ACROSS THE AUSTRALIAN CONTINENT ON FOOT.

(By George Earnest Morrison.)

It had long been a wish of mine to cross Australia. Lying in bed in Port Mackay with two crippled knees, I first resolved to do the journey on foot. When I heard on all sides of the long stretches between stations, and the possibility of travelling without at least two horses, I decided to go alone, and when everyone croaked to me that the blacks would kill me, if the floods did not drown me, I swore I should go somehow. I had no fear as well as blacks; quinine would be required to combat the fevers; a telescope might forward me of the latter. My telescope was stolen from me in Cooktown; my quinine, by accident, was thrown into Thursday Island. Of all things none was more likely to be useful than a compass, yet mine was utterly destroyed in New Guinea. What could I argue from these things, but that fever would pass me unharming, blacks would never endanger my life, nor would I ever be in a situation from which there was no escape but by the use of the compass. At Normanton, when I gave out my intention of strolling over to Melbourne, people professed to think me mad. The rainy season was impending, and many signs, especially the comet, pointed to its being earlier than usual. "How reckless," said one; "so insane," said another; "so suicidal," added a third. The elderly landlady of the hotel gave reasons as to the dangers which awaited me. She was no car she assured me, but she wouldn't be game to tackle such a walk. Fearing an attack of nervousness I hurried out of Normanton to an hotel 15 or 20 miles on my road to Cloncurry. Five teams were camped here. It rained with unpromising severity the better part of two days, and as the next house was 75 miles away I had just to wait patiently.

On Friday evening, the 22nd December, the sky was clear for the first time, and starting at about 15 or 20 miles on my road between camp on to rain again. The teams hesitated, and have been there ever since I fancy. This long stage is much dreaded by the carriers. It lies through country lightly timbered with the gutta-percha tree, the stunted bastard box, and the cockbiter, a district said to swarm with blacks, and usually subject to inundation. When I was half-way through there came on a violent tempest of wind and rain. The track became a bog and the knapsack got so sodden with water that I groaned under its weight. It was not safe to rest. The accounts I had heard of the track when flooded made me tremble to sit down, so I wearily struggled on through water and mud up to my knees, forgetting the dangers of this dismal, gloomy country in the fatigue of walking. Suddenly the wind died away, the sun shone out through the clouds, the rain stopped, and in a little while I came to where no rain had fallen at all. It had been merely a local storm. The following morning I came to two huts and a stockyard, the cattle station of Yeno Park. Two stages of 25 miles each through a country whose monotonous flatness is occasionally relieved by richly wooded sandhills, bring you, the first to a cattle station, the second to a public-house. Spear Creek, which has been on your left hand, is now lost sight of. The Saxby is crossed, and you are on that immense plain which stretches to the Flinders River. Between the Cockatoo waterhole, 3 miles beyond the Saxby, and a low hill called Fort Brown, within 3 miles of the Flinders there is a dark, gloomy flat, almost bare of trees, which is buried some feet under water during the rainy season. Carriers tell me 30 feet, and I can well believe it, for the high gums on the banks of the Flinders have drift timber in their very topmost branches. I had a mate when crossing this plain, an old man who sought my company out of nervousness. He was mounted on a poor wretched moke which had a fistula between its shoulders that was sickening to look at. Yet he was very proud of his horse and was quite disgusted because the old bib he could get for horse, saddle and bridle when he put him up for sale was 10s. Locomotion was so painful to the horse that hobbles would have been superfluous. His only fault was that he was so poor was that he was not a mare. When buying flour for my mate and myself I asked him how much should we require; 6 lb. he replied. "Surely," said I, "6 lb. of flour will not be enough for you and me for three days"—we were 51 miles from the next house—but he begged of me to trust him for that. Borrowing the loan of the kitchen he baked a damper of the weight and hardness of a stone. We had no knife strong enough to cut it. Nevertheless we managed to make it get into Cloncurry. Water and grass were abundant, and with the 230 a ton for the 250 miles from the Norman to Cloncurry, they had made satisfactory profits. I went some miles off the road to see the first sheep station. The Gulf country seems all adapted for the breeding of horses and cattle thrive wonderfully, but here, over 250 miles from the coast, the sheep does splendidly on the open downs with Gidya ridges, which stretch away to the N.W. of Cloncurry. Between the Flinders and Cloncurry I saw neither kangaroos, emus nor wild dogs, though the latter abound. There were native turkeys in scores, and every pool of water swarmed with wild fowl. Kites were more plentiful than crows, and never stopped for a meal but the trees near became grey with kites waiting for you to leave that they might swoop down upon the scraps. The wretched blacks are their without mercy. One night I was at a station, whose cooks had to have shot more blacks than any two men in Queensland, when the mailman came in and reported that he had seen a black prowling about the stockyard. Loading his rifle Mr. —— at once sallied out after him, but came back in an hour quite disappointed that, though he could pick up the tracks by the stockyard, it was too dark to follow them. Alligators are said to swarm in Spear Creek, as the Norman river is called above Normanton; I hesitate to give the dimensions of the largest that has been seen.

