not harmonize with his system of conducting affairs, he cleared with his wife and a following of like kidney with himself to a more "convenient" locality.

Great was the welcome old Jack gave me, followed up by offers of favours I had to decline. Jack did not take offence, but informed me that while I would find him on the square, a fine picnic was before us what with outlaws and blacks. His prediction was fully verified by the experiences our three years' sojourn in the district brought us.

So abundant was the supply of game between Abraham's Billabong and Borrooloola, a distance of three hundred miles, that we lived almost entirely upon this and fish, seldom touching our tinned or salt provisions, which greatly added to the bright side of the month's journey.

To give a detailed account of our brushes with desperate crafty whites and no less truculent Myall blacks would prove tedious; and the list of our personal experiences could be expanded almost indefinitely from those of squatters, managers and drovers, many of whom take rank with the best people I ever knew. But the life was a jolly one notwithstanding, and many a hearty, rattling

time was ours. We were meeting "all sorts and conditions of men," and any one holding with Pope's dictum—that "The proper study of mankind is man," would probably have found a better college for his purpose at the McArthur than in the crowded ways of cities.

The first intimation that we were not popular with all parties came from our black tracker, who reported our horses had been driven towards the Tablelands. We borrowed mounts and set out at once in chase; and three days afterwards—just one hundred miles from the settlement—came upon the missing animals. But the thieves, unfortunately, eluded us.

That was the first "nasty touch." The first instance of the effectiveness of O'Donohue's guidance, taking the complexion of rather grim humour, happened in this way. A Resident Magistrate from Port Darwin had arrived, as had also a contractor with some Chinese carpenters, to build the necessary quarters for this officer and ourselves. The carpenters "cut up rough," would not work, and damaged the material. The contractor appealed to O'Donohue for advice. His remedy, given as a joke, was simplicity itself. "Oh, get a waddy," said he, "and knock the ringleader down." The contractor secured a fine sample of the weapon named, went straight to the Chinamen, and upon their refusing again to obey orders, brought his cudgel down on the head of the self-constituted boss, nearly braining him. A noise followed, but blew over, and the carpenters, concluding the white man could not be played with, went to work with a will and made a first-class job. There were no unions on the McArthur.

CHAPTER XLI

Highway Robbery

COMING in with the gloaming after a hard day's horse-hunting, O'Donohue met me with a smile eloquent of something very much to his liking.

"Had a good deal in horses or struck a gold mine?" queried I.

"Better than either, my boy. There's fun on at the Robinson River. Two Chinkies just to hand report there are fellows at the Crossing representing themselves as Custom House Officers, and collecting poll tax from their countrymen as they pass. I don't suppose," he continued, "they will hesitate to relieve whites as well if they can. We'll not hobble the horses to-night—just run them into the yard, for we must make an early morning start."

After a rapid trip O'Donohue, the tracker, myself and one of the Chinamen, who said he could identify the men, drew near the shanty. Evidently our approach had been anticipated, for there were over a dozen men outside. One, who was a little apart, made a dash for a saddled horse near by, leapt on its back and made off like the wind, literally jumping his mount into the river. As his horse climbed the opposite bank the Chinaman cried out—

"That one pieceman!"

"Stop," cried O'Donohue, "we are police officers!"

The declaration was clearly superfluous, for the man made no sign of stopping.

I then drew a bead on him, but my Winchester bullet fell short, throwing up the dust at his horse's hind feet ; and before I could fire again he was out of sight in the timber.

The crowd had been so intent on watching the escape of their comrade that they fairly jumped to attention when O'Donohue cried—

“ I have you fellows covered. Drop your weapons and put your hands up ! Get into line ! ”

This, with one exception, they did with alacrity, one of them throwing down a revolver. The exception, who was also armed, stood scowling.

“ Here,” said O'Donohue to me, “ cover that fellow. I'm going to arrest him.”

Turning to the Chinaman he said, “ Johnnie, you look see savee man ? ”

John had his “ look see,” and pointed to the man who had thrown down his weapon, and to the one who had refused to obey.

O'Donohue dismounted, and put the handcuffs on the first-named, telling him to stand in front. He then approached the armed man, who declared with an oath that he would not go to Borroloola, which drew cheers from some of the crowd.

“ Silence, you hounds,” cried O'Donohue, never taking his eyes off his man, to whom he advanced boldly, wrenched the revolver from his hand, threw it behind him, and had the bracelets on him in a twinkling.

“ I won't walk,” said the prisoner.

“ All right, my lad, in that case we will chain you to a horse and drag you, and we'll see who gets tired first ” ; and with that he hauled him to the other prisoner, undid one pair of handcuffs, linked their arms, and fastened the bracelets again.

“ Now you will be nice and comfortable,” said he.

Turning to me he said, “ You and Jimmy keep your eyes on those scoundrels while I retire a little with my men and horses, and then I’ll cover your retreat, for we must take no risks.”

I had been watching one of the men particularly. Surely I could not be mistaken. Yes, it was Tim, whom I had met at Groote Island ; and he was running the shanty.

I stepped up to him and said, “ Hallo, Tim, would you sooner be here or at Groote Island ? ”

He jumped round with, “ You don’t mean to say it’s you ? ”

“ Yes, Tim, old man, and dashed sorry to see you in such bad company.”

“ All right,” cried O’Donohue, and with a parting injunction to Tim not to move as I stepped away lest he got a bullet from O’Donohue, I, in turn, retired behind my mate, and so we acted until at a safe distance from the shanty.

We had some anxious moments during the arrest, but it would never have done to display the white feather and go back empty-handed. Better to have received a bullet than that.

The man who had escaped was a notorious scoundrel called “ Slippery Jim.” I became acquainted with this fellow later on in a way that will keep his memory green so far as I am concerned.

We had two spare horses, on which we mounted our prisoners, and to which they were fastened by padlocked chains, these “ tender ties ” going round the necks of the horses and then round those of our captives.

We camped for only a few hours before sundown to spell

our animals, and to refresh ourselves and our "collectors" with damper and tea.

We travelled all night, fearing we might be followed by some of the shanty crowd, of whom we had more reason to be afraid than the blacks, who were troublesome in that part of the country.

The journey was a trying one, for as the wet season was setting in, we had bogs and swollen creeks to contend with; but we arrived at our destination without misadventure.

As Port Darwin was some six hundred miles away by land, and nearly 900 by sea, O'Donohue and the Magistrate held a consultation, with the result that the charge was reduced from one of highway robbery to that of assault, on hearing which the prisoners were almost as much taken aback, as when told to put up their hands. They were each sentenced to six months' imprisonment, the time to be "put in" at the settlement.

There had been no time to erect a lock-up. but O'Donohue was equal to all emergencies. An ironbark tree, growing near our quarters, was cut to within about three feet of the ground, a ring was cut round the stump and chains put into the groove and fastened with a padlock. A tent was then pitched over the stump, and the lock-up was complete. When the prisoners were "at home," they were chained to the stump, and thus left for the night. Weather permitting, they chopped wood and cut posts. The fellows grew quite contented, and when their time was up expressed regret at leaving us.

It was nearly a case of one of them remaining at Borrooloola altogether. It happened in this way. My mate and I were exercising our horses on the race-course, leaving our men secure in the tent, when a terrific thunderstorm came up. We raced back to find the prisoners' tent down

and the neck of one beneath the pole, which had nearly strangled him. To show he was sorry for the mishap, O'Donohuc, when the poor fellow had sufficiently recovered, slipped a heroic nip into the hand of each.

CHAPTER XLII

Murders by the Blacks

THE McArthur River Station, at the head of Kilgour Creek, had an outrun about eighty miles distant, in charge of a stockman named McDonald, who had as assistants another stockman and a black boy. The blacks had been killing the cattle freely, and, emboldened by their success, sought to take the hut by storm. Mac, accompanied by his companion and the black boy, went out to drive or frighten them away. The blacks, nothing daunted, came into the open, when the stockman's boy offered to "talk first time alonga Myall," and left the stockman ostensibly for that purpose. He then joined the enemy, and urged them to the attack, saying, "They can't kill you all." A shower of spears followed, one of which pierced poor Mac to the heart. The other white man made good his escape to the head station.

On news of the murder reaching us, we, with our tracker, went in pursuit, but failed in securing either the black boy or the ringleader, who, we afterwards learned, was made a great hero of by his tribe, and supplied with two lubras. This black frequently sent in challenges to the head station, saying he would fight any of them, he with spears and they with rifles; and the cattle had ultimately to be removed to the head station.

