FROM OCEAN TO OCEAN

ACROSS A CONTINENT ON A BICYCLE

AN ACCOUNT OF A SOLITARY RIDE FROM ADELAIDE TO PORT DARWIN

JEROME J. MURIF

This edition has been produced using the original edition annotated and corrected by Jerome Murif, kept at the State Library of South Australia.

First edition published in 1897

Photographs: State Library of South Australia, public domain

The publisher would like to thank the staff of the State Library of South Australia for their work.

Published by haere.net
Auckland, New Zealand
April 2017

Contact us: haere@haere.net

Foreword

I was cycling on the Oodnadatta Track, between the small pub of Williams Creek and the ghost town of Edwards Creek. Battling against winds, slowed down to a miserable speed of 4 km/h, panting, grunting. I was dragging 20 litres of water, and kilograms upon kilograms of food. The sand, the sun, the heat, the flies, and that merciless headwind: it wasn't an easy ride. It was hell.

But I thought about Jerome Murif. I just had read his account of how he had first crossed Australia, South to North, in just 74 days. I was in my 45th day, and only a third of the way. Knowing that he could cross the continent in so little time, 120 years ago, when sealed roads were a distant dream, and when even dirt roads were seen as a rarity. Well, it didn't make me feel better at all.

It was 2015. I had a good bike, I had a GPS, a phone, a solar panel, dehydrated food, the dirt road was easy to follow, and usually of good quality. There were "shops" every 200 kilometres, even though they usually only stocked a couple of overpriced items, sometimes of doubtful use, like this fuel stop only having lasagne sheets. Sadly I didn't think of packing an oven on my bike. But the point is, compared to the ordeals Murif had to face, my trip was a luxurious holiday.

Murif left Adelaide on March 1897 without much fanfare, as no bicycle manufacturer accepted to sponsor him, and he found no one willing to accompany him on that trip. He took 74 days to reach Palmerston (now called Darwin), over a terrain that is considered as more difficult than the Nullarbor, because of the long sand sections, where he had to walk and push his bike for miles and miles. Only six months earlier, in 1896, Arthur Richardson crossed the vast empty flat plain of the Nullarbor from Coolgardie to Adelaide. This was probably that ride that inspired Murif to attempt his overland crossing from South to North, something that had never been done on a bicycle before.

At this time the railway went north from Adelaide as far as Oodnadatta. After that you had to follow vaguely defined horse tracks and the Telegraph line (built in 1872) to Alice Springs, then all the way up north to Port Darwin. There were no towns, and Murif had to rely on the hospitality of telegraph masters and station workers for food, water and shelter when he didn't have to camp out.

The itinerary he was following was far from being random. The railway and telegraph line were closely following a string of artesian springs and waterholes known by the Aborigines who then guided the first white men through the continent.

Murif wasn't trying to establish a record: he took his time and even toured in the MacDonnell Ranges around Alice Springs for a week. This led a number of other cyclists to try and break his "record" just a few weeks after he finished his trip. But the first party failed, and the second party did beat the record only by a few days, after one member getting ill and having to cut the telegraph wire to get help.

Little is known about Murif after his ride was completed. He seemed to have vanished in the anonymous life that he was leading before the trip. According to Jim Fitzpatrick[1] the last trace of him was in a 1898 letter where he complained that "between editing and publishing, such an awful botch was made of the work that I have declined to have anything to do with the printed book".

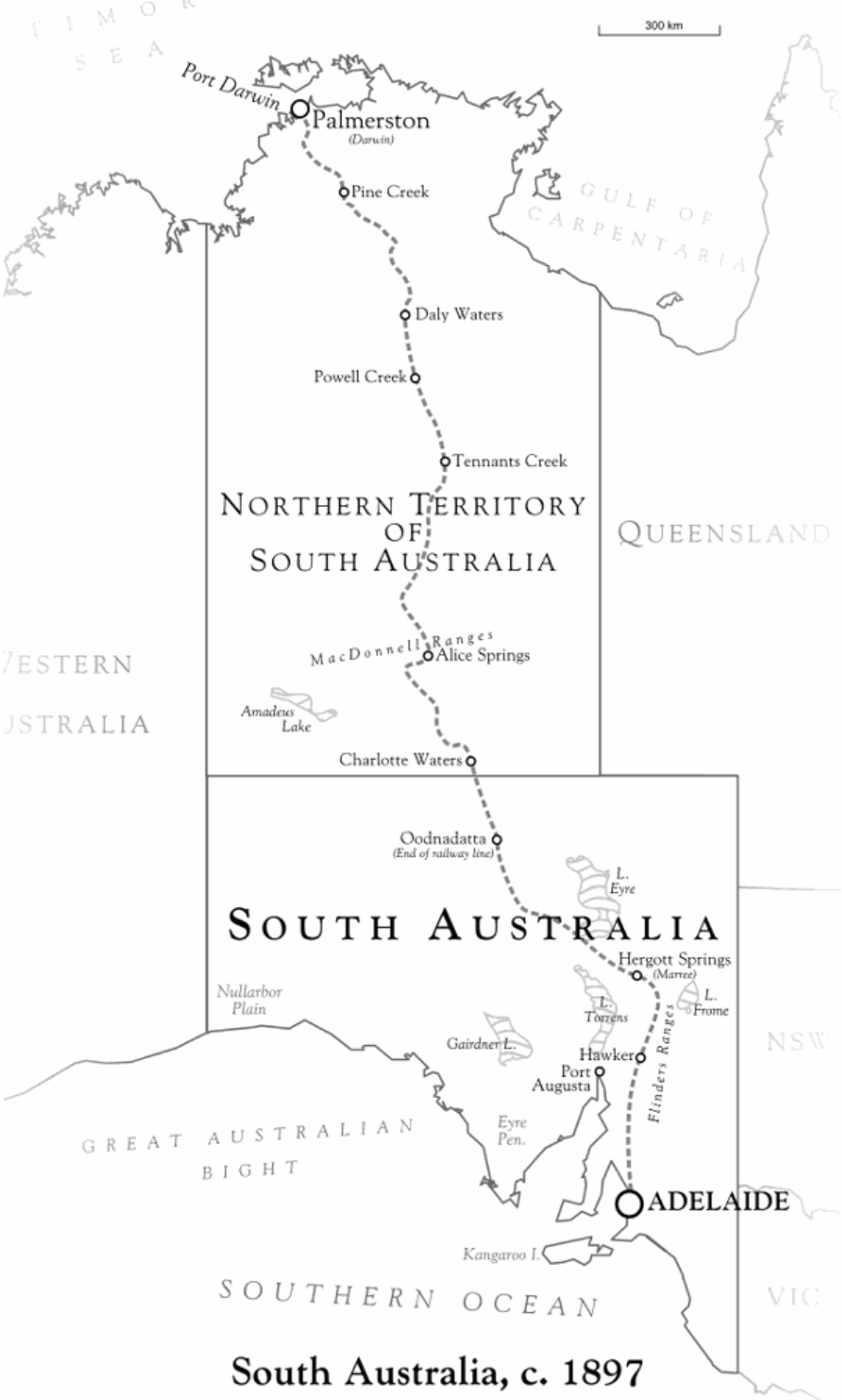
As for me, I made it as far as Alice Springs before I decided to go ride my bike on easier tracks, taking the train back to Adelaide. As I was looking out the window on the vast landscapes unrolling, I was also looking back on the past months in the outback. The trip was hard, but it was also magnificent and nothing like I expected. The beauty of the place is stunning and this experience will stay as one of the best memories of my life. As I was witnessing mulga and

1. The Bicycle and the Bush, 1980

spinifex appear and disappear from sight I thought of the lengthy descriptions Murif used in his account.

It is now clear to me that he liked this trip and its scenery very dearly, and that he was less of a record-setter but more of a traveller, an exploring tourist eager to discover new and exciting places. Just like me, and a long list of people who are crossing Australia on a push-bike every year, something only made possible thanks to the description of the tracks, places and obstacles lying ahead. Just like what Murif did in this book. And for that I am very grateful to have followed his wheel tracks in the sand.

Sylvain Eliade, editor — hære



South Australia, c. 1897

Note: this book has been annotated with SI (metric) units for reader convenience.

A vague longing to do *something* first flattered, then irritated, then oppressed me. In vain I tried to argumentatively brush it aside, to pooh-pooh it, to laugh it out of countenance. My arsenal of trite well-worn sayings (so commonly the accompaniment of a weak argument) was ransacked for ammunition to once and for all lay out this absurd restlessness. For instance, I resolutely endeavored to persuade myself that of course the maxim was true that "There is nothing new under the sun." I argued that that was as absolutely convincing in my case as a Maxim is in some others. Then I went to sleep, dreamily reflecting that *that* was settled, anyway. In the morning, I was witness that one saying, at any rate, was true : I had convinced myself against my will, and was in reality still longing for that formless *something*.

So I made a bargain with myself to strive to give my longing a local habitation and a name—to set about discovering something to be done that no man had yet even dared.

In my quest of a world to conquer, I bought a book of "Human Records" (which is not to be confounded with "A Human Document") so I might know what spheres had been already vanquished.

There inscribed were the names of the heroes who had sucked the most eggs, eaten the most dumplings, drunk the most liquor, chopped the biggest tree, drawn the most teeth, vaulted the most horses.

I passed these dizzy heights with a sigh. They were far above me. Besides, *cui bono ?*

And then, my mind revolving many things, speeding from one to the other, passing as the bicycle-scorcher passes the mile posts on the road-side—

Of course ! Why, what else could it be ?

To cross Australia on a bicycle, piercing the very heart of a continent, facing dangers, some known and more unknown—it was the very thing.

Now, looking back upon the task accomplished, I confess, with becoming humility, that it was not from a splendid devotion to Science ; it was neither to observe an eclipse of the sun or the moon nor to scour unknown country for the elusive diprotodon; not even in the interests of British Commerce (as represented by Jones's factory or Brown's warehouse), but simply to gratify this craving to do *something* before considerate people dropped me out of sight and out of mind—it was simply for this that I resolved there and then to pedal from Ocean to Ocean on a bicycle.

And when, a month after my task was completed, the Jubilee honours were announced I did not search the list in the expectation of finding myself down for even a peerage.

The *something* had at any rate taken shape at last ; in the first blush of delight the accomplishment seemed a trifling matter of detail. To do, and to be the first to attempt the doing of it, was my object. If that object was to be attained easily, all well. If, on the other hand, there were many dangers and they were safely overcome, then better still.

All I now lay claim to having done was the little all I had the desire to do : to travel a bicycle over every inch of the ground between Glenelg, on a gulf of the Southern Ocean, and Port Darwin, on the Arafura sea, a portion of the Indian Ocean—and to be the first to do it. In no sense of the word has my . machine been conveyed for me ; neither has any conveyance other than the bicycle with which I set out borne me at any time over any part of the journey.

Nevertheless in the fulfilment of my purpose I availed myself of whatever other aids offered. Thus I took full advantage of the hotels *en route*; and when, later on, the region of hotels being passed—and

these benevolent institutions are pitched marvellously far out—I did not ride off into the scrub whenever I suspected that people were ahead of me on the track. Not even the thought that those persons might invite me to a meal daunted me. The proffer of a blanket at night had no terrors for me. And if in the morning my new-made friends could give me some fresh directions, checking my own and serving as a safeguard, I thought none the worse of them.

But we are not on the track yet. Not even in the dressing-room.

* * * *

As the first few to whom I in part confided my intention pooh-poohed the notion, I consulted further with no one ; and as I was not in a position to pick up much information concerning the country to be traversed without disclosing plans which were never mentioned but to be laughed at or declared impracticable, I decided to go quietly at the first opportunity, and to be my own "guide, philosopher, and friend."

Still, I was not angry with those who chided me, In common, I fancy, with the majority of Australians, I knew but little of the northern part of the continent ; and I honestly believed that the journey was one which it would be difficult to complete. They said impossible, I said difficult—that was all the difference.

Men who knew the country led me in fancy into the centre of the continent, broke my machine upon any one of the thousand unexpected dangers of the open, trackless desert—and asked me to consider my helplessness.

Yes ; the journey was formidable. It had no attractions for me if it was otherwise. I thanked my friends, began earnestly to regard the excursion in a serious light, and held my tongue.

I smile benevolently now as I look back upon myself of those days. The thing is done, it then remained to be done.

* * * *

Before this time, I had thought of securing a companion to share the venture ; and I wasted a good deal of time and money seeking such a one.

The number of people who had the expedition in mind surprised me—I met them constantly.

"Ah, yes, great idea ! D'ye know I've been thinking about tackling it for some time ?"

"Well, co'on."

Then there was an awkward pause.

Generally I had to see them about it in the morning. In the morning—"Sorry, old fellow, awfully sorry, but can't manage to get away just now. Great idea, though, isn't it ?"

One whom I came to know intimately (we were, and continue, excellent friends) was at first all eagerness to join. But he too gradually cooled off and reluctantly and half abashed, but finally, backed out.

And in his case, why ?

Not because of the expense, nor through reading or hearing of treacherous blacks, of venomous snakes, of alligators and other interesting things we had so eagerly looked forward to throwing stones at. Not because of the certain hardships and probable perils to be encountered ; the likelihood of being stricken with fever ; the danger of getting bushed, and experiencing the terrors of thirst as well as the horrors of hunger (for we knew we could carry precious little of either water or food).

No ; just this, half apologetically said, and then only with an effort that did him credit—"The general impression seems to be that the thing, you know isn't to be done. When they hear of our starting out to try it, what will the fellows say ?"

And what talks we had had about our adventures in prospective ! A rousing change, too, was admittedly just the very thing he stood in need of. He could well afford both the time and the money. An "adventure" he was the one to thoroughly enjoy. But—the smile of the fellows left behind, their laugh and jest in case of failure ; it was more than a sensitive man could bear to think of. And so he stayed at home.

Two could travel in safety where one might perish. If one machine broke down, the other at least might bear food and water to the derelict rider. But if the derelict rider were alone, stricken ill, fallen a victim to accident far from any settlement—

Not a pleasant track—let us seek another.

There was the continent. No bicycle had crossed it. That was my *something*, resolved upon long ago. And if it had to be done alone—it might be misfortune. Who knows—it might also be the other thing !

* * * *

It was, then, to be a solitary ride. But that the *bona fides* of it could not very well be disputed, I had printed a many-paged book, ruled vertically. The headings to the spaces were :—"Distance," "Date," "Time," "Presence vouched for at," "By," "Address," "Departure," with a blank page opposite for "Mems *re* road."

Being well aware that many people would certainly be averse to hurriedly entering their names in the book of an entire stranger—a stranger, too, who must resolutely decline to state his business, his object, or his destination—I determined to call on and

make known my intention to two or three "leading men," foreseeing that, could I but obtain their signatures to begin with, others would be only too pleased, or at least would not refuse, to add theirs to the list.

Luckily the first of the notabilities I waited on took kindly to the idea, and at once very courteously obliged me. To him my thanks are once more repeated; and neither of the other two gentlemen next seen demurred.

Yet even this task was not accomplished without the customary kindly-intentioned warnings. Thus one of the three said :—"Do you know you face Death in seriously attempting to do this journey ?" What answer could be more common-place than mine—"One has to die *some* time, sir ?"

"Death"!—the word, spoken generally with much unction, and I were grown familiar.

Had the gentleman said—"Pooh ! It's easy. You ought to do it without hurting yourself, in so many weeks time,"—had he said that, I should have been sadly disheartened.

* * * *

When in Adelaide previously I had sounded a cycle-agent as to the reward he would be prepared to offer a man for undertaking the trip.

Like the others he ridiculed the notion—termed it preposterous, spoke of crocodiles, and of the rider having to carry a spare set of tyres, bags of flour, tanks of water, perhaps an extra machine. Nevertheless he proposed that the hare-brained unknown one be got to purchase a bicycle (on the sale of which I, of course, would be allowed a small commission), "and should he get through," remarked the agent, with a wink, "I would not mind returning him the purchase money."

"But, stay," he added, as an afterthought, climbing down yet lower, "it's bound to be a failure, and failure does nobody any good, you know ; so I'd rather not have my name or one of my machines mixed up with the thing at all."

As this might be the prevailing feeling among cycle-agents (and I have good reasons now for believing that it was) I determined on acting independently of them also. Than this resolution nothing in connection with the undertaking has since given me greater satisfaction ; nor was anything more comforting during the ride than the feeling of complete independence which flowed from it.

* * * *

I knew a little about bicycles, and did not pick one at random in the first, second, or any other agency I entered. Besides being on the look-out for a good mount, I was also seeking a firm which I could, if occasion arose, recommend others to deal with.

At last my choice was made. I paid the money, said nothing of my plans, and no embarrassing questions were asked.

Being now resolved to take upon my own shoulders all the consequences of failure—if I should fail—I erased the maker's name and substituted my own favorite word "Diamond" in its place.

If I broke down—well, a moral might be pointed on the evil results of riding an unknown make of bicycle. If there came success—well, again, I should have no objection to making my acknowledgement to civil people.

* * * *

The machine I chose and purchased came nearly up to my ideal for this present purpose. Let us look at it.

A roadster ; two 28 in. wheels ; weight, 29lbs ; gear, 62½ ; handy interlocking arrangement ; dust-proof caps over pedal bear-

ings ; bearings not of complicated construction ; tangent spokes ; the sprocket and back gear-wheels well set on their shafts.

I could not find fault with any part of the machine. Its general appearance pleased me.

The new saddle came off, and an old and comfortable one, with an appropriate tool bag, took its place. This tool bag was circular, and my drinking vessel (a "pannikin," not to put too fine a point upon it) fitted closely over its end. An old, tried, and trusty inflator was added to this part of the equipment.

Then I ordered a more than ordinarily thick tandem tyre to be fitted on the hind wheel in place of the one of the regular roadster pattern, and an endless rubber strip to be solutioned on over the tread of the front wheel.

As for the rest I did not look for gear case or cyclometer. If the country to be traversed came up to expectations in point of roughness, the former would be torn away—an objection which applied also to the cyclometer, as the only reliable make I knew of when in use protruded from the outside of one of the front forks. Neither was missed ; and I was glad I did not burden myself with them.

The brake was allowed to remain, and a bell was added. Both of these I intended to throw away when the beaten roads were left behind.

The equipment was completed with a spare air tube, chain-link and rivets, copper wire, file, spanners and plyers, solution and patching rubber, a long length of strong cord, tooth brush, compass, and small bottle of matches.

A pair of luggage-carriers were fitted to the handle bars ; on these was strapped a roll of light waterproof sheeting, 6½ feet by 4 feet, containing a change of linen, pair of socks, handkerchief, soap, towel, a small mirror—my extravagance !—a comb, and three small waterproof bags in which to stow papers, etc., in the event of

heavy rain falling. A leather satchel slung over one shoulder, and so fastened that it could not slip down, proved a handy receptacle for odds and ends. A rug and other things of which I may have occasion to make mention later on were forwarded to Hergott.

I had intended carrying front and back wheel duplicate shafts, but did not.

A tin to hold one quart of water was strapped against the stays, between the top of the rear wheel and the saddle.

A day was spent in riding through the hills near Adelaide with the object of testing the new machine, and that I might adjust its chain and bearings to my liking, learning the while what I could of its peculiarities, if it had any disagreeable ones—in fact, to break it in.

* * * *

On the evening of my fourth day in Adelaide, my very few arrangements being nearly complete, I rode down to Glenelg, obtained the local post-master's promise of a signature, and spent the night at the Pier Hotel. Next morning the P.M. walked down with me and stood on the pier—smiling, I observed— while I cycled down the firm sandy beach into the ocean ; then, having turned about, found myself dramatically waving my hat to the water.

That was the baptism of Diamond in the Southern Ocean.

The obliging officer entered a short statement in my voucher book to the effect that he had been witness to the incomprehensible ceremony (The statement served as a preface, and so was written on the first blank page inside the cover.) And now northwards through a continent.

* * * *

Still having a little private business to transact in Adelaide, I remained there for another night and well into the following forenoon. Then the bicycle, loaded now for the expedition, was lifted downstairs ; I shook hands with the landlady (who "couldn't make me out nohow," I dare say, good soul), told her I might not be back for tea and not to keep it waiting, and quietly pedalled away on my glistening Diamond, without a single person being by to see me off or wish me luck.

But there was the glorious sense of having resolutely acted an independent part. A glad feeling of being alive, untrammelled, free. And so we gaily sped along. It was a very dance on wheels. We are on the track at last !

* * * *

Kapunda, 50 miles[1] from Adelaide, gives us shelter for the night. To Gawler is half the distance. The road is good only to four miles[2] from Adelaide, thence bumpy macadam, with clay stretches, to within five miles[3] of Gawler. To the right, the Barrossa Ranges ; flat country showing to the left. Agriculture everywhere.

Beyond Gawler, I was advised to take the middle one of three roads, known as the Freeling; but after trying it, cut off to the right and got on to the Greenock road. Here was splendid running—down grades, too. Metalled with ironstone—some grand patches. So good that I passed the words "Post Office" at She-oak Log without dismounting to ask someone to sign for me.

About and after She-oak Log was undulating country, with the ranges showing now and again to the right. At a little place named Daveyston, I halted to pick up a signature and a long drink. A resident put down the one, I the other.

1. 80 km
2. 6 km
3. 8 km

Arrived at Greenock. Visited madam the gracious post-mistress, and obtained her signature. Prized, because it is the first in a lady's hand in the book. Then on to Kapunda. Undulating country, with good riding all the way. Arrived about 6 o'clock—hungry.

* * * *

This afternoon I met a cyclist seated in a spring dray, steadying his machine with one hand and himself with the other. They were noisily approaching at a jig-jog. We stopped.

"Good-day !"

"Good-day !"

"Accident ?" I asked.

"No—only this is less like graft. And where are you bound for ?"

"Head of the line if all goes well !"

"Oodnadatta ?" "Um."

"Mean it—on business ?" "Oh no, merely out for a ride," But my new mount had betrayed me to this wheeling Sherlock Holmes.

"Ah, you'll get over that sort of thing by-an'-bye. Just after I'd learned to stick on, I was like you—

The stiffest breeze was never too stiff,
Nor the highest hill too high.

Ha, ha ! Not bad, is it ? But as I was saying, I got over it. The bloom is off the rye'-din. Ha, ha !"

"Oh, come now," I expostulated meekly. "Never mind, no 'fence, you know. Bye-bye." Then to the driver—"S'pose we see if we can't knock a sprint out of the old quad., eh ? Ha, ha !"

And he laughed along the Greenock road.

* * * *

From Kapunda next morning. The road excellent, built up of ironstone, broken small. Gentle inclines, and longish down-grades. Undulating country, fertile and farmed. Before one quite reaches Waterloo, a cemetery is seen away to the left, remindful of a battle field.

The track continues hilly and ironstony to Black Springs; soon after that, at Stony Hut, a rivulet of brackish water crosses the road. Then one gets amongst the highest rises yet encountered. Through these, known as the Black Hills, winds the road, keeping fairly level for eight or nine mile[1], and so into the Burra. Rather a pleasant ride those last few miles, gums and peppermint or box trees picturesquely dotting the landscape, until at the Burra the ruins of once famous copper-mining works displease the eye.

From the Burra to Mount Bryan an excellent level metalled road keeps close beside the railway line; but a couple of miles beyond Hallett, the cyclist will come on unmade roads, so that he will have only fair riding to Yarcowie and Terowie.

Tyre troubles cause a delay between Yarcowie and Terowie. Ahead are cross-roads innumerable, and it being already sundown I reluctantly decide to stay at Terowie the night. 145 miles[2] from Adelaide.

* * * *

A drought lay heavily upon the land, giving the township in the eyes of the skurrying passer-by an atmosphere of even greater somnolence than usual. A church, a store (often also the post-office), a blacksmith's shop, a hotel, a school-house, with half-a-

1. 13 or 14 km
2. 233 km

dozen suburban tenements, constitute a township. It is affirmed that there are inhabitants, that on Sundays they go to church punctiliously, and that on one other given day in the week the farmers come in from round about with their butter and their eggs to the store, and then the township is "busy." Of the other five days there is no record.

An early start was made from Terowie on an absurdly roundabout road to Petersburg—unmade, too, but level, yet only middling for travelling on Head winds, besides.

Breakfasted, and steered for Orroroo; this township appearing to be right in the path of anyone making northwards. Much crossing and re-crossing of the railway. At half-way, Blackrock is passed. A hard, smooth road, running through the fertile Blackrock plains, now withered and parched; high ranges showing afar off on either hand—and so to Orroroo. Thence it is only a few miles to Walloway, where another rivulet is come upon. To Eurelia the road is not good, but it improves as one journeys towards Carrieton.

* * * *

In a blinding dust-storm blowing against us, a spring cart passed, whose driver invited Diamond and me on board. This was the first offer of the kind we had received, and it was thankfully declined.

My voucher-book was being signed readily. Only twice so far had it been presented without result. One poor human agricultural implement looked cunningly at me. A book canvasser had "had" him once, he said, and added "I ain't a fool."

Disaster is a merciless mocker; it deceives its victims into believing that it has sharpened their wits, whereas in general it has sadly dulled them. Here was a case in point.

In the other case a pot boy, the only "inhabitant" on hand, was so impertinently inquisitive that I did without his help. Perhaps another case.

* * * *

The evening at Carrieton was more or less profitably occupied in listening to a tap-room discussion of social, political and domestic economy as represented by seed-wheat. No matter into what by-ways the debate drifted, it came back inevitably to seed-wheat. There was infinite pathos in the tales of helplessness of these drought-harried men.

* * * *

There are abundant proofs as we steer out of Carrieton towards Cradock that we are already on the outskirts of the kingdom of the bicycle. The horses—bony apparitions mostly—have for the machine none of that contempt which tells of its familiarity to the city horse. So the bell is handy. Not so much to warn the equestrian as to soothe the bicyclist's conscience. You ring your bell and by that simple act throw on to other shoulders the full responsibility for all the frightened horse may do.

* * * *

To Cradock from Carrieton next forenoon. Thirty miles[1]. Strong head winds. Near Yangarrie, cross a gum-lined creek of shallow running water. Travelling stock and mail route all the way.

And on this stage a slight mishap, and an incident. Before creeping into a dam for a drink, I hung my satchel upon the fence. Having drunk,' a horse took my notice : it stood listlessly against the fence, on the outside, in a paddock entirely destitute of feed—a

1. 48 km

sun-baked waste. But for the support of the fence it must have fallen.

I remembered having somewhere seen such another animal described as a barrel-hooped skeleton, held together by raw-hide.

In vain I tried to shift it. It quite frivolously whisked its tail—its only token of animation. No persuasions, no beguilements could move it. I was interested—in the cause of science, and of sport. I had inflated my tyres a little, and now desired to ascertain whether a strong blast from the air-pump would throw it *hors de combat*. Visions rose before me. I should, if I could but succeed, tell a breathless people, ever intent upon the amiable pursuit of killing one another and other more harmless things, that when in the desert I had slaughtered every one of a mob of horses with the help of a new and deadly air-gun.

To discover something so deadly—here was a Companionship of the Bath at the least !

Thus murderously inclined, I approached with the weapon. The animal raised its head, cast upon me a look of mingled sorrow and reproach, lazily lifted its upper lip on seeing the threatening inflator, and—tried to eat it !

Of such stuff are the dreams of the bush. Thus moralising I rode off without my satchel. Had to race back four miles[1]. And there still leaning against the fence, apparently unmoved in so much as a limb, stood the animal, a pitiful monument to the appalling severity of the drought of '96-7.

* * * *

After you leave Cradock the ranges appear to be closing in in front. But they are escaped somehow ; and Hawker, 17 miles[2] from

1. 6 km
2. 27 km

the last township, is reached. Of Hawker I have two memories : one of a barber; the other of a "specially prepared" (*i.e.* warmed-up) dinner. Neither, I suspect, of absorbing public interest.

In the evening, a strong head-wind having calmed down, rode to Hookina (9 miles[1]); thence, being disappointed there in the matter of "accommodation," to a place known as "The White Well," seven miles[2] ahead.

Was it to be the first camp out ? Darkness had fallen, and lone travellers who can give no rational account of themselves must ever labor under dark suspicion also. But, at a roadside cottage, the rare bicycle served me as a talisman, and secured me a supper, bed, and breakfast. For the day, 64 miles[3].

* * * *

The road to Hookina goes through the ranges, and for four miles[4] there are rough and very stony hills to traverse. I took to the railway-line and rode alongside the rails ; but the "metal" was destructively sharp-cornered, and the riding unsafe, because of the steep embankments and the frequency of culverts There was also a tyre-tearing levelling-peg protruding at every chain or so between the lines.

From Hookina the track winds through soft but fair riding and level ground, with the high Arkaby ranges keeping well away to the east. Mount Alice shows up most prominently.