Cloncurry is situated in a slightly elevated upland, in the centre of a pan-shaped depression, surrounded by a rim of low hills. The adjacent country is very rich in minerals. Payable gold has been got here for many years. Bismuth, quicksilver and copper are found. There is a hill of iron, and a supposed large deposit of coal; but copper is the most abundant of its minerals. There is a mine of nearly virgin copper, so pure indeed as to be at present, owing to the absence of fluxes, unmeltable. This mine lately changed hands for £23,000, so there seems good reason for believing that the copper has a real existence. From Cloncurry my route lay to Winton. A publican in town kindly drew me a diagram by which I was to find my way to a hut on the M'Kinlay River, 104 miles distant. That map I keep as a curiosity. A distance of 9 miles was made to appear twice as long as one of 22 miles, setting the country at rest, and saving unnecessary anxiety and torture. The first night I could not sleep from fear that I had taken a wrong turning. In the morning I started to go 35 miles without knowing whether there was water on the track, or even where water I was making to. My waterbag holds two quarts and a half, but the day was so hot—the thermometer registered 159 deg. in the shade of the hut I refer to—that by midday, although I had hardly ever my mouth, the water was all evaporated. Still I kept moving, but at half-past four I just knocked up. It came upon me most suddenly. Without any warning I was seized with an irresistible desire to throw myself on the ground. I had no wish in the world but to lie down. I essayed under a tree. The society of mind, for it was but a chance if water was within 15 miles of me, seized on my brain, and I suffered torments. All through the night I lay asleep on my back, my tongue contracted to a point, my body hot and feverish, my head reeling. Just as day dawned I staggered up to the hut at which way was I to turn, to the right or the left? In a brief intermission of my confusion I recollected that I had turned off to the two roads right; but during the night I had got my head where my feet should have been, and I actually tried to pick up the track by walking away from it. But Providence watched over me, and set me on my way. I was so dazed that the sun appeared to me to move and indistinct every minute. A wide plain now stretched before me, and a belt of timber at its further end gave me hope. I reached the creek and threw down my knapsack, and followed up my thirst with a meal of a weary distance, but it was as dry as the Sahara. On again, and another plain, with another belt of timber was to cheer or disappointed me. The creek was drier looking and sandier than the first one. I was throwing myself down in despair, when my eyes lit on a beautiful pool of water under the shade of a weeping tit-tree. The reaction quite unnerved me. I rested and drank all day. The mailman came up in the evening and told me of a station about the country ahead. The contrast struck me forcibly. There were richly grassed instead of arid plains; creeks no longer dry and sandy, but sparkling with water, and plantations of timber, lightly and vigorous, not a parched and stunted forest. The twin parallel channels of the Williams River meander through a country as beautiful as an English park. Then a vast plain extends to the horizon, where, dancing grotesquely in the sun, is the timber marking the course of the Fullarton River.