The master of a small ketch running from Normanton with stores for the Stations told O'Donohue that he had arranged to get a young girl from one of the river tribes

to assist his wife in the work of his house. He was informed that this was not only illegal, but, for himself, highly dangerous. He only laughed and said he "knew his way about." When he started on his voyage the unfortunate Mac's mate was a passenger. The ketch having reached the spot where the master was to receive the girl, a big black held one up in his arms, and made signs for the master to come for her. In spite of all warnings, he anchored and proceeded in the dinghy towards the bank. The black walked on, the master following in his boat, until they were lost to sight round a bend, and that was the last ever seen of him.

The crew, after waiting some time, returned with the ketch to the settlement, when O'Donohue fixed up a search party in which I was not included having to look after the camp. The party indulged so freely in liquor before starting on this punitive expedition that there was every possibility of their shooting themselves or comrades instead of blacks. The ketch dropped down the river while the tide served, when the stockman and a sailor took over the task of towing her. It was then night, and when rounding a point they were confronted by countless lights seemingly dancing towards them. The stockman, who had not got over the murder of his mate, and moreover was amply charged with whisky, began to yell out that hundreds of blacks were coming with torches, and he and the sailor (who was in like case spiritually) began firing their rifles at the advancing foe.

O'Donohue on the ketch could see that the "demons" were nothing more than burning trees, the reflections from which were "performing the serpentine" in the water; but his endeavours to stop the shooting were all to no purpose. When a piece of lighted bark was sent flying by a bullet, or detached by the flames, fell to the ground, the

whisky-full, panic-stricken fools would roar that "another beggar was down"; and so the farce continued until their ammunition was exhausted.

This brave advance guard having been withdrawn from active service, a couple with less "imagination" were put in their place to pull the ketch to the landing.

A thorough search was made at the spot where the master had disappeared, but all to no purpose. The party could hear the blacks, but could not get in touch with them. The river was examined to the mouth, but not a black was to be seen, nor a trace of the dinghy to be found.

CHAPTER XLIII

A Cunning Black—A Plot that Failed

DURING O'Donohue's absence in the ketch, a strange Myall native reported (through the Settlement blacks) that a number of saltwater blacks had a big mob of cattle yarded at a lagoon about twenty miles down the river, and were killing them as wanted ; and he further said it was no use a few men going after them, as there were a large number of blacks, determined to fight if interfered with. He suggested we should all go. The Resident Magistrate was visiting a Station, and there were only the tracker, publican, storekeeper and his assistant and myself left, with two travellers camped a little distance off.

Although it was thought the story might be an invention, after discussion it was arranged that one man should take charge of the public house, and another of the store, while the remaining five of us went down the river to investigate.

We made a start next morning, taking the Myall with us, who, perhaps for the first time in his life, was mounted on horseback. To guard against treachery, he was chained to the saddle, and the horse led by the tracker. There was to be no shooting unless in defence. As we neared the lagoon and were speculating as to how we would be received, our Myall guide yelled, "Yaki! Yaki!" ("Look out, look out"), and, evidently forgetting that he was chained to the horse, tried to throw himself clear with

the idea of escaping. The animal plunged, broke away from the tracker, and made off through the timber towards the Settlement, the unfortunate black dangling at its side.

At this moment those who had dashed towards the lagoon, as soon as the black cried out, returned and reported there were no signs of either blacks or cattle there. Finding we were "sold," we at once went in pursuit of the horse, expecting every moment to find the mangled remains of the black. When upwards of a mile had been covered we noticed blood on the ground leading into the river. It was evident the chain had either broken or come adrift, and that our crafty guide had crawled to the water. A search along the bank showed nothing of him, and it was concluded he had been taken by an alligator.

A return to the Settlement was then made, for we felt certain that there we would find the blacks reported to be at the lagoon. In this we were right, for as we raced into the Settlement, we saw fully three hundred armed natives near the houses. We rode right at them, yelling and firing above their heads, when they made off for the river, into which they plunged and struck out for the other side.

We learned that as soon as we were out of sight, several blacks were seen to lurk near the Settlement for a little time and then disappear. Then, after a brief interval, natives appeared in force, but on being fired at had withdrawn to where we saw them.

The horse, to which the black had been fastened, turned up at the Settlement, with the broken chain attached to the saddle.

The blacks sometimes treated us to mild amusement instead of work and worry ; and they had a kind of respect for white men, notwithstanding their spear-throwing and cattle-killing. This favourable estimate they showed by, at times, requesting us to see fair play while they settled

their disputes. Some of their contests were bloody enough for the most depraved lover of gory sights ; but it was not such as these that we were expected to witness, but " battles " that were little more than farces, although by them considered serious.

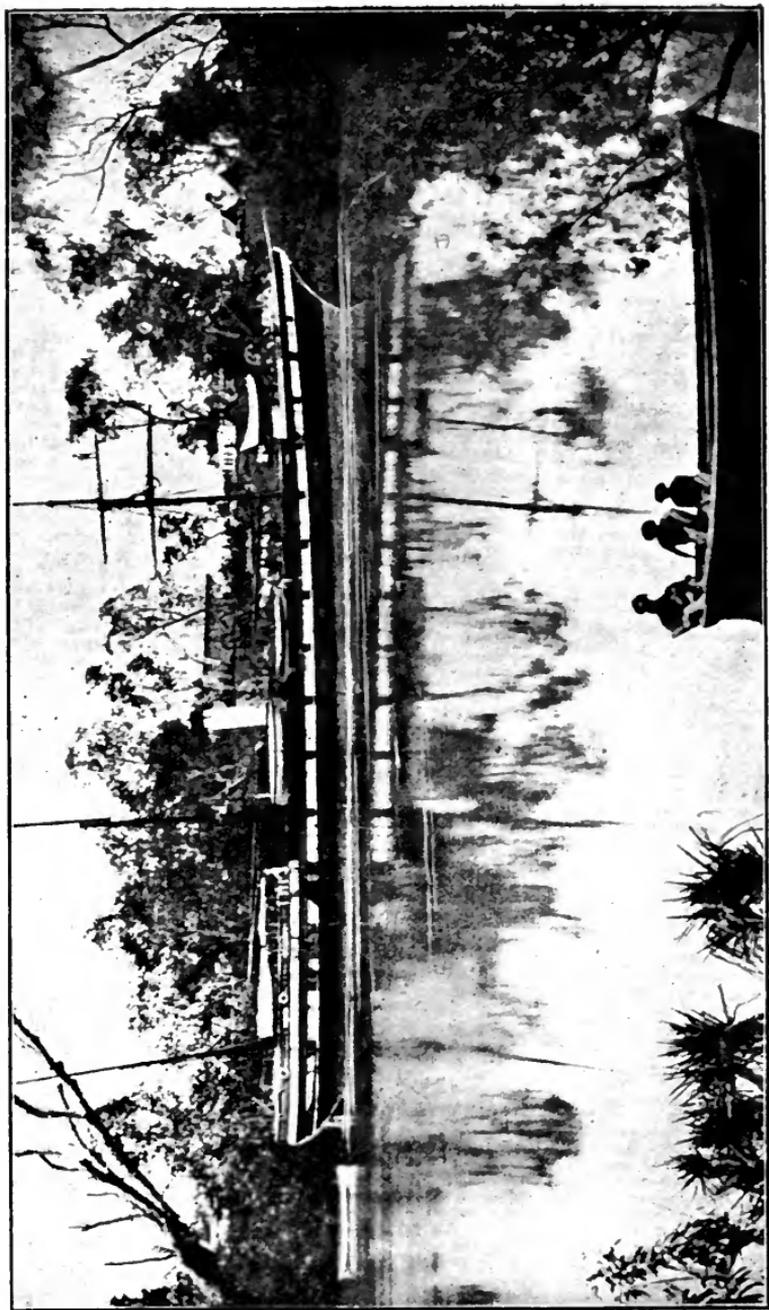
When a contest had been decided upon, seconds were appointed. Then two young men, got up with paint for the occasion, and each armed with a stout waddy about three feet long, would walk backwards and forwards, passing close to each other, talking, grinning, and making jeering remarks the while. Turning suddenly face to face, a desperate blow would be struck by one at the other, who, with waddy held at both ends, received the blow between his hands. Then number two would strike and number one guard, and so the engagement would proceed until perhaps, a waddy broke, when the one so disarmed would turn his back to his antagonist without danger of having his head knocked in. The waddyless black's second would promptly supply another weapon, when the striking would be resumed till both were tired, when the walk and abuse again took place. Finally a separation was effected by the seconds, and the " braves " would retire from the field of glory without a scratch.