* * * *

On examining Diamond by lamp-light—I made a practice of looking it over every night—I was unpleasantly surprised to observe

1. 14 km
2. 11 km
3. 103 km
4. 6 km

innumerable burrs sticking in both tyres. The back one, being of more than ordinary thickness, had successfully resisted their endeavors to get through into the air tube, and the strip on the front tyre, being new, had also dissuaded the attacking thorns from intruding too far.

These burrs, common to many of the agricultural districts of South Australia, and especially prolific where the ground is sandy, are known as "three cornered jacks." No matter how they lie upon the ground, one hard and sharp spear points upwards. They are very plentiful in their season from Hookina up so far as Parachilna.

* * * *

The breeze next morning, though light, was favorable. But the day was Sunday. I debated with myself, in bed, which would be the greater sin—to not avail oneself of an inviting breeze, or to continue cycle-touring on the Sabbath. Being unable to answer the question quite satisfactorily, I compromised, and made a late start.

To Parachilna (40 odd miles[1]): Bad, bumpy road, stony and soft, or hard and guttery. Dined here.

To Beltana (24 miles[2]): Alongside the railway line—on which trains travel occasionally, and even then for the most part only to Hergott. Some stretches of good track, but most of it heavy travelling. Much walking. Some very stony miles traversed over; country broken into low hills.

By way of change, there was fresh-looking high saltbush in the vicinity of Blackfellow's Creek—and also numbers of diamond sparrows. Blackfellow's Creek, a wider stream than had been expected.

* * * *

1. 64 km
2. 39 km

I met the first aborigines when close to Beltana. There were four of them, all females, fully dressed. They were walking towards me; and by way of entertaining them I rang my bell and cavalierly doffed my cap. For my entertainment doubtless they smiled, as only one of their kind can, and made grimaces. So we parted the best of friends. "It may not always be so," I thought; "the painful necessity may arise presently to shoot some of your male distant relations."

Bush country is here fairly entered upon; the wheat-producing areas ending about Hawker. The rainfall is too certainly uncertain further north. To the south it certainly is uncertain also.

The everlasting hills yet last, to east and west.

The night at Beltana; 64 miles[1] for the day; 354 miles[2] from Adelaide. In good fettle and with a healthy appetite.

The rough track had been very trying to my Diamond. But all was well. Sunday cycling, too; yet no accidents ! Resolved to cycle on the Sabbath in future.

* * * *

1. 103 km
2. 570 km

Beltana railway station, 1885

From Beltana Monday morning. Hilly to Puttapa Pass. The latter the most picturesque spot yet passed. Through a jutting rocky point, a railway cutting runs at the base of a steep and rugged hill, and at the cutting's end a lofty iron bridge of many spans runs out across a wide and very stony creek, through whose bed for a mile or so the track winds sinuously; then climbs the northern bank, and so on to country far from good for cycling over.

Saw the first mob of kangaroos—a small one.

Much creek-crossing; also much walking—tiring and very slow. Still, I was in such good condition that I frequently caught myself going at a "Chinaman's trot" where I could not do any riding.

In flat country now. The track (over marshy alkaline-strewn ground) faces towards several low flat-topped hillocks, and passes close to some remarkable metalliferous-seeming ironstone mounds.

Then to Leigh's Creek, at about 25 miles[1]. Here are a railway siding and a coal mine, Adelaide owned, but the prospects are not bright.

In front of a cottage somewhere about here I caught sight of—my first snake. A small one, brown, about 3 feet long. A frocked child was standing in the doorway keeping tight hold of a cotton-reel. To the unrolled length of cotton was attached a crooked pin, baited with a piece of bread. This precocious infant was fishing—when I chanced to come along and frighten away his eel.

On my thoughtlessly telling the mother (who, it transpired, had been having forty winks in a back room) she exclaimed, "Drat the boy !" Informed me that "the kid was always getting 'imself into some mischief—could never let things be," boxed the innocent little fisherman's ears, and took from him his tackle. "I wondered what he was awanting the bread for," she remarked by and bye; and when the child; who had gone to a corner to have his cry out, walked over to bury his face in her lap—"Lord bless his dirty little angel face," she said, as, spitting on one corner of her apron, she wiped the little angel face clean.

* * * *

From Leigh's Creek to Lyndhurst is very heavy road—now soft, now very stony, so travelling is hard work. Thus it was right through to Farina, 60 miles[2] from Beltana, where Diamond and I pulled up about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

An enthusiastic and almost intemperately hospitable wheelman, the only one in the place, made me welcome; advised me of an excellent stretch of road up to Hergott, 30 miles[3] on; closed and locked his store door to mark the occasion of a stranger-cyclist's arrival, and accompanied me for two or three miles[4] along the track.

1. 40 km
2. 97 km
3. 48 km

Presently some railway-workmen's cottages are reached, and here kind people provided an evening meal. And as I started somebody remarked—"Look out for a bit of a rut when you get about 4 miles[1] on."

One rut in four miles ! Yet, *mirabile dictu*, the road to Hergott came right up to expectations.

* * * *

Railway workmen up here console themselves for their miserable portion by giving their residences high-sounding titles.

Somewhere up from Hawker, a row of tents occupy the site of an old camp. A square tent standing at the top corner of the row is dubbed "No. 1, Transcontinental Terrace." A round one further along, "Euchre-ville." Here as everywhere is also a "Belle Vue House;" and likewise "The Shamrock"— *in memoriam* doubtless.

One with the name large-written over the entrance in painfully sprawling capitals is "Marine View Cottage !" A strapping workman was at the door.

"Which way lies the marine scenery, mister ?" "Eh ?" he questioned in return, not comprehending for a moment.

I pointed to the sign and repeated the question. "Where's the marine scenery, is it !"

"If you please."

"Oh, everywhere within a radius," sweeping his arm across the refuse-littered waste. "Marines for yez, but"—with infinite sadness—"all dead."

* * * *

4. 3 to 5 km
1. 6 km

Camels at Hergott Springs, 1886

At Hergott, 441 miles[1] from Adelaide. Bleak and uninviting. Treeless, save for some Government date palms; healthy looking plants, fringing an artesian bore. The hotel people kindness personified. "Spelled" the greater part of next day and overhauled the machine; cleaned the chain, and located one or two puncturettes.

Found awaiting me here some wearables, a rug and other likely-to-be-useful articles ; but hearing of depots still ahead, I readdressed the parcel, minus the wearables, back to whence it came. Although the nights were likely to be cold, the days are very warm; and the bulk of the rug made it "impossible" in bad country. At night time, for a while at any rate, when camping out I would try how sleeping between two or half-a-dozen fires suits me.

* * * *

Oil was to be had at the telegraph stations. (Neatsfoot—I fancy for this hot climate an oil of about the right consistency; sperm oil, such as is used for sewing-machines, being to my mind too thin al-

1. 710 km

together, while castor is, on the other hand, of course too thick.) As I had so far used hardly a single feeder-full, I merely replenished my oil-feeder and left the "reserve tin" behind. I had oiled each morning regularly, perhaps using another drop or two on the main bearings during the day, and had dropped a little on the chain after roughly cleaning it occasionally. Some machines call for frequent re-oiling; others do well with very little. Diamond luckily was among the latter.

The consensus of opinion at Hergott was adverse to the success of my project—for my intentions could no longer be completely hidden. So, rather than endure possibly irritating remarks on the subject, I moved on in the afternoon.

Several people southwards had told me of a cyclist who was coming presently with the object of attempting to ride right through. (It had got into the newspapers somehow—how I do not to this day know.) I was so lightly loaded that few, if any, of them suspected that I was the individual, "misguided," "rash" and many other things. Wherefore to me they laughed more derisively about the coming visitor than they might otherwise have done.

At one place, after obliging with his signature, a postmaster opened his heart to me. (That "somewhere about the terminus of the railway" was my destination I had permitted him to infer.) I ought to wait, he said, till the expectantly-looked-for other fellow turned up." He is bound to come along this way," remarked the P.M., "and—unless you'd rather not, of course—it would be company for both of you."

This officer added, cheering me on my way, that he knew the country northwards well, and he ridiculed, the idea of a bicycle being ridden through it.

Ah ! well, we shall see whether one cannot be pushed through in that case, I thought; and so moved on.

* * * *

The road from Hergott was far from pleasant and there raged that disheartening drawback to cycling, a head wind. All flat country; soft, sandy loam, covered with loose stones of varying sizes known as "gibbers." We shall know them better presently.

Travelled only 21 miles[1], and camped at Canterbury waterhole. Here was a Callanna sheep-station boundary rider's tent—a temporary shelter until the water evaporated; and I was made welcome to tea, salt mutton and—my first damper.

Before arriving at this waterhole I had to walk through a very soft, marshy salt-lake; sometimes having to shoulder the bicycle, and frequently sinking almost knee-deep into the mire. The subsequent sleep beside that camp fire was a re-creation to remember.

At a deserted hut a dozen or so miles from Hergott I met a "hard case" of the bush who had been camped there for three days, and intended remaining there for four or five more. He was "spelling," he told me. I suggested that it was a strange place to recuperate.

"Well, 's this way," he said, in an access of confidence. "I heard ole so-an'-so had sold 'is mine to a swindicate and was goin' to stand a blow-out at the pub at Hergit. I might's well be in thet, I ses; but I found I was a week ahead of it, and now I'm just waitin' here for that ———————— drunk. My oath, it *wus* hard when I larnt I was to be a ———— week out en them drinks; my throat's peelin'. You don't happen I to have ————————"

I cut in that I didn't happen to have ————————

"Then d'ye happen to have a squib ?"—(squib = revolver).

I looked at my friend. He observed the glance.

1. 34 km

"Now, now, nuthin' like that about me," he said. "Fact is "—in another burst of confidence—"I'm perishin' fer a bit of meat. There ain't no harm in *thet*, I hope."

We chatted (confidentially still) about this strange life of his.

"And how do you get meat ?" I asked in my simplicity.

"Why, y' know," he answered with a wink,"if we see a sheep we can't stand quiet and let it bite us, now, can we ? It wouldn't be human natur'." And he chuckled at his joke.

* * * *

A late start was made the following morning. An entry presently made in my note book has it thus : "Plugging away, barely moving, against a viciously strong wind, over bleak, soft, treeless, and nearly flat country, strewed with loose stones, and with a sand-hill now and again by way of change, or the marshy bed of a salt lagoon to wade through"—an experience to be forgotten as soon as possible.

Again : "There is no avoiding the badnesses. The railway line is near at hand. Tried riding alongside the rails—useless, too soft. Between the rails—too rough."

As the wind beat wildly into my face I heard it warningly cry "Go back ! Go back !" and in the lulls it droned and muttered chidingly—I knew not why— "Obstinate, foolish fellow." Whereupon, as I wasn't taking any warnings, I stooped, and in a short-lived sprint exerted all the strength I had to bore a hole through the blast.

This sort of thing lasted to Bopuchie, where are some workmen's huts. Here I was treated to bread and butter and tea by a couple of kindly-dispositioned expatriated women, whose husbands were working further up the line. I was also generously presented with a good clean handkerchief, as I had been heard to deeply mourn the recent loss of my own : the wind had whisked it out of

my pocket. The same night Diamond and I reached Lake Eyre cottages, where were the husbands and others, a "flying-gang" of navvies on the (some-day-to-be) Transcontinental line. Only 54 miles[1] from Hergott. Heartbreaking work. Yet fed ravenously.

After leaving Bopuchie, caught myself doing a cautious "Look out-for the Train," glancing warily up and down the line. Then I recollected that a train came along only once in three weeks, and was reassured.

* * * *

Did you ever, travelling alone, make unexpected acquaintance with a bush grave ? The lonely land has been clothed as usual in "weird melancholy." You are weary, and, perhaps, a little dispirited. And then, just behind a mulga tree, you come upon a mound—and it is the length of a man. If you are very weary you will sit upon it, and take off your hat, and think; perhaps in a minute or two shudder a little. Whereupon you will rub your eyes to try and satisfy yourself that you have been foolishly dreaming. But you will not sit again; you will move on, faster than you have been doing.

Between Hergott and Oodnadatta there are several rows of mounds. They are the vouchers for part of the cost of the at present useless railway line. For typhoid and dysentery played sad havoc in the navvies' camps.

* * * *

Leaving Lake Eyre cottages the track passes very close to the southernmost end of the lake itself : within, say, half a mile. The bed is 25 feet[2] below sea level, and occupies an area of over 5000 square miles[3]. I would certainly have ridden across and cycled on it

1. 87 km
2. 8 metres
3. 13,000 km²

had I not been told by the cottagers that the glaring, eye-paining, glistening sheet of salt, stretching away to the horizon north and east, was merely a frosted-over bog—all around near its barren, low, and stony banks, at any rate. But when the creeks have ceased to flow it soon becomes dry, firm under foot, and smooth—solid and ice-like in many respects. What a skating-rink 'twould make !

* * * *

Stony table lands, wide expanses of level country, support Lake Eyre on either side. Sand, stones, mirage, and sun—these are the "dominant notes" here.

I had been told some stories of the cattle of the region : how, for instance, an odd one had been known to chase a railway tricyclist along the line for miles. Hunting after swagmen, so it was said, was a pastime in which at every opportunity they freely indulged. I was now to have personal experiences.

When a traveller comes within near sight of a quietly grazing mob, the scattered units mass together ; then nine times out of ten the amazed animals race towards him in order to get out of his way. About this proportion of times they decided to cross in front of my bicycle; and the more I endeavored to prevent them doing so, by quickening pace, the more wildly they rushed to succeed.

The ringing of the bell had a more startling and discomfiting effect on them than the firing of a revolver shot.

Not far from Stuart's Creek I came upon a bull lying dead, with his horns deeply imbedded in a mound which his shoulders also nearly touched, his head being underneath between his front legs. I had been on the look-out for this interesting spectacle, of which an explanation had already been tendered.

A "sundowner" was tramping along one afternoon when the bull sighted him and gave chase. The country was level almost as

a billiard table, with the single exception of this couple-of-feet-high mound. Towards this the pair hurried. The chase was exciting. The bull gained rapidly, and was within a few yards of the swagman by the time he reached the mound. Then were some moments of supreme anxiety, till with an extra effort the man stumbled over just as, head down, the bull came charging along, on elevating thoughts intent. But not being in the habit of calculating upon the occurrence of hills, the bull collided with the mound, and broke his neck ! Each district has its own pet class of perjury. In the richer of agricultural districts they lie about the size of pumpkins; in the poorer ditto, about snakes; in the sheep country, about rabbits; here the best liars devote themselves to wild cattle. They all do pretty well.

Occupied an hour as I rode along working out the musical note educed by a tyre flicking aside loose stones. Found it to be a high D. ("Pung" in cycling notation.)

When the stone is not flicked aside, but the machine passes over it, a low D is emitted—by the rider.

* * * *

Road middling to the Blanche Cup and cluster of mound springs. These remarkable features lie about two miles off the main track, to the left. I cycled over—not cutting across at right angles, but gradually edging away from the track on sighting them.

There are eight or ten of the cone-shaped, flat-topped rises, all within a radius of half a mile. Roughly, I should say their average vertical height is twenty feet. The summits of most of them are merely small swamps decorated with rushes and bogged cattle in various stages of decomposition. Little driblets of water trickle down the sides.

Two of them are well worth journeying far to see.

The Blanche itself is an elevated circular pond of good drinkable water. On one side a lip has been worn through the impounding rock, and by this passage the cup gently overflows. The water so escaping streams down the sloping side, and forms into a shallow swampy creek.

The other is locally known as the Boiling Spring. Flowing much stronger than the Blanche, it boils or bubbles at the centre, not from heat, but because of the force with which the water is driven to the surface. The temperature of the water is about 100° Fahrenheit[1]. A circle of sedimentary sand, three feet in diameter, is kept in constant motion around the bubbling centre, and around this again spreads a wide circle of perfectly clear water. Rushes fringe the water's edge, and the whole is surrounded by a rim of whitish rock three feet wide. About once in every half hour the quickly settling sand so accumulates at the centre as to choke back the ascending stream. Then to the observer a big thing in bubbles heaves in sight a low rumble is heard; a periodical clearance has been effected, and the boiling spring boils bubblingly as before.

The surrounding country is bleak and desolate-dreary in the extreme. The average annual rainfall is about 7in.[2] per annum.

* * * *

If one is not on the look-out, these mounds, in general appearance so much alike, are apt to tantalise one. For my own part, moralising upon nature's marvellous scheme of compensation, I found myself adrift. Yet, pshaw ! Bushed so soon—and a rail track within three miles at most ? It was monstrous. Refused to consult my compass; and paid for my folly by some few hours of hard labor.

A boggy little lake of salt water, its supply kept constant by one of the mound springs, first intruded itself; and on rounding its

1. 38°C
2. 177 mm

northern end I was amongst sandy undulations past which I could not see. Then a wide but not gum-lined creek, the nearest bank low, and one point occupied by half-a-dozen blacks' wurlies, like so many boats on end. The further bank was high and steep; and climbing over this I marked a course, which I judged would be due east, towards some bush-like objects in the distance. But these objects proved to be a small mob of wild-mannered cattle, which soon, racing towards me, pranced gaily around with uplifted tails. It is not fair to ask a man to persist in a due east course in such circumstances.

I grew fretful; looked at the time, the sun, and the shadows, but could only make a guess at the east. The guess, however, happened to be correct, and by evening I was in Coward, a township which consists chiefly of a public-house and—an anomaly indeed !—an interesting bore.

The bore at the Coward is situated in the heart of the little township, between the railway fences. The water wells up to the height of a dozen or more feet above the surface, and, widespreading over the end of a six-inch[1] conducting pipe, feeds a tiny sparkling rivulet. This stream runs for several chains, and finally gives back the water to the desert ground.

* * * *

1. 15 cm

Coward Springs bore, 1898

All these artesian waters are drinkable, but more or less brackish. There, as at most of the other bores, blind fish come up out of the artesian reservoirs—fish beyond a doubt, two or three inches long[1], but exhibiting not even rudimentary eyes.

This total absence of eyes is a curious fact in natural history; in the great dark caves of America the crayfish have eyes, though they are sightless. So also elsewhere. But "eyes would be no use to them in the blackness down under," the local cicerone says. Yet wherefore ? Should they not rather be provided with unusually good eyes ?

(Happy thought : when all else fails I will come hither and inaugurate the great Centralian Sardine industry.)

1. 5 to 8 cm

To the Blanche Springs and the Coward (a trifle over 500 miles[1]) should be an interesting holiday cycle-journey for Adelaideans. They could time themselves to rail it back.

* * * *

Procured a fly-veil here. Should have had one before this; my eyes are already sore from the persistent attentions of swarming, irritating flies. Dinner; and then still northwards.

The Coward track, speaking generally, proved bad. Sand, loose stones; very rough, and ill defined. Terribly trying on the bicycle; but Diamond is staunch. We are fast friends already; and in the oppressive silence I find myself familiarly addressing the steel-ribbed skeleton with words of comfort and encouragement.

By the time I arrived at some cottages (The Bedford or Strangways Springs) it wanted only a couple of hours or so to sundown. Beyond loomed up sandhills, continuing, according to local accounts, in "an unbroken chain for fully five miles." As William Creek was my proposed destination for the day—or, rather, night—I went on, after having enjoyed the proverbial hospitality of another "travelling gang" of navvies.

When the railway cuttings were being put through these rolling hills, it was prophesied that in a very short time the loose sand would blow in again, and that its removal would be a constant source of expense. But by fencing off three chains or so on either side, cattle and horses were prevented from cutting up the surface ; herbage grew, and the sand now shifts but little.

* * * *

Here snakes breed unmolested. I saw several as I dragged myself and Diamond along. On coming to a particularly steep hill, I

1. 800 km

resolved to keep on the railway metal, rather than go up. To my pleased surprise the ballast was of the gravelly sort for a few hundred yards, and I was able to mount and ride through the cutting between the rails.

Outside the cutting began a steep embankment, with a culvert so close to me that I was just about to dismount and lead the machine across, when a dark streak, stretching at right angles to the front wheel, filled my eye.

It seemed to me in the shadow (the sun was low down in the horizon, and out of sight behind the sandhills) that a rabbit had from the centre kicked the loose pebbly material over the rails on either side; and not till I was within a foot of the thing did I make it out to be what it really was—a long snake.

I was too close to sprint. Of course I dared not stop. I had time only to mechanically lift on high both feet before I was on and over it. The next moment Diamond's front wheel struck one of the rails, and I was toppling down the embankment.

I was scratched and bruised, my clothes were torn, and I felt (as no doubt I was) pale. But on raising myself my first thought was for the bicycle. It had remained behind. There it was, lying contentedly on the side, with only the saddle and handlebars showing over the embankment. Another yard further, and we should both have been precipitated over the culvert.

With what anxiety, with what eagerness, did I examine my companion ! And what blessings were poured upon it when it proved staunch still—save that the handle-bars had turned a little in the socket. Not until I had taken all this in did it occur to me that I could only limp myself.

Pitch dark now, and no hope of moving on. A little faint, too; yet with no drop to drink. The need to camp; yet no shelter.

But I was callously weary, and without difficulty persuaded myself that I really didn't much care : the morrow would see me somewhere else.

At present I judged we were somewhere about Irrappatana.

We moved on at daybreak and reached William Creek before that depot was astir. Depot ! Alas, there was no bread here and no flour, and no corn in William Creek ! But at the "accommodation house" some dough was standing to rise; it would not be baked, though, till mid-day. My supplications prevailed, however; some of the dough was mixed up into an inedible batter, and cooked with some chops.

Without delay we detoured to Anna Creek, a sheep station, which was reached before noon. The proprietor's invitation to dinner was accepted; for wherefore had I come to Anna Creek ? I was ravenous. And the tea ! Strong, rich, milk-toned tea ! A feast, a feast for the gods !

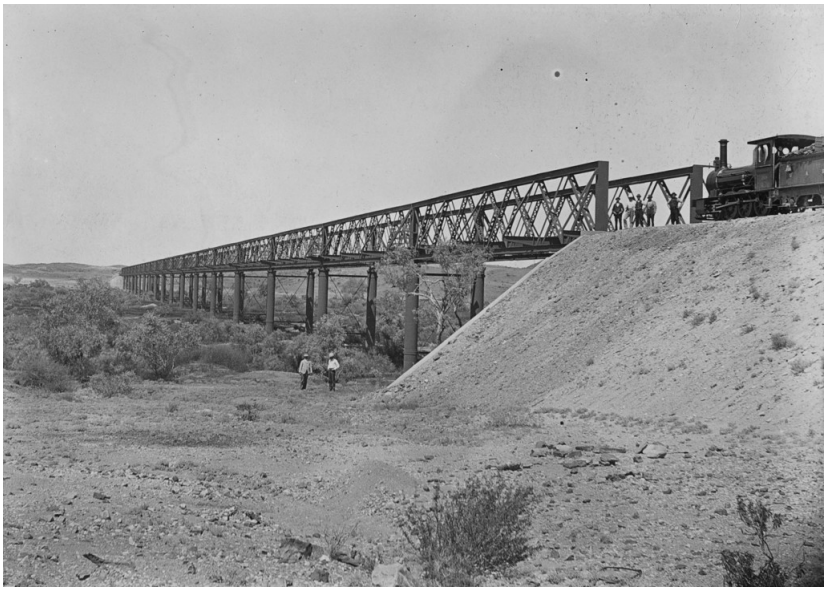
Such cups I had never seen. Cups which, once having been drunk from by a famishing cyclist, would ever after figure in his happiest dreams. "Not so very large," protested my liberal host, deprecatingly; "they each hold only a quart." Yet I remember being asked "Try a little more tea ?" as the meal progressed, and—fancy having answered "Ah, thanks !"

* * * *

At the Anna Creek homestead interesting experiments in irrigation are being carried out. Water is pumped by a windmill into tanks fixed on an elevated platform over a well, and thence circulated through convenient iron piping all round the dwelling house, and into the garden. Fruit trees, grapes, melons, &c., are grown luxuriantly. An oasis in the desert. A fore-runner, it may be, of great things.

The track was fairly good for a few miles, as it had also been on the other side of Warrina; but soon it became bad again, and so continued all the way to Mount Dutton. The wind, as usual, was also unfavorable.

* * * *



Algebuckina bridge, 1897

Towards Warrina (615 miles[1] from Adelaide) there are some picturesque spots along the creek, going northwards. Then the track again becomes terribly stony —so demoniacally vile that, although I riskingly "cantered" over much of it, saying fervently in my bitterness "Get thee behind me," I nevertheless failed to reach Warrina that night.

Diamond was now little less than animate, and there really seemed need of excuses to it for my rough manner of proceeding. It

1. 990 km

might be best for both of us, in the long run, if it was severely tested before we left the vicinity of our cheery friends, the iron rails, I remarked propitiatingly; then fondly fed its bearings (of me and my fortunes also, I reflected) with an extra drop of soothing neatsfoot oil.

We camped at some deserted huts, foodless, yet contented—thanks to Anna Creek. And at 9.30 next morning the voucher book was signed at Warrina.

After leaving Warrina the track keeps close by the railway line; and a ganger, who was starting out on his tricycle, obligingly offered to give the bicycle and me a lift for a mile or two. This was my second and last chance to avail myself of such a suggestion. Of course, in view of my fixed determination, I again gratefully declined to act upon it.

At Algebuckina I said good-bye to the last of the "travelling gangs" ; and a quarter of a mile on led Diamond over the high and otherwise remarkable bridge which spans Neale's River—a bridge said to be the longest in South Australia. Built of iron, 1900ft.[1] from end to end, in nineteen spans of one hundred feet each.

Please don't write to say that the Murray Bridge is longer : it may be.

At Mount Dutton railway siding is a most excellently-finished ground tank of fresh water. The road also from here to Wondellina is excellent. (To this latter homestead I had been advised to now shape a course.) Here at Wondellina are several natural springs of water, fresh as the memory of the station manager's welcome; bountiful as his splendid hospitality.

My intentions were well known now ; and in view of that, and because of the handsome treatment which I had latterly received on the strength of the enterprise in which I was engaged, I felt that, no matter what happened, I could not turn back now. So reflecting I

1. 580 metres

rode to Oodnadatta, tormented by the flies that by this time had almost blinded me. So it was "Spell-oh !" for four or five days to court recovery.

* * * *

Oodnadatta, the (some-day-to-be) Transcontinental Railway Terminus, is distant 688 miles[1] from Adelaide. The township becomes visible, as a speck on a vast plain, long before the traveller arrives at it. It contains, besides a few dwelling houses, a fairly commodious hotel, two general stores, a smithy, and a butcher's shop. The water from the artesian bore, about half a mile out, is quite drinkable, and is said to possess curative properties. A small creek is formed by the overflow, wherein, as the water reaches the surface at a very high temperature, a resident or visitor may indulge in a hot, tepid or cold bath at his pleasure.

Some people have termed Oodnadatta "a howling wilderness." But to-day the wilderness is hidden beneath a carpet of upspringing green.

Camels and Afghans are amongst its distinguishing features. Most of the whites are horsey or camely men. I heard some swearing.

Blackfellows are numerous; some of them are employed to perform menial duties at the houses in the township. Lubras make at the most two garments (one covering the upper, the other the lower parts of the body) suffice for a complete costume. There are always several wurlies and camps of blacks in the vicinity. The employed blacks share their wages, tobacco, old clothes, and tucker with the unemployed; the latter also providing further for themselves as best they can.

1. 1107 km

* * * *

Caterpillars were plentiful. The blacks gather up tins full, and, roasting them, evolve a very succulent dish. A small nut-like root, found wherever grass was growing, was also greatly sought after. As they walk along the lubras are continually stooping, or darting ahead or aside to pick up something—lizards, caterpillars, seeds, roots, eatables of various kinds, which they secrete or stow away in pouches, pockets, or tin cans. The male nigger prefers to stay at home and keep the fire alight.

From Oodnadatta northwards niggers are to be seen wherever white men are, as well as at intermediate places.

The clothes worn by them become fewer by degrees if not beautifully less the farther inland one proceeds.

I am told that the subject of their conversation, and that which causes most of the laughter so common among them, is generally of a filthy character and with an immoral tendency. One would fancy the poor animals could find but little to laugh about in their miserable nomadic lives; but they are so easily made to giggle that one is driven to the conclusion that their natural humour is of the most elementary type.

A council of the dusky ones called here to adjudicate upon my chances of getting through to Darwin arrived at the following decision :—"Wild blackfellow big one frightened. Him think it debbledebble an' run away all right. One time 'nother one think it (the bicycle) debble-debble, and throw it spear."

I had a look at some spears later on, and perceived how easily one of them might be so driven in as to puncture a fellow's tyre.

