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The Burke and Wills Exploring Expedition

FOR the last seven years exploration of Central Australia has been a topic of vital interest to our Australian colonists. The mysterious fate of Leichardt, and the insurmountable rampart of difficulties which repelled the intrepid efforts of Sturt, Eyre, Mitchell, and Oxley in the earlier period of colonial history, had together produced a belief that Central Australia might be characterised by Dante's line : *Abandon hope all ye who enter here.*

The first great impulse given to an elaborate scheme of discovery was that of a donation of £1000 offered, through the Argus newspaper, by an anonymous individual for the expenses of the exploration. This offer was coupled with the understanding that an additional sum of £2000 should also be raised for the purpose The arrangement and direction of the expedition was confided to a select body of learned men, and the requisite funds poured in rapidly. Fine camels were procured from Arabia; and on the 20th of August, 1860, a thoroughly well-equipped and carefully-organised expedition started to explore the great mystery of Central Australia. The command was intrusted [sic] to Robert O'Hara Burke, who had as his scientific assistant William John Wills, and about a dozen men under his entire direction. They were supplied with five-and-twenty camels, as well as horses, stores, instruments for scientific observation – everything, in short, that the exploration committee deemed desirable to ensure success.

Full of high hope they set forth, cheered by a vast multitude assembled in the Royal Park, Melbourne, to witness their departure. The camels were in care of Mr. Landells, their importer. The plan of operations was to proceed to Coopers Creek, about one third of the distance, where a depot was to be formed as a base of operations for the discovering party. Unfortunately, however, long before their arrival at the intended depot, the leader, Mr. Burke, and Mr. Landells, had a misunderstanding about the camels, when the latter returned with a portion of those animals, leaving Mr.Burke ultimately to pursue his journey northward with only three companions — Wills the astronomer and two men, King and Gray; six camels, one horse, and three months' provisions.

About two months after the expedition had set forth the committee forwarded to Mr. Burke despatches respecting the important discoveries made by Sturt, the Adelaide explorer. The messengers with these despatches failed, however, in attaining their object, and, after enduring terrible sufferings from fatigue, hunger, and thirst for seven weeks, were rescued by Mr. Wright, of Wright's Camp, through information conveyed by their almost exhausted native guide.

Anxiety being aroused in the public mind regarding the fate of the explorers, several relief parties were dispatched both from Melbourne and Adelaide. In July, 1861, Alfred, William Howitt (son of William and Mary Howitt, the popular authors), a ten-years' resident in Victoria and already well known in the colony as an experienced explorer, was chosen by the committee as leader of one of these parties, and set forth with a small band. On the Loddon he encountered Mr. Brahe, one of Mr. Burke's party, returning with an account of Burke, Wills, King, and Gray having pushed on from Cooper's Creek, provisioned for three months and purposing to return (if that way at all) within the three months. Brahe had remained at Cooper's Creek five weeks longer than the stipulated period, and then left to return to the Darling with his companions Patton, McDonough, and a Sepoy. For a week their journey was perilous and dreary when, fortunately, they encountered Mr. Wright, who had started with a party of eight to bring up supplies, but who was now on the eve of returning, two of his party having perished in the wilderness from privation and fatigue. One of Mr. Brahe's party died soon after, and also Dr. Becker, one of Mr. Wright's companions.

Mr. Brahe and Mr. Howitt returning to Melbourne, immediate measures were taken by the exploration committee for the relief of Burke. Brahe had left some provisions buried at the spot of their depot, with the word "Dig" cut upon an adjacent tree. Before returning towards Melbourne, Wright and Brahe had accomplished a hazardous journey from the point where they met, back to the Cooper's Creek depot, which they found, as they supposed, undisturbed. Here, however, the affair assumes a painful character, and remains vested in considerable mystery.

It appears from the evidence contained in the field-books of Burke and Wills and from the testimony of King, the sole survivor, discovered later on by Mr. Howitt, that Burke, Wills, and King had returned from their successful journey to the tropical sea to the depot at Coopers Creek, just seven hours after Brahe had departed. Gray had died from exhaustion on the journey.