CHAPTER XLIV

Hunting Cattle Stealers

ABOUT the commencement of one wet season O'Donohue and I called at the McArthur River Head Station, and while resting there word came in that three white men and a number of blacks had a large mob of cattle gathered to the south of the Robinson River, where they had erected yards, it being intended to drive the cattle into Queensland.

As these cattle were, without doubt, stolen property, O'Donohue determined to look them up, so he, the Station Manager, myself, Jimmy the tracker, and two station black boys were soon on the move. After several days' hard travelling, we arrived within about three miles of where the yards were supposed to be, and then camped. The blacks were sent out to have a look round, and on their return said the yards were there, but that the cattle had been driven away. Next morning we visited the yards, which were large and well built, and had apparently been in use for some time. The tracks indicated that some days had elapsed since the cattle had left. We searched till dusk, when we found the route taken by the mob. Next day the tracks led us to other yards, and on the evening of the second day we came to where the thieves had made their previous day's camp, the fire ashes being still red. That night a storm, accompanied by torrents of rain, passed over the country, covering it with water, and obliterating the cattle tracks; but we got on to those of



ROPER RIVER LANDING.

Captain Sweet.

horses, which we followed till dark. We then camped on the top of a high stony ridge, down the side of which, in the morning, we found it very difficult to lead our horses. We were then in a valley between ranges, and had not gone far when we heard a horse neigh. We struck off in the opposite direction and came to a creek. Knowing that the men we wanted were not far from us, we held a council of war, and decided upon having the first shot, if we found the fellows in possession of the cattle, for we knew they would not be taken red-handed without resistance. We rode down the bank of the creek, and after going about a mile we saw three white men, with some blackfellows and gins, sitting round their camp fire on the opposite bank.

On sighting us the men picked up their rifles and faced us as we rode across the creek. We recognized them as noted horse and cattle stealers. We bade each other good morning, and they followed this up by chaffing us, wanting to know if we fancied we were going to find the cattle in their possession, and asking the Manager if he would compensate them for the yards they had built, and so on.

Having no direct evidence against the fellows, we could do nothing but retrace our steps, and try and pick the cattle up on our way home. They had evidently resorted to the plan of circling round each day, and coming on our tracks had followed them up, let the cattle go, and pushed on ahead. On our way back we mustered two hundred, which we drove to the Head Station.

One of these "duffers" had actually built a butcher's shop on the overland track for the convenience of travellers, and drew his supplies from the station on which it was built, and those adjoining, without paying for them. Upon the Manager expostulating, he was told that if he did not like it he could lump it, or pay three hundred pounds for the good-will. The "deal" did not come

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off, for owing to the attention of the police, this free-booter was glad to take himself off with his liberty.

There were about twenty whites and a number of blacks in this horse-and-cattle-stealing gang. Their haunt was a large tract of country in the ranges, which they stocked by stealing at the end of each wet season, a few hundred head of cattle being taken from each station. They bred from the stolen cattle and horses, and sold the unbranded stock to the "reformed" cattle dealers, who then took them up country and there marked them with their registered brands.

These land pirates never camped with their stock, but worked them with blacks, so that in case of trouble they would be out of it. If any of the stolen branded cattle were sold, it was to some one who was supposed to be respectable, and by whom they were passed on to butchers and others. The "gentlemen" who stocked their stations by such purchases were known as "Lagoon" or "Clay-pan" squatters.

When it is remembered that one could ride for days and days and yet be on one station, it is easy to understand how impossible the work of complete supervision was. There were stations in the Territory ranging in extent from two thousand square miles to twenty-two thousand.

CHAPTER XLV

Fun at the McArthur

WE had been away on a long patrol, and on our return were informed there was a "sultry" lot at the public house, one of whom had threatened to chain the police up as soon as they came back. This made O'Donohue sulphurous, and as soon as our horses were attended to we walked down to have a look at this new "fire-eater."

O'Donohue seated himself on a case under the verandah, and the tracker and I on the window ledge. We had not long to wait, for out came the gentleman who was going to treat us so badly, and, as he passed O'Donohue, stamped heavily on one of his feet. My mate's fist shot out, and the fellow went head-over-heels. O'Donohue let him rise, but at once knocked him down again. The boaster would not fight, and began to yell "Police, Police!" until he understood, from what O'Donohue told him, the police were looking after him all the time. As soon as the "opera" started, out rushed the mates of the fallen hero, and they looked like taking part in the game; but revolver in hand, I quietly acted as umpire, and there were no more signs of interference.

A new chum fellow with notions of city decorum, and not a little "jammy," ran over from the store crying to us—

"Why don't you try to prevent this row? The poor man will be murdered. Don't you hear he is singing out for the police? Where are the fellows?"

I explained that my friend (pointing to O'Donohue) was a trooper, who was "remonstrating" with the fellow on the ground.

"Disgusting," said this young shaver, who, like the juvenile bear, had all his troubles to come.

The very friends of the creature who was going to be so brave turned against him, and he was fairly laughed out of the Settlement.

Owing to O'Donohue's methods the police had established a reputation that was even praised by the better spirits among our enemies. And a strange lot these enemies were. Some of them not worth talking about, mere vulgar vagabonds; others again, though vagabondish enough, with a spice of romance in them. All, objectionably bad or attractively wicked, turned up at the races, well-mounted to a man. As a precaution against possible contingencies, they got drunk in relays, some keeping sober while the others gave themselves every license that Bacchus and horse-racing provide.

We always took part in the races, joining pleasure to duty. O'Donohue would have died of heartache if there had been races from which he was debarred from taking part. His horse, first named "Coronation," but having lost his reputation at the Adelaide River, then designated "Ruination," proved so successful that his name was again altered to that of "Reformation."

There was enough drinking going on while the racing lasted to more than astonish a reasonable man; but that was a mere tea-meeting compared to what followed. Hard-earned cheques, representing months of toil, were "knocked down" in a few days; and on one occasion the drought was so acute that every drop of liquor disappeared. A raid was then made upon the store, where the stock of Lea & Perrin's Sauce, Friar's Balsam and

Painkiller was cleared out and sent the road of the beer and whisky. The orgies generally concluded with the more highly-strung developing delirium tremens; while many others, by their mutterings, ear-clawings, and gesticulations showed they were about seeing two-headed snakes and tartan alligators.

Not a few, when they found they were "getting 'em," hobbled themselves, or had themselves tied to trees to obviate the risk of providing food for the alligators by falling into the river or wandering into the bush.

And all this kind of thing had to be viewed by us with that charity and forbearance which ultimately made for greater peace and power.

CHAPTER XLVI

An Outlaw Escapes

SHORTLY after the race meeting, I was sent to Anthony's Lagoon, about one hundred and eighty miles south-west of Borroloola, to inquire into some instances of bare-faced horse stealing by "Slippery Jim," the scamp who escaped from us at the Robinson River Crossing. I had with me a black boy and four horses. We reached the Lagoon five days later, unobserved in the darkness; and when we had hobbled the horses and fixed up our camp, we strolled over to the store to see who was knocking about. Inside the store was a man I felt sure was the one I wanted, so I stepped to his side with, "Hands up! I'm a police officer, and arrest you on a charge of horse stealing." I had him covered and he obeyed. My black boy then relieved him of his arms, and put the bracelets on him.

It was "Slippery Jim" right enough. The prisoner looked small as he almost hissed, "You tried to 'pot' me once, but I'll be level with you yet."

Fortunately for me the storekeeper was the only other man at the Lagoon, and without delay I took my prisoner to the camp and fastened him to a tree with light chains we carried for such hospitality.

Next day saw us early on the road, James being mounted and the chains so arranged that his legs and arms had plenty of play. The boy led the horse, and I rode behind, carbine on thigh, it being understood that if he

attempted to escape I would pull the trigger ; but if he behaved himself, I would do all I could to make his journey comfortable. Once fairly going the prisoner seemed to treat the whole thing as a joke, and settled down to enjoy himself as much as possible. This should have aroused my suspicions, but it did not ; I rather flattered myself it was due to my straight talk.

Our last camp ! The black boy was out after the horses, and I, with Jim's assistance, was getting the packs ready, when stooping down to roll up my blanket, I received a crushing blow on the back of my head, and I knew no more till I found myself lashed to a tree, and lying at my feet the body of my black boy. But of "Slippery Jim," horses, camp gear, and arms there was nothing to be seen.

It was an awful predicament to be in, but I was too experienced to lose my head, and promptly set about the task of freeing myself. After a long and hard struggle I got one of my hands loose, and then quickly cleared away the other fastenings. My poor black had been dispatched by a ball through his brain.