* * * *

Most of the inhabitants seemed to rather pity my case. They were of opinion I might, if determined succeed in reaching Alice Springs, in the McDonnell ranges-and there find myself cornered. The district doctor (a gentleman well spoken of and respected by all) rather seriously advised me : "Be careful. Think well before you venture beyond 'The Alice.'"

But the time for thinking had passed ; and I left Oodnadatta, though not in the best of spirits, with my eyes still weak, and with very hazy notions indeed of what there might be awaiting me in the country beyond.

* * * *

To Macumba the track, with the exception of a few miles of sand to finish up with, is fair for cycling on—low stony tablelands and a few small hills. The channel of the Alberga River is wide, sandy, and lined with healthy-looking gum trees. Water is generally to be found in the Stevenson River—another large gum-lined creek, on the northernmost bank of which Macumba store is situated.

This place is only 38 miles[1] from Oodnadatta, but I remained here an afternoon and night, as there was prospect of gathering information as to the route. An obliging teamster who knew the country well worked out and presented me with a very useful map.

From here up everyone knows everybody else for hundreds of miles around; and no one has a large circle of acquaintance, even then.

* * * *

In the neighbourhood of Macumba snakes and snake-tracks are much in evidence. Between the Strangways sandhills and Alice Springs I rode over at the very least half a dozen reptiles. Each one

1. 61 km

acted in a way peculiar to its species or its mood, so that the traveller, not knowing in any case what may happen next, has the spice of excitement added to his journeyings. Yet no doubt one might pass through, and see no snakes at all. For many months of the year they are in hiding. The weather and the season must be propitious else they do not appear.

On leaving Macumba, continuing along by the Stevenson, sandy flats and low sandhills were encountered as far as the Government well (The Willow), 14 miles[1] on. So also to the next well, Oolaballana (16 miles[2]). Then very rough stony tablelands again.

* * * *

After getting out of the sand at a point where a branch track turns off to Dalhousie, I came upon one of that station's horse-teams. A midday meal was being prepared. There were two strapping black-fellows and a white boy whom I took to be 13 or 14 years of age. A wheat sack had been laid upon the ground, and on it had been placed a damper, corned beef, jam, knife and fork, and a pannikin. Saying "good-day" to the juvenile, I sat myself beside him. The niggers, gaping open-mouthed at the machine, were squatting in the shade of an adjacent tree. Three quart pots were standing pressed : in against the burning wood of a newly lighted fire.

"Where's the boss ?" I inquired after a few words.

The youth smiled. "I am the boss," he said, reaching an arm out towards a small linen tea bag, then standing up to throw half a handful into each quart pot. Cutting off a few slices from the damper, and sorting out "black's favorite" pieces of meat, he gave a low short whistle—and up marched the two sable attendants. To these he handed each his dole of "tucker"; they received it in sober silence.

1. 23 km
2. 26 km

"You wantem more, you sing out," he added as, taking with them two of the quart pots, they returned to their proper distance.

This custom of handing the blacks their allowance of food, or laying it on the ground and whistling for them to come and take it, prevails all through the country.

I admired this manly child's way exceedingly-In "bossing" them he spoke very civilly to the niggers, in a quiet, cool, masterful manner. He offered to load me up with bread and meat,but as I had resolved to break myself in to going on short commons I would accept nothing more than a couple of apples. The dray, I believe, had been down to Oodnadatta.

* * * *

"It's rough to Blood's Creek. I don't think you'll get there tonight," were the youth's parting words.

And he was right. It was a sweltering hot afternoon. Progress was slow; and at about 20 miles[1] having to hurriedly dismount (for the hundredth time), my left foot came on one of the large loose stones, and turned under me. The jar so nearly put out the ankle joint that I was compelled to camp right where the mishap occurred.

Stretching out my sheet of waterproofing I made myself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. Millions of flies; myriads of venomous mosquitoes. Hungry as usual, and feeling that if I had only one good long drink of water, hot, cold or lukewarm, I could die joyfully.

Waterproof sheeting is not conducive to good health especially if the night be cold. Because of the heat from one's body condensation sets in, with the result that the under side of the sheeting becomes a sheet of water. This discovery I made for myself on arising

1. 32 km

next morning; turning the waterproof over quickly, I greedily licked up, cat-like, all I could of the precious dew.

* * * *

To Blood's Creek Government Bore (38 miles[1] from last camping place), sand ridges and very rough "gibber" country has to be cycled or walked over; but on nearing the creek the track greatly improves.

Thus far, gidea and mulga have been the trees most often met with, though the creeks have almost invariably been thickly lined with box and gum.

* * * *

Camped with the contractors for the bore, and overhauled the bicycle, though all the overhauling called for was the cleaning of the bearings. This I did by squirting kerosene through the lubricating holes, tilting the machine at a sharp angle, and revolving the wheels until the searching fluid had completed its cleansing work.

When the wheels are nicely adjusted, and the chain is at just the proper tension, and everything is running smoothly, it is a mistake to undo the parts A good chain properly adjusted should ask for but very few attentions. I used not take mine off, and only washed it occasionally with soap and warm water—leaning the bicycle well over so that the grease should not fall on the tyres. It worked best after a little greasy residue had collected around the sprocket I tore apart and re-made the joint in the air tube of the tyre, as it had started to leak slightly. Because of the hot sand and the heat generally, the solution in the tube joints rots away, providing a source of much annoyance, as such a leak is difficult to stop.

1. 61 km

* * * *

It is 60 miles[1] from Blood's Creek to Goyder's Well. The "going" is good to Charlotte Waters; thence along the telegraph line for 14 miles[2] through heavy sand, next 6 miles[3] of stony hills, followed by 6 miles of good track over Boggy Flat, and, lastly, 4 miles of small sand-hills. There is a better road to the west from the Charlotte, they say.

The Adminga is reached half-way between Blood's Creek and Charlotte Waters. Hard by the crossing there is a beautiful little pond of clear, cool rain-water —a deep, round hole sunk in the solid rock, with one large leafy tree leaning out over it, and sheltering it from lapping winds and sun alike.

* * * *

We are into the Northern Territory at last.

The Charlotte Waters telegraph station on the Transcontinental line (a large galvanized iron structure, close by which stand many small sheds and outhouses) is situated six miles across the border, on a slight elevation on the north boundary of the stony tablelands. From there horsemen coming from the south can be seen, with the aid of a telescope, while yet they are at a distance of seven miles.

It is no uncommon thing here for the thermometer to register as high as 124deg. in the shade for several days together. The annual rainfall averages about five inches[4]. Many iron tanks, connected and standing at one end of the building, are filled from the waterholes of an adjacent creek in the rare times of plenty.

1. 97 km
2. 23 km
3. 10 km
4. 120 mm

The voucher book was signed, and at once a start was made.

And then a rather unpleasant experience befel. I intended making for Goyder Waters; a track, it had been said, could be easily followed, and so I made but few inquiries. There was a cattle station 20 miles[1] beyond the Goyder—perhaps I could reach even that. It was a mistake, though, to keep alongside the tele-graph line—a sad mistake. For five or six miles[2] I struggled with my burden over loose sand-hills. Surely this was not the passable track travellers had spoken of ! The Macumba teamster's sketch was consulted—why, I had not been on the track at any time since leaving Charlotte Waters !

How far the sand stretched I did not know—as far as could be seen, at any rate. A fierce sun tormented me from above and blistering sand from beneath. The track must be found. I fought through the yielding sand, now pushing and again shouldering and here and there riding my bicycle, in a grim earnestness rarely experienced before. In those first half-dozen miles I had been prodigal of a precious quart of water. Now I was becoming parched beyond endurance.

Fourteen miles[3] had been struggled over. The long since lost. Was even this the track ?

And Goyder Waters ! What did I know of Goyder Waters ? It dawned upon me now that I did not know whether to look for a rock-hole, a soakage, or a creek.

A well ! How we race towards it. No—a maddening mockery ; it is a fenced-in grave ! Did he die ?—

But it is dangerous to think. On, on !

At length, in the deepening haze of the twilight, the real well is seen.

1. 32 km
2. 10 km
3. 23 km

At such a moment one forgets the teachings of experience. I threw myself down, and drank, and drank.

* * * *

And so, though saved, made another stinging lash for my aching back. For I drank and drank until I found myself seized with the most dreadful cramps I have ever had the satisfaction of getting the better of. On trying to rise I was, somewhat to my amusement, unable to do so, as during the tussle one of my bootlaces had become entangled with the hooks of the other, and the recurring cramps would not allow me to reach down to undo it. So I had willy-nilly to lay quiet where I had fallen, ignominiously hobbled and *hors de combat*.

It would not be particularly difficult for one who does not know the country to perish hereabouts. Just take the wrong turning, or meet with a disabling accident, or lose the indistinct track, and in one single hot day the business may be done. Solitary graves are plentiful. When a man gets the bad taste in his mouth, and fancies he hears water flowing ripplingly over gravelly beds, he realizes how very simple a matter the perishing may be.

Towards the end a cyclist would leave his bicycle (now become a burden to him) while he staggered over to search what, from the distance, seemed a likely-looking place for water; and on coming back he would be lucky indeed if he could find again his silent steed. This second search would not be prosecuted coolly, madness would then quickly overtake the distracted seeker; he might drink from and bathe in imaginary streams, throw off his clothes to let the surging waters touch and cool his parched skin, but ever uppermost in his distorted fancies would be some form of his elusive bicycle.

* * * *

Crown Point, 20 miles[1] from The Goyder; much sand, but a well-defined track. The last five miles fair for cycling on; but for nearly a mile along the bed of the Finke River (approaching Crown Point cattle station) is a terribly heavy white sand bed.

After my previous day's experiences in the sand I succeeded in crawling thus far before the next sundown, and remained for the whole of another clay before proceeding onwards. At the Crown Point station I fed, I tear, like a wolf.

How soon the drooping spirits revive ! I set out for Horseshoe Bend hopefully, even gaily.

Crown Point station is so named because of its propinquity to a hill about 350 feet hight, of sugar-loaf shape, surmounted by something not unlike a crown.

West of thiscrowned point is a long, low, stony, and unused saddle; then again a hill of about the same height as the Crown and of similar strata— white and brown desert sandstone. Apparently the formations were one in times long past.

The Finke channel passes to the east of both Crown Hill and station. The river here is thickly fringed with giant gums, which grow for some hundreds of feet in from the bank proper. Swamp gums, box trees, and acacias are plentiful also further out. In width it varies from a quarter to three-quarters of a mile. In times of drought famished horses have been known to paw down and down into the loose sand in the bed, searching for soakage water, until they have made graves for themselves.

Around Crown Point the cyclist need not look for thorns. He will find them without a search.

A marsupial mole (which some of the blacks named for me “el-comita,” others “qu-monpita”) may also be found here. The species

1. 32 km

is unique. It puts in an appearance after rain; at other times it burrows in the sand, and vanishes.

* * * *

Down from the cattle ranche by the river's bed, there are generally gathered a large number of natives, of the Larapinta or Arunto tribe. In the main camp many small fires burn, around which humble hearths the various families find already fashioned their unostentatious and separate homes. They sleep huddled up with the family dogs, close by the fires, but without a vestige of covering or shelter except their scanty every-day attire.

They appear to be quite happy, and are presented with cancerous bullocks now and then from travelling mobs, and others.

Nightly one hears the sound of their laughter, mingled with weird cries, monotonous chantings, and beating of tom-toms, or sticks upon the ground. They think themselves very clever if they succeed working up an echo. When ferreted out, the discoverer claims it as his very own, and the others listen in admiring silence whilst he works the "wondrous vocal gift" for much more than 'tis worth.

I was surprised to notice that the niggers' hands and feet were not particularly large. The heels, though, are roughened, hardened, and split like battered and blackened pieces of corrugated iron. The soles are apparently made out of rhinoceros hide. "Three cornered jacks" only tickle them—even when they happen to sit down on the spiky abominations.

* * * *

One black, an "old hand" at the station, but transported from somewhere afar off, inveighed in good, angular Whitechapel English, pidgin-ised, against the fool blackfeller who sit down alonga here !

Wherefore was it, if he had such a very poor opinion of them, that he remained among them ?

He withered me with the contempt that was in his answer.

"No can make it rain !"

In his country-a majestic wave of the hand in-dicated where that was-if the porter at Heaven's flood-gates went to sleep or forgot to open them within a reasonable time, certain old men jumped up and walked alonga blackfellows' camp, where they called in the aid of eagle-hawk's feathers, paint stripes, many fires and a good deal of fuss. And then—a big thing in corroborees : big one, plenty shout out. After the corroboree the "old men" and the other participators in it shifted their spears and boomerangs to high ground, built mia-mias, and waited. And when they had waited long enough the rain fell. "Sometimes piccaninny rain—one night corroboree. Big fellow corroboree ? My word ! B-i-g pfeller rain."

Should no rain fall the explanation was not far to seek. "Nud-der" (opposition shop) "blackfeller hold it corroboree. Too much big pfeller noise make it, and frighten *him* away."

What wouldn't some perturbed whitefellers give for so simple a philosophy !

* * * *

Horseshoe Bend, 28 miles[1] from Crown Point. Mostly sand : very little riding. Here is a depôt and accommodation (meal-providing) house. The depôt is picturesquely situated in a sharp bend of the Finke River. Rugged hills show up on all sides. In front, by the river's side, a well; and in the sandy bed itself, many nearly permanent soakages delight the casual traveller.

1. 45 km

* * * *

Here it was that one of the encamped blacks on spying me rushed helter-skelter to the storekeeper to breathlessly inform him that whitefellow come along ridin' big one mosquito.

Previously blackfellows had described the bicycle as a "piccaninny engine." "Big pfeller engine come alonga bime-bye, I suppose ?" questioned the blackfellow, having in mind a Transcontinental railway doubtless. "One-side buggy" had also been a native's not inapt description of the novel vehicle.

The blacks (always camped near-by wherever white men linger) are of great help to the whites in dealing with horses and cattle. Their cleverness at tracking is well known. An illustration, out of the way.

At one of the very few houses between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs the proprietor brought three cats—three of about a like size—into the back room; told me the various names by which they were called to breakfast, and then requested me to drop one of them—any one of them I chose—through the window I did so to humour him, and off scampered pussy to a brush-shed over the way. Going outside, after shutting the window and locking the room door, the "boss" called loudly for "Billy." From the further side of the stock-yard's fence came a blackfellow.

"What name that fellow cat make it tracks ?" the "boss" said, pointing to the very faintest marks.

A moment's scrutiny, and the blackfellow replied "That one Nelly me think it." And he was right.

At the Horseshoe Bend depôt I purchased a water-bag (and a good one it was—lasted me all the way through) and a small billy-can, which served my purposes until I reached Alice Springs.

So far the sparse, low scrub on the sand flats and rises was chiefly acacia, of many varieties, while clumps of mulga marked the firmer soil. Spinifex (not of such coarse growth, I fancy, as what in other places is known as "porcupine") was everywhere. The track through the sand gets so badly cut up that when walking one keeps well in to where a thin crust may be left, and finds oneself steering a very erratic course. Beyond the Bend we reach the first desert oak—a very good shade tree, with from 10 to 15 feet of straight stem. The wood is very hard and heavy; one can hardly drive a nail into it.

At Oodnadatta we left the regularly fenced country. Apparently one may here take up for grazing purposes a hundred acres, and use a hundred thousand.

No sheep beyond Oodnadatta either. Beef and goat's flesh is the vogue. The goat's flesh is called "mutton."

* * * *

To Depôt Well, 15 miles[1] from Horseshoe Bend; no riding—heavy sandhills. Stopped at a camel camp. Fifteen miles is not much of a distance certainly; but on a hot day (as all days up in this part appear to be) to not lead, but get behind and push, the bicycle through, with the surety of more tomorrow, and for days to come—Diamond and I agreed that it was a "fair thing."

These drift sand-hills—red, loose, and sometimes very steep indeed—make travelling, no matter how one may creep, very wearisome and laborious. When you have struggled to the summit of one of them you take a view of the surroundings. As far as the eye can see (and, alas ! very much further) an unbroken stretch of the same formation. You wade ankle deep on descending; and when pushing a bicycle up you have to "tack," planting each foot sideways in the

1. 24 km

sand to get the necessary grip. I was glad I had provided myself with boots instead of shoes.

Broom-brush, spinifex, and desert oaks (these at long intervals) alone break the burdensome monotony.

* * * *

Only soon after a heavy rainfall could much riding be done in those sandy districts. Two-inch[1] tyres should be used; inch and three-quarters[2] are too narrow. Mine, as well as being one and three-quarter inches only, were "tandem"—altogether too heavy (or "dead") for cycling over sand. I deflated them slightly, so that a wider surface might be availed of.

* * * *

Picked up a bush culinary wrinkle here.An Afghan, whom I watched kneading up flour preparatory to shaping out a camp-oven damper, made a sodden centre, the curse of many a "bush cake," impossible by the simple expedient of pressing the middle part down until scarcely any centre remained-nothing more than a thin layer, which must necessarily result in a central crust.

* * * *

It is a twelve mile[3] stage from the Depot Well to Alice Well, through much sand. The Hugh River crosses the track in half-a-dozen places.

In the afternoon, when within a few miles of this Well, I came unexpectedly upon a loaded waggon stuck in one of the last crossings of the Hugh. A very steep bank rose at the farther side, up

1. 50 mm
2. 44 mm
3. 12 km

which the horses had been unable to pull their load. The harness was lying on the ground, piled up; but there was no sign, except tracks, of the horses or their drivers. I coo-eed and mounted on top of the load to look around—and then, in the midst of this desert, from the interior of a coverless box, embedded between two flour bags, smiled up at me seductively a dozen or more beautiful, although quite rotten and shrivelled, apples ! I lifted one out, and to ease my conscience, remembering having heard that there was a blacks' mission station to the east, stood, and, naturally assuming that the loading was missionaries' property, put down a shilling in the apple's place. But tasting one only was worse than not having any at all; so, coward-like, I sprang from the waggon, mounted Diamond, and hurried away before the temptation to appropriate a down-south shilling's-worth of the luscious (because so rotten) fruit became irresistible.

At the Alice is another "accommodation house," however I did not need to visit; for the horse drivers, from whose waggon I had been tempted to take the shilling's-worth of apples, were here giving the horses a "spell." They fed me liberally; but I said nothing to them about the apple.

The Hugh is a very large, sandy-bedded creek. The banks are heavily timbered with massive gum trees. Good camel and horse feed grows in this part of the country—a species of acacia, and a succulent sage-bush-like herb.

* * * *

To Francis Well, the next 20 miles[1], is mostly through sand. Here are some niggers who keep the troughs full of water on the chance of passing teamsters supplying them with tobacco or small lots of flour. The mail passes every three weeks, once going down to Oodnadatta, the next time returning to Alice Springs; and the mail horses for the change are running here.

1. 32 km

The well, sunk at the junction of the Francis Creek and the Hugh, contains beautiful fresh water. Black cockatoos flutter among the branches of giant gums which mark the meeting of the waters-flutter and squawk incessantly. And now and again too, one catches sight of the gaudier galah or the gay ring-necked parrot.

At one of these wells the bucket was too heavy for me to land unaided from the deep bottom. Here was another annoyance, if nothing worse. I was desperately thirsty. The water glittered tantalizingly in sight. Ha ! An empty bucket at the surface. I half-filled it with stones, and it obligingly went down and gave me all the assistance I wanted in weighing its companion up. Afterwards, at shallower wells, I tied the cord I carried to my billy-can, and so supplied my modest wants.

* * * *

By climbing the higher of the hills which are to be seen after you pass Francis Well, the remarkable column known as Chambers' Pillar rises afar off in the midst of sandhills to the west It looks like a mighty furnace-stack built upon a hill top : the hill about 100 feet high, the Pillar another hundred. But the soft desert sandstone of which it is composed is fast wearing away. This still majestic landmark, a solitary sentinel guarding the heart of a continent—its days are numbered in the book of Time.

* * * *

Camel train at Farina, 1928

Camels do nearly all the carrying in this country; and at Francis Well a caravan was camped. A white man was in charge. I do not know how the stranger fares at the hands of an Afghan, but the few white men I met along the road at halting places between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs were without exception most generously hospitable and most kindly-dispositioned. All did what they could—by more or less clear directions anent the route; by supplying me with food and inviting me to "spell" with them if they were "spelling"—to make my journey a partly enjoyable as well as a successful one. I gratefully admit how largely I am indebted to one and all of them.

From Hergott to Alice Springs the population is grouped under three generic headings—"Whites," "Afghans," and "Blackfellows." The loftier Afghan sometimes scornfully denies that he is of our color, have heard it asked of a Jemadar—" What name fellow drive so-and-so's camels along to Birdsville ? Whitefellow ?" and I have heard him answer : "No, not whitefellow. Afghan-man boss go las' time." Beyond the MacDonnell Ranges the Afghan and his camel disappear, and are neither seen nor heard of more. There is

a no-man's land; then, further northward, the vacant place is filled by Chinamen.

It is both interesting and amusing to listen while Afghans and blacks or blackfellows and Chinamen converse. Not that they make a practice of so indulging; there are entirely too many vernacular difficulties in their way.

One such attempt at conversation was suggestive to me of two blind men who, getting drunk together, led one another up wrong turnings, until, after a final and protracted endeavour to get back to anywhere near the starting point, they found themselves both hopelessly lost.

Each has a way peculiar to his class of directing that luckless traveller who may be so ignorant as to make enquiries of him.

You ask an Afghan how many miles it is to a certain place. He slyly leads you on to make a guess for yourself-and at once cheerfully agrees. Yes, ten mile," or whatever it may be the other has suggested.

The blackfellow tells you vaguely that the certain place is "L-aw-ong way," "Ova that a way," or "Byen bye you catch 'em all right."

The Chinaman listens very politely to all the questions you put to him, and then remarks with his most guileless smile, "No savee."

Still some white men's directions are not very lucid. One, for example, will say, "When you come to there look out for a small stony hill *to the right*," waving, as he says, the left hand from him. Also East is spoken of when West is similarly indicated. Others, again, expect a fellow to perform mental gymnastics. One will clear and level a small space upon the ground to serve as a blackboard. He begins, "Now, we'll put it, here's North—" and draws a line pointing due South.

* * * *

Mount Breadin's Dam is another 10 miles[1] from Francis Well. The track is fair for cycling over. Camped somewhere in the scrub. Dry sand makes a fairly comfortable blanket.

Desert oaks had for the last few days been frequently met with, growing singly or in groves. The wind soughs through the foliage—like the music of rushing, seething water in some distant creek.

Water, always water ! Thitherward one's thoughts here ever fly; upon memories of it one lingers with the utmost fondness.

As I struggle on and on, deeper and deeper into the toils of the desert, there grows upon me a morbid dread of running short of water. To have it was my greatest craving; to have plenty of it my chief aim.

The wind is mostly in my teeth, but that is of small consequence now that I am content to creep over these interminable wastes.

Everybody carries a bottle of eye-water. Sore eyes are very prevalent in this sandy country. The flies had it pretty well all their own way with me down by the Goyder; so now I also have had to procure a small bottle. A depôt would not be a depôt without a stock of it.

By noon Diamond had borne me to the Deep Well and its "accommodation house." Having obtained some provisions, we pushed on and camped that night some 15 miles[2] ahead. Deep Well is in flat sandy country, in a valley of the James Range. As it is about 200 feet deep, the water is drawn by bullocks attached to a "whip." The surrounding country is lightly stocked with cattle and goats.

1. 16 km
2. 15 km

The well itself is rented from the Government, and a small charge is made for the water.

Between here and Alice Springs another well is badly wanted. Another well—or, better, two. This absence of, or long distance between, waters is a well-founded matter for complaint with teamsters or team workers, and must impose great hardships on anyone whom business—or "eccentricity"— may prevail on to travel hither.

At the very best the life of the teamsters on these far-inland tracks is full of misery and hardship. That anyone should voluntarily go overlanding they cannot comprehend. Here I am asked in astonished curiosity what I am going through the continent for. It must be for a bet ! I can only answer that I am going with much the same object in view as a hen is said to have when she walks across a road—just to reach the other side.

* * * *

The flies refrained from tackling a couple of very highly-greased aboriginals whom I spoke to at the Deep Well. They had burnished themselves with a thick oil, derived from animal fat, no doubt. Each on-coming fly, when within six inches[1] of the glossy surface, shot off at a right angle, as though it had run its head into an invisible stone wall. Now and again one could be seen to drop slightly, as if stunned. I do not think the oil-skin they wore was of good quality.

This couple were disposed to approach too unpleasantly close whilst I was re-inflating one of the tyres. Suddenly undoing the pump, I vigorously squirted fresh air at them. The blast pierced the special atmosphere in which they had so long moved; the fresh air came as a shock to them, and they were careful not to venture within range of so deadly a weapon any more.

1. 15 cm

The flies, I think, trouble the blackfellows more than the whites. A blackfellow's hand is constantly passing across his face to drive the pestering things away; or they protect themselves by starting a small fire and sitting at the smoky side of it.

* * * *

From the Deep Well, sandhills and sandflats extend northwards for about 20 miles[1]. Then a large range is encountered, through which the cyclist may ride until he reaches a steep incline well known as The Pinch. Here the track goes over a high ridge by way of a narrow cutting through the rock.

Granite hills now hem us in, but soon we enter a narrow pass between two long and wall-like rock formations. This is Hell's Gate. We hurry through. The track now passes over well-grassed sandy flats, which make good riding. At about eight miles[2] a big hill rises to the right. Opposite a pad branches off to the left.

A welcome break, guiding the thirsty or curious follower to the rockhole, the Ooriminna. Right into the heart of a range this pad takes one. Very soon the cyclist will find either leading or pushing his machine to be out of the question. However others may manage (for the bicycle will be everywhere in time), I stooped and shouldered mine. And how its bright parts sparkled with ill-contained inward joy. I persuaded myself, whenever it was thus borne along the tedious way ! Now, with it held aloft, I walked or scrambled and climbed over the last and rougher part of the two miles to the water.

* * * *

Very weird is this Ooriminna. It is a citadel of Desolation strongly guarded ; and how the hole was first discovered must for

1. 32 km
2. 13 km

ever be to us a mystery. Judging from the surroundings, horses or men could hardly have thought to find water here. And but for water what man or beast would pierce these solitudes ?

The hole is formed in an extremely rocky gorge of the range. Huge boulders heaped up in strange fantastic shapes, the counterpart in miniature of castles, fortresses, and towers, stand gaunt and frowning, or threatening to fall precipitately, above, below, and on the more open side. The hole itself is almost a circle; it is probably 20 feet in depth and 25 feet across. Above it, at the back, always in deepest shadow, are several small caves, wherein are native drawings—rude as the scribblings of a schoolboy in his snatched moments—of snakes and hands and things beyond this pen's power to name. From over these caves the water falls when the rains come.

The rocks are an unkindly-looking grey, spotted mixtures of granite, quartz, and sandstone.

Still higher up the quickly-rising gorge is a second rockhole, a smaller one. Approaching from the southern entrance I first came on this one—inaccessible to horses and camels—and only saw the larger rockhole as I descended, with bicycle still shouldered, trudging on to strike the road which leads to Alice Springs, from which this Ooriminna pad loops out and back again.

* * * *

After getting clear of the Ooriminna rocks there are four or five miles of sand, low lying between the ranges; and now, at last, the cyclist finds awaiting him a splendidly smooth and hard clay flat, stretching right away for over 20 miles to the already faintly outlined MacDonnell ranges.

The track soon enters and winds through densely packed and tropically-foliaged scrub, with here and there a small clear space suddenly opening out in front. At the moment of entering each of these recurring spaces one may discern the fast uprising and dark-

ening blue of distant mountains—and again the obscuring scrub envelopes bicycle and rider.

After the stories he will have been told, the cyclist, should he be a stranger and alone, will surely throw a glance to one side and to the other—ahead, too, as he turns each of the numerous sharp angles—in half-timid and half-hopeful expectation of seeing start out or up to intercept him a score or two of spear-brandishing and yelling bogie men. And he will almost certainly be disappointed.

* * * *

One who comes upon this mountain wall from the long plains of the south cannot with a single sweep of the eye take in its mightiness. To right and left it holds its course until its purple outlines are bathed in haze, become a mere faint streak, and finally are blotted out. But far behind that gaudily-tinted curtains of sky, which forms the strange horizon of these inlands, this range extends, a steep, austere wall of rock, rising almost perpendicularly from the plain four hundred miles[1] from east to west.

A gap in this mighty wall of rock becomes clearly defined by the time one reaches the bank of a wide creek, with a bed of white sand, which takes its course in the heart of the ranges, and is well known as The Todd. Following up this watercourse for a few miles, the gap through which it comes, the Heavitree, is reached.