Burke and his two companions, exhausted by their arduous travel, without store of provision and almost without clothes, their six camels dwindled down to two, finding their reserve camp broken up, and nothing left but the buried provision and memoranda, instead of pushing on after Brahe, which probably was impossible in their exhausted condition, remained for a few days to rest themselves, and then started *not however, in the route of their returning party towards Melbourne but for Mount Hopeless,* trusting in that direction to reach a settled district in South Australia. They had placed in the cache memoranda of their proceedings, but had unfortunately, left no observable indication of their return. Thus, when Brahe returned to the depot with Wright, they appear to have remained in entire ignorance of the arrival at the depot of Burke, Wills, and King, and of their departure in the direction of Mount Hopeless; and, in entire ignorance of this all-important fact, Brahe returned to Melbourne, Mr. Howitt returning with him for further orders and reinforcements.

Meanwhile, baffled in their attempts to reach Mount Hopeless, Burke, Wills, and King were reduced to the last extremity and unable to leave the neighbourhood of Cooper's Creek in fact, only prolonged their unhappy existence through the hospitality of a friendly tribe of natives, little knowing how near at hand help had been. Burke and his unfortunate companions arrived at the depot on the 21st of April. Burke and Wills died in June — thus were dead, be it observed — before the relief party started from Melbourne; and King, the sole survivor, was discovered amongst the natives on the 15th of September by the relief party.

The field-books of Burke and Wills, discovered by Mr. Hewitt's party, contain full details of their expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and a most affecting chronicle of the sufferings from hunger, cold, and exhaustion, from which ultimately they died. We will give this sad history in the words of King — the survivor.

KING'S NARRATIVE.

"Mr. Burke, Mr. Wills, and I reached the depot at Cooper's Creek on April 21, about half-past seven in the evening, with two camels. All the provisions we then had consisted of a pound and a half of dried meat. We found the party had gone the same day, and, looking about for any mark they might have left, found the tree with "DIG April 2l". We dug, and found the plant of the stores. Mr.Burke took the papers out of the bottle and then asked each of us whether we were able to proceed up the creek in pursuit of the party. We said not, and he then said that be thought it his duty to ask us, but that he himself was unable to do so, but that he had decided upon trying to make Mount Hopeless, as he had been assured by the committee at Melbourne that there was a cattle station within 150 miles of Cooper's Creek. Mr. Wills was not inclined to follow this plan, but wished to go down our old track, but at last gave in. I also wished to go down our old track. We remained four or five days to recruit, making preparations to go down the creek by stages of four to five miles a day, and Mr. Burke placed a paper in 'the plant' stating what were our plans. Travelling down the creek, we got some fish from the natives; and some distance down one of the camels (Landa) got bogged; but although we remained there that day and part of the next trying to dig him out, we found our strength insufficient to do so. The evening of the second day we shot him as he lay and, having cut off as much meat as we could, we lived on it while we stayed to dry the remainder. Throwing away all the least necessary things, we made one load for the remaining camel (Rajah), and each of us carried a swag of about 25-pounds. We were then tracing down the branches of the creek running south, but found that they ran out into earthy plains. We had understood that the creek along Gregory's track was continuous; but, finding all these creeks ran out into plains, Mr. Burke returned, our camel being completely knocked up. We then intended to give the camel a spell for a few days, and then make a new attempt. During the time that the camel was being rested Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills went in search of the natives, to endeavour to find out how the nardoo grew.