Two days' walk from here is the M'Kinlay River, which drains an immense area of rolling downs. I was tracing up this river, cutting from one point of timber to another, and wondering whether the hut was above or below me, when I saw a man on horseback driving cattle. I drew nearer and nearer to him, and long before I could see his face I recognized the wild war song which had so often inspirited me in my voyage to the islands. This was a young Kanaka, a kindly nice lad, from Malaitalava, beguiled from his home—one of the most beautiful islands of Polynesia—to tend cattle, to do fencing, to mix with gins, and all the sultry dreariness and cheerlessness of the most utterly wretched district of the Never Never. The manager of this cattle station was in Cloncurry, and the South Sea Islander was in sole charge. I was taken very unwell when with him, and for three days the Kanaka showed me the greatest kindness and attention. Leaving now the M'Kinlay River and steering diagonally over to its first sandy billabong, I traced it up till I came to an out station. In this stage of 30 miles I was two days without eating anything, during which I suffered much from thirst. The next stage was 25 miles over the ranges in which the Diamantina takes its source. The heat was scarcely bearable, there was an entire absence of animal life, a faintly marked track which turned and twisted to every point of the compass and continually ran out, and no water, though billabongs and sandy creeks were crossed by the hundred. The only exercise at that unbearable time in my weakness was the fear of blacks—the wild kalkadoons who are so greatly feared in the hills. At the head waters of the Diamantina a sheep station was being formed where the countless billabongs resolve themselves into one of the finest rivers in Australia, a river which shall perpetuate the name of Lady Bowen. The Diamantina from its source trends away to the north-east, and then bends round in the shape of a horseshoe. I was on it for 115 miles, having it for 55 miles on my left, then crossing it at Dagworth station, and having it on my right for 27 miles, till its junction with the Western at Eldcroix, one of Sir Samuel Wilson's properties. Both here and at Dagworth there was immense activity. Two or three years hence they intend having 300,000 sheep at Eldcroix and a proportionate number on Dagworth. Fencing, tank sinking and building were in progress with marvellous activity; wages are very high; any unskilled man can earn 30s. or 35s. a week; and well he may feel, as a vegetable garden is now an essential part of a large Queensland station. I was out of the country where men are constrained to feel meat and damper. The money spent by the squatters hereabouts chiefly finds its way into the publichouses of Winton, a rising township on the Fetlean Waterholes, near the Western River, placed on a high flat, with not a tree near it. The telegraph line is being extended from here to Cloncurry. Winton station, another magnificent sheep run, is 15 miles out of Winton. Fifty miles further is Kiwham station. Then there is a long stage in the open downs, and you pass through the foot of Gidya scrub country, through Manchoo station to the Thomson River—at this early stage, a trickle of peculiar white water which I stepped across.

The days after crossing the Thomson I undertaken by a strange gentleman on horseback whose companionship I found so agreeable that we travelled on together for 75 miles. He was a gentleman of the Queen's Guards of the Coast of Africa, a cook by profession, and one of the kindest, most considerate men it has been my lot to meet. He would ride on ahead and open the gates that I might not break my stride. He would strut himself of water if the day was hot, that I might have the more. And this is how we fell out.—We had to go one day 25 miles carrying water. Though pinched with thirst I would not take his share. Not to be outdone I also refused any water, and being annoyed I vowed that I would not drink. I was afraid an opportunity to record my scale of this darkie's kindness. John Smith was his name, and he was the first black man ever seen in Iceland, having been there when he ran on board a Dutch man-of-war which was taking Prince Henry of the Netherlands round the world. The Thomson River was absolutely distance on our right, two stations being situated on creeks running into it. On the Blumah Creek is Blumah station, which, like all Fairbairn's stations, is being rapidly improved on a princely scale. Twelve miles further there is a waterhole on the Thomson. The water in the Emu Creek was stinking; the fish were rotting in the mud, and the crows were in hundreds. Up to this creek grass had been in abundance. Not till I was overtaken by rain, 250 miles further on, did I again come to any. Now I had to pass through the downs at Gilpin station, and the Gidya scrub, the characteristics of the country for the last 600 miles, till in three days I reached Winton, a township of 1,000 people, in a store, here, a saddler and publichouse, and there will be other houses shortly. I said chiefly because of the abundance of the splendid dam of water in the Thomson and because of the interesting fact that every man in the township was drunk. All whom I met lost in drunken amazement at my prodigious walk. I was now an experienced swagman. My swag was Merino New Zealand, or knapsack, fashion. The tucker, spare shoes, socks and shirts, some reading matter and a hammock, the matches, baking powder and salt beef were rolled up in a single blanket, and the whole then enveloped in a strip of oilcloth and borne on my back, being kept by strapping over the shoulders. Carried in this way only could I secure the untrammelled use of my arms. The swag was seldom less than 20 lb.; at times its weight varied according to the distance I had to carry tucker. I seldom travelled by night; the heat of the day seemed more to be dreaded, it is my favorite boast that I have yet to see the day that is too hot for me.—My own dress was cabbage tree hat, flannel shirt and twenty pounds, afterwards replaced by moleskins, and a knife and sheath knife. Boots I wore two times too large, and as I always cut the stifening out of the back before using them, I escaped the torment of heel which has troubled me on my former walks. Upon arriving at a station I went straight to the store, bought what rations I required, and camped in the most convenient water. The greatest hospitality was always shown me at stations where I was known, but—I made it a rule to sit down indifferent of all help as possible. When I had decided to camp I spread the oilcloth, and having lit a fire put on my salt beef to boil in the billycan, and my tea, sugar and the quart of tea made, I had a Johnny cake or flatjack ready for cooking on the ashes of the coal. The former differ only in size and are distinct from a damper in that they are cooked on the hot embers, whereas a damper is baked in the hot ashes with hot embers outside. No wood that I have seen can equal the Gidya for giving the very salt and other most valuable fat. A Johnny cake made with baking powder is a most delicious sweetmeat—my best baking powder is Rose's fruit tack. Of course, I did not stroll myself to those two articles of diet. I carried with me a little apples and rice, tea, cocoa, arrowroot and vegetables, including potatoes. Preserved potatoes, when prepared by the Australian housewife, you have boiled your meat, are most delicious. Of course, I carried baking powder; the johnny cake becomes a beautiful yellow; no than tea can imagine you are eating bread made with milk, butter and eggs. At the stores—every station has a little store—flour was 10s. a 10 lb. bag, pound, 1s., apples and potatoes 1s. 6d., and meat, though most of the stations do not charge for it, was 3d. to 4d. per pound, 1s. 6d. per lb.