The distance through the Heavitree is about 200 yards. The creek's sand-bed spreads right across between the high, bare, sharply-cut mountain sides. The road crosses the Todd at the same time as both pass through the Heavitree Gap; then runs along by its eastern flat bank among the ranges, until three miles onward the buildings at Alice Springs township come into view.

1. roughly 650 km

* * * *

Alice Springs Telegraph Station, 1900

A sheltered, peaceful, cosy-looking place, this isolated Alice Springs. On a flat, with large gums scattered through and all around it, and mountains towering up a very little distance off on every side. There are two clusters of houses. One comprises the hotel-cum-brewery, a smithy, and a general store; the other can boast of two stores, a harness-maker's, an often-vacant butcher's shop, and a private dwelling-house. Both clusters are snugly ensconced, hidden among the very numerous gum trees with which the whole flat is dotted; between them some particularly high and shady trees give shelter to the township stock. Cattle are ever to be seen reposefully cud-chewing during the hotter portions of the semi, tropical days.

All shade and silence and tranquility ! It seemed as I came upon it to be the veritable "Sleepy Hollow" of romance, with appropriate Catskill-y surroundings, too.

The supplies for Arltunga goldfields, the mica fields, neighboring horse-station and cattle ranches, and the telegraph stations up north, all pass through here.

It is a terminus of townships; beyond it lies the undeveloped.

* * * *

Arltunga is only in its earliest infancy, and is sadly handicapped. But then one is assured "There's any Scotch quantity of reefs about," and "The country hasn't been half prospected yet." Country, by the way, never is, it seems.

The mica field, on the other hand, arrived some time back at a working age. It has, as it were, bought its shovel and done a little towards paying for it. Some mica of good quality, and in exceptionally large sheets, too, is to be had.

I know little or nothing about the value of a mica claim; do not even know whither when raised the shiny transparency goes. Much is, I know, used for insulating purposes on electrical machines, but; in such cases only small washers are required as a rule. As to the larger blocks, so attractive to the eye when prepared for exhibition, ignorance possesses me.

If one has the inclination one may, however, learn a great deal about it, if one likes to run up to Alice Springs. In search of information (and no policeman being handy), I approached a prospector. He was an encylopædia on the subject. Within five minutes I knew that lawyers now-a-days wrote out their wills and other people's on mica because it will not burn, and that lanterns for enclosing electric arc lights are fitted with the same material in place of glass, the heat (sometimes reaching as high as 10 or 12 horse-power) emanating from the electric light being altogether too fierce for combustible glass to withstand ! If I had stayed another day in Alice Springs, I should have written a treatise on "Mica and its Uses."

* * * *

The telegraph station is a mile and a half beyond the Alice township, and with its substantial roomy stone buildings and outhouses makes up another little township of itself, Near the station there is in the Todd a very large waterhole, which contains a sufficient permanent and unlimited supply of fresh water to deserve the name of spring. There are also a couple of wells on a bank of the creek; the water of one of them is used for gardening purposes, the others, I was told, is almost salt.

The flat around the station is, like nearly all the flats within the ranges, covered with saltbush and other stock-fattening growth. Grasses of many valuable kinds flourish thickly in the hills and gullies—in fact, no better limited tracts of pastoral count could one wish to see than are to be found within and in the neighborhood of these MacDonnell Ranges.

The climate, too, is nearly all that could be desired throughout the greater part of each year. The days are warm, the nights cool—a little too much warmth sometimes, at others a little too much cold.

White people seem to live there as much for the purpose of making strangers welcome as to amass money in a leisurely fashion, and black people are more plentiful than gooseberries. Physically the natives to be seen about are very good samples of aboriginalty. As at Oodnadatta, the female blacks do most of the washing and general domestic work for the townspeople, and of course the male blackfellows are invaluable to those of the score of settlers who do much dealing in horses or cattle.

In this quaint spot, and amongst this hospitable community, I remained for several days. There were many "gaps," sheltered waterholes, and other interesting spots to be visited, and every man in the place came forward with hearty offers to be my cicerone. Having been so long unused to opportunities for gormandizing—unused, too, to sleeping between sheets on flock mat-

tresses—the hotel and those good things which it contained exercised strong magnetic attractions.

Inquiries about the road ahead were pursued diligently, and an operator at the telegraph station (obliging and considerate, as they all were) sketched out for me an artistic and lucid plan of the route so far as Barrow Creek. Armed with this plan, and loaded with provisions, the "condition" I had put on during my few days' stay, a water-bag, a quart pot, tools, and various other things, including a light parcel of meat extract, Diamond and I one fine forenoon started out over the mountains, thence on to the exterior desert, with the enticing prospect of I-didn't-know-what before me.

Having come so far without hurt worth speaking of, and with the kindest words of encouragement from the people here, I felt sanguine of being able to make a fair show at the business thus far only half transacted.

* * * *

The township was out to say good-bye ! Of the number was the telegraph master, a genial officer who, in addition to controlling this most important repeating station on that Transcontinental line which links Australia and Europe, has acquired during a long residence a profound knowledge of the aborigines of Central Australia, their languages, their customs, and their folk-lore. He had with him his camera ; and later on, when (myself all unconscious of it) "Murif's Ride Across Australia" headed many a paragraph and sketch, there appeared in one of the Adelaide papers, beneath a drawing, this brief account, reproduced here as showing how others on the scene viewed the enterprise at this stage, after the capabilities of the machine had been in part demonstrated. It is described as the expression of "Our Alice Springs correspondent":

"The above snapshot was taken on Monday morning, April 13, just as Murif was about to begin the second half of his great

undertaking. Up to that date he had travelled over 1,130 miles[1], the latter part of the journey being anything but pleasant from a cyclist's point of view. There were many obstacles to overcome in the shape of miles of rough stony road, especially the "gibbers" near Charlotte Waters. Three-cornered Jacks are another enemy to the cyclist; also miles of sand, which affords splendid exercise and gave Murif a chance to develop the muscles of his arms by pushing his machine, it being impossible to pedal over the sand.

"Murif's greatest piece of luck was noticed by me whilst out riding some forty miles[2] from here. I was looking down at Murif's track, and saw where he had left the road to escape a stump and ran across a piece of brandy case with three large nails standing point upwards. His tyre missed these by half an inch. After passing an obstacle of that description, his luck must carry him over the remaining thousand odd miles safely.

"There are still many dangers he will have to steer clear of whilst travelling north of here. Stumps overgrown by grass will be one of his greatest enemies. A hard collision with one of these would mean serious damage to his machine, and the distance between the telegraph stations—the only place where he could repair a bad break—being some 200 miles[3], a mishap would prove serious to him. In places above Barrow's Creek, and *en route*, he will find the spear-grass very troublesome, and a cuirass would prove very beneficial to him while travelling through it to keep the seeds, which are long and very sharp, from penetrating his body.

"Both Murif and his machine were looking in the best of trim. On leaving here he was carrying a fair amount of dunnage, including waterbag, &c. The quartpot strapped underneath the saddle whilst travelling does duty as a storage-room for his tea and sugar. On his back he carries a small knapsack full of provisions. On his belt he has a small pouch for pipe, tobacco, and matches. He

1. 1,820 km
2. 64 km
3. 322 km

smokes very little during the day, and when short of water dispenses with the pipe until such times as he can afford to indulge freely. He converts his lampstand into a rack for his revolver, which article all travellers north of here carry, although it is some years since the natives attacked a white man on the road. However, prevention is better than cure.

"Murif, unlike most cyclists, prefers to travel in loose pyjamas, using clips, rather than the knickers, the former being cool and comfortable for this semi-tropical climate."

* * * *

Myself, writing from Alice Springs, begged for assistance "to give expression to my deep feeling of gratification for the many kindnesses I had been the recipient of on the road, They are thorough white men up this way—the most generous-hearted, the kindliest, the bravest I believe any country in the world could produce. Knowing them, one realises of what noble stuff our pioneers are made."

Now I call at the telegraph station to try and express my thanks to the last of the men—the men out back who know and show what brotherhood is; wheel thoughtfully through the ranges 14 miles[1], and ——

* * * *

As Diamond and I passed into the heart of the land we picked up a great deal of information regarding the most suitable equipment for the journey. Pretty well everyone had something to suggest.

"Ha ! yes," said one, "the thing is to keep up your strength, and for that there's nothing like good sleep."

1. 23 km

So I should have carried an inflatable mattress and pillow—a simple affair, planned on the pneumatic principle, to be pumped in every night at bedtime.

A shot gun or a rifle—"never can tell, you know."

A kodak—"That would have kept your mind occupied."

A tent—"Something light, of course, and easily rigged."

A sextant, quadrant, or theodolite—the suggestors weren't quite sure of the differences between these things; all sounded impressive enough. A pocket telegraph instrument.

Cyclist's cape and riding suit, with long woollen stockings—for grass-seeds to hold on to, no doubt.

Aluminium water canteen, flint and steel and touch-paper, a medicine chest (the larger the better), snake poison antidotes and brandy (doubtless to make me see 'em), the Bible or a few works of my favorite author, a small "handy" spirit-lamp, a field-glass, much woollen underclothing, rice, oatmeal, cream of tartar, dried this and pressed that; stock, taps and small die-plate; bombs for scattering obnoxious niggers, a recently-invented apparatus for extracting water from damp earth by evaporation and condensation, sponge for gathering up the dew from the tree leaves, a hammock, mosquito curtain.

And many other articles which I cannot bring to mind just now. The reader is entitled to suggest as many more as he pleases.

But it was too late to start collecting all these things at Alice Springs, so I considered, and contented myself with the purchase of—an ounce of quinine, a box of Cockle's pills, and a quart pot.

* * * *

During the time I remained at Alice Springs I bothered my head very little indeed about what there might be in store for me

in the country beyond. I had previously been led to cogitate over so very many evil possibilities that I had long resolved not to lay myself out particularly to guard against any at all. Had I devoted my thoughts and actions to making certain of all being safe to the end, then very plainly my wisest plan would have been to turn and back. When advised to arrange against this or that misfortune I returned grateful thanks for the advice but all the same trusted rather to precautionary measures inventing themselves, or being invented by other than such a powerless atom as myself.

I placed implicit trust on three things—good health, good luck, and a good bicycle. If any of these went wrong, no preparation which I was in a position to make would go far towards the prevention of very nasty happenings.

* * * *

On resuming, after the welcome interval at Alice Springs, a 14-mile[1] cycle walk through the MacDonnell ranges was the first act billed on the day's programme.

The track winds its toilsome way over the lowest rises and through gullies squeezed between the higher of the rough granite and sandstone hills. Much bigger ones—each duly catalogued and named by somebody at sometime, I have no doubt—loomed up in every direction. Many of the gullies are well grassed. Saltbush and mulga are met with occasionally; and everywhere spring up low hushes of the kinds that are fattening and well-beloved of flocks and herds. Rideable stretches of a mile or so may be passed over as hardly worth noticing.

The hills end rather abruptly; and a thickly timbered plain outstretches itself, extending as far eye can reach. Riding on to it one finds everywhere abundance of grass as well as salt and blue bush.

1. 23 km

There are some open places, but for the greater part of the way to Burt Well (21 miles[34 km] from the range) the traveller advances within avenues cut- through densely-packed and far-extending mulga scrub.

The riding is very fair—a light loamy soil—but a sharp look-out has to be kept for stumps on the roughly-cleared chain-wide track along the telegraph line.

Innumerable small spire-like formations and mounds, the hills of white ants, dot the track, and cumber its sides. None, curiously enough, are known to exist south of the MacDonnell ranges.

Yet what impressed me most during the day's ride was that instead of having entered a desert, I was pursuing a course through country of the best description for stock—only lacking in water.

* * * *

Arriving at a lovely waterhole overhung with gum trees on the Burt Creek (a pad branching from the main track leads to it), I stopped to have a bath and enjoy the cool of the heavy shadow.

It is a law of the overland that a waterhole, unless it be very large or there be others close by, must not be used for soapy-washing. One dips up water with a billycan or pannikin, and, stepping back, should he not have a wash-dish, he washes with one hand. It isn't satisfying, but it has to do.

My waterproof served as a basin. A hole, begun with the boot-heel and finished off by hand, was scooped out in the easily-shifted soil, the waterproof spread out over and then pressed down into it, and—there it was.

By the time I had had my refresher and a smoke I found it very easy to persuade myself that the place was quite secluded and comfortable enough to remain the night at, and I acted accordingly; stocked a supply of firewood in reserve against the chilliness

of coming wee small hours; pulled up by their roots (which I then shook free of earth) a quantity of the plentiful 18in.-high dry grass, and arranged my (low-) downy couch in systematic 4x6 and side-banked fashion in the lee of the sheltering bush to which I had close-tethered Diamond.

I hung up the lining of my wash basin to dry, lit a fire and brewed a quartpot of tea; but not being very hungry did not broach my precious cargo of bush bread and goat's mutton. I had with me a piece of old newspaper, and I read it. There was a little writing to be done, and I did it. A torn garment called, through the rent, for thread, and I gave it some. Then I overhauled the bicycle, and, finding everything as it should be, broke short a piece of stick and discordantly accompanied myself in an "impromptu" —"Across the Continent in Pyjamas"— by thrumming on the front wheel spokes. Smoked. Stood up and looked around at the scrub; sat down and scribbled a little more—and felt lonely as I could wish till bed time.

Before sundown I had watched awhile the diamond sparrows flocking for their evening drink in clustering clouds of dear little twittering atoms. And note, I had begun to tell myself in meditative strain—note how considerate Nature provides for these, even these smallest of her trusting creatures. But a couple of hawks came along, and, swooping low down, pounced greedily upon the thirsting little creatures. I saw no good reason why I should interfere. I gave Nature credit for knowing its business, and guessed the hawks were peckish. Yet, against my reasoning instincts, I threw a lump of wood at one of the murderous, darting birds of prey. The whizzing missile frightened him away alright—and killed about a dozen sparrows.

How very like many great human schemes and systems !

* * * *

But now bedtime. The sun was down, and the stillness was intense. A dim sense of unreality pervaded everything, including even thought—consciousness, the *Ego*. Perhaps it was only through sharp contrast with the past few nights spent talkatively with new acquaintances in Alice Springs; but the solitude made itself felt more oppressively than I can recall it ever to have done o' nights the other side of that reposeful *ultima thule*.

All which trifling details of how I spent one afternoon and fixed my camp I give now, to save, to some extent, vain repetition later on.

So far as "tucker" was concerned, before my own good stock had quite run out I was so lucky as to come upon a traveller (whose business was his own), with his two black-boys, somewhere between the Burt and Tea-tree well. He re-loaded me with all the eatables I desired, and made me welcome to them with the magnificent generosity of the bush.

* * * *

Flat, almost level country extends to a Government well—Connor's—about 23 miles[1] northward from the Burt watercourse. Covering this well, as also those others to be seen still further north, very fine-meshed nettings are hinged to one side, preventing wild dogs, iguanas, and birds from falling in. It is, as till the others are, walled round substantially with upright hardwood posts, sunk touching one another; and it is of course, equipped with windlass, buckets, and a line of troughs. The water is as good as anybody could desire.

* * * *

The feelings of surprise engendered by the sight of such good grazing country, the interest and curiosity excited by the ever-

1. 37 km

present countless ant-hills, the mild astonishment as I looked through the straight and level avenues lined sharply through the mulga (avenues extending so far that their turning points were lost in the haze of distance)—these were the deeper impressions.

But after the first day out from the ranges these feelings in part gave place to intermittently-recurring sensations of a kind entirely new to me. The high hills behind had, as it seemed, shut me off from the whole world of animation. Up to the MacDonnell, if one doesn't get bushed, one expects to meet with people every other day or so; but here, amid the myriads of ant hills and the thick, impenetrable scrub, it is as if one had strayed into a wonderland whose every inhabitant had died and had had erected to him or her a lasting monument.

And I was cycling through the silent burial-ground !

A ghostly suggestiveness, a little creeping of the flesh, an uneasy expectation of meeting with—one seldom questions at such moments what—urged me quickly on a little way, or, again, would prompt me suddenly to stop, dismount, lean over on the bicycle, and with craned neck peer into the gloomy scrub and rather hoarsely invite what might be therein to "come out." Then, recollecting it to be rather early for that sort of "business" yet awhile, I'd laugh shamefacedly, then philosophise a little, as, sitting beneath a shady bush or mulga tree, if not short of water, I'd smoke a quiet pipe. For I was in no hurry, and by no means did I dislike these new sensations.

* * * *

Hann's Range is 15 miles[1] from Connor's Well. Soon after leaving the well dreary open country is met with—nothing to be seen for many, miles but spinifex. Bad riding ground; for where there is much spinifex there almost always will be found very loose

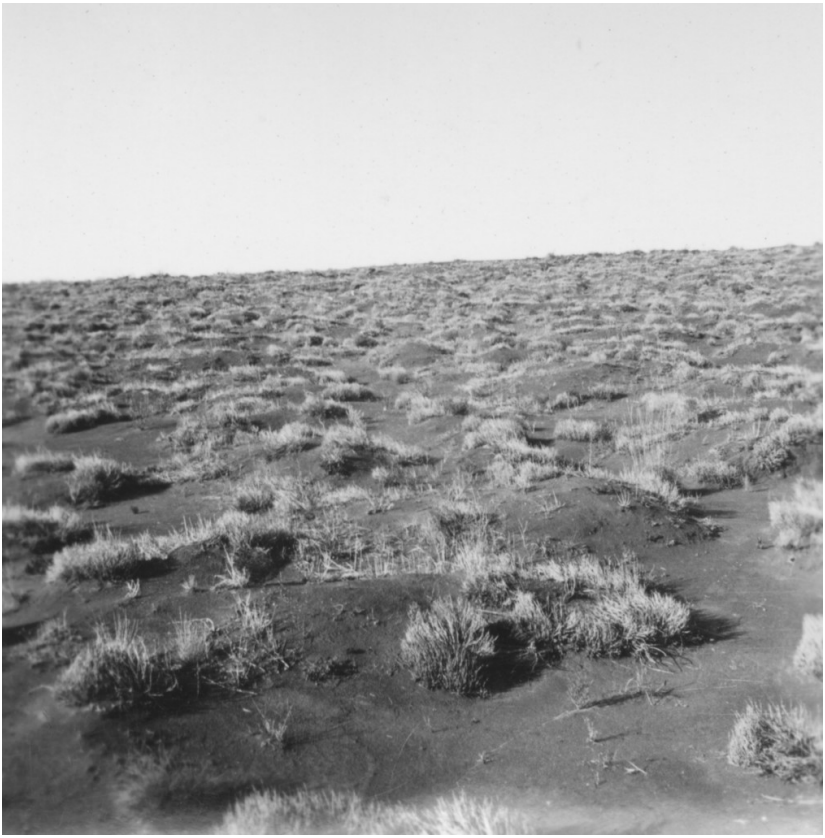
1. 24 km

or sandy soil or ranges. I look longingly for signs of a mulga thicket, as there I knew the ground will be much firmer.

As it approaches Hann's Range the road improves to very good, and once again the mulga scrub shows up. The range is but a very low one, and is soon left behind. After a run of 7 miles, over fair quartz-pebbly track, another well (Ryan's). After Ryan's another fair stretch of 14 miles, leading into a gap known as Prowse's, where it passes through a low hill of granite—Mount Boothby. The sand thence becomes heavier, and so lasts to a watercourse—the Woodforde, Here are camping places—soakages and waterholes—and at one of these (a crossing of the creek) I spend a night.

A very large burr has put in an appearance; and after it come burrs of all sizes and of several different varieties.

* * * *



Spinifex and sand, Simpson Desert, 1936

Much of the cycling hereabout is equivalent to cross-country riding. Wherever the ground is soft the loose sand blows in and fills up the two narrow parallel riding spaces which are sole indications of wheeled vehicles having travelled this way at some time long gone by.

Between these clearly defined pads a ridge is formed on which grows spinifex or a tussocky grass; so no choice is left to the cyclist but to sheer off to the side. As spare horses are brought along when once a year supplies are carted up to the telegraph stations on the Transcontinental, the sides for some distance out from the track are

very badly cut about. One then perforce must ride as best he may, or walk, through scrub and spinifex and over fallen timber.

From time to time, since leaving Connor's Well, many kangaroos had been seen in the occasional open spaces.

At Ryan's Well, and from there northwards, there grows a small pale-green leaved plant, bearing a ripe and tasty berry, in appearance not unlike the gooseberries of down south gardens. I tested one, and liked its flavour well. Then I experimented with a couple, then four; and as there were no signs of ill effects, I fell upon them tooth and nail. Their taste recalled rock-melons. The more I ate of them the more I relished their peculiar "twang."

* * * *

Beyond Hann's Range tracks of naked feet had frequently been observed. Where the ground is hard the cyclist may not heed these footprints much ; but in the slowing sand one feels so very powerless to "manoeuvre," that, for a little while at least, the sense of being alone is rather agreeable.

Near a turn in the track a black head and shoulder disappeared behind a bush. Surely, I thought, the time for an adventure has come; so, dismounting, I walked back to the turning point and, completely hidden, peeped along the track.

There was a curious sight. Half-a-dozen natives, now in full view, were making a minute examination of the wheel marks. All were gesticulating wildly. No "animal" like this had they ever seen before. I would have given—what *could* I have given them ?— for their thoughts. Again and again they ran along the track for a few yards—they who had been tracking all manner of walking and crawling things all their lives. Next they appeared to be comparing notes of the strange "beast" itself—so I judged from the movements of their arms and bodies.

And thus they were still engaged when I turned Diamond once again, and wheeled northward.

* * * *

From the Woodforde to the Tea-tree Well the track was fair—a light loam. The mulga scrub in places is extraordinarily dense. A matter of wonderment to me was how the explorers could have forced a passage for themselves and their animals through those miles upon miles of closely packed trees and undergrowth. One ceases to marvel at the creeping progress they made. You need to be in some such place as this (about the Tea-tree Well) before you realise how brave and venturesome and determined the first explorers were —how terribly hard and dangerous their work.

Now the track is plain enough to Barrow's Creek; anyone may follow it—a fact with which, needless to say, I was not acquainted until I had passed over it But as the stumps have never been grubbed, and as the ants' dwelling-places, if ever interfered with, have been rebuilt or are in various stages of re-construction —-what with one threatening wheel-smasher and the other—the visiting cyclist may easily fancy himself touring in a skittle alley studded with ninety-nine thousand pins.

* * * *

The ant hills, ever prominent features in the landscape right through Palmerston, are formed of hard dry clay, or of sand mixed with a cementing solution secreted by the insect. It calls for a very forcible kick to knock the top off even a small one. When broken into, the structure is seen to be cellular, and the dirty-white inhabitants are discovered moving hurriedly over the particles of dry grass or wood which every cell contains.

The cyclist must exercise much caution amongst those pinnacled hillocks and mulga remnants : but on good patches the

sensation of sweeping around and in and out through the many obstacles is rather enjoyable. You have some of the delights of cycling and of skating into the bargain.

* * * *

The Tea-tree Well is about 50 yards away from the bank of a pretty wide but not deep creek, on the bank of which flourish the inevitable giant gum-trees. Out from that side of the watercourse farthest from the well, and into the bed of it, grows the bushy nigger-harboring scrub from which the well derives its name. Blacks might be in there by the dozen, and a person camping near this well be never a whit the wiser. The general aspect of the place and its surrounding are wild and likely-looking enough tor any-thing in the way of adventure.

Although it was early in the afternoon I felt drowsy, and planned a sleep at this celebrated spot. First a reconnoitre : tracks of naked feet in plenty; but, then, you can find them almost anywhere. So I comforted myself, and (to my disgust afterwards, of course) argued with myself that there was need of courage; then drew a bucket of the excellent water from the well, and made my "camp."

* * * *

The burrs had, for the last two days, been very troublesome; wherefore I improvised a burr-dissuader, which proved a very successful affair. Finding an old tin matchbox near the well, I prized off the top and bottom pieces, and, with a pair of small folding scissors, shaped one end of each to correspond with the convex outside of the tyres. These pieces of tin I fastened on the bicycle between the forks with the small studs which at one time had held in place the front and back wheel mud-guards. Each piece was so adjusted as to nearly touch the tyre. A cover with central bead would need a corresponding cut in the tin.

A prickle seldom punctures at once; a few revolutions of the wheel must be made before the thorn gets through into the air tube. The object, then, was to remove the thing before those revolutions were made.

When experimenting with the puncture preventative I found that the part of the tyre immediately over the valve bulged out further from the rim than any other portion of it, and so touched the tin. This was remedied by deflating the air tube, loosening the valve and shoving it well in and back from the rim ; then properly bedding the outer cover and inflating slightly before again screwing the valve up. A final tightening was given when the tyre had been fully inflated, and I had the cover an equal distance all around from the thenceforward ever-ready and effective appliance.

Then, having tested it on the burrs about the "camp," I debated whether it was an ejector or a dissuader, an interceptor or an arrester, a burr-catcher or a burr-guard—and, so debating, to sleep.

* * * *

But not for long—soon I had company. Dingoes—the howling nuisances of the bush—began their unearthly wailings in the scrub. A revolver-shot scatters or quietens them for a while ; but soon they collect again, and emphasize their piteous, dismal cries.

An early start from the Tea-tree ; and soon Central Mount Stuart is sighted, rising slowly into distinctness, until, at about 20 miles[1] on, the track is within about 3 miles[2] of it.

A gum creek, the Hanson, runs between the track and the mountain, and between the creek and the track is a belt of mulga.

The mount itself rises out of the heart of a vast stretch of level country.

1. 32 km
2. 5 km

For myself, with memories of printed and spoken descriptions, I expected to see a solitary peak; instead there is a short range, consisting of three or four hills, the highest of which—this Central Mount Stuart— rises 2500ft.[1] above sea level. Its formation is among its peculiarities, but its layers of red and bluish rock give little foothold for vegetation. And, above all, it is affirmed that it is only 2½ miles out from the exact centre of the continent of Australia. But on this point there is room for doubt.

Central Mount *Stuart*, too ? Yet I remember to have read in one of Stuart's dairies :—

"There is a high mount about two miles and a half, which I hoped would have been in the centre; but on it to-morrow I will raise a cairn of stones and plant the flag there, and will name it Mount Sturt, after my excellent and esteemed commander of the expedition in 1844 and '45, Captain Sturt, as a mark of gratitude for the great kindness I received from him during that journey."

The hill must always be an object of surpassing interest to each fresh observer. One cannot but feel saddened by the crowding thoughts of hardships undergone by those intrepid ones who first penetrated here.

* * * *

But it was an exceedingly warm forenoon ; and, although Mount Stuart is a sight well worth travelling many a mile to see, I notice the short Philistinish sentence in my note book—"Would have preferred a brewery."

Some day there may be a Central Mount Stuart Hotel.

The road from the Tea-tree had been fair and level, and so it continued to the Hanson Well—a total of 33 miles[2].

1. 762 metres
2. 53 km

At the Hanson a blackfellow was bending over and drinking from the troughs. He was somewhat startled on turning and seeing me dismount; but though he had with him a few implements of the chase and an iguana, he did not look particularly wild.

My waterbag was empty. Leaning the bicycle against something, I stepped over towards the well and began—"Here, "Hanson," lend a hand to————"

But he had very civilly started walking after me to lend the hand before I had asked it of him.

The bucket was soon landed, and not another word was spoken until I had drunk deeply of the sparkling liquor. Then I found that the naked one was capable of "yabbering" fairly well.

" 'Nother white pfella walk longa track ?" he said, inquisitively.

"No more—which way blackpfella sit down ?"

"By and bye more blackfellow come."

Then, indicating a direction by a hand-wave he added vaguely—"Longa scrub."

Then I went to the machine. Lighting my pipe, I overhauled the parts, spinning wheels and performing other simple operations.

"Hanson" had approached cautiously; but at length his curiosity got the better of him, and he came near. He sat down on his haunches and eyed it quizzically, and for several minutes in silence. At length—

"My word, good pfella nanto that one !" ("Nan to" = horse.)

I jumped into the saddle and exhibited my nanto's paces. Then laid it down. He quizzed it again.

"Him no wantit feed ? No walk-about ?"

"Ah, wait," I said ; and took out the air pump, and set to work.

"Hanson" rose from his haunches and bent over the inflating tube.

"My word," he cried, slapping his legs in prodigious glee—"My word, him grow fat all right, my word !"

I gave him half a stick of tobacco. Never yet have I heard a blackfellow say "Thank you." "Hanson" received the tobacco in silence, and just as if he didn't know he was on the point of asking for it. Yet he may have been thinking of something else because, as I handed it to him, he said—

"White pfella him big one cleva. What him think, him do ?"

I thought I had heard the same thing somewhere before.