Why the murderer did not finish me right off is a puzzle to this day. Perhaps the consideration I had shown him while on the road had softened him a little ; or he may have thought torture was what I merited.

I covered up the poor boy's body with boughs, to keep off the birds, and made a start for Borrooloola, a distance of twenty miles. It was midnight when I stumbled into the police quarters with little recollection of how I had reached there. After O'Donohue had given me a drink of water I told my story, whereupon he swore he would not rest till he had run the brute to earth ; but a hunt lasting over many days was to no purpose. Neither Jim, the horses, or anything he took were ever seen or heard of.

CHAPTER XLVII

On Patrol

ONCE a year, during the dry season, we patrolled the country for hundreds of miles. Of all my experiences this was the most enjoyable. The weather was then beautiful, with abundance of water and feed for our horses ; and, when not tied to time, we indulged ourselves and made this duty an ideal holiday. We had plenty of arms and ammunition, plenty of "packs," a couple of black boys to look after the horses and prepare the camp ; and, what was better than all, we had perfect health and were as hard as nails.

The scenery was often fine beyond description. New and interesting discoveries were made each day during our short journeys in different directions ; in all the lagoons and waterholes fish and game abounded ; at each station a most hearty welcome awaited us ; and we had authority from owners and managers to shoot a beast if we required fresh beef.

Oh, the glorious nights spent by the camp fires, with the glittering stars, like friendly eyes, looking down on our content ! Then, in the early morning, just before the great red sun rose above the horizon, how invigorating was the dew-laden atmosphere, and how delightful it was to gaze, as we often could, over the seemingly endless plain, carpeted as far as the eye could reach with luxurious grass, studded with belts of Pandanus, cabbage palm, paper-bark, Leichhardt pine, and the fig tree, glistening in

the golden rays. It is simply impossible to portray in words the solemnity, the grandeur, and the golden glamour of the magnificent panoramas that enriched our vision. A turn of the head, and the eye would rest, say, on a series of lagoons where beautiful lotus lilies slept on the mirror-waters, and waterfowl revelled in the comfort of their translucent realm. A glance in yet another direction would discover vistas of superbly-rich valleys, musical with the murmur of waterfalls and the song of birds; and beyond these again the great winding rivers with their fringes of giant trees. Around us were kangaroos, mobs of wild cattle and untamed horses, sometimes feeding quietly, as if they knew nothing of fear; at other times starting and staring at us before stampeding across the plain.

It was indeed a sweet pilgrimage through a land of beauty, yet the advent of hostile natives or lawless whites might at any moment have marred the peace of the whole. Notwithstanding this, what manner of man is he who, having once heard the "Call of the Wilds" sounding on his inner ear, does not yearn to obey the siren-like appeal?

I have not mentioned the precautions taken by travellers when passing through country occupied by hostile natives, nor need I go into this matter fully. Mention of one important safeguard, however, must not be omitted. Naturally after a day in the saddle, under perhaps trying conditions of heat, one could not watch all night for foes, so after supper the mosquito nets would be stretched near the fire, and we would then steal away, as cunningly as possible, to a distance where, wrapped in our blankets, the night would be spent.

This custom was the outcome of a habit the natives had of stealing up to a camp at peep of day and throwing spears through the nets in the hope of killing supposed

sleepers. On several occasions I have returned to my net in the morning to find spears thus thrown sticking through it.

Before reaching the country we were then in we had occasion to use our nets, but not for the purpose stated. Towards evening one day we fell in with several overlanders, and decided to camp together. One of the company was a new chum, who was not a little anxious to have a brush with the natives, and not a little boastful as to what he would do if attacked. His companions, experienced men, had a sense of humour, and whispered to O'Donohue that they would have a bit of fun later on.

That worthy fell in with their idea readily on the score that all men should have experience, and that at the earliest moment ; with which philosophy I also agreed.

Here I must tell that there are two kinds of nets used, one having the entrance at the side, and the other at the bottom. The latter contrivance is right enough for mosquitoes, but if you desired to leave it in a hurry—well, then your troubles begin.

One of this kind was spread by the new chum, and after the usual yarning and smoke each turned in, the brave man in his cul-de-sac.

In the stillness before dawn, when sleep weighs heavily on the eyelids, an unearthly yell rang through the camp, and then the cry, "Blacks ! Blacks ! The blacks are on us !"

This was followed by several shots as sticks were thrown at the new chum's net, which began to assume all shapes as its inmate writhed and emitted cries for help. The more the poor wretch tried to disentangle himself, the faster he became bound, until his cries ceased, when we went to his aid, and from the tangled skein of cotton goods, extricated him in a half-suffocated condition.

It was some time before he could mould his face into a genuine grin. He had learned what sort of net to use in future.

This, we were informed, was not the only "Colonial experience" the "chum" had secured since starting. On their first night out, when he put his head under his net, he let out a roar, "Snake—there's a tremendous snake in my blanket!" pointing at his net. All hands rushed with sticks with which they belaboured it until one said, "I guess he's dead now," and stooping down drew out a deadly reptile in the shape of a stockwhip!

The new chum made for the owner of the stockwhip; but that worthy simply roared, and sang snatches of "Home, Sweet Home," as he kept him at arm's length.

I might mention here that when travellers have no nets, and are in danger from the blacks, the plan adopted is to leave the camp fire and go to a safe distance to sleep.

One morning not long after parting with our merry company we came to a bullock team, standing with a great wagon full of stores, for some outback station, and the driver—an elderly man known as "Bullocky Jack," lounging under a shady bohemia tree. We rode close to him, and O'Donohue called—

"Jack!" but not a move. Then "Jack, are you asleep or deep in study?"

Jack rose slowly to his feet, and with a scowl of feigned anger said—"You came at the wrong moment, and now a fine song, an immortal lyric, has fled on the wind of the Never Never, gone beyond recall, lost for evermore."

"So it's poetry you're at, is it?" went on O'Donohue.

"It is, my brave O'Donohue, and as you sometimes fancy yourself on Parnassus, perhaps you would like to hear the latest song of the wilds."

“Nothing would I put before it,” said my mate.

“Well then, listen,” said Jack. “The title is ‘Jack of the Never Never.’”

“My name is Jack ; I guide my team
Through dangers, fearing never ;
I skirt lagoons whose silver sheen
Adorns the Never Never.

“At glint of morn up leap the flames
That set my billy boiling ;
And yokes are put on wrinkled necks
That tell of trackless toiling.

“We go, my sturdy beasts and I,
Far, far from human dwelling ;
O'er leagues of grass-lands, summer bleached ;
O'er realms where floods are swelling.

“But what care we for summer heat,
Or when the ‘wet’ comes o'er us ;
I hum a song and tell my pets
Of sweet camp spots before us.

“Perchance some day I'll not arrive,
And I'll be called a slow one—
When I have crossed the Great Divide,
My frosted head a low one.

“But what of that ? Beneath the grass
I'll dream of all the wonder
I knew by river, plain and swamp,
Nor wake as peals the thunder.”

“A good song,” said O'Donohue meditatively. I liked it so much that I there and then secured a copy.

We said good-bye to our “free-world bard,” he to journey on, we to push forward to the “sweet camp spot before us.”

CHAPTER XLVIII

We Leave the McArthur

HAVING spent three happy and exciting years at the McArthur, it was with mixed feelings that we received our recall to head-quarters at Port Darwin. When we arrived the district was overrun with thieves and worthless creatures, and we were leaving it fit for honest men to live in.

The two troopers who came from Darwin by steamer to take over our duties brought orders that O'Donohue and I were to proceed back overland—in other words, journey on patrol all the way. We were soon busy getting ready for the long journey, and having a dozen fine horses of our own, decided to use them instead of the Government ones, for, once in Darwin, good prices could be obtained for them.

It is strange that although the McArthur was a very bad place for malaria, and that generally those camped there any length of time went down before it, neither my mate nor I ever had a touch of it. Indeed, we had not experienced a day's sickness during the three years there. My old friend, Jack, the storekeeper, was one of its victims. While suffering from it, he was missed one morning, and we found him dead on the bank of the river. He was buried where he died.

Jimmy, the tracker, accompanied us on our journey. We did not hurry, and made the most of what might be our last trip together. A fortnight had elapsed when we

rode into the police camp at the Roper ; and then we found that one of the troopers was out on duty at the "back of beyond," and the other a perfect wreck from malarial fever. As soon as we had exchanged greetings, the Roper man informed us that Stickleg had been murdered.

"Stickleg murdered, eh?" said O'Donohue. "Well, it's a pity they did not hang him instead of relieving and letting him off with an absurdly short term."