But to return. No one in Jundah could give me any lucid information where water might be found on the track, but I had an uncertainty which predisposes to the fever of the palate. With the river in sight on my left, I had never seen water for 25 miles, and for 5 miles to water and found none into this 18 miles, it would have gone hard with me. I had to wait for water, and was rewarded for. At several places in the 65 miles cattle tracks crossed the path, and by following them I found water. I was caught by the heavy rain, and filthy that it gave me severe griping pains in the stomach, which interfered much with my walking. For a greater part of this distance my way lay through a country, in which cattle run owned by two men, and in extent larger than Yorkshire and Durham.

On the Thomson I found myself to be most interesting river in Australia. Fifteen miles above this, the Thomson had joined the Barcoo. Walking east deep through the combined stream, I passed half way through the glorious reaches of the river opened up above and below me, and the high banks crowned with magnificent gums. The country was rarely visible, and everything foreboded rain. I rested a day or two and went on.—A slight drizzle fell persistently. Not heavy enough to keep me awake, it made all my things sodden. There was no sun to dry them, nor had I sufficient patience to steam them before a fire. Once I lost my box of matches, and calling at a house to replenish them was given as a favor 12 lucifers. These had to last me two days, sleeping out the meantime. [illegible] cannot imagine any sayerer as than when hungry, with no food cooked, nor any house within a day's walk, to have to light a fire in wind or rain with your last match.

On the 23rd of February the Thargomindah and Windorah mailman served me a dirty trick. While I was camped for lunch he and another man came up to me, both well mounted, and driving pack horses. It was a hot, sultry, thirsty day, and I had a large stock of water than usual, having filled my two quart billy as well as my water bag. These men asked me for a drink, and, before I could stop them, they had emptied my billy of all but a mouful, though they were within 2 miles of water on horseback, while I was over 25 from it on foot. I made it a rule of my walk never to ask or accept a drink from any traveller, whether on foot or horseback. It gave me satisfaction to be independent even in this. The same evening of my meeting with the mailman a foot traveller was encountered and we camped together. We made an excellent breakfast, lit a roaring fire, for we were once more in Gidya country with abundance of firewood, and calmly settled ourselves for the night. But we were not long asleep before the slight drizzle which had forewarned us was succeeded by a heavy pelting rain that knew no ceasing. Outside I hardly believe the effect of that rain. In the morning our camp was on the only dry ground within sight. For 15 miles we did not see land. The track was a clearly defined channel between the banks. The creeks were running into a very strong current, and we were so often in water up to our armpits that I travelled with nothing on but my shirt. We reached shelter, there to be detained for three days. It rained for seventy-six hours at one stretch. In five days nine inches and thirty points fell. Dams were burst everywhere. The whole country into Thargomindah became a vast series of swamps and flooded creeks. Rocking to it, every danger vanished at my approach. Wading through swamps and swimming creeks with long distances to carry food, I yet experienced no fatigue; the death of excitement kept it away. Where the swamp extended for miles it was but natural that in the hurry and excitement of the times, with no guide but the sun, and water often to my breast, I should wander from the track, but a wide coat on the dry ground would as surely discover it to me. When the water was in motion, centipedes in hundreds and an occasional snake constantly floated across the path in unpleasant proximity. The snakes I saw in my walk were more varied and numerous. On the red Mulga ridges I killed several Mulga snakes—a finely marked brown snake 3 feet 6 inches long, and a third. When I was at the head waters of the Diamantina, a black passed me, trailing after him a snake 9 feet 6 inches long, and as thick as a calf. It is a kind of rock python, which often attains a length of 13 or 15 feet. The black would have me to believe that it was not deadly. It is a man's duty to kill every snake he can. I have killed the brown snake, the tiger snake, the poor harmless carpet snake, and a black snake with a blue belly. There were many I had no means of identifying, not the least interesting being an native tiger, which I killed in the middle of my coming, and commenced to wriggle about in a most fantastic way. Just as I turned for a stick it made one spring off the bank and vanished down a hole not large enough to introduce your two smallest fingers. Many anecdotes of snakes were told me. People unkindly take advantage of one's credulous inexperience.