"Yes," I coincided, and felt for the moment that it devolved upon me to say or do something towards proving myself worthy of a share in the flattering opinion. "Awfully clevah. I-er have known—"

I was about to speak of a scientific American's flying machine; but the bicycle was quite far enough in that direction.

"Have known-er eccentric bodies of them stand bolt upright on their heads. Say 'Nansen'—I mean 'Hanson'—" as the thought struck me—"did *you* ever have a try at standing on your head ?"

But "Hanson" didn't savee. He giggled; repeated to himself vacantly a few times "Head ? Head ?" and finally put a poser to me.

"Which way ?"

It was but a Christian duty that I should instruct and edify the poor benighted heathen. No one besides us two were near to witness the good deed; so as he sat on his haunches and continued gazing up into my face expectantly, I slung my satchel on the handle-bars, emptied into it a few things from my pockets, levelled off a little sandy space on the ground, and showed "Hanson" by a single object lesson how the "clevah" thing was done.

The benighted one took very kindly to my humble Christian endeavour.

"Well, 'Hanson,'" said I, taking up my satchel and replacing the articles, "do you think you could manage it ? Tell you what; suppose you stand alonga upside down, then this other fat-one stick of tobacco I give it. Savee ?"

"Hanson" saveed.

far from succeeding the first time he tried, or the second, but needed not the slightest word of encouragement from me to try and try and try again.

"Here 'Hanson,'" said I at last, compassionately, "knock off. You'll be suffocating yourself. Besides I want to ask you which way track go."

But he had taken it very much to heart, this feat of standing on his head, and was bent on its achievement.

"Which way track go ?" I said again. "Me do it this time all right, I think;" and was "this time" just as near success as before,

"Don't you hear ?" I called out "I want to ask you about the road." But he only wanted to stand on his confounded head.

I rather regretted having put him up to the wrinkle; the track from the well might be in any direction.

"Me give it you that fellow stick of tobacco all the same you stand up," I said.

Again he only muttered a choking "Me do it all right," and again another try.

But it was all of no avail He couldn't stand on his head and I couldn't stop him from trying. His face might long since have grown purple; but I was unable to see. His ulster would hang downwards and get in the way.

"What infernal nonsense," I said impatiently to myself. Here was I, in the heart of a continent, miles from any other white man, my sole companion an unknown black, myself ignorant of the track, and paying for the freak of a moment in this absurd way.

"Hanson" was still struggling. I gave him up as hopeless, got into the saddle, and wheeled away.

I wonder if "Hanson" has done it yet, and if upon the strength of it he's been raised in rank in his tribe !

* * * *

Those aborigines are a perverse lot. Bushmen and those who have long lived at the telegraph stations or at Port Darwin agree that you can never rely upon astonishing them. Take a tribesman from the inlands, as the native police have sometimes had occasion to do, show him the "mighty ocean," and he regards it stolidly; and so with many of the marvels of civilisation. But do some fantastic trick or show him some simple, gaudy thing, and he is transported.

But their laughter is mostly a giggle, especially in the presence of white men. I never heard from any of them a boisterous outburst, nor ever heard one with a bass voice—unless he also had a bad cold.

My "Hanson" was not wholly uncivilised. He wore, as I said, an "ulster." Now, a blackfellow's full dress away from settlements consists of an "ulster"—not universally so called—and a waist band, which are worn low down in front The "ulster" measures about 10 inches by 6[1], and is suspended from the band. Of course where white men are stationed and the blacks are permitted to congregate, the "nager," or clothes-line, is drawn lower down and higher up on the part of the females, and those of the males who can procure them wear bifurcated garments.

1. 25 by 15 cm

* * * *

Eight miles[1] from the Hanson Well,and we are at the Stirling horse-breeding station. Fair road for most of the spin, though there are three sandhills near the end of it. And in the short spin, too, we say good-bye to that salt bush—here a strongly-growing patch—which has been for so many miles, so many hundred miles, our sole companion.

A wide, fertile and picturesque creek-flat, studded with gums, was ridden over before the Stirling Creek itself, and afterwards the station, came into view. Following up the watercourse I had arrived within a couple of hundred yards of a not imposing little row of buildings (for all that, there was a pleasure in sighting them) without being able to detect a soul, when suddenly out of the creek started up, as if by magic, about fifty of the best specimens of Australia's hirsute savages I have ever had the opportunity of picking up broken pieces of volapuk from—a handsome, murderous-looking set of able-bodied cut-throats, who came racing towards me.

"Hello, my beauties," I said, and pressed as quickly as convenient to an open door.

Resting the bicycle against a verandah post, I looked inside and asked hungrily "Anybody home ?" but there came no reply.

Wheeling sharply and addressing the crowd of sable ungarmented savages, now volubly "yabbering" and deeply interested in a discussion of the bicycle— "Which way boss walk, sit, run, tumble down, or jump up ?" I enquired anxiously.

One only, so far as I could make out, laid claim to be a linguist.

"Him go after bullock. Not long him come back. You wait ?"

This was a re-assuring start, anyhow.

1. 13 km

Wait ? Rather ! Though I badly wanted to push on to Barrow's Creek I would have waited a week, could it have been so arranged, to see this man—for the bare sake of having one good look at him, for the possibility of a hand shake from him.

For I had heard of him, though never previous to my passing Oodnadatta. And I had heard of his lion courage from those who must themselves be brave men. I knew of the spear marks he bore, and how it was he came to, bear them; yet fearlessly as ever remaining here by himself for months at a stretch, a kindly master to a horde of athletic treacherous savages, with not the slightest chance of anybody coming to his assistance should he ever be in need of aid !

When, after a couple of hours "wait," I saw him riding up, I felt no pang of disappointment; he looked in full the hero I had pictured him. I managed an indifferent-sounding "Good day—a bit hot ?" and looked away over to where stood his horse; but I watched him with a leaping, boyish happiness through the corners of my eyes, and there came again and again to my mind the expressive deliberate words of more than one quiet-spoken old bushman—"Ah ! But it is *he* who is the grand man !"

There was no doubt that I was outside the pale of civilization now; he had heard nothing of a cyclist being on the road.

There was no occasion to tell him I was hungry. A welcome feast was soon prepared, and I ate—no, I fear, I gorged.

And what a mine of information is this man himself ! What would he not be worth to the interviewer ? But he talks with more than the modesty of the bushman, and that is saying much.

The natives now-a-days along the overland track are not, in his View, quite so black as they are painted in the imagination of some residing south of Alice Springs. Articles might be pilfered from a camp left without anyone in charge, but otherwise the natives near the wells and on the road might generally be looked

upon by the passer-by as harmless, if properly handled. To east and west, however, are several places in which the natives are "cheeky." "And," added my host, "some 'bad' fellows now and again find their way into the Bonney"-a fresh water well to which I had not yet come.

* * * *

From Stirling to Barrow's Creek is 22 miles[1]. The first eight or nine of these takes the traveller along the Stirling Valley, over well grassed and timbered reek flat sand plains.

Here are many healthy specimens of the celebrated Stuart's Bean tree. This is one of the most beautiful of shade trees. The few I had noted particularly had grown to a height of from 35ft. to 40ft[2]. The pods when ripe split open, and, the bright scarlet beans within being exposed, a very pretty picture indeed is presented. The beans are very hard, and about three-eighths of an inch[1 cm] long. Dusky damsels gather them, bore a hole through each one, and string them into necklaces. Even lying about on the ground those bright-coloured little ornaments served to add another charm to the romantic scenery of Stirling Vale.

Although not given to collecting curios, I took one with me over the Foster range (five miles of barren mountain-top and very stony track, the descent on the north side being particularly steep) and along the further eight miles of stony creeks, cutting through flats between other ranges, which led to Barrow's Creek.

* * * *

At the crossing the creek is wide, and heavily timbered with gums. The telegraph station lies the other side, and is very prettily situated at the foot of a steep hill which marks one side of a gorge

1. 35 km
2. 10 to 12 metres

in a range bearing away to the east. The buildings are of stone, and everything about the place bears evidence of a very attentive supervision. The whites "in camp" at the time were the station master, two or three assistants, a cook and a police trooper. A well-kept and prolific garden is close by, and a low stone wall and headstone mark the burial place of those who were killed when the natives made their oft-told-of attack.

That was in '73, when as yet the natives were unaccustomed to the new institution of the Overland and when their favorite recreation was the cutting of the wire. They watched a line repairing party file out, northward; and having waited, with their native cunning, until those men were beyond the possibility of recall, on a Sunday evening, when the eight inhabitants of the station were talking together outside the stone wall, they suddenly sprang from ambush and poured in a shower of spears. And yonder are the graves of the station-master and a linesman, who paid for the natives' treachery with their lives, while others paid for it with months of agony from' spear wounds and thrusts.

* * * *

There is no place of call in the 160 miles[1] between Barrow's and Tennant's Creeks, and it was certain I would be very hungry before that distance had been travelled, however short a time it might occupy.

Here was a stage in which a sporting-rifle or a shot gun would very probably come in handy. But then a gun is of no avail without powder and shot, and the carrying of these, to say nothing of a kangaroo leg or turkey (buzzard), loomed up an altogether swamping difficulty.

Still I knew I could do comfortably for a fair time without food, provided I had plenty of water.

1. 257 km

This latter was promised me in the several wells ahead. The "going" was said to be fair; so, after looking into the matter, I saw no reason why the distance could not be covered without weighting myself with bulky provisions; and I finally resolved on trying to make the run with water only by me.

So before breakfast time on the morning fixed for the departure I gave notice of my intention not to take anything; and, happening to have in my hand at the moment the only article in my possession which I could very well do without—the 3dwt. bean—I handed it over to the resident trooper, who had made out a road plan for me.

"Why not keep it ? You know there are thousands to be got about here ?" the officer asked wonderingly.

"Then throw it away," I answered ; "it's altogether too much of an unnecessary weight for me."

"Three pennyweights !" The trooper ejaculated in his surprise.

But I was not allowed to keep intact my resolution ; and out of the multitude of good things pressed upon me, I chose a small piece of cake, rolled it in paper and hung it to the lamp bracket.

* * * *

Within the first half-mile I overtook a small mob of sheep, with two or three black boys in charge; and, rather than scatter the little flock, rode to one side, in through the scrub, until they had been left behind.

Before another mile had been covered I noticed that my cake had disappeared. It could not been long gone; and, as the thought had just entered my mind to eat it up and so be finished with it, I stopped, leaned the bicycle carelessly against a bush and walked back; but the tracking through the scrub was slow, whereupon I gave up the search and returned.

The bicycle had been blown over by a gust of wind, and was lying on the ground. Worse still a thousand times, the stopper had been jerked out of the neck of the waterbag, and the precious water had drained out. However, it was only 20 miles[1] to a soakage; my spirits were high after my recent good living : so, with a few cursory remarks to the wind and to Diamond, I remounted and rode on.

* * * *

Before many miles had been covered, against a head wind and under a sweltering sun, a sharp thirst reminded me that I had eaten a salt-meat breakfast; and that thirst became sharper still before Taylor Creek was reached. The track, too, was a bit heavy-over flats of light loamy soil and sandy plains for the greater part of the 20 miles.

On coming opposite the bend, where the Taylor Creek is nearest on the track's eastern side, I rode across to refill the waterbag; but all the soakage water had dried up. Holes had been sunk in the gravel about two feet deep, but only a white gritty clay showed at the bottom of each one.

It was a weary search along that creek's bed ; up and down I tramped anxiously, burrowing and scratching, but unavailingly; and after an hour spent in this way, it was a sadder man who returned to pursue an onward course.

Six miles is not far; but it counts for very much when a man has done twenty before it on a hot day, and that is topped up with an anxious search, a sandy road, and a disappointment. That six miles took me to a well sunk in the Taylor, at a point where the creek passes through a range. A bucketful of water was soon hauled up, and, pushing in one of the two stop-holts which were provided at the sides for that purpose, thus leaving the bucket suspended on

1. 32 km

top of the well, I leaned over and had gulped down three or four mouthfuls before I made a shocking discovery.

The horrid stuff was almost salt !

I spat out what I could; but what I had swallowed had far from given me relief.

Yet how it glistened ! Was it mockery ? I laughed a little, and knew the laugh was forced. Yes, this was thirst.

Would the tantalising stuff be better boiled ? I made the experiment; it failed.

I tried it with some meat extract(a few capsules of which I had); but—it was salter than ever.

With tea ? Perhaps, but I had no tea.

A smoke for consolation—no, I dare not.

I bathed my face and hands, and was a little relieved. Then, filling the waterbag, on the off chance of later on feeling more disposed towards poisoning myself, made all the haste I could for the Wycliffe.

* * * *

An old turn-off track beyond the Taylor Well leads out in an easterly direction to the Frew River and El Kedra—both abandoned stations. The country about there had been stocked at one time, but the natives were uncontrollable and very troublesome, spearing and slaughtering many of the cattle; and the lessees deemed abandonment advisable. From those places, and from another lower down and to the west—Anna's Reservoir—the natives count upon having frightened away the white men, the would-be settlers, and are inclined to "fancy" themselves accordingly. In other words, they are said to be "bad" about those places, and, as somebody significantly expressed it, are "spoiling for a hidin'."

It was dreary "going"; and the thoughts associated with, the country were not cheering. It was flounder, flounder through the heavy sand, with the lips parched and the throat dry—and growing drier and drier. I turn back now to my note-book and find the single entry—"This five-mile 'plug' is the killing gait."

Yet no creek showed itself. My legs were beginning to send up signals of distress—and all the time that water "flopped" in the bag and tormented me.

The night came on swiftly. Diamond, we must make a dash for it ! On, on !

An ant-hill or a stump overlooked as I tried to make out the timbers of a creek in the far distance, now wrapped in the evening haze, and I was sprawling on the ground, and Diamond had been thrown heavily as well. I limped over, and tried to mount— tried again and again, but each time a numbed knee refused to answer to the call.

I sat down to ponder things. That knee-cap— the swelling startled me for a moment. I might crawl, no more—crawl, and leave Diamond behind. But whither ? That could not be thought of.

No sleep that night. And water—!

The bag—! No; it were better not. I tried to sleep.

Yet, that water—was it so *very* bad ? I wasn't so thirsty back at the well; it would be palatable enough now.

I reached for it, and drank it greedily.

"Fool !" The reflection came instantly. "Now look out !"

How hot it was—stifling.

My brain was converted into a busy telephone exchange, and every subscriber was ringing up viciously.

"Hello ? hello ?"

That was from the leg; a cramp. I attended to it.

Again a vicious ring. The swollen knee called for sympathy—anything else I couldn't give it.

A violent call. The tongue this time. Poor member, poor badly-treated member. But be still. Yet somehow, try as it would, it couldn't get back to its proper place.

Then, in a quiet moment, the brain set to work on its own account. Diamond—was Diamond safe ? What were the faithful one's injuries ?

But another interrupting call : those muscles again.

A mosquito ! Ha, sing away, fasten your sucker where you please—you are but a mere circumstance to-night !

Hot Moisture ! on my forehead ! Now, what mysterious well within me held yet a drop of water ? (Was that a rustle ? Niggers, perhaps. Ah, well—)

Ants ? Very well; what matter ? But—but keep off that knee !

And, oh, for one long deep drink of water !

Dives, has that monster Lazarus relented and begged for you a drop of water yet ?

* * * *

It is wearisome to write how *I* felt and what *I* said and did—more wearisome perhaps than it is to read. But these unpleasant incidents seem to be regarded as the "most prominent features" of the journey; and they are here set out, not because there is any gratification to be got from the operation, but because by pointing out the pitfalls, they may serve to make easier the path of those who shall follow me.

* * * *

The dawn, if it brought no assuagement of the thirst, brought at any rate more hope; and still stiff and sore and aching, I limped, leading Diamond, towards the Wycliffe, which I knew could not be far away. It was an hour's drag through sand and scrub before the turn-off pad was reached; then a mile down the pad, the waterhole itself.

The Wycliffe is a wide watercourse which, after rain, stretches out unrestrained at many places in its course into a series of shallow swamps and clay-banked waterholes. One of these was filled to overflowing with "the nectar of the gods;" and, literally, rushing to its edge, I drank with rapturous delight.

The cravings of an abnormal thirst having been satisfied, I placed the polluted water-bag to soak, made a pot of tea, further refreshed myself with a wash, and had hardly touched the earth when I fell asleep.

* * * *

It may have been reality, or it may have been fancy; certainly I heard a rustle, and sat up quickly.

Three blackfellows were walking towards where I lay. At the instant of seeing them they were scarcely half a dozen yards off. I did not move— where was I to move, and why ?

"What name you wantem ?" I asked.

As none of them had on anything more than what looked like a piece of old clothes line with the frayed ends knotted together in front, with boomerangs thrust through it at the sides, and as each carried a woomera, or throwing stick, and a spear, they appeared to be quite respectable wild savages.

It is at such moments that a self respecting person should, in a twinkling, live his life over again—he should look down through the corridors of his years and renounce all his wickednesses.

Also the armed and treacherous natives; these denizens of the wildest tract of the Australian continent, descendants of those (or maybe the men themselves) who have murdered settler and traveller in cold blood—these formidable fellows, I say, should have raised a whoop, and casting their spears at my prostrate form, should then have robbed me of the few trinkets I possessed, and my revolver, and have left another carcase to tell silently of the infamy of the black people.

But things go wrong. For my own part, instead of looking back through any corridors, I observed that the feet of my visitors were much larger than were those of the natives south of the Alice. And, instead of a war-whoop and a deadly lunge, one of the three stretched out a hand and whined the single word "Baccy ?"

And this is the romance of our Dark Continent ! "These undraped fellows, carrying spears and boomerangs, roaming about an unfenced wilderness, romantic enough in contour and general setting, capable enough, one would judge, of eating uncooked rattlesnakes for choice-whining "Baccy ?

It was exasperating. Besides, I wasnt going through the country loaded up with tobacco for free distribution among blackfellow-strangers.

It, at the instant, occurred to me that those three strapping fellows might, if they chose, possess themselves of all the tobacco I had, and the bicycle into the bargain, I was certainly too weak to—

Then it flashed through my mind—"What would the fearless fellow back at the Stirling do ?" I made up my mind for him at once.

"You fellows, get !"

Then I turned over, as if dead certain they would

"get !"

and after "yabbering" to or about the bicycle they disappeared—whither I did not know.

By the generality of those white men with whom I conversed on such matters before reaching Alice Springs, it is—or was—an accepted belief that, from that place onward, natives are nearly always about at watering places along the overland track, although the traveller may not catch sight of even one. They are ever so much more sharp of sight and hearing than the whites, and, being treacherous themselves, they are very suspicious of strangers, and so they hide if they do not clear out on learning of a strangers coming.

Some of them believe or pretend to believe the whites have robbed them of their choicest hunting grounds, and, naturally, these work themselves up into revengeful passions when dwelling on their wrongs.

It is always best, or so I heard, when the traveller is alone, or there are only two together, to keep moving —not to linger long at one spot. And I must say that I have noted a spicy and suggestive soupçon of restlessness at night-time in the manners of those few travellers with whom I camped beyond the Alice. The revolver was invariably seen to before turning in.

And, on principle, a revolver should be carried. If whites ceased to carry the weapon, then the natives, observing its absence would grow braggishly bold and presuming.

* * * *

Devil's Marbles, 1890

Seventeen miles[1] of bad travelling ground—red loam and sand plains—brings the traveller to the Devonport Ranges. A couple of miles before passing through them, a creek, the Sutherland, was crossed. The white sand in the channel was piled up in strange formations. How terrific and eddying the current of water must be which at wide intervals comes tearing down ! As it stood, the bed suggested a reproduction, in the solid, of a narrow strip of wild-surging tempestuous ocean—a series of waves and billows, small mountains high.

Through the range though, it is good riding.

A mile or two beyond the Sutherland, on a flat among the low hills, huge, smooth boulder-like masses of granite threaten to block the way; but the track winds in among them, and out again.

The boulders lie thickly around in every direction, singly or piled one upon another. They are of all shapes —round and oval

1. 27 km

predominating—and run from scores to hundreds of tons in weight. Some are so perched as almost to tempt the passer-by to bring a crowbar with him next time he comes and tip them over.

These are "The Devil's Marbles," and a very novel and rather fantastic appearance they present. The solitary traveller may easily conjure up images of giant hobgoblins coming along in play hours to practice the game of "Catch"—surely, by the way, the devil' own favorite game.

I was about to sit in the shade of a large boulder, when from the further side of it came out an animal uncanny and weird as its surroundings. In form it resembled an iguana, but was five or six times larger than any one of that species I could remember to have seen, and, while I stood and looked in mild astonishment, it rose on its two long hind feet, and so walked a short distance; then as suddenly "flopped" down again, and disappeared.

The 36 miles[1] from the Wycliffe to the Bonney Creek is nearly all bad country for cycling over. I was riding at the moment of first sighting the Creek, and a little while afterwards was able to discern the well away out from the farther bank. To the left of the crossing and not far from it, a small column of smoke was rising; and by the fire—two standing, the others sitting or lying down—were half-a-dozen bandicoot-hunters.

I had reached the Creek's bank before observing the blackfellows, and had been on the point of dismounting; but their unexpected presence (I had noticed no fresh tracks), induced me to keep going, and I spurred Diamond cruelly on to make him cross the pebbly bed, past which there promised to be a stretch of good hard level road on which I could—well, manœuvre, should the occasion for doing so arise ; although it would have taken much forcible persuasion to induce me leave the water once I reached it.

1. 58 km

But Diamond was very weakly and out of condition that afternoon and stuck its rider up right in the middle of the gravelly passage. I came off with a right-pedal dismount and faced over the skeleton barricade only just in time to see the backs of two fast-running niggers before they disappeared into the scrub.

I pushed Diamond up the Bonney's bank and over to the well.

One hesitates to perpetrate an obvious joke about this Bonney water. But I had eaten nothing, with the exception of the "gooseberries" already mentioned, since leaving Barrow's Creek, so now made the quart-pot full of thick soup, and devoured it, before carting in a stock of firewood, for we must camp this night at Bonney Well, notwithstanding its rather evil reputation.

Firewood was scarce, and the coming night gave promise of being chilly; but, a sufficient stock collected, I strolled down to the blackfellows' camping ground. They had left no weapons, but had generously allowed to remain for my inspection (or it was hospitably intended ?), one iguana (on the still smouldering embers, and over-done now), six inches[1] intact, and several small pieces of frizzled snake, and one half-picked bone—which last may have been part of a picaninny's arm so evil did it smell. The flies had taken possession of everything eatable, and there appeared no good and sufficient reason for disturbing them.

* * * *

"Better not light a fire," I had been warned, wherever unfriendly blacks are said to visit, especially when camping alone. But when the chilly early morning comes and the marrow in one's bones gets frozen, a fellow having insufficient covering is certain to start a thawing blaze, and take his chances with the waddying niggers. Last night had been warm, but this was a season of sharp changes—with the day time only there invariably came great heat.

1. 15 cm

As I lay stretched on my sheet of waterproof, I ruminated on many things—on the many narrow escapes from dire disaster of this and other days. How often had I straightened out those pedal cross-bars, which luckily ever seemed to receive, give to, and so dull the hidden timber's sharp upsetting blow ! Fortunate to be sure was I in having chosen this priceless treasure of a bicycle frame. Again and again my eyes opened wide in astonishment, when, after some unavoidable stump's onslaught, a tumble, or other mishap, its every part was found to be perfect.

So with my head shoved into the widest part of a pair of pyjama mosquito-curtains, I made certain that my revolver was close at hand, and, being hungry enough to make me feel miserable, was yet quite happy and contented in the knowledge that I was to some extent experiencing the reality of those indefinite possibilities of which I had been forewarned.

* * * *

A mosquito-curtain is grateful and comforting; but after a hot day's toil one feels little inclined to erect a frame-work about one's couch, fix up the netting, and cut pegs to keep it down all around. For pegging would be necessary; if it were left anyway loose, the average able-bodied, athletic mosquito of these parts would just lift the thing up and get to work. Therefore I contented myself with shoving my head into whatever most bag-like spare wearable I happened to possess—pyjamas, for instance—thus lessening the effectiveness or length of the insects' sting by the thickness of the sheltering material.

It is further South that the story is told of the mosquitoes and the boiler-maker.

A man was engaged re-riveting a faulty boilerplate. The mosquitoes were very troublesome; but, after showing fight awhile, this rivetter devised a plan of revenge, and resolutely worked on until

the job in hand was finished. Then, smiling through his swollen lips and eyelids, he climbed in through the man-hole, clapped on the cover, and laughed in wild derision as those on the outside stamped on the plates, frantic and enraged at thus losing their prey. Then came a silence. Then a strange humming was heard; next a boring noise; and then, to the hidden one's dismay, an intruding sting appeared, and yet another, and still countless more, all feeling around to grip and fasten on to him. But the boiler-maker was a man of resource; and as the stings projected, or injected, with mighty blows he clinched them tight, chuckling the while, until those outside, making discovery of what was being done to them, took fright, and, spreading their wings flew upwards—and nothing whatever has been seen of that man or that boiler since.

* * * *

From the Bonney Well I started, after breakfasting on a pipefull of tobacco, with the intention of making Tennant Creek (62 miles[1]) that same night. But several unforeseen events altered those plans.

Gilbert Creek is 14 miles[2] ahead. And here (I smile disdainfully now) I made myself uncomfortable. I picked up a pad that led into the creek; then having dined on meat extract and smoke, carelessly led the bicycle across the creek. But no pad in this direction was to be seen, and I heedlessly wandered on until what appeared to be another creek was crossed. Then a bend; this was crossed also—the bicycle having to be led much of the time. Now this was getting monotonous; still no pad leading onwards. There was nothing for it but to go back on my tracks. But my tracks— where were they ? We had been passing lately over a hard gum flat, covered with leaves, and no mark showed to my inexperienced eye. I remember at this

1. 100 km
2. 23 km

moment, that I paused, ran my finger through my hair, and felt as lonely as that other unfortunate man who lost his shadow.

I had come from the East; going by compass, I rode on—to a creek. This I followed back, pushing the machine over the uneven surface, and not at all sure, after all, whether this was the right creek. But—a furrow !

I put the water-bag; to my lips, and, I think almost drained it.

All was plain sailing back to the waterhole now, and there the existence of the several creeks was explained away—the water was in a billabong, or a short creek-arm, which had been mistaken by me for a separate watercourse. But the last hour or so had taken more out of me than a day's hard work could do.

* * * *

Three parts of a mile up the pad, a dozen dingoes were scampering over a short patch of heavy sand through which I had walked when coming down. I stopped short to observe them. They were as confounded as those niggers were whom I had before watched examining the tracks of the machine. A man had passed over that patch; of that those dingoes certainly had no doubt. But whence had he come, and whither gone ? They scented up and down on either side in vain. The trail of the bicycle they disregarded—that was no man's marks. And there they were excitedly scampering up and down when a revolver shot led them to slink into the scrub, each taking a way of his own.

* * * *

Nearly the whole of the 30 miles[1] and the next mile (Kelly's) is bad red sand, unrideable in places, the pads being filled in with

1. 48 km

loose drift stuff; while tussocks of grass and porcupine, low scrub and fallen jagged timber, await one at the sides.

Riding over telegraph poles is a feat which the cyclist here is called on frequently to perform. In many places the track runs alongside the old line of wooden telegraph poles; in other places, again, the modern galvanised-iron rods stand just where stood those wooden poles of older days. In each case the old poles, in various stages of decomposition, lie often right across the track; and the rider cannot always see them until after he has felt the bump.

Against the continued use of the wooden poles there had been many grave objections. Four of the most pregnant sources of trouble were white ants, lightning, bush fires, and the rapidity with which that part of the wood below ground rotted away.

* * * *

Formerly line-repairers were nearly always at work. Now most of the repairing is done but once a year, before or after the line has had its annual end-to-end inspection.

In the changed circumstances the overland telegraph stations are no longer chiefly depots for the use of those whose chief business it is to keep the line in efficient working order, but are mainly for the occupation of those whose duty it is to re-transmit messages from one repeating station to another, up or down. From Palmerston a "wire" is sent to Daly waters, repeated there, and received at Alice Springs; thence on to Hergott, and so to Adelaide. Or it may be retransmitted first at Powell's Creek, next at Barrow's Creek, then at Charlotte Waters, and so on to Adelaide.

One sequence of repeating stations operate through the night, the other throughout the day. At some—Alice Springs, for instance, the work goes on continuously.

The working of the line from Palmerston down to Attack Creek (between Powell's and Tennant's Creeks) is superintended from the north; the lower part, from Alice Springs.

* * * *

Half way between the Gilbert and Kelly's Well the track runs as a main street through the heart of a thickly populated city of spires, known as Little Edinboro'—a multitudinous array of ant hills, stretching out east and west far beyond the range of vision, and extending also some miles along the track.