The Roper man said some one was to be sent to inquire into the matter, but his mate was away, and he could not possibly go ; would we ?

I at once consented if O'Donohue was willing. It was only fitting that I should inquire into the death of the author of the most heartless crime I had witnessed, and whose worthless neck was probably spared because when he was tried I was too ill to tell what I had seen. O'Donohue, as a matter of course, would go, and at once asked for all particulars to hand.

Our *confrère* then informed us that as soon as the famous hunter gained his liberty he had purchased a ketch, fitted her up with the requirements of a trepanger, and sailed away, finally deciding on a small sandy island in Arnheim Bay for his camping ground. There, while asleep in his tent one afternoon, the Myalls had crossed from the mainland and, stealing on him, had done him to death.

The trooper provided us with horses, and our own were to rest till we returned.

CHAPTER XLIX

Search for Stickleg's Murderers

IT was at the end of September that we started on our quest. Besides O'Donohue and myself we took four black boys and sixteen horses, six of which were packed. It was a tedious and trying journey until we reached the Goyder River. The country had been nearly swept by fire, and it was only here and there that we were able to get grass for our horses. The heat was intense, and the flies a continual torment. A fortnight had almost elapsed before we came to the tributaries of the river named, when many lagoons had to be crossed. The work and discomfort that this entailed were in a measure compensated for by the abundance of game provided by these waters.

We had hoped to secure some of the Goyder River blacks as guides, but the only ones we managed to speak to were a few old men and gins digging for roots in the swamps. It looked as if we were being avoided. Some of those we caught had never before seen a white man nor a horse; and to each one captured we gave some slight present as a parting gift. At one of the stations reached we secured the services of a black boy acquainted with the language of the natives of the country we were then in, and who also had a fair knowledge of English.

One day we caught a couple of young gins in a swamp, and they—through the interpreter—said they knew a man who was acquainted with the murderers. With the assistance of the black women this man was eventually

brought into our camp. The men, he said, who had actually killed Stickleg were Minderapin and Charawe (they also had Macassar names, Packandoo and Science), and two other blacks named Learlumer and Marraping; that the native name of the island upon which the murder took place was Coondaccoomoorra; also that a large number of Myalls had crossed to the island, and finding the white man asleep, had driven a spear into him; and that when this was done, they all—with the exception of the four named—cleared back to the mainland.

As he knew the spot where Stickleg first landed, we kept the man with us. On we went across patches of mess-mate and sand, ti-tree flats, belts of jungle and through swamps, until we came to a network of salt water arms, in nearly all of which the mangroves were so thick that we could not get through.

At last, after weary toiling, we arrived at the landing place, having travelled nearly three hundred miles, and were shown the island upon which the tragedy had occurred. We could not get to it, however, as there was a stretch of deep water nearly a mile broad between it and the mainland. We followed up many pads leading from the water, and came across several camps, in which we found numerous articles that had belonged to the murdered man. An iron boiler had been broken up by the natives of one camp for the purpose of securing pieces for spear heads. We destroyed the camps and all the property found. On the beach we noticed a spring of water gushing from an oyster-covered rock, and there at low tide we watered our horses. We also found several turtle nests and indulged in oysters and eggs.

Not having seen any signs of the blacks in the vicinity, some of us walked eastward, searching the mangroves and jungle where possible. There were numerous tracks

leading into them; in truth, from the appearance of things, it seemed as if the blacks lived within these fastnesses. In some cases evident care had been exercised to conceal the pads and tracks, and many entrances into the mangroves and jungles were masked with bushes. After an exhausting walk of some seventy miles we located a number of blacks in a swamp, but they bolted into their retreat as soon as they caught sight of us. We managed, however, to cut off and run down two little boys. They were desperately frightened, but became calmer as the interpreter talked to them. When the murderers' names were mentioned, they pointed into the great jungle abutting on the mangroves. The little chaps were fed and then liberated. No grass grew under their feet as they made off.

O'Donohue and I then debated the position, and it was agreed the "game was up," as far as we were concerned. To have driven the blacks into anything like workable country would have needed a very large expedition. We picked up our boys with the horses and made a move for the Bar, reaching home after an absence of five weeks. O'Donohue then summed up the matter by saying that if the authorities thought "the game worth the candle," after hearing our report, they could go ahead.

CHAPTER L

Spears and Revolvers

ON returning to the Roper I was delighted to meet a friend from Port Darwin. He was one of the merry "set" who had witnessed my buffalo ride, and had bounced the story of my fall with great vim. He had soon after my leaving for the McArthur joined the force, and as both of us were as full of yarns as a twenty-four page paper claims to be of news, talk began early and ended late. Indeed so much was there for each to hear and so much for each to tell, that it was only by dint of "late sittings" that we were able to grapple with our congenial tasks.

And right merrily were we doing so when a station owner from North of the Roper came in with a tale of depredations by the blacks and asking for assistance.

"What about your *dolce far niente* now?" said O'Donohue to me, laying stress on the only Italian phrase he was master of.

In answer I hummed a bar or two of "In the Sweet By and By," and without further ado we made preparations to give the assistance sought.

The man in trouble, who had a reputation for kindness to the natives, stated that his flock of goats had disappeared. He had supplied a number of natives with provisions and sent them in search of the missing animals, when the return of an aged "billy" without any of his mates aroused suspicion. He had then learned that the

truculent blacks who had received the provisions had driven the goats to their native camp, where they had been killed and eaten as required—all except the home-comer, which had been passed as an undesirable. What a Roper black considers unfit to eat must remain so for evermore.

The goats disposed of, the blacks had then turned their attention to his cattle, being led in their attacks on these by two desperate natives wanted by the authorities for murder.

The war party consisted of O'Donohue, George (the new trooper), the Station Owner, myself, a stockman and three black trackers. On the first morning out I was very near giving the camp an early and rude awakening. I awoke with a feeling that danger was near, so I noiselessly opened my net and peered out. Not far in front of me was a dry water course, and in this I saw a glittering point of fire—a lighted stick, held for a certainty by one of our black foes, though as yet unseen. I seized my carbine, and was in the act of pressing the trigger, when my finger eased on the lever, and the point of the weapon dropped—it was the Morning Star. I did not tell my companions how nearly I had come to offering Phosphor an indignity.

After some hard tracking we got in touch with the enemy, who at once sought the refuge of the long grass on the river bank. I was riding with George, when he jammed his spurs into his mount and gave chase to a black crossing a clear space not far ahead of us. He was one of the murderers wanted. As my mate drew near, revolver in hand, he called on him to stand, but the words were scarcely out of his mouth when his horse stumbled and came heavily to the ground, throwing his rider at the feet of the black.

The savage carried a heavy yam stick, and with this he

tried to transfix the trooper ; but before the black could effect his purpose I had shot him in the shoulder, whereupon he made off for the grass cover. Before, however, he could gain this, George in his turn sent a bullet after him, which struck the fugitive in the leg, bringing him to the ground.

He immediately sat up, and, resting his elbows on his knees, yam stick in hand, waited for our advance. The stockman then crept up from behind with a view to securing him, and had almost done so when the native threw himself back, giving the stockman as he did so a blow that laid him out. But the trick was disastrous for the black, for by it a charge in the white man's revolver was exploded as he fell, and the ball, piercing the black's head, killed him instantly.

Leaving my horse with George, I rushed into the grass with the intention of driving the blacks on to a clear patch, where one of our party was stationed, when another shot rang out followed by the cry, "I'm speared!" Going back on my tracks, I made for the spot from whence the cry had come, and found the station master with a spear in his shoulder. George, who reached the spot at the same time as myself, told the manager to stand firm while he pulled the weapon gently out. His gentle pull, however, meant one in which he used his full strength, the result being that the weapon came out with two wire prongs attached, leaving a third behind. Although the operation must have been acutely painful, as ugly lacerations were the result, the plucky fellow did not let a whimper escape him. The amateur surgeon then bent the wire of the third prong into a circle, through which he drew his handkerchief. Telling his patient to clutch a sapling with his good arm, he lay back with a good purchase, and succeeded in drawing the barb out. Judging

from the force necessary for this, its point must have been embedded in the bone; but a little sigh was the only proof forthcoming of the intense pain to the patient.

While these operations were proceeding, we had heard shots near the river bank, and shortly after O'Donohue, with the balance of the party, returned and reported that the blacks had escaped across the river. One of the black trackers had received a nasty gash in the chest from a stone-headed spear.