"Having found their camp they obtained as much nardoo-cake and fish as they could eat, but could not explain that they wanted to find the seed themselves. They returned the third day, bringing some fish and nardoo with them. On the following day the camel Rajah seemed very ill, and I told Mr. Burke I thought, he could not linger out more than four days; and, as on the same evening the poor brute was on the point of dying, Mr. Burke ordered him to be shot. I shot him, and we cut him up with two broken knives and a lancet. We cured the meat and planted it; and Mr. Burke then made another attempt to find the nardoo, taking me with him. We went down the creek expecting to find the natives at the camp where they had been seen last, but found that they had left. … Mr. Burke said that we ought to do something, and that if we did not find the nardoo, we should starve, and that he intended to save a little dried meat and rice to carry us to Mount Hopeless.

"The three of us then came to the conclusion that it would be better to make a second attempt to reach Mount Hopeless, as we were then as strong as we were likely to be, out daily allowance being reduced. . . . We had not gone far before we came to a flat where I saw the seed, and cried out that I had found the nardoo. They were very glad when I found it. We travelled three days and struck a watercourse coming south of Cooper's Creek. . . . We were all greatly fatigued, as our rations consisted of only one small johnny-cake and three sticks of meat daily. We camped that evening about four o'clock, intending to push on next day, until two o'clock p.m., and then, should we not find water, to return. We travelled and found no water, and the three of us sat down and rested an hour, and then turned back. We all felt satisfied that if there had been a few days' rain we should have got through. We were then, according to Mr. Wills' calculation, forty-five miles from the creek. We travelled on the day we turned back very late, and the following evening, reached the nearest water at the creek. We gathered some nardoo and boiled the seeds as we were unable to pound them. The following day we reached the main creek; and, knowing where there was a fine water hole and native gunyahs, we went there, intending to save what remained of our flour and dried meat, for the purpose of making another attempt to reach Mount Hopeless.

Nardoo – emergency rations

"On the following day Mr. Wills and I went to gather nardoo, of which we obtained a supply for three days; and, finding a pounding stone at the gunyah, Mr. Burke and I pounded the seed, which was such slow work that we were compelled to use half flour and half nardoo. Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills then went down the creek for the remainder of the dried meat which we had planted; and we had now all our things with us, gathering nardoo, and living the best way we could. Mr. Burke requested Mr. Wills to go up the creek as far as the depot and to place a note in the plant here stating that we were then living on the creek; the former notes having stated that we were on our road to South Australia. He, also, was to bury there the field-books of the journey to the gulf. Before starting he got 31b. of flour, 41b. of pounded nardoo, and about 1lb. of meat, as he expected to be away about eight days. During his absence I gathered nardoo and pounded it, as Mr. Burke wished to lay in a supply in case of rain. . . . We then lived on fish till Mr. Wills returned. He told us that he had met the natives soon after leaving us, and that they were very kind to him, and had given him plenty to eat both on going and returning. He seemed to consider that he should have little difficulty in living with them. . . . During Mr.Wills' absence, while Mr. Burke was cooking some fish during a strong wind, the flames caught the gunyah, and burned so rapidly that we were unable to save any of things except one revolver and a gun. Mr. Wills having returned, it was decided to go up the creek and live with the natives, if possible, as Mr. Wills thought we should have little difficulty in obtaining provisions from them if we camped on the opposite side of the creek to them. Coming to the gunyah, where we expected to have found them, we were disappointed and, seeing a nardoo-field close by, halted, intending to make it our camp. For some time we were employed in gathering nardoo and laying up a supply. Mr. Wills and I used to collect and carry home a bag each day, and Mr. Burke generally pounded sufficient for our dinner during our absence. But Mr. Wills found himself getting very weak, and was shortly unable to go out to gather nardoo as before, nor even was he strong enough to pound it, so that in a few days he became almost helpless. I still continued gathering, and Mr. Burke now also began to feel very weak, and he said he could be of little use in pounding. I had now to gather and pound for all three of us. I continued, to do this for few days, but finding my strength rapidly failing, my legs being very weak and painful, I was unable to go out for several days, and we were compelled to consume six days' stock which we had laid by. Mr. Burke now proposed that I should gather as much as possible in three days, and that with this supply we should go in search of the natives —a plan which had been urged upon us by Mr. Wills as the only chance for him and for ourselves. Having collected the seed, as proposed, and having pounded sufficient to last Mr. Wills for eight days, and for two days for ourselves, we placed water and firewood within his reach, and started. Before leaving, him, however, Mr. Burke asked him whether he still wished it, as under no other circumstance would he leave him, and Mr. Wills again said that he looked upon it as our only chance. He then gave Mr. Burke a letter and his watch for his father, and we buried the remainder of the field-books near the gunyah. Mr. Wills said that in case of my surviving Mr. Burke he hoped that I would carry out his last wishes in giving the watch and letter to his father.