There were fresh horse tracks near the well; and at the well itself, two white men, with their two or three black-boys, were camped, "spelling." An offer of hospitality was at once extended to me; and, as I had been three days and two nights without eating "white man's tucker," there was no hesitancy about the acceptance.

And it did not require much persuasion to induce me to camp here; for he who eats not, neither shall he feel much inclined to work.

"You'll not think I'm a beast, will you ?" I said apologetically. "The fact is, I've eaten nothing for three days." But there is no need to apologise on the Overland.

An army of ants marched up and promenaded on the table-cloth; but provided one is reasonably cautious and brushes the insects off before taking into his mouth any of the pieces of meat to which some may have fastened themselves, their presence at one's dining table is of no great consequence when one is very hungry.

Ants are very numerous everywhere through the continent; and, in a journey through, one comes across communities of them, representing, I believe, every known kind and species.

The traveller is not much interfered with by the white ants found north of the MacDonnell Ranges— those favor a harder

diet than that which man provides—but the ordinary meat, sugar, and bread-devouring varieties, muster up in myriads wherever one camps.

At many of the camping grounds alongside wells, soakages and water-holes, are oblong 7x4[1] spaces enclosed by sloping, little banks or walls of scooped-up sand, six inches[2] high or so. As the troublesome and evil-smelling insects climb up these walls, the loose sand gives way, and they topple back again. Within such ingeniously-fashioned ramparts the traveller is secure—from one pest, at any rate.

Nor are flies less universal than ants. They are always, everywhere. They attack one's eyes shamefully; but the slightest scratch anywhere calls for immediate protection against their poisoning attentions.

A plaster of wetted clay is not a particularly cleanly covering; but it acts very well for protective purposes, and I believe it also possesses curative properties.

At meal times a piece of meat lifted from hand or ground to the mouth becomes so thickly covered with the pests that the diner finds it imperative to flourish it around him and cry "Shoo !" blow hard upon it, or make one or two feints at biting before taking the stuff in.

But they are philosophers, these men of the bush, and so declare that the flies purify the atmosphere, demolish poisonous matters in the air, prevent the spread of devasting disease—and so on. Some people, tho', if snakes were so numerous that folks couldn't travel the country without wearing a snake-proof suit, would certainly discover how very essential the reptiles were to—perhaps the armour-maker's existence.

1. 2x1 metres
2. 15 cm

* * * *

Up North—or was it down South—a talkative gentleman with a glass eye (named—the man's I mean—Blank), keeps a store. One day, *ipse dixit* he was shoeing a restive horse. The flies were very bad. His glass eye suddenly pained him; and when he made effort to take it out of its socket, to his horror, he found he couldn't. The flies had bunged it !

That is the man's story, not mine. I can only vouch for their infinite capacity to bung eyes not made of glass—and to imperil souls.

* * * *

None of the eye-protecting fixings seem torts satisfactory for use by a cyclist in country were careful steering is called for. Those which will keep out the flies are objectionable, for various reasons. The principal being that they also obscure the vision.

At Oodnadatta, a fly-guard made of very fine meshed wire was given to me, and I carried it right through to Palmerston. It was made as a very large pair of spectacles, and when folded occupied but very little space. Because of a few faults, I did not often wear it. It darkened the ground, got uncomfortably hot at times, and when a fly did get underneath, the little wretch invariably wagged its tail with joy at having a whole eye to itself, and "wired in" so avariciously, that hunting it out became an instant necessity. And then outsiders, dozens of them, would hang on to the wires and search for a wide opening, shoving their stings through now and again in the hope of reaching something. Nevertheless, if one of these wire-meshed guards could be had to fit close all round the eyes, it would be as good as, if not better, than most of the others. Goggles with colourless glass were not to be had. The netting of the ordinary hat-veil is too open; a cyclist when riding does not shake his head, about so the flies soon enter through. Cheese or mosquito nettings

are hot, sticky and uncomfortable; and dangling corks are too ornamental.

* * * *

There were several of the ant-repulsing citadels at Kelly's Well, and in one of them, close by a bush to which I could fasten Diamond, I spread my sheet of waterproof. But my camp companions pressed upon me some of their own blankets—generosity of a prince was that encountered from first to last.

Well-fed, and kicking about under warm blanketing, with a sense of safety, and with food and water at one's hands—yes, certainly these things have their advantages.

* * * *

The dingoes gathered round and howled; but to their noises I paid little heed—until someone moved. Then, looking out, I saw one of my hosts kneeling on his bed clothes, and in the act of pointing a rifle towards where a loud-voiced member of the serenading party sat.

The blackboys' sleeping quarters were near the fireplace; and just after I had become fully conscious of what was going on and expected to hear a shot fired, one of the "boys," rising on his elbow, suddenly exclaimed pleadingly, "No shoot that one dingo, mitta ! Him my fadder, I thinkit."

At which interruption the one spoken to muttered —was that a curse ?—I laughed, and the dingo vanished.

It was not the first time that thus the white man had been robbed of his prey. For to hold the hand in such circumstances is only prudent.

In the morning the hat of the aboriginal who had awed his father's second-life was missing; but after a short search it was re-

covered some little distance from the camp—or its remains were discovered, in two parts.

The brim was torn from the crown, and a strip of about an inch between them had been bitten out all round.

I reckoned nothing would come amiss to that species of wild animal which would chew up a nigger's hat-band, and for ever after was at night time more or less uneasy about my bicycle's tyres.

The natives of these parts hold pretty generally to this doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls : your father, dying, may "jump up white-fellow," or be changed into a kangaroo, an emu, an eagle, or a dingo—mayhap even an ant.

One of the natives was named the equivalent for kangaroo, with something tacked to it. Wherefore he must never taste kangaroo flesh.

It has been written somewhere :—"Australian natives are treacherous. You should never in the hush let one walk behind you. Keep him always in front." A bushman told me that was altogether wrong advice. "If you have any cause to be suspicious of a niggers intentions," he said, "keep him behind you, and well out of sight at that—even if you have to hit him on the head with a waddy to make him stay there."

This authority was rather violently disposed towards the natives, whom, *inter alia*, he charged with the atrocious crime of having once kidnapped a dog of his. "If anyone of them starts giving you back answers," said he, "to shoot is about the only way to make quite sure about that one. It's fine," and he laughed, "to see the beggar's jump." He assured me he had, on occasion, known 'em to jump as high as seven feet.

* * * *

From Kelly's Well the 32 miles[1] to Tennant's Creek provided the best stretch of cycling ground for many a day. The soil was of a firm loamy nature, covered in places with gravelly quartz and ironstone.

The first part was over level ground timbered with mulga and box, and with not a hill in sight anywhere to east or West; but at about 20 miles some low flat-topped scattered rises appear, and then, at 26 miles[2], the McDonnell Ranges. Here ironstone and quartz veins outcrop, and colors of gold are found in many of the gullies.

An excellent track continues on and over the range (which is not a high one) and then level country again spreads out.

* * * *

I had eaten breakfast at Kelly's well; but one meal, or a second does not long suffice, for a man who has been for days hungry, Tissues get eaten away, and it takes days—nay, perhaps weeks—of substantial feeding before the loss can be made up and the used tissues replaced or replenished. At Tennant's Creek, during the many days I remained at the telegraph station, I could eat almost continuously. My happiest thoughts were centered around the dinner table, and there was a savage delight in the partaking of every meal.

At many of those stations I was ashamed of my appetite. Everywhere I was apologising (needlessly of course) because of this unnatural-seeming craving for food which for days possessed me. And it appeared so extraordinary to see people sit down to a viand-loaded table and eat only a little. And that, too, without much apparent enjoyment ! When a fellow finds he has eaten much more than two others together, at the same table, he is apt to be backward in asking for more; and, perhaps, therefore it was that often

1. 51 km
2. 32 and 42 km

when the time had arrived to get up from a meal I felt reluctant to leave without taking what remained of the joint with me.

* * * *

The telegraph station at Tennant's Creek is, in outward appearance, like a substantial stone farmhouse, and is situated out on the plains 3 or 4 miles past the foot of the McDonnell Range. There is a main building, three-roomed. One of these is used as a harness room; there are several small cottages and sheds; and a large stockyard is at no great distance away.

In the Creek, about a quarter of a mile from the station there are some nearly permanent waterholes, and a freshwater well is sunk on its nearer bank. Close by this well is a bath-house, and a vegetable garden—adjuncts, these latter, of all the telegraph stations. As at the other stations also, cattle and sheep, horses and milch cows are kept and attended to or shepherded by blackfellows.

Located here was, in addition to the officer in charge (whom I had often heard spoken of, always in terms of high praise and respect, down Alice Springs way), an assistant (operator), a white man cook, and one other white employee, this last generally useful hand.

* * * *

As I have already stated, I had very often straightened out the rat-trap pedal cross-bars of the bicycle. The unavoidable stumps, small ant-hills and prostrate telegraph-pole ends, et hoc, had bent them inwards frequently; and as one of the four exhibited signs of the very rough usage to which it had by this time been subjected, the handy man obliged me by taking it out altogether and replacing it with an exact counterpart of one of the less marked ones—a substitution effected as neatly as if one of the most expert of cycle-repairing shop hands had been the craftsman.

Of this trifling alteration, which was in no way necessary, I have paused to write, for the triple purpose of giving acknowledgment to the ability of the workman, and of remarking that after all the rough usage to which it had been subjected, the bicycle still continued to look almost as if just from the shop window (in reality it was better than new, since it had been tested and proven), and, thirdly, of making for myself opportunity to say that, notwithstanding the many hard knocks it received after leavings Tennant's Creek, it yet kept in that excellent condition which was my pride to the very last moment I had use for it.

* * * *

Having no wish for a recurrence of those hungering qualms which had been felt before arriving there, I departed from Tennant's Creek loaded up with all the provisions I could conveniently or otherwise stow away inside and out, and proceeded for 33 miles[1] over ground which in places was fair, but which for its greater part was rather sandy for cycling over, to water and a camp, at one of the Hayward Creek branches, of which there were three to be crossed. The route was waterless between Tennant's and this creek, although Phillip's Creek was met with at 21 miles, and the Gibson at 27[2]; also several low hill-ranges were passed through.

An excellent sketch plan of the route had been made out for me at the telegraph station by the exceedingly obliging officer in charge there and his assistant; nevertheless, there were so many creeks to be crossed and, as it seemed to me re-crossed, that almost before the first day was over I continually doubted which of them was the particular one I was next coming to or had last left behind.

This doubt, however, did not exist on arriving the following day at Attack Creek, some 12 miles[3] on from the Hayward, because

1. 53 km
2. 34 km and 43 km
3. 19 km

of the beautiful sheet of clear fresh water which existed in it. This Attack Creek is deep, and its sides are fringed with giant gum trees. It is not wide; but the nearly permanent sheet of water when I passed there, was fully a quarter of a mile in length between the banks.

There is a solitary grave away up from the cross-ing; and, again, after passing the Morphett (10 miles[1] on), is the last resting place of a traveller who, a couple of years back, when dying of thirst, attempted unsuccessfully to so damage the telegraph line as to attract to the spot a repairing party.

Not every man can climb a telegraph pole; and one cannot cut or undo stout and firmly fastened wires with one's teeth.

Near the Morphett Creek a narrow pad branches off to the west of the telegraph line, loops out to the headquarters of a very seldom heard of cattle station, and proceeding thence, rejoins the line track at about 35 miles[2] south of Powell's Creek.

One may keep nearer to the telegraph line and travel *via* Kuerschner Ponds; but against going that way I had been advised. The track was said to be very rough. Nevertheless the straight-ahead road might be the better for cycling. The good people of these parts do not regard tracks or the cyclist's eyes. It has often been recommended to me to turn off at certain places from “hard gritty rises” on to where the track runs over “nice soft flats.” Of course the flats were found in such places to be well grassed and suitable for travelling mobs of cattle, whereas the gritty rises (some, good cycling) invariably were barren or spinifex-covered.

Right up almost from Tennant's Creek to the re-junction spoken of, the 88 miles[3] stretch of country is of a very unkindly nature, for the stranger, anyway. The supplies which are annually sent to the various telegraph stations are forwarded only as far as

1. 16 km
2. 56 km
3. 142 km

Tennant's Creek from the south; down as far as Powell's, they come from Palmerston. The intervening distance (from Tennant's to Powell's, 123 miles[1]), does not therefore bear those evidences of traffic which are distinguishable between most of the other stations.

* * * *

This lack of clear guiding marks is most troublesome about the stony creeks, whether there be water in them or not. When a waterhole has been reached it is not always easy to pick up the track on the other side. In many cases there is no pad at all visible to the unaccustomed eye, as cattle and horses spread out on approaching water, wander aimlessly awhile after drinking, and destroy all traces of a particularly beaten path, as not until long after leaving do they "string" again.

At waterholes, too, (and these remarks apply to many watering places higher up the road) the track is so "freaky." From one hole full or dry, you must pass straight on; from another, the track may take a sudden bend to the east or the west; at still another, the pad does not pass the water, but, after leading to it, forms with the pad going out, more or less of a V; while at a fourth, you have to double back for some distance on the pad by which you entered. When the grass is high and the track not clear, or where many paths lead out from, where one finds oneself, as it were, "cornered" and when one does not know whether the follow-on section of his road runs northerly, easterly, or westerly, one is liable to feel—well, uncomfortable.

As cattle had been lately running in some parts of the country in this stage, between Tennant's and Powell's Creeks, the main pad, if there be one at all was cut into in places by better beaten ones, and in other places there were such puzzling branches that the non-bushman traveller might be just as likely to follow up the

1. 198 km

wrong one as the right. How it may be with the expert bushman, I do not know.

Before reaching the cattle station (known as Bankabanka, I believe; there was no one at home except a few blackfellows and lubras, who greatly enjoyed the sight of a so ragged a whitefeller and the bicycle, but who were a very inoffensive lot of people), I was so fortunate as to come upon a couple of horsemen; and in their company I was glad to "spell" awhile. Valuable directions also were obtained about those pads ahead which led out and in again to the telegraph line, and I had word, too, of a mob of sheep in charge of a white man, who, by this time, was expected to be camped somewhere between the station and the line.

After a day's travelling away from the cattle station, first over an expansive, luxuriantly-grassed plain on which not a tree was to be seen for many miles, and then into and through rough, rugged ranges.

I reached the waterhole on which the sheep were camped, and spent there a happy night, eating and thinking of the fresh mutton, cake, and other acceptable novelties with which the gentlemanly drover-boss plied and supplied me.

Referring to my note-book, I make out the following random jottings :—"The mulga has disappeared. The prevailing trees appear to me to be dwarfed, stunted gums; whether in truth they are properly gums or box, or peppermint, or what—I cannot tell; but they are clearly of the Eucalyptus family. Nearly all white-stemmed, and averaging from 20 to 30 feet in height. The yellow blossoms of a wattle bush relieve the lower but never thickly growing scrub. Extensive belts of spinifex; and, on less sandy soil, and about the creeks, many flats covered with long spear grass. This grass is over six feet high—a continual source of annoyance, as now is the time to catch the falling seeds; sharp pointed things these, which wriggle and twist about in one's clothes, until they enter so far that a fellow has to stop and pull them out of the various parts of him. Further

north, the people tell me, this spear grass grows to a height of 12 feet (and over that; but 12 feet is tall enough for me), with worrying seeds of proportionate size. Have torn my handkerchief in two and wrapped a half around the extremity of each pyjama leg to prevent the obnoxious things accumulating around my ankles."

Much walking—sand. Riding northerly; the cross shadows before and after midday add to the already many risks. And the pads are so narrow; branches of trees and bushes hit the face; often an eye-lash from an eye. Find myself at morning time or evening dismounting hurriedly to lead the bicycle over the shadow of a branch which I mistook for substance, and a minute after, running full tilt into a log which I had mistaken for a harmless shadow.

"Stony hills, small creeks, and grassed flats" was the order of the day on which I again struck the telegraph line; and along by that the track was both distinct and fair "going" passing between low hills to Renner Springs. Glazed pebbles and agates (of no value except as curios) were thickly scattered on the hill-tops and at the foot of the various rises for some distance.

* * * *

Where the pad led on to the line-track two natives were walking on ahead. On turning and seeing me they only hacked a little from the twelve inches[1] of highway, and looked astonished. I pulled up to interview them—or it may be I trembled so much with terror that I was unable to continue riding. Two very good specimens, these. Well set up and picturesquely ornamented, with many cicatrices rising across the breasts and arms. One was able to speak comprehensibly; the other wore feathers in his hair, and looked from head to foot an unsophisticated savage, reminiscent of a Fenimore Cooper's Injun fresh starting on the war trail and bent fixedly on acquiring somebody's "skelp" for his wigwam. As it was, I daresay he was out on a hunt after bandicoots for his dinner.

1. 30 cm

After inquiring the distance to Renner Springs— which I knew to be about 15 miles[1]—and getting the usually precise information "long way," from the one, I asked politely of the other what his name might perchance be. But he did not answer; and the spokesman, in explanation of this silence, probably, told me, "Him German blackfellow."

Ha ! here was a discovery. The "Made in Germany" grievance had invaded the north-central Australian tribes !

"Sprecken sie Deutch, herr blackfellow ?" He condescended to give me the disrespectful-sounding monosyllable "Yah !"

Now this was a serious quandary. I had used up all my German that seemed suitable for the occasion.

I struggled with memory for a few moments.

Ah, yes ! "Hast die das Schloss ?"

He shook his head, and said, "Er," in disgust.

Beyond this I could not go. It was, perhaps, just as well. Later on I knew what "German blackfellow" meant. When a white man can't make himself understood the 'bout camp black (who knows he speaks pure English) says, disdainfully :—"What 'im pfeller talk ? 'Im German, me tink it."

So it comes about that the "German blackfellow," is the blackfellow who no speak it Inglis—the "myall," the wild-fellow.

* * * *

Having cycled what I counted on as being the 15 miles[2], and while yet looking ahead expecting at any moment to catch sight of the Renner Springs station buildings, I was surprised to hear much shouting and many strange cries. A ridge chain ran parallel with

1. 24 km
2. 24 km

the track, a quarter of a mile off, on my deft-hand side; and in the bushes a little way out from this a dozen or more wurlies had been erected. From the vicinity of these wurlies scores of natives were now pouring, laughing, screaming, and yelling to each other to hurry up and see the circus. They had observed me before I had sighted them and were running towards a bend in the road ahead of me.

I slowed down; and as they were so considerate as to hoot back their yelping dogs, and as the pedalling operation appeared to divert them hugely (I believe they had never witnessed anything half so funny in their lives before), I stopped when part way along the line they formed to give them a better chance of satisfying to its full their very patent curiosity.

Those who had collected were of all sizes and ages, and most of them had left home so very hurriedly that they had quite forgotten to put on their "ulsters." But there were no females in the assembly. Here (and likewise back at the Stirling) I notice the lubras come but a very short distance from their wurlies, near which they remained standing—screaming during the first few minutes of the excitement with delight, and, I think, calling the dogs back.

Not from anyone of the crowd, for whose edification I spun the wheels round, could I get a word of white-fellow lingo; and all I have by which to remember my futile attempts at a conversation is a note written on the spot to the effect that they, in common with other of the natives whom I had met "laughed in fairly good English."

* * * *

The first beholding of adult blackfellows and blackfellowesses naked, may be slightly shocking to sensitive nerves. An uncomfortable, uneasy feeling will probably be induced. But this creepiness soon passes, and one comes to either look upon or pass unnoticed

the ungarbed blackfellow (and later on the average lubra), as he might the apes and monkeys in a zoological gardens.

Some of the habits of those animals are theirs, too; when collected and watched awhile it will for evermore "go without saying" to the observer that they are natural-born hunters.

They have no thought for the things of the morrow, but they consider the birds of the air and how they shall catch them. The youth's are adepts in the art of stone throwing; lubras, though; are by far the better hands. They ask not for money as wages—only "tucka," "toombacca," or "bacca" and "ole clo."

One of them in a quiet confidental chat gave it as his opinion—"White fella big one fool; him *work* all the time !"

I explained how it might be : the whitefellow worked to save up money with which to purchase leisure in his old age—"all the same sleep all day *then*," I explained.

After ruminating—"Why not him sleep all day along-a *now*?" he asked puzzled. And so puzzled me.

* * * *

Sometimes there is a charm in the simplicity of their "English."

"That one big fool hoss," remarked a blackboy, referring to an animal which, instead of remaining near and feeding, had a tiresome habit of travelling afar off when hobbled out of an evening—"every day him walk about all night."

This boy had seen a kangaroo close by the camp, and made an observation to that effect to his employer,—thinking probably the latter would like to have a shot at it.

"What sort of kangaroo; Big fellow ?"

"N-o," came the answer slowly, "not big pella,"

"Little fellow, then ?" by way of suggestion.

"N-o," still the reply, "not little pella."

"Well what size was it ?" impatiently.

"Lee-tle bit big pella."

It is fellow, fella, pfellow, pfeller, pfella, pella according to the pliancy of the talker's tongue.

Renner Springs is the name of a cattle station situated on the edge of a wide belt of table lands (and downs country as it is called), which stretches away eastward with hardly a break to Queensland. It is about 20 miles[1] south of Powell's Creek. One white man only resided there. A chinaman cook is employed, and blacks do all the station work. Although not good for cycling over, most of the land between Tennants Creek and here seemed to me to be well suited for pastoral purposes.

Near the small homestead are several springs— circular ponds of clear drinkable water, occurring out on the flat; but along the line of an adjacent quartzite and—sandstone ridge, one overflows, is fenced in, and serves to irrigate a garden by means of the trenches in which the water is continually running. On leaving the garden what remains unabsorbed of the water (which on coming to the surface has a temperature of 95°), is soon lost again in the sand.

At Renner's there was the usual cordial invitation to eat, and the equally usual "Thanks—many thanks, yes." The blacks, the manager said, had during the past few days been gathering from all quarters for the purpose of holding a big corroboree, and the number in camp was being added to hourly.

The first part of the twenty miles or thereabouts to Powell's Creek consisted of sandy flats between the usual low hills; and for the rest the track kept on fairly hard ground between and over the hills of various small ranges.

1. 32 km

Natives must have been about in great numbers, yet I saw none for some time after leaving Renner Springs. Stopping to make a note of something, and looking back, I was surprised to see a thin column of smoke ascending from a hillock which I had passed within the last quarter of a mile. Stopping again, further on, I observed the same thing had "again" occurred, and wondered if there was any truth in the smoke-signalling theory, and, if so, what did these present signals convey.

I missed a turn-off track at about 15 miles from Renner Springs, and, keeping close to the telegraph line, did some very rough hill-climbing. An hour or two's slow travelling, however, brought me first to Powell's Creek itself, and then, all safe but more clothes-torn, out through a gap in the ranges, immediately behind the telegraph station.

* * * *

The main buildings at Powell's Creek are of stone, with galvanized iron roofing; and, when taken together, form two sides of a square. The operating room, with two other rooms (officer's dwelling) are under the one roof; a wide verandah, bedecked with potted flowering-shrubs and faced with lattice-work, overgrown, with evergreen climbing plants, runs along the front and at each end. At a right-angle, but separated from the more imposing structure by a distance of about one chain is a row of stone-walled cottages—stores and sleeping apartments; and other necessary offices; and a vegetable garden.

With the exception of the gums which grow thickly in the rich ground on the banks of the creek, there are no neighbouring trees of any great height. The telegraph station itself is in a fork of the creek.

In the stone walls of one of the cottages are several portholes—reminders of other days, when the natives were trouble-

some. To-day the blacks would be almost as likely to wage war on the citizens of Adelaide as to attack the inmates of one of those telegraph stations.

An enthusiastic cyclist (but minus a bicycle) was stationed, as assistant, at Powell's Creek. An amateur photographer also in same person, equipped, too with a camera; and during the several days I remained; several excellent photos of the bicycle were taken— some with a lubra or a blackboy "up."

My boots were mended with copper wire; and my cleaner pair of pyjamas (kept in reserve and put on in any sheltering clump of bushes or behind a hid-tree, immediately on sighting telegraph or other station buildings) were minus half a leg. Further, I gave them here, as I did people every where, to understand I was a nobody—one of whom they probably never again would hear anything more. Yet I was, received as courteously, and welcomed as cordially, as if I had been an influential politician' or a titled governor's son.

* * * *

From Powell's Creek it is but 54 miles[1] to Newcastle Waters homestead. The road from the telegraph station to Lawson's Creek (26 miles[2]) runs mostly either alongside or over low spurs and branches of the Ash-burton Range, with occasional stretches of sand and clay flats.

When cycling through range country I have nearly always found the track, where track there was, fair for riding on; and there is ever a bright novelty in the panoramic changes. Any sort of surface, in fact, in preference to sand.

* * * *

1. 87 km
2. 42 km

Before reaching the Lawson (where I camped for a night) I obtained a splendid view of an extensive sheet of water, lying away from the track, about three miles to the west. So very small was my knowledge of the country that I had not the remotest idea of this vast reservoir's existence.

Yet Lake Woods is a permanent fresh-water lake, with a circumference of between 80 and 90 miles[1]. It is fed from the north by the Newcastle River, and by the annually-flooded flats which drain into that, at times, noble stream.

The lake is bordered to the water's edge with heavy timber, and the country everywhere in its vicinity grows abundance of the best stock grasses— Mitchell and Flinders chiefly. The timber is mostly, box; but among the lower trees are a pea-bearing plant and other bushes which cattle dearly love.

Native companions, ducks and wild fowl of many varieties gather, too, in uncountable numbers in the bays and long-reaching arms of this magnificent lake.

* * * *

From Lawson's Creek up to Newcastle Waters station (28 miles[2]) and thence for 15 miles[3] beyond, is some grand grazing country, carrying mobs of the sleek and most healthy-looking cattle that ever delighted an owner's eyes. But I cannot speak in like terms of praise about the roads.

Here is a note from my directions for this stage : "From the Lawson to Sandy Creek is 6 miles. Mostly rough. Rough also to the bend in the line about three miles on. Kept along the line from Lawson's to the bend. About a mile north of Sandy Creek water can be had by going across to the Newcastle Creek (running north

1. 130 to 145 km
2. 45 km
3. 24 km

and south)—about 3/4 or 1 mile westward. The bend to Pole Camp Shackle, about 8 miles. Water might be to the left, perhaps a mile; follow pad or tracks into it. The Shackle to Newcastle Station 12 miles."

* * * *

In this stretch (28 miles), I had the first experience worth noticing, of that "Bay of Biscay" formation of which much had been heard. And what there was of it was rough on bike and rider. Undeniably so.

Where "Bay of Biscay" ground occurs, the soil is generally a blue-black clay—a pug-mixture of silt and decomposed vegetable matter—which the roots of a thick and wiry blue-grass hold firmly lumped together.

Either that, or the loose stuff between lumps of stone-hard pug is periodically washed away, and in the process holes are formed of varying depths. Anyway, the surface is rough as the Bay of Biscay—which is the explanation of the term, I suppose. Where, it is met with, the country is flat and subject to heavy floodings; and so it follows that in the rainy seasons those Bay of Biscay plains are converted into shallow, muddy lagoons or impassable lakes.

After the water has evaporated or drained off and until a pad has been worn through, the journeying over these wretched tracts is so unavoidably jolting and chin-choppy that (so 'tis said) horsemen dismount or stop and loll in their saddles, every hundred yards or so, to rest until their aching jaws and bones re-set and the kinks straighten out of their spinal columns. Walking or cycling over it is as pleasant as walking or cycling up and down a stairway, with the stairs of unequal height and width, blindfolded or in the dark.

* * * *

The Lawson Creek rises in the ranges east of the track, and, cutting the road at right angles, flows into Lake Woods just below the mouth of the Newcastle. This latter creek then, coming from the north, is seen at intervals away to the west; and—a strongly running river for months in some rainy seasons—contained, when I passed along, a chain of wide lagoons and lengthy waterholes between its thickly timbered banks.

The water is quite white; not thick, but milky in appearance, a minute quantity of clay or silt being held in suspension. Nevertheless one could hardly wish for more palatable drinking water. But with its peculiar color it is wasted here. A dairyman, now, would go into raptures over it. Indeed, the country about here, what with the excellent pasturage and the abundance of water, was strongly suggestive of overflowing milk pails.

The road crosses the Newcastle Creek before the cattle station, a couple of chains up from the northwesterly bank, is reached; and a very large waterhole (from which, with a well to fall back upon, the station gets its supply) is close by the crossing place.

I had seen many smokes since leaving Powell's Creek, but had not caught sight of any of the natives. To this waterhole, however, had just come in some ten or a dozen weedy ones; but interest in their kind was on the wane, and I gave them scant attention.