We made our return journey to the Bar as speedily as circumstances would allow, where our wounded men—the trooper, black tracker and stockman—had their injuries attended to with the best skill at our command. The station owner speedily recovered, but the tracker's wound took longer to heal.

The stockman, however, was the most unfortunate, for the wound from his "knock-down" blow was shortly afterwards supplemented by fever, and then by a broken leg, sustained when journeying to Pine Creek (distant 300 miles) for medical aid. His mates set the broken leg as well as they could, but it was some weeks before he could be attended to professionally and the result was a crooked leg. However he went South for a time and returned with restored health, although with a permanent "list to port."

I mentioned that on hearing the squatter's cry I went back on my tracks. It may be worth mentioning that it is unwise to allow evilly-intentioned natives to get behind you, as their practice is to follow up your trail. By going back upon your own tracks you are brought face to face with the enemy—a surprise for them and an advantage for you.

I was beginning to think we would never get away from the Bar, for now another delay was caused by a couple of

our horses having strayed. Making a start at midday for a lagoon some thirty miles distant, for which the animals had probably made, I found the heat so intense that by sunset, as I had still a considerable distance to go, I decided to camp. Putting my quart pot on the fire with the last of the water from my bag I made the inevitable tea and partook of the eternal tinned mutton and damper. The frugal meal disposed of, I was soon asleep dreaming that I was perishing with thirst and had chanced on a clear stream of cool water. While still absorbing this I awoke with a thirst that would have been most valuable under certain conditions.

Without a drop to drink, and with every desire for the liquid of my dream, I secured my horse and determined to push on, although it was only two o'clock. After proceeding some miles in the clear moonlight I came to a shallow clay pan, from which I filled my pot and quenched my thirst. To guard against possible contingencies I strained the liquid through my teeth. A daylight examination of the pot showed me that it had been a case of "where there is no seeing there is no grieving," for otherwise I certainly could not have faced the horrible mixture. I again rested, and at daylight made for the lagoon where, as expected, I found my horses.

While preparing my breakfast several blacks with fishing spears made their appearance. They seemed to be quite friendly; but I was not feeling in a trusting mood after my late encounter, so decided to make myself scarce. To enable me to do this I upset my quart pot and then, on account of the seeming accident, excused myself for not entertaining my dusky brethren, pleading moreover that I was in a hurry to get back to the Bar. So off I went, driving the "strays" before me.

CHAPTER LI

We Journey Home

AFTER a few days' spell we finally bade farewell to the Roper, leaving Jimmy the tracker behind. We made our travelling easy exercise, and took advantage of every opportunity to enjoy ourselves. Game was, as usual, abundant, which enabled us to fare sumptuously every day. At Abraham's Billabong we found the shanty in full swing, and our reception was in striking contrast to that we had experienced there before. Numbers of drovers and overlanders were in camp, and with the hospitality of genuine Australian bushmen they made much of us, every one acting as if they owed us all they could do in the way of kindness for the part we had played in ridding the country of the thieves and vagabonds they with others had found such a scourge.

One morning, when a few days out from the Billabong, we found that one of our horses had strayed away. His tracks were soon picked up, but it was two hours before I came up with the truant, who had broken his hobbles. Having taken him into custody, I selected a more direct route for our camp, but had not gone far when the horse I was riding gave a sudden plunge and a snort of fear, nearly unseating me. Pulling him together, I looked round to ascertain the cause, when I saw what sent a cold chill up my spine. Through the green leaves of some dwarf bushes I beheld a black face, a human face, grinning at me in a horrible manner. For eyes there were white

spots, and the open mouth disclosed rows of glittering teeth. I approached with awe to find a mummified native—or rather a skeleton with the sun-dried skin drawn tightly over the bones. It was hanging to and crouching at the foot of a sapling some nine feet high. Before I could see the remains in their entirety I had to draw aside the green leaves and boughs by which it was partly hidden, and then the full horror of my discovery presented itself. I saw that the sapling had been cut off at the height mentioned and the top pointed. The withered arms were extended, and held in position by the sapling, the point which had been through the palms of each hand. The poor creature, thus crucified, had been left to endure the nameless tortures of a lingering death. Could anything more fiendishly cruel be imagined? Clammy with a cold sweat, begot of grief and horror, I longed to know whose work it was so that I might rid, if possible, the world of a monster.

I made haste to O'Donohue with the news, who remarked that it looked like the devilry of "Hairy" Smith, a drover who used to boast that he never carried a revolver, having found that a stockwhip with a wire lash was more effective with the natives. He was also known to have said that when he wanted to glut his vengeance to the full he killed in the way described. O'Donohue then reminded me of a story told by a drover at the Roper of a fellow who went for a swim in the river, saying he had no fear of alligators, but had his leg so ripped about by one of these tropical horrors, that though rescued he bled to death on the bank before efficient aid could be brought.

I remembered. "Well," said O'Donohue, "that was the end of 'Hairy' Smith."

When I asked if we would do anything with the remains of the poor creature I had found, O'Donohue in the

poetical way he could command, replied, "We will leave them in Nature's green shroud. It may chance that they will never be seen again. If they are, who knows but that the spectator may be led to dwell on how hard the human heart can become, and learn to guard his own."

The discovery of this harrowing bush tragedy cast a gloom over us, and it was some time before we could look upon the beauties around us with that joy they were so fitted to inspire.

The heat was now growing in intensity, and the thunder-booms were like immense voices telling us of the deluge to come, and ordering a quicker advance.

Our next halting place of importance was at a small station on the Waterhouse, a tributary of the Roper, and about sixty miles from the Katherine Telegraph Station. As we drew near the homestead, which consisted of a bark hut, I was impressed by the beauty of the picture that opened out. The hut had been well placed on the high sloping bank of a large lagoon, in which flourished the beautiful lotus lily, and on which were wild fowl of all kinds. On one side of the dwelling, at some little distance away, was the river, and on the other and to the rear an undulating plain heavily grassed and studded with fine patches of forest timber, a stand near the dwelling being especially notable. The property was owned by a young Englishman named Graham, well known to O'Donohue, and embraced about two hundred and sixty square miles of country. It appealed to me as an ideal locality for a cattle station, to say nothing of mixed farming.

The proprietor gave us the welcome we expected—in truth he was right glad to have our company. I fancy he was feeling that it was not good for man to be alone, for while he had a couple of white men in his employ, in

addition to a number of black boys, at the time of our visit they were scattered. After a preliminary yarn, following the handing over of our horses to a couple of the boys, we had a dip in the lagoon, and, in spite of the leeches which were thirsting for our blood, and got some of it too, we experienced a good time.

During the conversation after tea Graham said he would be glad to get a good mate to assist him in "running the show," adding that he would take five hundred pounds for a one-third interest; and if we could lay him on the tracks of the kind of fellow he wanted (O'Donohue knew the brand), he would take it as a favour.

I felt strongly tempted to ask O'Donohue when opportunity offered, to put in a good word for me, as I had the money; but other considerations weighed against the idea, and I had to rest content with the conviction that the life would have suited me right along the line.

Although we had the best of reasons for pushing on, we remained a couple of days with our genial host, and when we parted it was with a promise that we would do our best to find the man he wanted.

After this we made our going as good as we could till Pine Creek was reached. We camped for the last time at the Lagoon, about twelve miles from Darwin. When at breakfast O'Donohue said to me: "What an awful ruffian you look, to be sure, with your dirty old clothes, and that great beard of yours" (for I had not shaved for a long time). "I need not talk, I know," said he, "but as we are getting into civilization, we might as well try and make ourselves look respectable, at least as far as our figure-heads are concerned. I am going to clip myself, and if you like I will fix you up with a real Van Dyke beard."

I rather fancied the idea, for my mate was a good barber, but I was proud of my travel-stained, dilapidated clothes and unkempt beard, and so declined his offer ; and he decided to follow my example.

CHAPTER LII

Barrack Life—"The Baron"

IT was just four o'clock when we rode down Cavenagh Street and made our way to the barracks. The welcome we there received was a most cordial one, and the boys made it clear that they were not a little proud of the way in which we had kept our end of the log up in the lawless country where we had represented authority for so long. We were plied with questions until we had to take refuge in the Parliamentary practice and request that notice be given.

Without loss of time we reported ourselves to Inspector Paul, who said nice things to us for the manner in which we had carried out our duties.

This over, and other pressing matters attended to, I took an opportunity of waiting upon my old friend and chief the C.C., who was as delighted to see me as I was to meet him. The inevitable yarn followed, and when we parted, it was with a promise on my part to continue it at an early date. He wanted to know everything; and while I cannot say that I kept my word to the letter, I gave him enough.