"In travelling the first day Mr. Burke seemed very weak, and complained of great pain in his legs and back. On the second day he seemed to be better, and said that he thought he was getting stronger, but on starting did not go two miles before he said he could go no further. I persisted on his trying to go on, and managed to get him along several times, until I saw that he was almost knocked up, when he said he could not carry his swag, and threw all he had away. I also reduced mine, taking nothing but a gun and some powder and shot, and a small pouch and some matches. On starting again we did not go far before Mr. Burke said he should halt for the night, but, as the place was close to a large sheet of water, and exposed to the wind, I prevailed on him to go a little further to the next reach of water, where we camped. We searched about and found a few small patches of nardoo, which I collected and pounded, and, with a crow which I shot, made a good evening's meal.

Burke dies

"From the time we halted Mr. Burke seemed to be getting worse, although he ate his supper. He said he felt convinced that he could not last many hours, and gave me his watch, which he said belonged to the committee, and a pocket-book to give to Sir William Stawell, in which he wrote some notes.

"He then said to me, *'I hope that you will remain with me here till I am quite dead: it is a comfort to know that some one is by; but when I am dying it is my wish that you should place the pistol in my right hand, and that you leave me unburied as I lie.'* That night he spoke very little, and the following morning I found him speechless, or nearly so, and about eight o'clock he expired. I remained a few hours there; but, as I saw there was no use in remaining there longer, I went up the creek in search of the natives. I felt very lonely, and at night usually slept in deserted wurleys belonging to the natives. Two days after leaving the spot where Mr. Burke died, I found some gunyahs, where the natives had deposited a bag of nardoo sufficient to last me a fortnight, and three bundles containing various articles. I also shot a crow that evening, but was in great dread that the natives would come and deprive me of the nardoo.

Wills dead

"I remained there two days to recover my strength and then returned to Mr. Wills. I took back three crows; but I found him lying dead in his gunyah, and the natives had been there and taken away some of his clothes. I buried the corpse with sand, and remained there some days, but finding that my stock of nardoo was running short, and being unable to gather it, I tracked the natives who had been to the camp by their footprints, and went some distance down the creek, shooting crows and hawks on the road. The natives, hearing the report of the gun, came to meet me, and took me with them to their camp, giving me nardoo and fish. They took the birds I had shot and cooked them for me, and afterwards showed me a gunyah where I was to sleep with three of the single men. The following morning they began talking to me, and putting one finger on the ground and covering it with sand at the same time pointing up the creek, saying, *'White fellow'*, which I understood to mean one white man was dead. From this I knew that they were the tribe who had taken Mr. Wills' clothes., They then asked me where the third white man was, and I also made the sign of putting two fingers on the ground and covering them with sand, at the same time pointing up the creek. They appeared to feel great compassion for me when they understood that I was alone on the creek, and gave me plenty to eat.