* * * *

A Chinaman—for we are entering the land of the Chinaman now—was in charge at the Newcastle. A "colonial experience" gentleman was there, but he was on the sick list. Three or four valuable dogs were chained to box kennels around the homestead. In case the blacks showed signs of becoming troublesome, all the person in charge had to do was to unloose one of those dogs, and no blackfellow could come within two miles of the place. Possibly no other fellow either.

The two managers, brothers, were absent; but I had had full permission to "make myself at home at Newcastle Waters" from one of them—I had met him travelling southwards between Tennant's and Powell's Creeks, and, as I said, had been generously treated by him.

The buildings, of which there are perhaps half-a-dozen—store, kitchen, men's sleeping room, manager's dwelling and others, as well as sheds—had all been designed and erected with an eye to use rather than to ornament. A garden close by is tendered to by a very civil Chinaman, I noticed only one black-fellow about the place.

Here I spent two happy days, eating, sleeping, writing and reading; taking no account of the time, absolutely unconscious of day or date, nor troubling about such inconsequential matters; I was right, the bike was right, so all was right as right could be.

Leaving the station, the creek must be re-crossed to get to the track which runs northwards to Daly Waters (82 miles[1]). To this track the thoughtful Chinaman ordered the station blackfellow to lead me— thoughtful, because the maze of tracks and pads was slightly bewildering. Here for once was the yellow man superior over the black. But, ordinarily, there is no love lost between them. Each views the other with a magnificent contempt.

To one of the blackboys in the service of a traveller, I said at nightime, pointing to a place where someone, camping, had made a comfortable bed of dry grass, (the blackboy was peering around for a sleeping place.)

"Why you not sleep over there Johnny ?" "No fea," he replied; "Him Chinaman make it that one."

Or he may have only meant that it was too luxurious.

From Newcastle to Newcastle North (a waterhole in the "river,") is 8 or 9 miles; a very good and level road. From the wa-

1. 132 km

terhole the road continues for six miles through scrub, swamp, and box trees; and this was chiefly a stretch of silky clay, kneaded, when wet, by travelling cattle, and ruined for the cyclist's purpose.

Bright green-leaved guttapercha trees are numerous along this portion of the route. The tree, or more properly bush, grows to a height of 15 or 20 feet; when a branch is broken, a thick milky substance exudes. Scratches made on one's hands or face by its thorny projections become very painful and take a long time to heal.

* * * *

At the end of the 15 miles from Newcastle station one suddenly finds oneself clear of the scrub, and, as it were, precipitated into Sturt's Bay of Biscay Plains. This arm of plain is 15 miles across; enough to make a cyclist feel sea-sick before getting half-way through.

Towards the middle of the dry season a fairly level pad is beaten; and then the ride across could be done expeditiously and without much risk to man or mount. But that pad, although traceable, had not as yet been fashioned when I chanced to get there, and as much careful navigation was called for as is needed to steer a ship through the Bay of Biscay itself when in its most cantankerous mood.

Having launched this frail barque upon this tempestuous sea (this is merely by way of variation), the voyager loses sight of land. Billows and blue grass everywhere, and not a drop to drink. One false step, and a broken neck or leg might follow. The look-out must be kept alert.

To save the barque—or perhaps we had better come back to the continent and call it a bike—I had been doing a good deal of walking : and when 7 or 8 miles had been covered I sat down to rest and make a short note of the fact that neither a tree or a shrub was within range of vision, "although afar off, to the east, what is

either a low range of hills (the Ashburton ?) or a line of dense scrub can be traced." The note lengthened out, and it rambles on :—"I feel it more than ever to be almost an indictable offence (against its maker) to press a respectable bicycle into negotiating such an outrageous track. Where's the telegraph line ? As usual, I dunno. But no matter. This is the road right enough. Cut the telegraph wire ? As soon think of cutting ———

"What a sheet of water must be here when this plain is covered ! Besides being 'Biscay'—lumped clay—this ground is fissured—long slits and crevices, from an inch to four or five inches[1] wide... Sky overcast...

"Been thinking what a mess I'd be in if a downpour of rain comes on before I could get out of this. In a few minutes all the ground would be impassable —20 miles or so of black stickphast. Bad for D (Diamond); bad for me."

The note was unfinished. I stowed the book, picked up my ever-sparkling diamond (for I had spent many a half hour in brightening it), and vaulted into the saddle as the hind wheel was going to bump. There was a moment's strain and doubt as to whether the bicycle could be upright as the wheel endeavoured to climb out of the abyss, then we were off bump, bump, bump, kangaroo-fashion.

There was a reason for this unusual haste—a heavy black mass away back on the southerly horizon. The clouds overhead, too, were moving up fast from that direction; and as these ominous signs to me betokened the quick occurrence of that dreaded rain—

On, Diamond, on !

* * * *

The clouds held back, and I was industriously persuading myself that they were only smoke, when out of the treacherous 'Biscay'

1. 2.5 cm to 10 or 13 cm

we passed unharmed, Diamond and I, through a narrow opening in an apparently never-ending and sharply-defined wall of thickly-packed tropical vegetation, of glistening leafy trees and trailing plants, bright flowers and rank undergrowth.

Fifteen anxious miles of bumpy, desolate, barren wretchedness, and now, all suddenly, a cyclist's paradise, dense foliage and deep shade, with a winding track, hard and level and strewn with ironstone gravel.

A fairy land; and fairy fingers pulled hard upon the wheels and stopped them. Then, as in some delightful dream, I led Diamond to a hedgewood tree, and stood stock still to drink in the melody—silent melody; for there was no sound to woo the eyes from the feast of tropic beauty.

And, drinking, I tingled with delight, and gloated on this prodigal glory in form and color as a miser might in secret upon his piled-up hoards of gold.

O marvellous Nature, supreme master-artist, what human brain could conceive so glorious a transformation scene—so swift, so entrancing, so unexpected !

But the wheels spin again, yet slowly; for the change may come at any moment, and I dawdled to stretch the sweetness out.

* * * *

Bluegrass and open space appeared too soon. But the fit of depression was a thing of a moment; for around the little flat were large box-trees thickly clustered; and, on the further side, majestic leafy coolabahs fringed a reservoir carved by the hand of nature in the rock and clay, and capable of holding three or four million gallons of water; fairly open on the side from which I approached, but on the other sides walled in by a tangled growth of well-nigh impenetrable scrub and brush and forest tree.

The coolabahs threw deep shadows on the carpet of soft grass spread upon the open side; and in this romantic spot—were six or eight confounded Chinamen !

* * * *

Occasional parties of celestials, equipped with guns, horses, and provisions, make across from about here to Queensland, to evade the pole tax, Along by many cattle stations to Camooweal, a border-town, is the favored route. As Camooweal is far away from anywhere else, the expense of carting the Chinamen back to whence they came would be too great; and if imprisoned for a short term, when they first arrive—well, they have arrived anyhow.

A party of Chinamen are considered to have done well if half of those who set out for Camooweal ever see it. The blacks knock over a lot; several always drop by the way, and nobody troubles much about them or their misfortunes.

The present gathering had with them three horses.

These they did not ride, but loaded them with provisions and necessaries, and, walking beside them, led them along.

Deciding to camp at Frew's Ironstone Ponds (the reservoir is 36 miles[1] from Newcastle), I chose a place among the coolabahs, and walked over to the Chinamen.

" Good day." It was a feeler.

"No savee."

Taking out a florin (the only silver coin I had), I said to him, whose smile was blandest, "You got it flour ?" pointing to a small bag of it. "You bake it Johnny cake, so big," I drew a small circle on the ground and laid the two-shilling-piece within the circle.

1. 58 km

The yellow man's smile broadened at sight of the white money. He knew something of English. He said "Welly Goo."

So, happy in the certainty of having fresh baked bread for supper, I, leaving them, proceeded to make my primitive wash-basin preparations, and had a bath.

Before sundown, the Chinamen had shot a great number of the ducks with which the surface of the waterhole (in common with most of the others along the track, by the way) was swarming. And one of them, at supper time, came over and presented me with an only three-parts empty tin of jam—a small tin. May he have escaped both niggers and imprisonment ?

* * * *

Often o' nights, as here at this romantic camping place, there came to me the clear realization of what would be the consequence of a disabling accident. There were no means that I could see of getting out from places in this country for months if my machine smashed up. I was a nobody—had neither wealth nor influence at my back, and would be powerless to do anything or get people to do anything for me.

And suppose I did get to a telegraph or other station. Is it a couple of riding and pack horses, with saddles, packs, and provisions all on, and a black boy, you would throw at the head of a stranger cyclist who had been warned against coming your way, yet who arrives—only to break down at your door ?

I would be a nuisance to myself and everyone else around the place I reached, and to all who had associated their names in any way with mine. Ugh ?

The situation would be unbearably horrible. And the prospect ! When the time came, and I was given the chance to go north or south, what a prospect loomed either way before me !

If the bike broke down, I would have made but very little exertion indeed to get out into the world at either end. Why should I, even if an opportunity of doing so soon presented itself—out into where the crooked finger of derisive "I told him so" would evermore be mockingly bent towards me ? Why should I, when I could lie down and remain, quite comfortably, and in peace, at the side of the first waterhole I should come upon !

When a fellow gets into the habit of lying awake o' nights out in the open, gazing upwards at the starlit sky, and thinking dreamily of what lies beyond, he is—atleast some of him are—liable to become more or less desirous of satisfying the curiosity such ruminations excites. The stars twinkle as if they were all quite happy. If one could only be quite sure— But I'd rather chance that than face the other certainty. I would cut no telegraph wire; would trouble no station people or anyone else. And so I comforted myself, and slept well.

* * * *

On leaving Frew's beautiful pond early in the morning, the road leading to Daly Waters (55 miles[1]) was assured by the Chinamen's tracks. Remarkable tracks these—left by flat oblong pieces of wood with which each traveller was sandal-shod.

The road from the pond, still strewn with ironstone-gravel, immediately entered the forest, where of the sky little was to be seen, except a narrow strip overhead. A short strip this, too, for the road wound now to the west, now away to the east, or, again, ran northwards ;

And so light-heartedly I wheeled through the morning's shadows, between two walls of forest trees, and over or around logs and branches of fallen ones, for 17 miles. Then came three miles of dangerous "Bay of Biscay" ground; Then five miles[2] of still treacherous

1. 89 km

track, on which were many patches of "Biscay holes" and lengths of fallen timber; and then again the jungle, and so to Daly Waters.

Besides the higher trees, a heavy undergrowth, and many kinds of grass flanked either side. The trees were in great variety—bloodwood, ironwood, lancewood, coolabah, bauhinia, hedgewood, whipcord tree and quinine tree. Added to these, a bush known as the water wattle, a native orange, and a turpentine bush; and, for aught I know, a dozen others.

I passed through an extensive belt of tall, and remarkably straight trees, growing very close together. The trunks were branchless for a long way up, 25 feet of clear stem being not uncommon. To this very respectable forest tree there had been given the name of mulga, a misnomer truly, judged by the standards of the south.

But of them all the most to be admired had a stem, straight and slender, 30 feet or more in height, leafless; but bearing on every branch large numbers of a bright red flower, in shape, resembling very much the fuchsia !

And of flowers there are not many on the Overland. From the MacDonnell Ranges, right up to Powell's Creek, my only "button hole," was a large bell-shaped, blue flower, growing on a bush about 3 feet in height; but, Diamond, I bedecked with yellow wattle blossom wherever it could be got. Beyond Daly Waters, a little round flower, like a "billy-button"—white, blood-red or variegated—replaced the larger, and more quickly, withering blue-bell.

* * * *

This day, like every other day up there, was "blazing" hot. Parts of the road, too, were unsafe; and my waterbag, from being knocked about, and worn thin in places, allowed the water to evaporate quickly (truth to toll, I had soon drunk it all rather than have this occur), and a stretch of 35 miles[1] had to be cycled over

2. 27 km, then 5 km, then 8 km

before more was got. Yet, notwithstanding these things, the ride from Frew's to Daly Waters, all through dense forest, lingers to my memory as making one of the most enjoyable day's cycling I ever had.

The feeling of loneliness had to a great extent worn off. I had, it may be, become inured to it. Still, the charge of scene and country was so marked and impressive that often throughout the ride, in the last gloom and shadown of countles solemn giant trees, encompassed by a penetrating solitude I experienced again those indescribable sensations to which I had not been for many a day susceptible— mystic sensations of a hushed expectant awe as in the presence of a something living, breathing, but intangible. As I passed by I glanced into an opening, or looked far back between the trunks where trees were scattered—and it seemed to me so very strand that nothing should be moving there !

Yet this sense of being alone with throbbing nature—the hidden influence—was not by any means unhappy. It was a restful feeling—a feeling of peace-fulness, as though one had awakened from a long, long sleep, to find oneself in a calm, and weird existence somewhere beyond the state of life : a borderland arrived at after death.

And the toil and turmoil of existence in the world which had been left behind, viewed from the distance, appeared now to be so very purposeless; its work-a-day prosaic rounds and its confinement so very galling; its dead-sea-apple pleasures so few and shortlived; its miseries, so many and enduring; the worth of it all so very little that the consciousness of having to again return to it was as a jarring note.

And in the vast immensity of towering forest the thought of quiet Death was no unwelcome one. I realised so clearly what an insignificant atom this was which moved through it, as an ant might- so insignificant that, had the certain prospect of the atom's end appeared, for anyone to fuss or mourn over such a trivial incident as

1. 56 km

that death be, seemed extravant, as absurd as to mourn the withering of a blade of grass or the falling of a leaf.

In this land of forest, and quiet and vastness, the silence, if it be given a thought, is so profound, so unnatural, that memories of some night in childhood come back to mind—some dark, still night through whose long hours the child waited alone in a roomy house, hushed with bated breath, and "fancied things."

* * * *

About mid-day I arrived at water—probably The Burt; a shallow, clayey creek. After drinking, and whilst the quart-pot boiled, I put in the time carving my name on the trunk of a gum-tree overhanging the waterhole. I was not sure about the date, but cut one in. High grass grew on that bank of the creek on which I stopped—grass high enough to cover and shade the bicycle which, when I pushed it in, stood nearly upright against the finger-thick blades.

A smoke was rising down the creek; and when my opposition cloud was raised an inquisitive black female hove in sight. When first observed, she was on the far side of the watercourse, peeping from behind some bushes; but a minute afterwards she came out into full view. My first impulse was to call her over. Then I wondered how she would act if I remained silent. So I pretended not to be aware of her presence, and went on with the letter-forming.

The lubra stood still for a moment, irresolute; then she advanced slowly, keeping a little way out from the creek, and passed me before she crossed. To keep her in sight I had need to turn but very slightly.

On seeing her step down into the creek's bed I took pains to kep my back to her. Presumably she was unable to satisfactorily explain away the mien of deep preoccupation so osten so ostentatiously displayed. At any rate she came very close, looked on from

behind as I worked, and once coughed, or "hem'd" aboriginally. And still I obstinately continued deaf. She had a becomingly dirty bone stuck horizontally through her broad nose, and for the rest was fashionably droned in a dog's-tooth necklace.

At last she touched me on the shoulder. At this I faced sharply around and stared with a look intended to convey blank astonishment. She giggled; but there was a tinge of uneasiness or uncertainty about the giggle; then said "which way nanto ?"

Having gone so far with no idea of saying or doing anything in particular to the young woman, I now acted on the prompting of the moment —rushed from her suddenly into the long grass, collared the nanto, and rushed out with it. She screamed,at my reappearance-or rather at appearance of the prancing bicycle.- Then turned and ran; and I ran the nanto after her.

But shoving the bicycle handicapped me, and she outdistanced us easily. I stopped and called out to her to come back, but she wouldn't. I cried almosy tearfully, "Angelina," but 't was no use.

I reckoned women were a class of people no fellow could understand, and walked sadly back to my lonely dinner—hour—for dinner I had little.

From this waterhole I felt not the slightest of inclinations to go on. Had I brought with me from Newcastle sufficient food to last me out I might have camped there for a week. Finishing off my name plate leisurely (this was the only place at which I had so occupied myself), I ate what I had to eat, and smoked.

And, smoking, I pondered deeply over the notion of making for the blacks' camp and trying to strike a bargain with the chief or elders of the tribe—that they should keep me well supplied with tucker for a week or so, and show me the lions in return for which I'd teach 'em to ride the bicycle at, say, two snakes a lesson, lubras half price.

But I had been learning to ride myself one time and knew how strangely learner's legs get tangled up in spokes and other parts, a cyclist cannot cycle without. So I decided to go on. Having so decided, I yawned, called out despairingly for Angelina to come forth and see me off, waved my hand in the direction she would most likely be observing from, and made wheel tracks for Daly waters.

* * * *

Those tracks were formed but very slowly; for it had entered my mind that the end of my journey was approaching, and I knew not whether to be glad or sorry. I almost concluded to my own satisfaction that life would be almost worth living if at the end of it a fellow having arrived all alone at a weird un-desecrated old forest like this should then mysteriously disappear. If he were to get away far back, and tread lightly in going, people might search for months and never find him; and there would be no ghosts of ghoulish undertakers or neighboring unsympathetic corpses to trouble his last sleep.

But for myself I had no justifiable excuse for doing anything of that sort—so long as the bicycle didn't break down.

Meditating thus, I came to still another large waterhole, surrounded on all sides by massive boulders of the now common brown and friable iron ore. A pretty spot indeed. Forest trees grew thickly around, except at one side, and there they were more scattered, and high grass and bushes lined that bank.

The follow-on track was most uncertain, and half an hour was occupied in making sure of it.

Having at length traced out the right pad, which went off again from the waterhole at a sharp angle, I strolled down to the water's edge and had a drink; then cracked up several pieces of the iron ore, but as they didn't look "kindly," gave up prospecting; next cooeed to try if there was an echo, but found there wasn't; had

another drink, stretched myself out in a shady place, and, without having the slightest intention of doing so, fell asleep.

On waking I looked at my watch. "The deuce !" I darted for the bicycle. Now where was the bicycle ?

The soil was hard white clay, yielding no foot-prints for a guide. Think fixedly as I might, I could not bring to mind where I had "planted" it. True, I could not think very fixedly. Too many disagreeable thoughts came crowding up.

What a pretty ending to my journey this ! My bicycle, it would almost seem, had carried into execution the little poetical thing in the way of existence-endings I had contemplated vaguely a while back—had wheeled itself out into the un-desecrated old forest, and vanished from mortal ken.

I found it—of course somewhere, and within half an hour.

* * * *

The watercourse this hole or pond was in, came into view occasionally until Daly Waters telegraph station was reached. *Ergo* it must have been the Daly Creek. It, like all the watercourses beyond the Burt, has its fall towards the north to join the coastal rivers. *Ergo*, again, the country running northward from the Burt must have its fall towards the coast.

The buildings at Daly Waters are on the south hank of the winding creek, and, being erected on piles, stand two feet or more above the ground—not, because of floods, though, for this bank is well above the plains but to mitigate the white ant evil.

All the way up from the MacDonnell Ranges, anthills had ever figured more or less prominently. Oftentimes fantastically-shaped groupings of them had been mistaken for men or animals. They had been gradually increasing to average size, until here at Daly Waters, or a tow miles on, they rose as high as the sag in the telegraph wire.

It had already been told me that between Pine Creek (258 miles[1] from Daly Waters) and Palmerston (146 miles[2] still further on) the railway line in many places deviated to save the cost and labour of cutting through the ant-hills, so large and of such very tough material were they fashioned there. I was always very grateful for scraps of information like this.

Daly Waters seemed nearly as good as the end of the journey; for at the Katherine River (only 190 miles[3] on) there was a hotel, and this meant civilization and perhaps a township. At the telegraph station two or three days were spent. Residing there, besides the stationmaster, were an assistant, and a Chinaman cook. Many natives were camped in the neighborhood, and they, or occasionally a handy Chinaman, got the "odd jobs" of the station to do.

Here, as at every other place of call, the tinkling of the meal bell fell on my ears sweetly as heavenly music. Music with words, too, learned from a black-fellow, who thus pithily interpreted the ringing— "Chow-chow, quick fella, come on now."

* * * *

The natives, of whom some were about the station have a faith in the professing medicine man, which, unless a limb be missing, often goes far towards making the patient whole. The "doctor" of a tribe will examine the afflicted one, diagnose the case, and find out where the pain is. There's bound to be something of a pain somewhere. Having made his arrangements preparatory to operating, he applies his mouth to the part—swelling or wound, or whatever it may be—makes a big show of sucking, tangles himself up somewhat in the practice of his profession—and draws out a lump of wood, or a stone, thus exhibiting tangible proof of the efficacy of his method of treatment.

1. 415 km
2. 235 km
3. 306 km

They put a little fire (live coals and a few pieces of dry wood, with the fired end towards the wind) at their heads of nights, so fearful are they of an evil spirit—a bogey man, of whom their grandmothers warned them when they were children.

* * * *

A native at one of the telegraph stations kindly pointed out to me two remarkable constellations, hitherto, doubtless, unheard of by our own astronomers. He interpreted them to be, one, a representation of the emu, the other, of course, of the kangaroo.

And, why not ? The natives should have their familiar animal groups of stars just as properly as had the ancients on other continents their Bears and Fishes. And both of those to which I have, referred are "all there," safe enough—up in the heavens somewhere.

* * * *

This astronomer had been working steadily about the station for a matter of three or four months at a stretch, during which period he had shifted his residence a few dozen times, and had now taken it into his head that he would be all the better for a bit of holiday-making (from which, by the way, the natives generally return in a very lanky condition) away out among the smokes. He counted on being absent until the middle of the next following month, and informed the station master of that fact in these terms :—"This one moon tumble down. By-'n'-bye new pella moon jump up. Fust time picaninny. Lee-tle bit ole man —then come back."

The expert understands this "yabber" instantly.

* * * *

There is a law of the Overland—an unwritten law, of course—regarding the camping of blacks a wells by which white men are gathered. At sundown one of the whites says to the blacks, "clear out, go to your camp," and indicates a locality for them to "clear out" to. Or one of them comes up and asks, "which way we camp to-night ?" If they venture to put in an appearance again before sunrise—well, then, it is understood they can be up to no good, and, as trespassers, are duly "dealt with."

* * * *

The officer in charge at Daly Waters showed me many kindnesses; and as his business took him up the track I rode on and camped with him at some iron tanks near a dried-up waterhole known as The Ironstone, about 33 miles[1] beyond the station. Between those tanks and the Elsey cattle station—77 miles[2]— there are on the road two wells (from one of which , by the way, a man walked out to look up some horses about a year ago and has never been heard of since); and as the cattle station is approached several billy-bongs in or near the Elsey creek are met with.

The country from the Daly to Elsey Station is nearly all low-lying and subjected to annual heavy flooding. The dangerous "Bay of Biscay" is come upon within a mile or two of the telegraph station, and extends northwards through Stewart's Swamp for about 30 miles[3]. Thence the riding varies. There is a good deal of sand, with many long and short stretches of harder "crab-hole" ground, "gilguy," and "devil-devil."

This last name is applied to clay, pure and simple, or silty soil similar to " Biscay," but with this difference, that in contracting after rains, in the quick-drying rays of fierce tropical suns it cracks, while the "Biscay" becomes distressingly bumpy. These cracks are as

1. 53 km
2. 124 km
3. 48 km

so many ever-set traps lying in wait for wheeled vehicles. The jaws of many of them would easily admit a waggon wheel. They run in all directions across the track and with it. To go slow is the cyclist's sure way of getting through without accident.

"Gilguy" denotes small patches of mixed "Biscay" and "devil-devil" ground—possibly dried up clay pans. And "crab-holes" are roundish openings, like rabbit barrows, but going straight down in the soil. These "crab-holes" are the more dangerous ones for horsemen. Here and there one is warned to sheer off the pad by an uprising roughly-trimmed branch of tree or length of dry wood which some traveller has shoved in to mark a bad spot.

The vegetation along the track is distinctly tropical. So also is the climate. -And so both continue all the way to Palmerston.

But I confess to disappointment with the arrangements in the forestry department. From Elsey upwards there were altogether too many trees of the Eucalyptus family.

From Daly Waters to the Katherine (190 miles[1]) are many and fine specimens of Ironwood, Ebony, Bloodwood and Currajong; but the prevailing tree— the one, at least, which from the track the passer-by will see most of—is the familiar Gum.

* * * *

The homestead buildings, at Elsey Cattle Station (100 miles[2] from Daly Waters) were, I thought, the most prettily situated group I had seen anywhere since —oh, years ago. The Elsey river winds its billabonged way in front and between the homestead. This is a garden in which anything that might be planted should be proud to grow.

1. 306 km
2. 160 km

A beautiful reach of fresh water is a permanency in the river at this point, with the sweetly scented flowers of many water lilies ever floating gracefully upon its surface—a surface ruffled, as I at calm evening time gazed with admiration on the fair picture, by sharp splash and undulating widening circle, as a fish jumped now close to one bank now over at the other; or, again, where one had risen high up to a fly, or for amusement, in the centre.

Little forests of pandannus palms overtopped by stately paperbarks or gum trees line the sides; and massive climber-laden trunks, or towering branches of giant tree growths, meet the eye wherever it be turned.

Here also, along the chain of ponds and billabongs up and down the Elsey, is some of the most delightful scenery one could desire to look upon. Here, too, cotton grows naturally, making a brave show— bunches of pure white dotting the landscape, and touching off the vivid green of tropic bush, or thickly grouping in some wide space by themselves.

The Paper-bark at once attracts the eye. A very large tree this. On the wettest day one has but to prize off a piece of the trunk's soft outer covering, and there is to his hand compressed—laminated, as mica— a hundred sheets of dry and easily-lighted coarse straw paper.

The mimosa tree and the cabbage tree, as well as many other palms, likewise flourish in the favoured neighbourhood of the Elsey. In fact, Elsey, as it appeared to me, was a vast botanical garden; and at supper time, such a feast of sweet potatoes and other dainties were spread that sleep but tardily drove out the thoughts of them.

A Chinaman cook had been speared here, in the manager's absence, about a fortnight before, and I thought the Chinaman who had replaced him, and who was now in charge (the manager being again absent) must be a fairly lucky man—for a Chinaman.

And, above all, he cooked the sweet potatoes deliciously and baked—oh ! lovely cake.

* * * *

From the Elsey a stretch of 18 miles[1] of sand (the timber is mostly gum trees) runs northwards; but this is to be avoided by taking the "new road," which bears in a more easterly direction. The track for part of the way to the Katherine was freshly marked as a party of black trackers and a police trooper, having in charge two or three prisoners—natives, who had speared the Chinaman—had left the vicinity of the station only the day before my arrival there.

From the excellent road-plan made out for me by the courteous officer at Daly Waters (he had, I think, every inch of the road in his mind's eye) I was able to make unhesitatingly into the various watering places. Nevertheless, there are one or two places on the Roper River and at the Esther Well which might puzzle one not so blest as I was.

I overtook the police party after I had camped one night on the Stirling, at a waterhole in one of that creek's bends, about 40 miles[2] from the Elsey; but after a very brief stoppage, proceeded on towards the Katherine.

Of the prisoners I know nothing, and never heard of them again; but I was told they would be imprisoned, then quickly released, enrolled among the native police, and for evermore hold their heads high. "There is always an opening for men of spirit in the native police force," said one who ought to know.

Give a nigger a rifle or revolver and he will shoot his fellow niggers—go out hunting after them if permitted—with the greatest of glee, readiness, and cheerful animosity.

1. 29 km
2. 64 km

"You see wild blackfellow along track," more than one "civilised" philanthropist asked me. "Sometimes, I think," I have answered. "At once has come an expectant, pleased expression to the questioner's face." "You shoot him all right ?" has been asked in amusingly hopeful tone.

* * * *

The presence of a trooper with black trackers probably accounted for the scarcity of blackfellows along the road, but just after leaving the Esther Well, which is only 24 miles[1] from the Katherine, I ran across two. They seemed though rather inclined to clear among the trees.

Dismounting, I endeavoured to get some information from them about a turn off of which I was still doubtful; but they were too much interested in the bicycle to make what they would tell me very clear.

Each carried a spear. One was headed with three wires—No. 6 guage—fastened close together, and looked quite bad or good enough to permanently damage a Chinaman with. The effective end of the other one, a long bamboo, was fashioned out of one side of a square gin bottle. (Gin, by the way, is a favorite N.T. drink.) A very business-like weapon this was too. A slight scratch from it should be capable of inducing *delirium tremens* in the veins of the staunchest teetotaler.

