

The Overland Telegraph Line : its early history

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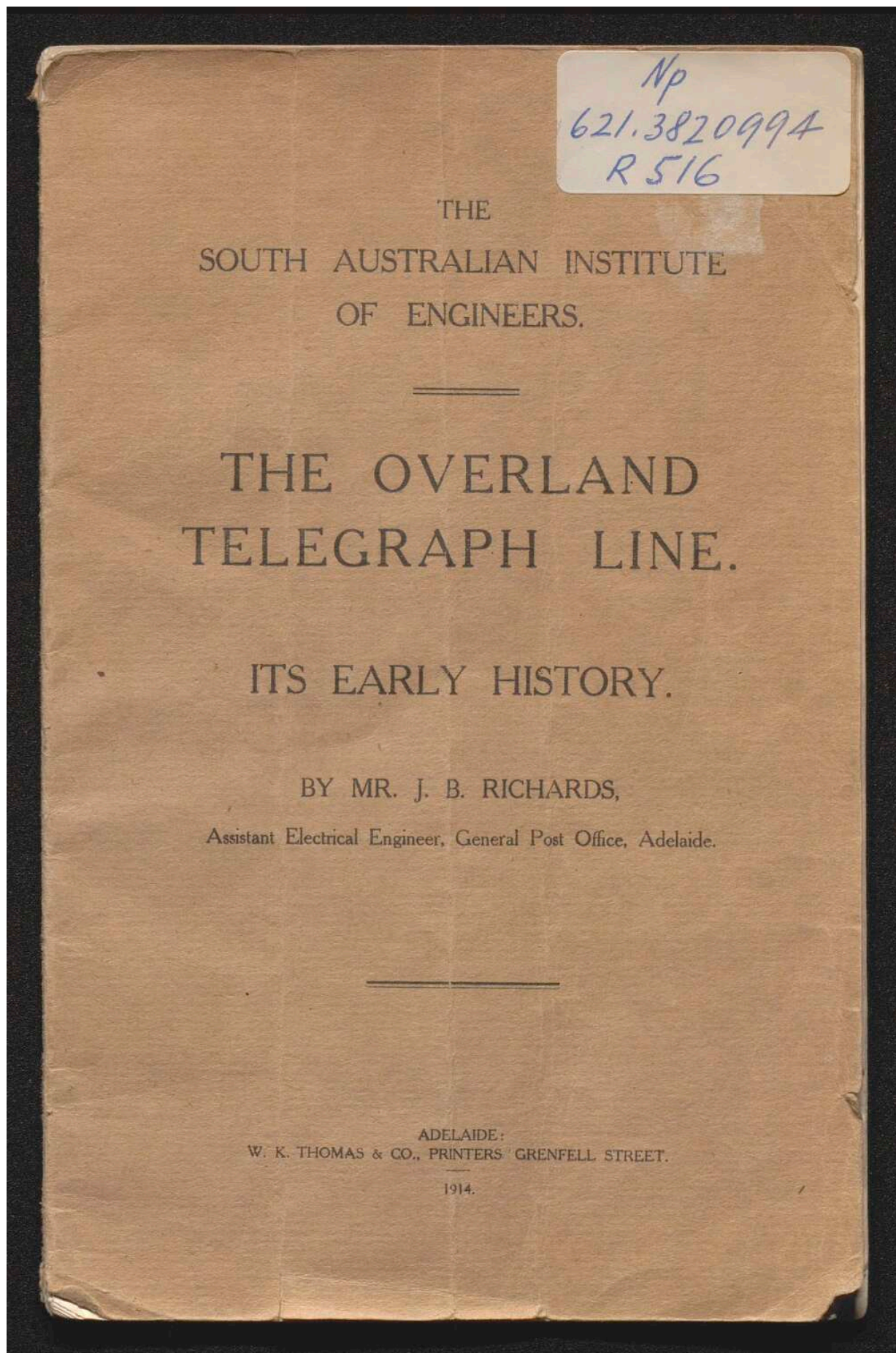
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