"After being four days with them, I saw that they were becoming tired of me, and they made signs to me that they were going up the creek, and that I had better go downwards; but I pretended not to understand them. The same day they shifted camp and I followed them, and, on reaching their camp, I shot some crows, which pleased them so much that they made me a break-wind in the centre of their camp, and came and sat round me until such time as the crows were cooked, when they assisted me to eat them. The same day one woman to whom I had given a part of a crow came and gave me a ball of nardoo, saying that she would give me more, only she had such a sore arm that she was unable to pound. She showed me the sore on her arm, and the thought struck me that I would boil some water in the billy and wash her arm with a sponge. During the operation the whole tribe sat round, and were muttering one to another. The husband sat down by her side, and she was crying all the time. After I had washed it I touched it with some nitrate of silver, when she began to yell and ran off, crying, out "Mokow! Mokow!" (Fire! Fire!) From this time she and her husband used to give me a small quantity of nardoo both night and. morning; and whenever the tribe were about going on a fishing expedition they used to give me notice to go with them. They used also to assist me to make a *gourly*, or break-wind, whenever they shifted the camp. I generally shot a crow or a hawk and gave it to them in return for these little services.

"Every four or five days the tribe would surround me, and ask whether I intended going up or down the creek. At last I made them understand that if they went up the creek I should go up the creek, and if they went down I also should go down; and from this time they seemed to look upon me as one of themselves, and supplied me with fish and nardoo regularly. They were very anxious, however, to know, where Mr. Burke lay, and one day when we were fishing in the waterholes close by, I took them to the spot. On seeing his remains the whole party wept bitterly and covered them with bushes. After this they were much kinder to me than before, and I always told them that the white men would be here before two moons; and in the evenings, when they came with nardoo and fish, they used to talk about the 'white fellows' coming, at the same time pointing to the moon. I also told them that they would receive many presents, and they constantly asked me for tomahawks, called by them *'bomayko'*. From this time to the time the relief party arrived – a period of about a month – they treated me with uniform kindness and looked upon me as one of themselves. On the day on which I was released, one of the tribe, who had been fishing, came and told me that the 'white fellows' were coming, and the whole of the tribe who were then in camp sallied out in every direction to meet the party, while the man who had brought the news took me across the creek, where I shortly saw the party coming down."

We will conclude this melancholy history with extracts from Mr. Howitt's journal, taking up his narrative when the relief party had arrived upon Mr. Burke's track at Cooper's Creek, they as yet being in entire ignorance of the fate of the brave man and his associates.

Howitt's journal

"**Camp 32; Sept.15;** lat. 27 deg. 44 m., long, 140 deg. 40 m. —On leaving this morning I went ahead with Sandy to try and pick up Mr. Burke's track. At the lower end of a large waterhole found where one or two horses had been feeding for some months, the tracks ran in all directions to and from the water, and were as recent in appearance as if only a week old. At the same place I found the handle of a clasp knife. From here struck out south, a short distance from the creek, and found a distinct camel's track on a native path; the foot print was about four months old. I then sent the black bay to follow the creek, and struck across some sandy country in a bend on the north side. In about four miles this led me to the lower end of a very large reach of water, and on the opposite side were numbers of native wurleys. I crossed at a neck of land, and at a little distance again came on the track of a camel going up the creek; at the same time I found a native who began to gesticulate in a very excited manner and to point to the creek, bawling out, *'Gow, Gow'* as loud as he could. When I went towards him he him he ran away; and, finding it impossible to get him to come to me, I turned back to follow the camel track and look after my party, as I had not seen anything of them for some miles. The track was visible in sandy places, and was evidently the same I had seen for the last two days. I also found horse tracks in places, but very old. Crossing the creek, I rode after our party. In doing so I came upon three pounds of tobacco which had lain where I saw it for some time. This, together with the knife-handle, the fresh horse tracks, and the camel track going eastward, puzzled me extremely, and led me into a hundred conjectures. At the lower end of the large reach of water before mentioned I met Sandy and Frank looking for me, with the intelligence that King, the only survivor of Mr. Burke's party, had been found. A little further on our party had halted, and immediately went across to the blacks' wurley, where I found King sitting in a hut which the natives had made for him. He presented a melancholy appearance, wasted to a shadow, and hardly to be distinguished as a civilised being but by the remnant of clothes upon him. He seemed exceedingly weak, and I found it occasionally difficult to follow what he said. The natives were all gathered round him seated upon the ground, looking on with a most gratified and delighted expression.