From Daly waters, and at many places still farther south, the grass was for miles at a stretch so high that, mounted on the bicycle, I often could not see over the top of it. In front, at such times, was only a faint streak or hollow, where the top of the bending grass at either side of the narrow pad met. The pad itself, the ground on which I cycled, was not at such times visible—except when I dismounted and crept down into the strange narrow tunnel to have

1. 39 km

a reassuring look for or at it. When riding, a passage through was forced, or as it were, was ploughed open, which when the machine had passed closed up again as water would. It felt like being engulphed in ocean. I often fancied I was on the point of drowning, and sat bolt upright to take in a breath of the upper air. That was fancy; what I now say is not.

At every few hundred yards, the thinner, shorter, wiry undergrowth of "blades" wound round and round the rear hub, until the roll becoming Wide and high arid tightly coiled, it acted as a brake twixt wheel and forks. They became entwined among the chain's links, and fastened themselves between the teeth on both the sprocket wheels, and so frequent stoppages were a necessity. This state of things lasts only to the end of May or June. The long, rank, useless grass, being an impediment to the progress of man and beast, is, as it dries, fired by passing travellers, and the second growth which then springs up, is short and sweet. The natives, too, set fire to it, as when it grows, they cannot see or track the game or animals they hunt for. Many patches had already been burned off, and the minute particles of black ash which overspread the ground, rose at the slightest touch, floated in the air, and begrimed the passer-by.

Two very extensive fires faced me after parting from the natives at Esther Well. I had grown used to riding among smouldering embers, and with the grass or dry trees burning right and left; but the second of these fires was the biggest thing I had witnessed. After passing out of the first, and leaving one black, sky-obscuring wall behind, a mile or two's stretch of untouched grass and tropic bush and stunted gums was ridden on to. At the end of this arose a mighty pall of jet-black smoke, stretched out I knew not how far, with flame-jets glancing through. The whole country seemed ablaze. The land was overcast, the sky shrouded as if a fearful thunder storm was imminent. The smoke ascended and remained suspended, as might dark, heavy, threatening banks of cloud, and the fire

at intervals leaped up and gleamed on this side or on that—a passable equivalent for lightning.

It was a grandly impressive spectacle. But there were other considerations than the spectacular. Hooked, a little uneasily, for an unlighted opening along the fast advancing line; and seeing such a gap between two trees where there was little else but sand, I turned over—walking—and so passed through.

A dozen steps in I stopped to look behind. The flames had already closed in !

In front, far on as I could see, the stems or branches of dry standing trees were burning; and on the ink-black ground were smouldering heaps of tindery bush, or still-blazing fallen limbs. Thick strewn everywhere were the hot, and quickly blackening ashes of that tall grass which had been waving majestically in each breath of wind a few short moments since.

Shouldering the bicycle I walked cautiously to where the pad showed still a narrow streak, yet offering a clear, narrow running space. As I walked—I speak without exaggeration—I now and again heard sweat drops, hiss and fizzle, as they fell on a burning log or some little grass-root heap.

* * * *

For five miles ata stretch this fresh-burnt ground continued. Trees stood out like torches all the way; and on the pad were many live coals of fallen timber. I dare not hurry, and often had to dismount and lift the bicycle over, because if my tyres blazed up I hadn't water to spare with which to put the Ixionic fire out. Nevertheless I did that five miles scorching.

* * * *

Out of the fire and into a frying-pan of hot sand ten miles long and unridable. Towards the end of the ten miles so many large boulders and long flat slabs of granite cropped up in the track that there was a danger of getting dizzy from rounding them; and these senseless outcroppings at the last became so numerous that a bye-track made a seven mile detour towards the Katherine. At that beautiful river I arrived, after a hard days "graft" at sundown. 214 miles[1] from Palmerston.

A hotel at last. Those "terrors" of the Overland which were to bring certain destruction had been left behind.

The buildings consist of the hotel and store, telegraph and police stations. They are on the south side of the river, which to the westward joins the Daly.

The sloping banks of the Katherine rise 80 or more feet from the gravelly bed, and are thickly timbered with giant trees of many varieties. Here and in the country round about are, as well as thickets, jungles and beauty spots innumerable, the stately paperbark and Leichhardt pine, Pandanus palms, white cedar, woolly-butt, bloodwood, ironwood, banyan, and other trees; and splendid couch and buffalo grasses.

When in flood the stream is about a quarter of a mile wide. Boats are kept at both the hotel and the telegraph station. Alligators are known to exist in several places, in deep holes and long reaches, but only a small species of crocodile is often seen about the crossing place. A fine specimen of one of these latter was on view at the hotel.

* * * *

It was at this telegraph station that I received a message from a fabulously wealthy company of cycle-part makers. My journey, as I have said, was practically at an end. Those "perils" that were so

1. 344 km

great that failure was, I was told, certain, had been surmounted. Yet, only now, seated at a hotel, I read a curt and, as it seemed to me, impertinent and "catchy" telegram, endeavoring, as I took it, to ferret out of me—unwealthy me—a most valuable advertisement gratis. Up to this moment, when success had been practically achieved, nothing had been heard from that quarter. I regarded it as mean, and answered accordingly.

The company took further action then; but, in view of later developments, it would be meanness on my part now to speak further of a matter which would not deserve mention at all but that it has been made to some extent public property. Only this further : *my answer to the telegram has never yet been published !*

Without any promise of recompense I gladly did all I could for another firm whose manager had treated me civilly, and who did not wait until danger had been passed before identifying itself with the fortunes of the trip.

* * * *

At the Katherine, where only one night was spent, I refitted myself with wearables from the stock of the widely known hotel and storekeeper; had a swim in the river; then tied boots and other things on Diamond, shouldered the lot and walked across.

The country is flat for ten or twelve miles. Travelling only middling—rather soft. But before the morning was far gone, rough hills were entered and they continued most of the way to Pine Creek (68 miles[1]).

* * * *

It was hazardous to hurry the bicycle over those rocky hills, but Diamond stood the rough experience more than manfully, and

1. 109 km

jumped the miniature precipices encountered on the down-hill sides without ever loosening a spoke.

At one time, in the very early part of the journey, I favored the notion of entering Palmerston, with the bicycle in a fearfully battered condition—a revolving bundle of splints and copper wires. But how could I ? And I found myself proudly exhibiting it everywhere, and finally in a Palmerston shop window as being "better than new."

In my mind, now, was the fixed idea that nothing could break that machine. I knew I couldn't. And it had been called on to undergo some rough usage.

Towards the end, such confidence had I come to repose in its excellence, in its unbreakableness, that on hearing sticks and things rattle among the spokes I used only to laugh, say "Sool it, Diamond !" and let them fight the battle out.

* * * *

The hilly country alternates with stretches, of sand, blue-grass, swamps, and rough patches of white clay or pug, with here and there a stunted gum. I find at this stage this memorandum written for myself —"Horrid, swampy, inexpressibly bleak and unattractive, miserably stunted timber—a result, p'raps, of centuries of bush fires. A 68 mile-span unfit for anything—except those strips close by the creeks and watercourses." These latter were the redeeming features. The water in some was deep, notably in the Driffield, Fergusson, Edith and Cullen Creeks, which are rivers for a month or two in the rainy season.

In one of them—the Edith, I think—a little way down from one, nearly waist-deep crossing, was an inviting reach of calm, deep water, with many picturesque pandanus palms and woolly butts caressing it; and as a family of aboriginals—two old men, many pic-

aninnies and some females—were bathing by the roadway. To this I wheeled the bicycle.

The bottom was gravelly, and in the deepest place there was only four feet or so of water. The stream, or rather hole, was narrow; and while paddling about in it the thought struck me that it would be just as well to cross now and here as to cross at any other time and place. And, besides, an opportunity for experimenting presented itself.

To bundle up the clothes and the few odds and ends I had with me was the work of but a couple of minutes; those things I was able to walk across with. On returning I laid the bicycle on its side close by the water's edge, made fast the interlocking gear, and fastened securely to its handlebars one end of the strong string I always had carried. To the free end of the string I attached a stone. This I threw to the opposite bank and swam over after it.

I would have swam that stream though my knees had got the gravelrash in the transaction !

Laying hold now of the string I pulled gently on the bicycle until it moved; then pulled it quickly whilst in the water; and so landed it where I was standing. Undoing the string I allowed my silently weeping comrade to remain out in the sun, where its doleful tears quick turned into smiling rainbows while I resumed my clothes. Then gave it five minutes attention.

This wetting, I might here remark, did no more harm to the bicycle than a smart shower of rain would have done, but at Palmerston, where I totally immersed it in the sea, I found the salt water quickly formed rust on the various nickeled parts around the nuts and where the spokes entered the rim and perhaps within the tubes themselves for aught I know, as there, alas ! monetary considerations forced me to part with it.

* * * *

I caught some fish in the waterholes, along the track. They bite at dough or flesh of any sort; or the first one captured will do as bait for catering more with.

From the Hayward Creek up to Daly Waters (230 miles[1]), the fish are small, averaging about 8 inches[2]; but higher up, as at the Elsey, and in more lasting holes to east and west, much larger ones are to be had. Some will rise to a fly; others take meat. The best bait one can use is a section of widgery (or "witchery," a grub three or four inches[3] in length, found at the roots of gum trees, and tasting, when slightly roasted, not unlike a hen's egg.)

A packing or any other needle, heated to take the temper out, and bent into shape, makes a sufficiently good hook. But I had been provided with the regulation pattern steel article by a trooper, at one of the telegraph stations.

* * * *

At the Little Cullen Creek, seven miles from the Palmerston railway terminus, a genuine diamond has been found within the last couple of years; and several small heaps of tailings near the crossing place were accounted for by a native who told me "white-fellow bin on track of nudder one; but no catch im."

On from the Cullen are groups of shallow holes, now half filled in, where alluvial gold has been sought; and various reefing properties, notably the Cosmopolitan, came into view on nearing Pine Creek.

Pine Creek (where I spent but a night) is not itself a large place, but it is the centre of an extensive gold-mining district. On one

1. 370 km
2. 20 cm
3. 8 to 10 cm

side of the main street is the railway station yard; on the other a first-class hotel, a store, blacksmith's, wheelwright's and butcher's shops, besides several more business and dwelling houses. Most of the Asiatics connected with the mines, occupy a portion of the town away back from the main street.

Owing to the surrounding wooded hills and neighbouring gum creek the general aspect of the place is prepossessing.

Of the Wandi goldfields, about 30 miles[1] to the east, it is said that several valuable properties exist there. But the climate is trying, and properties in the district need to be very valuable indeed before Europeans will infuse energy into their developement.

* * * *

This line from Pine Creek to Palmerston is spoken of as "the northern section of the Transcontinental." I do not pose as one who can say with authority whether it is advisable or not to complete the railway through the continent. That is not my "line" at any rate. Nevertheless I have formed opinions. Without any concessions at all from a leave-granting government, with barely the permission given them to construct a railway, and with even a squaring donation to the exchequer of a million pounds or so, a band of reasonably, business-like, experienced, company-promoters, I'm very sure, could make large fortunes in English or French money out of the undertaking—for themselves.

* * * *

I had expected to find a well-beaten track, perhaps a macadamised road from Pine Creek to Palmerston. But—a road where there was already a railway ! What for ?

1. 50 km

On to Union Town. There is a store here, kept by a welcoming European. So far 10 miles of good although hilly road.

At the store I was advised to look out for tracks leading off to the Chinamen's mines, of which there were several, away back in the hills from the railway. This advice I conscientiously acted on—"looked out" and followed one for miles until I came to the mine and the Chinaman. But in among the hills there was only "no savee," and a noisy quartz crashing plant; so I retraced my wandering wheelmarks, kept close to the railway line, and arrived at Burrundie (124 miles[1] from Palmerston) sometime in the afternoon.

Burrundie is the last—or first, whichever you please—of the overland telegraph stations. Here there was hospitable entertainment at the hands of the station master; then on to the Howley Cottages, 100 miles[2] from Palmerston. As the unpremeditated visit into the regions of Chinese no-saveedom had interfered with the day's progress, at the Howley Cottages I was made comfortable for the night.

My voucher book was now again constantly in use. I had tried hard when in at the Chinamen's mine to possess myself of a celestial's signature, as a curio, but had not succeeded. Was it possible that the book-fiend had been there too ?

Next day, from the Howley, I made fairly good time, passed the Adelaide River (the half-way refreshment-house on the railway, 77 miles from Palmerston), and Rum Jungle (58 miles from Palmerston) and got in as far as the 46 mile[3] cottages, where on the warm invitation of the resident ganger, I camped until morning.

* * * *

1. 200 km
2. 160 km
3. 124 km, 93 km and 74 km

From about Burrundie the cyclist is given the choice of occasional lengths of old pads (white clay soil mostly), alongside the railway line, and of the ballast or embankments, between or close by the rails' I chose a little of each.

Hilly country extends from Pine Creek to about the Adelaide River. The various rivers are thickly lined with screw palms and thickets of stout bamboos, and the country generally is substantially timbered.

The only white resident at Rum Jungle (a railway camp, on a small watercourse, tributary to the Finniss, where the jungle is remarkably dense; the prefix may be reminiscent of railway-construction days), said there was plenty of time yet to find alligators in the Darwin River, between the jungle and Palmerston, although the water was getting low. But why should I go hunting for them when I bore away hence as trophies, still preserved, two alligator teeth ?

And, speaking of alligators, it has recently been printed—"there are no snakes in the Northern Territory." There are, to their proper season. You may see them even without drinking heavily. I cycled over two and left them behind, on a narrow pad by the eastern side of the railway line, within a few hours of leaving the Howley cottages.

The size of one was larger than I would care to say. It remained quite motionless after the bicycle had passed over it; so I dismounted and threw a stick to ascertain whether the docile-seeming reptile was alive. It was. First rising aloft its head swiftly to bite at the passing piece of timber, it then immediately turned and commenced wriggling towards myself. I never mounted a bicycle more quickly in my life, nor did a quarter mile in faster time.

The ganger at the 46 mile cottages and the guard of the passenger train running between Palmerston and Pine Creek, as well

as the writer, have cause to know that in the matter of snakes, as of some few other things, the Northern Territory isn't Ireland.

From the 46th mile I kept entirely to the railway line (a blackfellow at one of the cottages dubbed the bicycle "kangaroo engine") and before midday I was within ten miles of Palmerston.

There was a fairly-good road, its surface covered with fine brown ironstone rubble, for the remainder of the distance. Very high trees and a profuse wealth of tropical vegetation lined the track; but "cyclone" was writ large and in unmistakable characters everywhere—in uprooted trees and other features.

At two and a half-miles from Palmerston are the railway workshops and several suburban dwelling houses.

* * * *

On arriving opposite the first of these buildings I dismounted to take off my hat and wipe a little of the dampness from my forehead; and a sentence picked up somewhere came back to mind. I looked fondly upon the bicycle which had served me so well, pressed gently one of its handles, and whispered :—

"Thanks, Diamond, *'Est ist vollbracht.'* "

With a sigh of relief the pen is laid down and the scissors are picked up. The few next following paragraphs are from *The Northern Territory Times*:—

"Mr. Murif, the gentleman who undertook to ride across the continent on a bicycle, arrived in Palmerston on Friday afternoon, accompanied by several of the local cyclists, who picked him up at the 2½ mile. After riding round the town the party proceeded to the point below Fort Hill, where the overlander's bicycle was dipped in the sea, and the point christened 'Bicycle Point' in commemoration of the event.

"On Saturday evening Mr. Murif was entertained by the Athletic Club at a smoke social in the Town Hall. The Government Resident presided over a large gathering. Murif was heartily welcomed.

"He declared that he could have accomplished the trip in less time, but if good time was made nobody would follow him. He would like another man to try the journey.

"He was sorry, he said that he could not say as much as he would like in thanking the residents of the Territory for the kindness they had shown him since his arrival amongst them. He had also to thank the Athletic Association, who were treating him in a right royal manner, and also those gentlemen who had so kindly come out to meet him on Friday afternoon. In fact, ever since he had started upon his trip, that one word 'Thanks !' had ever been upon his tongue. He had had to say thanks for kindnesses received at the very commencement of his journey; all along the route he had had occasion to use the word, and now when his task was completed and all his troubles over, all that he could say, in return for the hearty welcome they had tendered him, was that one little word— thanks. Down south he had always heard much of the hospitality of Port Darwinites, but he had not the remotest idea of its munificence until he came among them."

* * * *

Again :—"When seen by *The Advertiser* correspondent on Saturday morning Murif was busy cleaning his machine after the sea bath. On being congratulated on his safe arrival he replied, 'Yes, both of us,' pointing to the bicycle, 'are safe and strong as ever.' The cycle, indeed, looked in perfect condition, the wheels running as true as when they left the workshop. Murif was well and in the pink of condition."

And among other things, in reply to an interviewer :—"I wish you would do me a favor. I want to thank all those whom I met on the road for the most hospitable manner in which they treated me. Never have I met a better class of men. I was treated like a prince whilst *en route*, and never once was I refused anything I asked. Information re the track ahead was readily tendered, and it was with regret that I had to leave my new friends who had been so kind to me. I had heard that the Territorians were the essence of hospitality, and now I fully believe it."

* * * *

These Palmerstonians, who treated me so handsomely, are a laughter-loving and generously hospitable people.

The European residents, being very largely civil servants are as such prohibited from entering the field of politics. This disability hangs heavily on them, and is ruinously enervating and mischievous in its effects. Peacefully, contentedly, unprogressively as the calm and happy dead are they. Earnest consideration and study of the wants and welfare of the land in which they live are neglected and the action to which such grave study ever prompts men is wanting. Their lives are rounds of light gaieties and small pleasures. A picnic, dance, a sports day or a concert is ever an absorbing topic.

These are not right lives for white men, such as they are, to live; but the embargo forces them to live it. Nothing so retards a country's progress, nothing perhaps is so great a hindrance to the development of its resources, as a non-political feeling among the inhabitants. Here politics are taboo. The real business of life, the storring cry of "Advance Australia !" is awfully lacking.

Remove the disability, take away the restraint, make an exception in favour of those civil servants who live so far up north in South Australia, unmuzzle those who have it in them to speak,

and the people of the Territory—the Territory itself—will soon be be heard of. So long as they are not heard from, so long must the Territory continue as a heavy weight.

* * * *

Chinese, who are ready and willing to work night or day and seven days a week, have ousted Europeans from many branches of trade. Hairdressing, tailoring and bootmaking are all done by them or Japanese.

Paper kite flying seems to be those people's most favoured form of recreation. Of a breezy evening the main street of Chinatown, running parallel with and distant but a couple of hundred yards from Palmerston's principal street, is indicated by half a dozen or more kites rising up into or stationary in mid-air. The ends of the retaining strings are either fastened to shop verandah posts or proudly held by their yellow owners.

These kites, built on scientific principles, are made very large and of fantastic shapes. Hollow "musical" reeds are attached; and when kite flying is "on" the loud monotonous humming of these wind instruments prevades every nook and cranny in Palmerston. Every visitor gets a crick in his neck from looking skywards.

* * * *

Many blacks hang about the town. The roads are unmetalled. The loose soil is dark brown, and consists of sand mixed with particles of friable ironstone. The three varieties of tracks which show prominently everywhere are suggestive—a few of booted whites, many of sandalled Chinamen, and over and under all those of unshod natives.

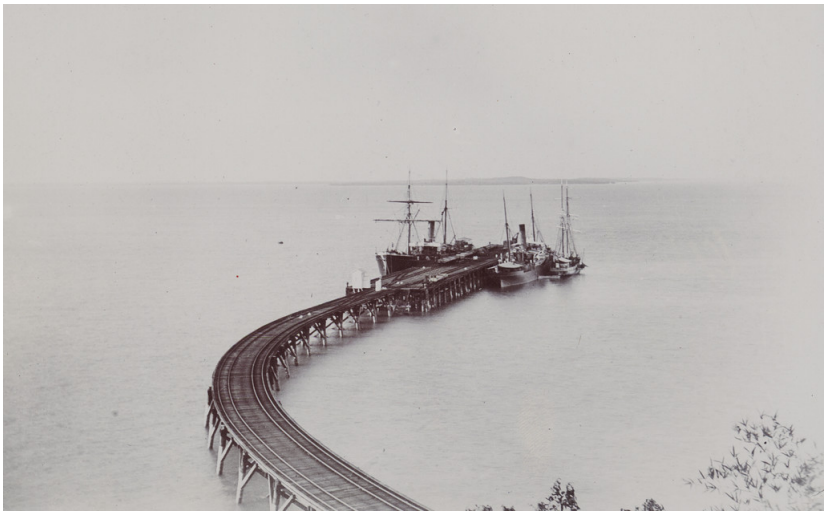
* * * *

The thermometer does not register very high. But here there is a stuffy, suffocating, sweat-producing latent heat the whole year round, with very few weeks' cool to brace the enervated up.

One misses the heavenly blue of southern climes. The sky has ever in it a hazy dull metallic grey.

The town is on a table-land, and is well laid out. The drainage is good; hence malarial fever, once pretty prevalent, is now less common.

* * * *



Port Darwin Jetty, 1900

The chefs are invariably Chinamen; this applies to most of the Northern Territory. Hence one hears the word “chow, chow” used commonly by the whites to denote meals or meal time—“Chow's ready,” “come to chow,” “There goes the Chow bell,” and such like expressions.

A nobbier is disposed of with one indefinite "Chin, chin." Freely translated it means something between a votre sante and "another coffin nail."

And, over and above all, is a splendid, almost prodigal hospitality.

* * * *

One last look back over the journey - and the track.

However it may have been with myself (whether met with the adventures I had been hopefully looking forward to and whether the exciting episodes or interesting incidents and objects came up to expectations or not) of this I still feel assured : For two or three good humoured cyclists, with whom considerations of time would be of but secondary importance who would start in the proper season (that is March or April), and who would need not to be niggardly in their expenditure, no more promising fields can there be in all the world for a cycle-trip, at once interesting and sufficiently adventurous, than along this same route—in the crossing of Australia from South to North.

Although anyone undertaking to do the journey in fast time will be called upon to endure privations and run grave risks of coming to grief, yet a person who had been once overland, or one of the telegraph station employees—a cyclist in short, who beforehand knew how the tracks ran and where exactly the watering places lay—should find the task neither very difficult nor demanding a great expenditure of days.

Now that the country and what to expect has become a little better known; now that it has been seen and spoken of from a cyclist's view, now that the wheelman may therefore prepare himself, it remains open for any down-town or up-country sprinter, with the three good things of which I have made previous mention, viz., good health, good luck and a good bicycle, to double up the

writer's so called "feat" into very small compass indeed, and incontinently knock it out of sight into the obscuring depths of an oblivious cocked hat.

It was one of my objects to leave it so open. Nevertheless I will not take upon myself the responsibility of advising anyone to bother about having a try at the "record-smashing" business unless it be well worth his while to do so.

To be prepared counts for very much. The cyclist who is sure of his road can never imagine the weakening effect which uncertainties on that most vital point can produce. Such doubts evolve sickening, depressing, unhappy sensations which make themselves felt more acutely than do the mere bodily disablements associated with hunger and thirst.

I knew next to nothing of the country, and made it a point to make but very few enquiries about it before I travelled up to have a look. I knew nobody in it, and from the day of my leaving Adelaide to the day I arrived at Sydney, I met no one with whom I had been in any way previously acquainted.

* * * *

I have in no case named those with whom I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted on the track for the reason that had those names been written it would as frequently have devolved upon the writer to expatiate on matters by right concerning only the men themselves, and besides I but seldom indeed questioned anyone about his business.

I have no material, therefore, out of which to "work up" on the weakness of slight acquaintanceships, the usual traveller's series of semi-biographical impertinences, even were I so minded.

But the following-named gentlemen are well-known, and I feel especially grateful to them for they all in one way or another

befriended me :—Mr. Mat Connor, Mr. Harry Gepp, Mr. James Cummins, the Messrs. Louis Brothers, Mr. Coulthead, Mr. Gunter, Mr. Heilbraun, Mr. Wallis, Mr. Campbell, and police officers Bennett and Kingston.

From what I have already written it will go without further emphasizing that to the ever-courteous and obliging assistants and officers to charge at the various inland telegraph stations I have cause to be and am grateful also.

* * * *

The only wheeled vehicles I knew, or now know of, as being in the country, besides the bicycle, after leaving Alice Springs, were those under cover at the Telegraph and Cattle Stations, and a buggy at the sheep camp, between Tennant's and Powell's Creeks.

There are no camels north of Alice Springs, except when a caravan travels from the latter place to Barrow's or Tennant's Creek with the yearly supplies.

* * * *

Yet, to this land where the bicycle is but imperfectly known one may pick up some bright knowledgeable notions in "improved bike" building. An "additional strengthener" suggestion came from a man who had been inspecting my mount as it stood against a wall with the interlocking gear closed, and thus of course kept perfectly straight He said to me

—"See how strong the back part of the machine is compared with the front," and his "notion," soon forthcoming, was that it would be an improvement if two more tubes were added : These to run, one at each side, from barrel bracket forward to the front fork extremities, back stay style.

As I had no desire to make enemies I admitted the front-fork-to-crank-shaft-bracket stay would undoubtedly be, as the inventive person remarked, "a strengthener." "But," said I hesitatingly, "As the most agile brains in all the world have been at work for the last ten years or so intent upon thinking out improvements in bicycle construction, I fear there must be some and (although to us perhaps unapparent) objection to the innovation."

At another place I had casually remarked upon the fact of the bicycle's handlebars having turned in the steering socket when I fell somewhere (thus, by the way, saving other, more vital parts, the sharp shock.) That this movement should have occurred appeared to a listener, as it will to many people, to indicate a grave fault, if not danger. "Why," he exclaimed suddenly, but after much cogitation, "to provide against that happening would be the simplest thing in the world"—by drilling a hole through the front tube where the maker's name and trade mark were (in my case, where they were not, because I had scratched both off) and then driving a strong pin in ! I told him I didn't want the fault rectified.

It surprised me to find how extraordinarily anxious people were about punctures. It was "What would you do if you got a puncture ?" until I came to hate the word. Very few had much thought of the consequences of a broken crank, fork, tube, shaft, or rim. But I believe nearly every one who hasn't a bicycle lives in constant terror of that dreadful bogy puncture.

I was made re-acquainted with descriptions of many of those wonderful leverage-chains, improved brakes, and puncture-proofing devices which work so emphatically well in print. One invention very much in favor was an inner-tubular arrangement—"quite a simple thing—made up of a hundred or so sections or distinct chambers, like an endless string of stumpy sausages." It was so obvious that when one sausage had lost all of its stuffing and collapsed, the other ninety-nine would yet remain for the utilisation of the wheelman !

Of such were the humors of the trip.

If the blacks I met with were not quite so wild-mannered as I could have feared or hoped for, it was through no fault of mine. Neither was it for me to rouse them up with a stick, or go hunting for some others less mild-mannered.

As I have said, if I heard of a white traveller anywhere, I did not try to dodge him. If one will but consider how I spent time and money in searching for a companion before starting (it was only because I was forced to, that I started alone), one may perhaps find excuse for me when I confess to feeling rather glad whenever I met or heard of there being a white man on the track.

* * * *

And why was the journey made? As was said long ago, I wanted to do something before I was put out of sight and mind. Had I merely wanted to dig out a few sovereigns for the pockets of cycle or cycle-part makers I should have adopted other methods. But I sincerely desired to do something for Australia, and it seemed to me that this would be the most effective means in my power of making the inlands better known, and of arousing some interest in our heritage in the north. Two or three knew of the desire; and no sooner was the task accomplished than on a day in June I wrote this letter to one of them :—

"Sir,—Now that the matter has passed very nearly out of my hands and risen beyond me, I wish to formally assure you ("formally," for hitherto I have spoken the words, as it may have appeared, but lightly) that everything I have done in connection with my recent bicycle trip has been mainly with a view to advertising the Northern Territory—a country which it is my hope to see, in the near future, looked upon and referred to no longer as a costly, cumbrous and unremunerative "White Elephant," but rather as a

strong and healthy, though over-sleepy youth, whom, on awakening, something had aroused to manhood.

"I have allowed to slip by opportunities of making fair money (of which, sir, I thoroughly appreciate the value) which I might have earned by accomplishing the journey in hard-to-be-improved on time; but I preferred this rather than do aught to defeat the end I primarily had in view.

"A declaration in public to that effect in the past would, perhaps, have savored of boastfulness or presumption; it may, indeed, perhaps so savor now. So certainly also, a few months ago, would any announcement of my intention to cycle alone across the continent. Hence my silence, lest my own ambitious purpose should be frustrated. That purpose is now being well worked out.

"It will make the Territory known : that, sir, you know, was the ground upon which I sought from you and the Hon. the ———— -the favor of those highly-prized signatures in my voucher book, which you both granted me. And that, as it was the ground on which I approached you, was the main prompting to do the thing I have done.

"I thank you once more for having obliged me, and remain, sir, your most obedient servant,

"JEROME J. MURIF."