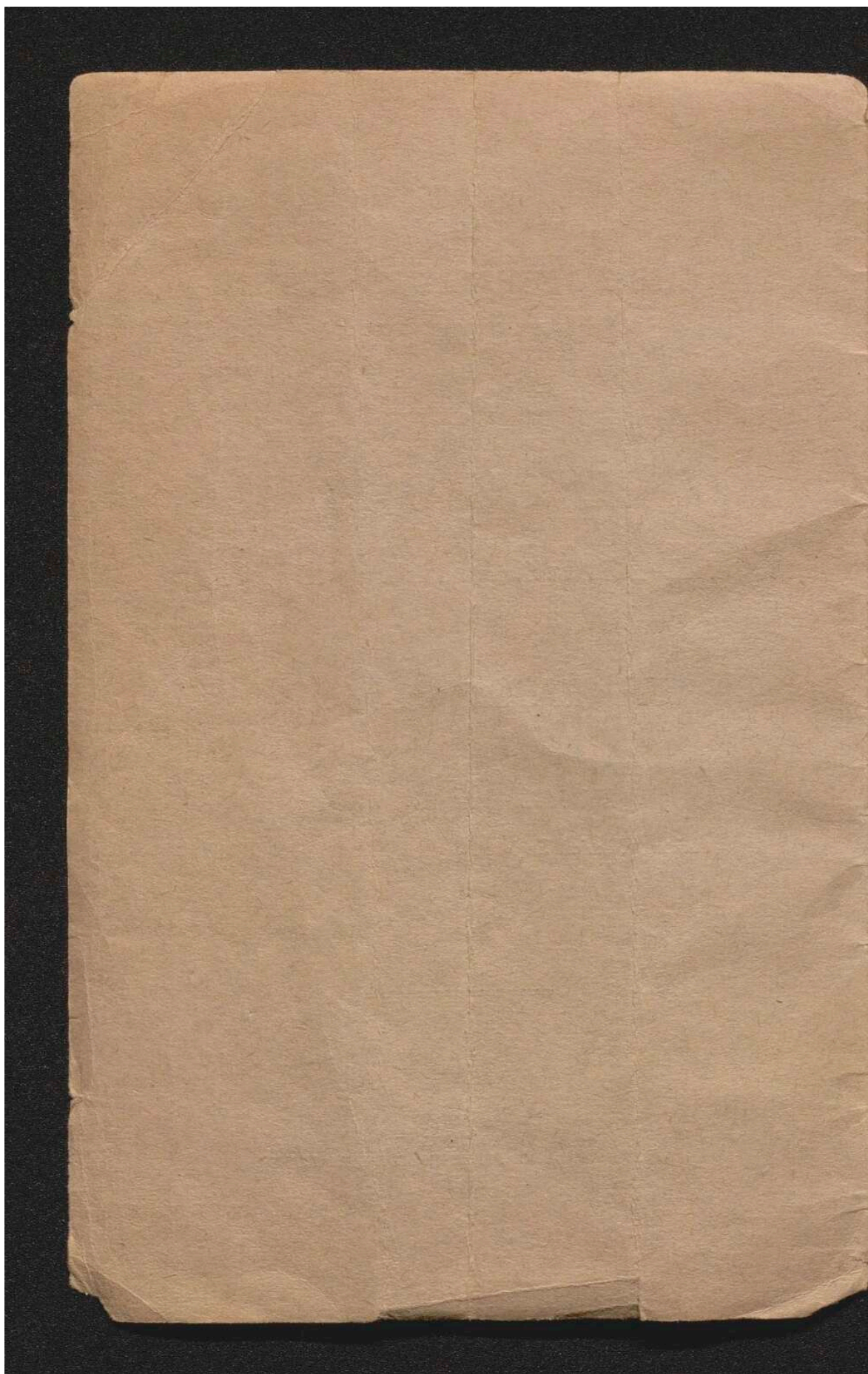
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THE
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE
OF ENGINEERS.