"**Camp 32; Sept.16** —King already looks vastly improved even since yesterday and not like the same man. Have commenced shoeing horses and preparing for our return.

"**Camp 133: Sept.18** —Left the camp this morning with Messrs. Brahe, Welsh, Wheeler and King, to perform a melancholy duty, which has weighed upon my mind ever since we camped here, and which I have put off till King should be well enough to accompany us. We proceeded down the creek seven miles, crossing a branch running to southward and followed a native track leading to a part of the creek where Mr. Burke, Mr. Wills, and King camped after their unsuccessful attempt to reach Mount Hopeless, and where poor Wills died. We found the gunyahs pretty much as King had described them. Poor Wills' remains we found lying in the wurley in which he died, and where King, after his return from seeking the natives, had buried him with sand and rushes. We carefully collected the remains, and interred them where they lay; and, not having a prayer book, I read chapter XV of 1st of Corinthians, that we might at least feel a melancholy satisfaction in having shown the last respect to his remains. We heaped sand over the grave and laid branches upon it that the natives might understand by their own tokens not to disturb the last repose of a fellow being. I cut the following inscription on a tree close by to mark the spot:

W. J. WILLS.

XIV YDS. W.N.W.

A.H.

"The field-books, a note-book belonging to Mr. Burke, various small articles lying about, of no value in themselves, but now invested with interest from the circumstances connected with them, and some of the nardoo-seed on which they had subsisted, with the small wooden trough in which it had been cleaned, I have now in my possession. We returned home with saddened feelings, but I must confess that I felt a sense of relief that this painful ordeal had been gone through.

"**Sept. 21** – Finding that it would not be prudent for King to go out for two or three days, I could no longer defer making a search for the spot where Mr. Burke died; and with such directions as King could give I went up the creek this morning with Messrs. Brahe, Welsh, Wheeler and Aitken. We searched the creek upwards for eight miles, and at length, strange to say, found the remains of Mr. Burke lying among tall plants under a clump of box-trees, within 200 yards of our last camp, and not thirty paces from our track. It was still more extraordinary that three or four of the party, and two black boys, had been close to the spot without noticing it. The bones were entire, with the exception of the hands and feet; and the body had been removed from the spot where it first lay, and where the natives had placed branches over it, to about five paces distance.

I found the revolver which Mr. Burke held in his hand when he expired, partly covered with leaves and earth, and corroded with rust. It was loaded and capped. We dug a grave close to the spot, and interred the remains, wrapped in the union jack, the most fitting covering in which the bones of a brave but unfortunate man could take their last rest. On a box-tree at the head of the grave the following inscription is cut:

R. O'H. B
21/9/61
A. H.

"**Sept. 23 –** Went down the creek to-day in search of the natives, I could not think of leaving without showing them that we could appreciate and reward the kindness they had shown to Burke's party and particularly to King. For three miles we travelled over alluvial flats along the creek, timbered with box and large gums, and dotted with bean-trees, orange-trees of large size, but at present without fruit, various kinds of acacias, and other bushes. To the right hand were level flats and sand ridges, apparently tolerably grassed. We then came on a large reach of water, where four or five natives had just been fishing; their nets were lying on the sand to dry, and the fire was yet burning. At three miles more we found the natives camped. They made a great commotion when we rode up, but seemed very friendly. I unpacked my blanket, and took out specimens of the things I intended to give them —a tomahawk, a knife, beads, a looking-glass, comb, and flour and sugar. The tomahawk was the great object of attraction after the knife, but I think the looking-glass surprised them most. On seeing their faces some seemed dazzled, others opened their eyes wide as saucers, and made a rattling noise with their tongues, expressive of surprise. I made them understand that they were to bring the whole tribe up next morning to our camp to receive their presents, and we parted the best of friends.