We had just settled down nicely to our barrack life and our much tamer duties when the force stationed there was added to by the arrival of a very warlike Teuton, who claimed to have fought for his country in the Franco-Prussian war, and to have taken his part in many of the hardest fights of the campaign. Whenever occasion

offered (and in this matter he would act on the slightest provocation), he adorned his left breast with a number of decorations. There was no doubt he had been a smart cavalryman, and we had no reason to question his word. Still this ostentatious display of silverware grew rather wearisome, and the upshot was a suggestion from O'Donohue that we should have some fun with our comrade, who had been designated "The Baron."

Fun at the Barracks was of everyday occurrence. Much of our fooling struck me as very funny, and the way in which O'Donohue's suggestion was carried out will serve as a fair sample of our nonsense.

One day the Baron was on special duty, and had turned out in full regimentals. At dinner time, having seen our victim already seated, we marched into the mess-room with our breasts covered with saucepan lids, tops of tins, and tin crosses. It was with the greatest difficulty we maintained the seriousness required. When we took our seats the Baron glanced round, glared and then looked down at the cloth. No one spoke. The China boy appeared with the soup, and was in the act of passing it over the Baron's shoulder, to place it before him, when he caught sight of our gaily-decorated breasts. This was fatal, for, in his surprise, he tilted the dish and some of its contents ran over the Baron's medals. Then the "band began to play." Up jumped the infuriated hero of a hundred fights and made a rush at the Celestial who, plate in hand, dashed through the doorway, his white clothes rustling, his pigtail on end and yelling at the top of his voice, "Hi! Yah! Whafor?" the Baron following, purple with rage, and swearing in many languages, which, in his excitement, he mixed up in a chaotic manner. We could contain ourselves no longer, and simultaneously gave vent to our mirth in peals of

laughter, in which we were joined by the black trackers and the other Chinese boys, who had hurried to the mess-room when the opera started. The Sergeant now, in hot haste, came on the scene to ascertain the cause of the uproar. He shot a keen look at us, and then added his double-bass to the roars.

Meanwhile the chase was proceeding. All round the compound went the hunted one, and the medalled hunter, who found that riding pants, top boots and spurs were not conducive to good going. Then they nearly collided with the Inspector, who had hurried out to find the reason of the unseemly riot. His face for a moment was red with anger, but when he saw our decorations he gripped a post and his fat sides shook with laughter.

At last the boy darted through the gate and made for Chinatown, still holding his plate. The Baron thereupon gave in, went to his room, and changed his uniform.

Soon after this our comrade resigned and went to China, where he secured a good position in the Chinese army.

A young trooper fresh from the south, with some influence at his back, had been entrusted with the leadership of a party to the Adelaide River, where an outrage had to be inquired into. He was receiving his final instructions from Inspector Paul, who remarked, by the way, that if he chanced to encounter a native named Dombey he was to call upon him to surrender, and if he refused he was to open fire. One of the troopers, with a keener sense of humour than barrack discipline, asked in an innocent way—

“And if, sir, he has his son with him will we call upon Dombey & Son?” The Inspector gave ever such a faint smile, then sternly said: “What the Dickens are you

talking about?" With a hearty laugh the horses' heads were then turned for the road.

The young fellow returned all the better for his experiences. When asked by the Inspector if he had knocked over Dombey & Son he smilingly replied that so far as he knew the firm was still intact.

In the barrack-room an outline of the trip was given for the benefit of those who had been left at "home."

"And did you have a shot at an alligator?" asked O'Donohue.

"Oh, yes," went on the colt, as we called him. "When at Marraki Creek I put in a little time with a new chum shooting party, who were camped there, and it was decided to try for an alligator which had been seen in the river the day before. A large groper hook was attached to a long rope, baited with some wild geese, and cast in. A blackfellow's dog was tied to the mangroves as a decoy, and a blackfellow left on the high bank to keep watch. Of course the dog started howling, and just before lunch the blackfellow yelled out: 'Alligator been catch em hook.' The party ran down when, lo and behold, the 'gator was fast. Several shots were fired into him, and he was dragged on to the bank to all appearance dead. But they knew as little as I did about killing alligators, and one of them went so far as to get on the brute's back jockey fashion, thinking him dead as Julius Caesar. We then went to lunch. About 4 p.m. we returned and found the 'gator had gone home, but only to be recaptured, as he was still fast to the hook. He was made the recipient of a few more shots, dragged ashore and his hide taken off. His length was fourteen feet. The blackfellow was correct when he said: 'That one first time sulky fella, him no dead.'"

While with this party I heard that on another occasion

two white men and two blackfellows were looking for horses higher up the same Creek, and followed tracks leading into the river. Arrived there they found the bed of the river a chain of isolated waterholes. Being near midday they selected a camp on the bank and turned the horses loose. One of the white men went down for a "bogey," and noticed that one of the waterholes was quite discoloured, while the others were beautifully clear. His attention was then drawn to a movement in the water, and at once divined that the pool contained an alligator. He immediately called to his mate to bring the firearms and he with their two black boys joined him. The 'gator was stirred up by throwing stones into the pool, and as he appeared several shots were fired into him, and he turned on to his side. Considering that he had had sufficient lead to keep him quiet they made two pack saddle surcingles fast to him and hauled him high and dry. As he was a good specimen, it was decided to secure his skull. So one of the party propped his mouth open with a piece of wood and left him for the ants and wild dogs to pick his bones. After having tiffin they went to the river to water their horses and found his lordship back in the pool, but looking very sad. A few more bullets were pumped into him and he was again hauled out, and this time sure was made doubly so by one of the black boys cutting his head off with a tomahawk. When first landed it was noticed he had been in the wars, for he was minus his right fore leg and his left hind one had been mutilated, probably in an encounter with a shark.

"I wonder what made him take to the solitary water-hole?" asked one of the company.

"Oh," said O'Donohue, "he was up in the floating dock for repairs."

The mention of the dog-decoy reminded me of a Mc-

Arthur River incident. I was standing on the bank when a couple of men put off from the landing in a punt, leaving a greyhound on the bank, the property of one of them. The faithful brute, not wishing to be severed from his master, went into the water and made for the punt. A splash followed, and I saw that an alligator had gone in pursuit. The dog's fear found expression in piteous cries, till the saurian striking it with its forepaws as a preliminary to grasping it in its glittering vice, drew it beneath the circling eddies. I saw nothing more pathetic in the wilds, and heard no more pitiful cries than those of the poor hound.

One of our fellows was a great practical joker. Soon after our return a trooper under orders for the Roper was getting his gear ready, which included several jars of ginger. Our wag's eye settled on these, and he decided to annex one as a sample. Procuring a like jar he filled it with mud, sealed it up in the approved Chinese fashion, and substituted it for one of the others. During his journey the trooper gave one of his jars to the wife of a station owner as a slight mark of appreciation of the kindness shown him, and went on his way rejoicing. He had not covered much of this, however, before he was overtaken by the irate husband, who wanted to know what the thunder he meant by insulting his wife by giving her a jar of mud.

The trooper protested his innocence, and declared that some one in barracks must have "rung the changes." But the manager left him in much the same rage, and matters were not adjusted between them till the culprit sent a letter owning up to his guilt, and making a full apology to the lady for the annoyance he had caused her. Nor did he stop there, for by way of showing his contrition he took the first opportunity of sending a brace of

jars to the then pacified squatter, to be handed by him to his wife, as a peace offering from all concerned.

At about the same time a trooper was told off to act as escort for the gold from up-country. He had a weakness for putting off to the last moment whatever he could, and if it was to board a mail launch you could stake your existence it would be at the last moment that he would do so. One day our facetious one saw his trooper's bag waiting for the customary rush, so he promptly emptied it, exchanging four bricks for the things abstracted. As the steamer's last whistle was sounding in rushed "Procrastination," whipped up his bag and made a dash for the boat's deck, which he reached just as the jetty hawser was thrown adrift. It must have dawned on him that this bag was heavy for we saw him stoop down, rise and shake his fist at the barracks and then followed four splashes. He had emptied his bag. It should have proved a lesson for him, but his was a chronic case. Campbell's "Last Man" will probably be just such another character.

CHAPTER LIII

O'Donohue Meets His Man, and I a Friend

VERY soon after the incident recorded in the previous chapter, O'Donohue reported to me that he had found his man, that is he had met the very one Graham required as a partner. "And the funny thing is," went on my friend, "the three of us are old mates."

"And who is he?" I asked.

"Well," said O'Donohue with a satisfied smile, "he's nobody else than Bob Stanish."

"Why, I thought he was on the Kimberley fields looking for a fortune," said I.