The Bulloo I crossed in a boat; a deep-weed hole put me on the track to Hungerford. At Thargomindah I had laid in such a large supply of flour and beef that for 75 miles I was absolutely independent of everyone. Timber and water were abundant. By this time I had trained myself to do with a bare blisters, I could walk on them without wetting my lips. The Corellas flock to water at sundown, the thirsty traveller need but be guided by them, and he will infallibly be brought to water. The Paroo was greatly swollen. I had been told to be careful, as the bed of the creek is thickly timbered with the Tpunyah. The stream was not less than half a mile wide, and you cannot see the opposite bank till quite close to it. But caution was necessary. I walked slap in, and crossed without difficulty. Hungerford is across the river. The boundary between New South Wales and Queensland passes through the centre of the town. The hotel is in Queensland, where the license is less; the store is in New South Wales, where there free trade. I had done with Queensland. Drinks were now 6d., and motion was to take the place of beef. In crossing the Paroo, a little below Hungerford, I waded in a careless way into the stream, with my heavy swag on my back. Gradually it got deeper; it came over my waist; it reached my breast, my chin then was in the water; the next moment I went out of my depth altogether. The current, in among the lignum bushes was very strong, and being impeded with my swag and boots I was a long time disembarking about before I could get into my depth again. The experience was of use to me. I stripped and found a passage among the trees; then, returning for my swag, I swam into it with them in comfort.

Not till I was 100 miles below Hungerford did I overtake the flood waters of the Paroo, and nowhere through the last of the swamps. There were public houses now every 10 or 20 miles into Wilcannia, and I came in, in that wretched country of clay pans and sand ridges, with its unfinished strong, its vast flats of saltbush and acacia, and its no depth anywhere. The country then came on a beautiful lake which wandered away to the east till its outer margin was hidden. For a little while I felt enthusiastic about the country I was in, but having to toil for some hours through heavy sand my misplaced enthusiasm was turned into ridicule. The scene continually opening before me seemed the very incarnation of dreary desolation. There was no shade, no relief, no beauty. Weak and fagged, and badly in need of a spell, I could not rest till I was in Wilcannia. Here I had arranged with the carrier who had closed on Easter Monday; it was Wednesday before I had the means of buying any food. With no money in my pocket, and camped on the flat below the hospital, where I was regarded who have knocked down their cheques in the bells of this town rest till recuperated enough to start away with their swag, my experience of Wilcannia was not a cheerful one. Another spell, I was to learn, is a distinct requirement to myself, but he knew it not. Wilcannia is one of the hotels, and twice changed a supper. On the second evening another of the camped men was put in the lockup and got a fortnight. Another had been living on the flat for almost, no one knew how he lived. He had sixpence. On the Wednesday I got money and gave a farewell at Jones' Hotel, to the tramps, the vagabonds, after which I left on the 70 mile track. At the end of the 70 miles is Tarcoola Station, situated in the centre of the enclosing hills. The way lies through vast clay flats of saltbush and mallee, interspersed with sedges of mulga, borse, leopard wood and sandal wood. The walking is heavy, and there is one stage of 23 miles without water. Above Tarcoola the country is more heavily pictuesque. Immediately after leaving it I got into the endless saltbush plains, the hill clumps of box and pine on which can be seen such an incredible distance. The large hot which gives the name to the station, I saw from seven 20 miles off. There are publichouses every 10 or 12 miles. The laudably of one of them poses in Melbourne society as a squatter, forsooth. Up here she is known as the Scrub Tucker. I travelled now very rapidly. From Hay I travelled through Deniliquin, Echuca, Rochester, Elmore, Heathcote and Kilmore, reaching Melbourne on the 21st of April. Throughout the journey I was a perfect pet with him. Instead of immense tracts of country owned by one man, and given up to sheep, there were a succession of beautiful little farms, each with its haystack, its neat little cottage, its substantial fence, and its scene of vigorous activity. Ploughing was in full swing, clearing and grubbing. The beautiful fifty country, seemingly so fertile, and supporting so excellent a class of people, pleased me beyond measure. Certainly, I thought, my colony may be the smallest, but it is the healthiest and most beautiful of them all. The fact I have just made, has led me 1700 miles through the interior of Australia without seeing a kangaroo. My only objection to writing this account of my walk was a natural one. If it had never been written many people might think that I had done something wonderful. They will read this and see that any one who cared to take the trouble and give up four months of his time could have done the walk more quickly than I did, more easily, and with less discomfort to himself.