"**Sept. 24** – This morning our black friends, about ten o'clock, appeared in long procession, men, women, and children, and at a mile distance they commenced bawling at the top of their voices, as usual, They must have numbered between thirty and forty, and with the aid of King I at last got them all seated before me, and distributed the presents —tomahawks, knives, necklaces, looking -glasses, combs —among them. I think no people ever were so happy before, and it was very interesting to see how they pointed out one or another who they thought might be overlooked. The piccaninnies were brought forward by their parents to have red ribbon tied round their dirty little heads. One old woman who had been particularly kind to King was loaded with things. I then divided 50 pounds of sugar between them, each one taking his share in a union-jack pocket-handkerchief, which they were very proud of. The sugar soon found its way into their mouths. The flour (50 lb. of which I gave them) they at once called 'white-fellow nardoo', and they explained that they understood that these things were given them for having fed King. They left, making signs expressive of friendship, carrying their presents with them. The men all wore a net girdle, and of the women some wore one of leaves, others of feathers. I feel confident that we have left the best impression behind us, and that the 'white fellows', as they have already learned to call us, will be looked upon henceforth as friends, and that, in case of emergency, any one will receive the kindest treatment at their hands.

"**Camp 31 - Sept. 25** —This morning I turned my face homewards, the object of our mission being fulfilled. The party are [sic] in the best health, the horses in fine order, and the camels none the worse for the journey, and decidedly in better health than when they left the Darling. On the edge of a country so well worth exploring, in a tolerably good season, and with the means I now have at my disposal, I feel how much might be done."

The Governor of Victoria, in his letter to Sir Roderick Murchison, read before the Royal Geographical Society and published in the *Times*, observes that, ere 'the recall of the several parties sent out for the relief of the missing expedition, he trusts that they shall be able so far to complete the task as to connect the settled country, by Mr. Howitt's aid, with Burke's Land (as the country towards Carpentaria is to be called henceforth), by the beat possible route, and by means of the party sent by sea in the Victoria steamer, to add greatly to the knowledge of the gulf and of the embouchure of the different rivers falling into it."

A diagram showing the route of the Australian explorers,
and a small map of Eastern Australia, will be given in
next week's Number 1130 – London Illustrated.

THE NARDOO (MARSITEA QUADRIFIDA).

The nardoo belongs to that class of flowerless plants which have distinguishable stems and leaves in contradistinction to that in which stems and leaves are undistinguishable —as seaweed, fungi, and lichens. The part used for food is the involucre sporangium, or spore-case, with its contained spores, which is of an oval shape, flattened, and about an eighth of an inch in its longest diameter, hard and horny in texture, requiring considerable force to crush or pound it when dry, but becoming soft and mucilaginous when exposed to moisture. It is the same substance that sustained Macpherson and Lyons when they were lost in 1860 between Menindie and Coopers Creek, a pint of it serving them a day. They pounded it in the manner of the natives, between two stones, and made it into cakes like flour. The spores vegetate in water, and root in the soil at the bottom, where the plants grow to maturity. After the water dries up the plants die and leave the spore-cases on, in many instances quite covering the dried mud; and it is then that they are gathered for food. On the return of moisture, either from rain or the overflowing of rivers, the spore-cases are softened, become mucilaginous, and discharge their contents to produce a fresh crop of plants. The foliage is green and resembles clover, being composed of three leaflets on the top of a stalk a few inches in length. This order contains five genera and twenty-four species, all of which are inhabitants of ditches or inundated places. They do not appear to be affected by climate so much as by situation, and have been detected in all the four quarters of the globe, chiefly, however, in temperate latitudes. Their uses are unknown to European botanists. If the nardoo grains are carefully opened without crushing them the spores can be readily perceived, of a regular oval form, with the aid of a magnifying glass of small power. — *Illustrated Australian Mail.*

MESSRS. BURKE AND WILLS.