"Indeed he was, but having found one, he's now in Port Darwin looking for something good to put his money into—at least he was looking when I crossed his track, but now I fancy he has finished his search and will be Graham's mate. He seems sweet on it, and is to give me an answer in a day or two. It'll be rather odd if Bob, who came to see a prospective mate, finds two."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Well, simply this: He's very fond of a young lady here, and I have a notion you'll be happy to hear it."

"Why? This is getting exciting."

"You remember when giving me an outline of your cruise in that very fine steamer the *Nawog*, you met a young girl on board a schooner, *en route* with her family

to the Kimberley fields. I think you went to the ship for oil."

"What, you don't mean Mary Steele?"

"That same," said my friend.

"Did you say anything to Bob about my having met her?"

"Devil a word, my boy, for I thought you might have been just a bit gone on her yourself."

"No, not that, old man, but I pitied her because of what she would have to endure. I'll own up I thought her a fine girl."

"Ah, well," said O'Donohue, "it's a small world after all. You'll see Bob to-night, for he's coming to the barracks to talk with the pair of us. He's a true blue, and mightily fond of his old pals."

True to his promise our mutual friend turned up about eight o'clock, and when the usual handshakings and personal remarks had been disposed of, O'Donohue, Stanish and myself talked business. O'Donohue introduced the matter with—

"You must know, Stanish, that Alf was my fellow-agent in that affair of the Waterhouse," which gave me an opportunity of opening matters up still more by telling our visitor and old crony how pleased I was to hear of his good fortune.

"It's a bad thing to give advice," continued I, "but if I was doing so I'd say, 'Stanish, you go bald-headed for that station opening.'" And then by way of seeing if he would come "to" if I fired a shot across his bows, I added, "And if so, you can't do better than take a wife with you, if you can chance on the proper sort."

Just then O'Donohue suddenly remembered he had to attend to a small matter and asked to be excused, adding—

"I'll be back in a jiffy."

"I think I'll try it," said Stanish, referring to the squatting offer. "O'Donohue gives Graham a fine name, and he's not the man to talk nonsense when it means business. And as to your suggestion about getting married—well, that's just where the whole matter hinges. To be frank with you, Alf," continued he, "I'm engaged to a young woman in Darwin, and if she's game to face the life at the Waterhouse, I'm going there."

"And if it's a fair thing to ask," said I coaxingly, "what is the young lady's name?"

"Mary Steele," said he.

"Would you be surprised to hear that I know her—or rather, that I've met her, and, if I'm any judge of human nature, know her. Acting on my convictions, Stanish, old chap, I congratulate you."

He stared at me, and the look asked for more, so I told him how we had met and all about it.

"Put it there," said he, as he held out his hand. "Now," continued he, "will you do me a favour?"

"I will if I can," I said.

"It is this—act as my best man, and as Mary's father is dead, O'Donohue will give her away."

"That I will," cried O'Donohue, who had heard the words as he again entered the room.

"I must be going now," said Stanish, "but I'll see you some time to-morrow with my answer."

"Hold on," said O'Donohue, "we must have a 'smile' over this."

CHAPTER LIV

Conclusion

AS this book is in no sense a love romance, it would be a mistake to give it an ending befitting one by making all I could out of the marriage of Bob Stanish and Mary Steele. Still a word or two is needed before I drop my pen.

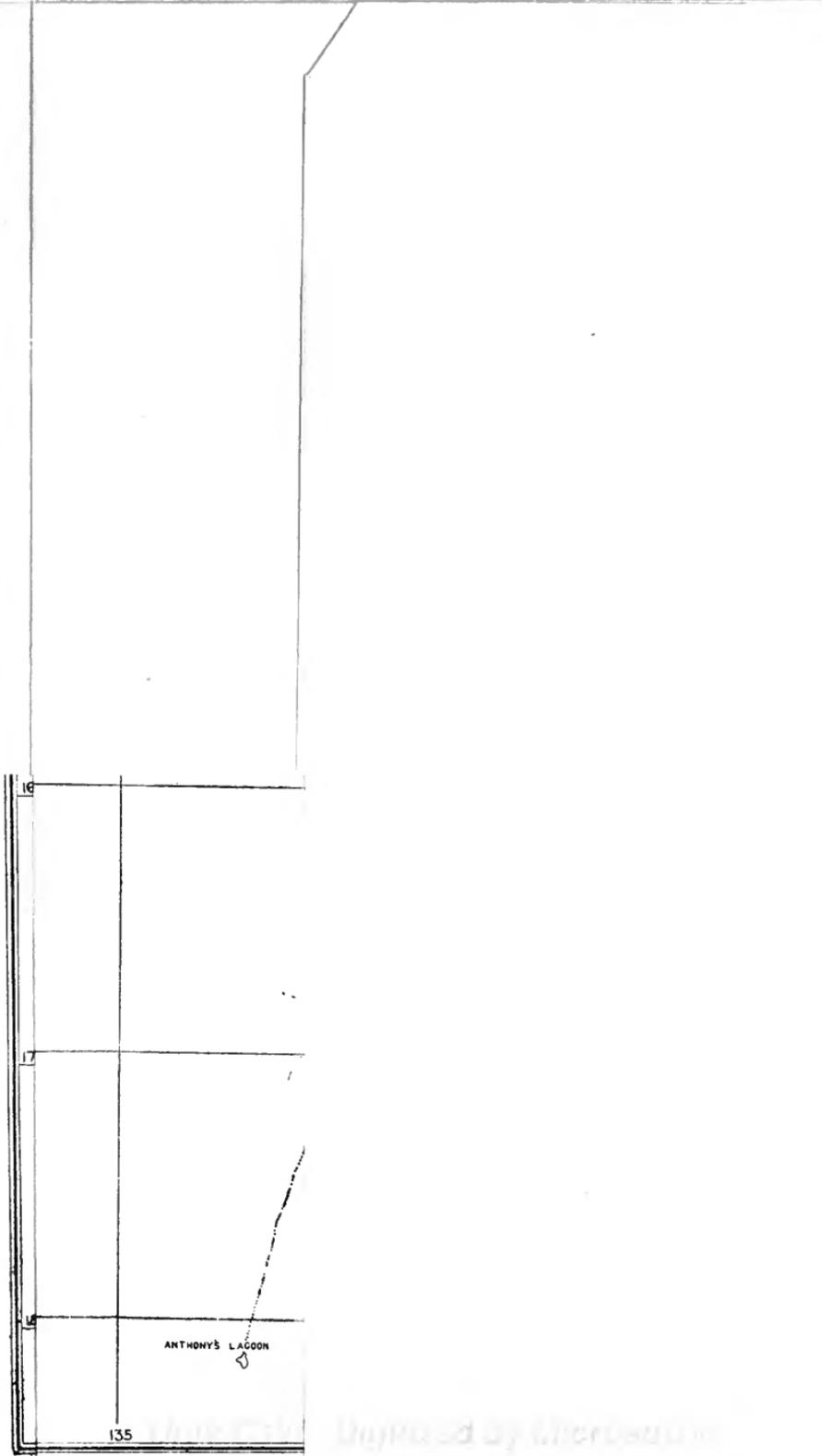
The event was as merry as such occasions should be, and I am sure a better matched couple never faced the duties of life together. Just one little cloud passed over Mary's face, and that was at our first meeting after the interview with Stanish. She ventured to say she had written to me, but had received no reply. I at once protested that I had written—and then remembered I had put the letter in the inside pocket of a jacket I had not again used. Asking to be excused, I in hot haste looked up the garment, and there was the letter. I had forgotten to post it. I took it with the wretched substitute for a post-office to her at once, and she was well-pleased to find she had not been forgotten.

The Waterhouse venture turned out a far finer stroke of business for Stanish than any of us dreamt of at the time, for Graham, who had to go to England on family business, did not return. In a letter to his partner he said he liked the life of the Australian bush well, but circumstances were his master. The full management he handed over to him, with the offer of his full interest if he cared to buy him out. This Stanish subsequently did.

And now I have come to the last words of my book. In these I desire to express a hope that the information given in my introduction will prove of value—that it will assist in drawing attention to that wonderfully rich and varied stretch of country known as the Northern Territory, and help to awaken the enterprise necessary to make it, as it can be made, one of the most prolific sources of wealth, happiness and national greatness that the world holds in store for the energy of man.

And if the free narrative of my adventures by flood and field in any way assists in directing my fellow Australians or others to the Territory from which they are drawn, while at the same time providing entertainment for a leisure hour, I shall have reaped an ample reward.

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ANTHONY'S LAGOON

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