We gather from the Melbourne journals the following particulars of the previous career of these lamented gentlemen, whose names have become household words throughout the Australian colonies :

ROBERT O'HARA BURKE, the leader of the expedition, was born at St. Clerans, Galway, Ireland, and was in his fortieth year of age when he died. He was partly educated at home, and afterwards for the higher studies, in Belgium. Subsequently he entered the Radetzky regiment of Hungarian Hussars in the Austrian service. Here he displayed great assiduity in military studies, soon came to be regarded as a most efficient cavalry officer, and at an early period obtained a captaincy. The eventful political changes of that year of continental disquietude, 1848, led to Mr. Burke's relinquishing the Austrian service. Afterwards we hear of him as holding a command in the Irish mounted constabulary, when he was for some time stationed in Dublin. On resigning this office to emigrate, he received several very flattering testimonials, demonstrating that at that time, as continually since, he had the ability to secure the respect and esteem of his companions and fellow officers. Mr. Burke arrived at Hobart Town in 1853, but appears soon to have proceeded to Melbourne, where he at once obtained an appointment as acting inspector of police, under Mr. Mitchell. In this capacity he remained till the close of 1853, when he was transferred to a command at Carlsruhe. In 1851 he was advanced to the Beechworth district, to relieve Mr. Price, the police magistrate, and with a step in promotion to the post of district inspector. During the progress of the Crimean War Mr. Burke obtained leave of absence to enable him to visit England, where he hoped, with the interest he possessed, to have been enabled to share the glory and the peril of the grand struggle then existing between Russia and the Allied Powers. In this hope he was disappointed by the termination of the war, upon which he returned to this colony and reassumed his command in our mounted police force. In 1858 Mr. Burke was removed to Castlemaine, where he was stationed when he obtained the appointment of leader of the Victorian Exploring Expedition. From the moment it became probable that he would be selected to fill this responsible post Burke is said to have diligently prepared himself for it. He at once commenced all active examination of the records of previous explorers, so as to become thoroughly acquainted with the personal experience of Australian pioneers of discovery and well informed as to the actual knowledge of the interior and remote coasts already on record. He likewise entered upon a course of regular training, taking severe pedestrian exercise, and accustoming himself to fatigue and privation of every possible kind that an attempt to traverse the vast untrodden wilds of Australia was likely to bring to his experience.

Of **WILLIAM JOHN WILLS**, the sharer of Burke's perils, sufferings, and glory, we are informed that his father was a physician at Totnes in Devonshire, and Wills was designed to pursue the study of the same profession. With this object in view, he sought with ardour, as the pupil of his father, the attainment of the various branches of knowledge required in this profession, and for four years exhibited the most unremitting application to such studies. In chemistry and the experience of the medical schools he became specially distinguished for proficiency. He had received an excellent academical education at the grammar school of Ashburton —a public school of note, as being endowed with scholarships by the famous William Gifford, and also by Dr. Ireland, Dean of Westminster. Wills arrived in this colony in 1853, and at first obtained a situation at the Royal Bank Station, Deniliquin. His father emigrated the succeeding year, and settled at Ballarat, where Wills assisted him for a time in his profession. Subsequently, he obtained employment in the service of the Government as an officer in the Survey Department, under Mr. Byerley, and there displayed his characteristic assiduity and proficiency. Having acquired a knowledge of and interest in astronomical and other sciences to which the observatory is devoted, he obtained through the recommendation of Mr. Ligar, the Surveyor-General, a situation as assistant in that establishment. Here he remained for two years, when the opportunity presented itself of offering to join the Exploring Expedition. Wills it appears, had long entertained a strong wish to be connected with such an enterprise. So long ago as 1855 he frequently spoke, as many of his friends can recollect, of a longing desire to explore the interior of Australia. He also expressed at this time a belief that he should be among the first who ever should succeed in crossing to the Gulf of Carpentaria. In 1856 there was a proposal brought before the public by a Dr. Catherwood to explore the interior of this country. This project, however, was abandoned; but Wills, who happened then to be on the River Wannon, immediately on chancing to hear of it walked to Ballarat, a distance of ninety miles, in his anxiety to join the proposed expedition. He was twenty-seven years of age at the time of his melancholy yet glorious death.