THE OVERLAND
TELEGRAPH LINE.

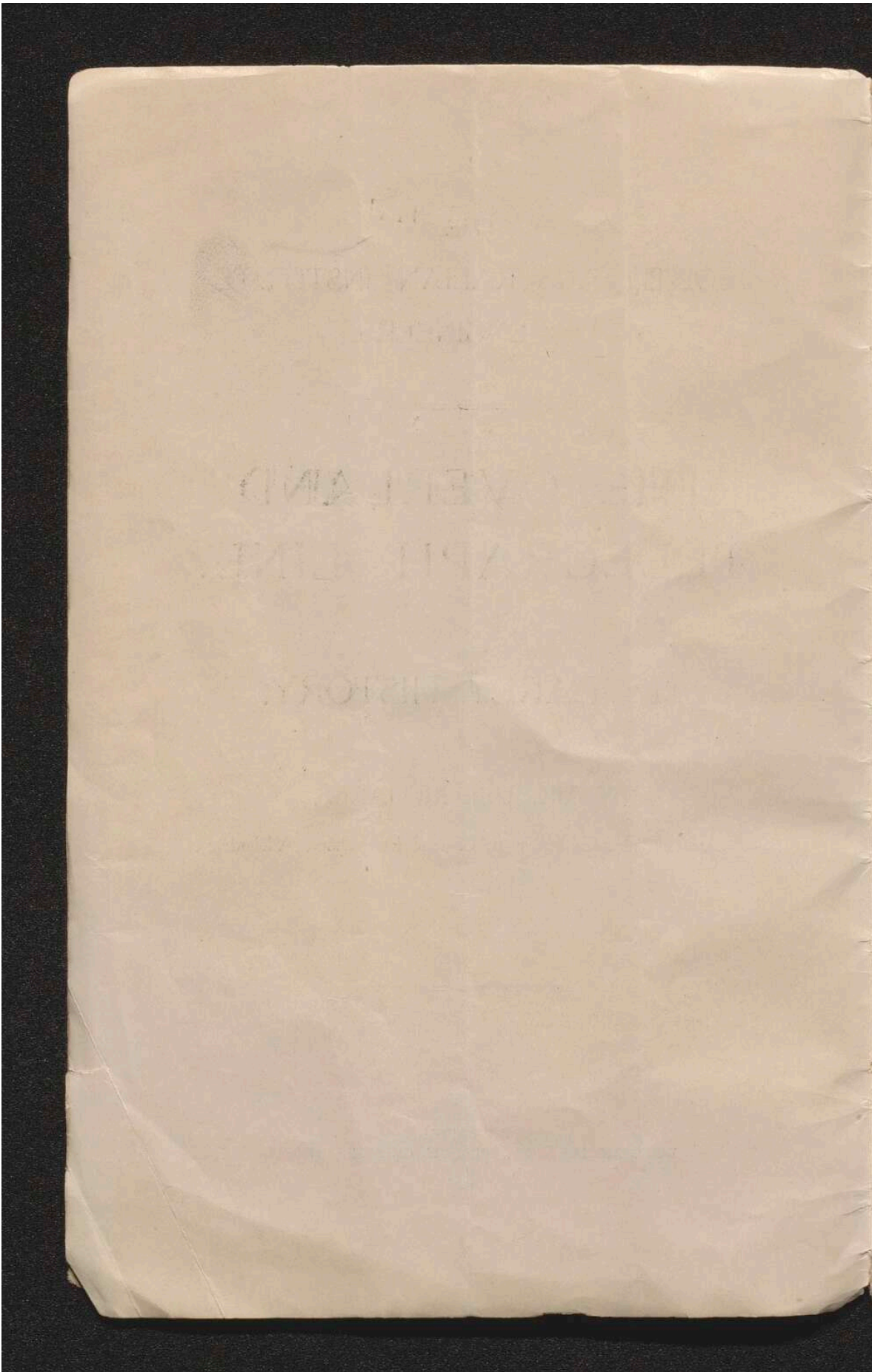
ITS EARLY HISTORY.

BY MR. J. B. RICHARDS,

Assistant Electrical Engineer, General Post Office, Adelaide.

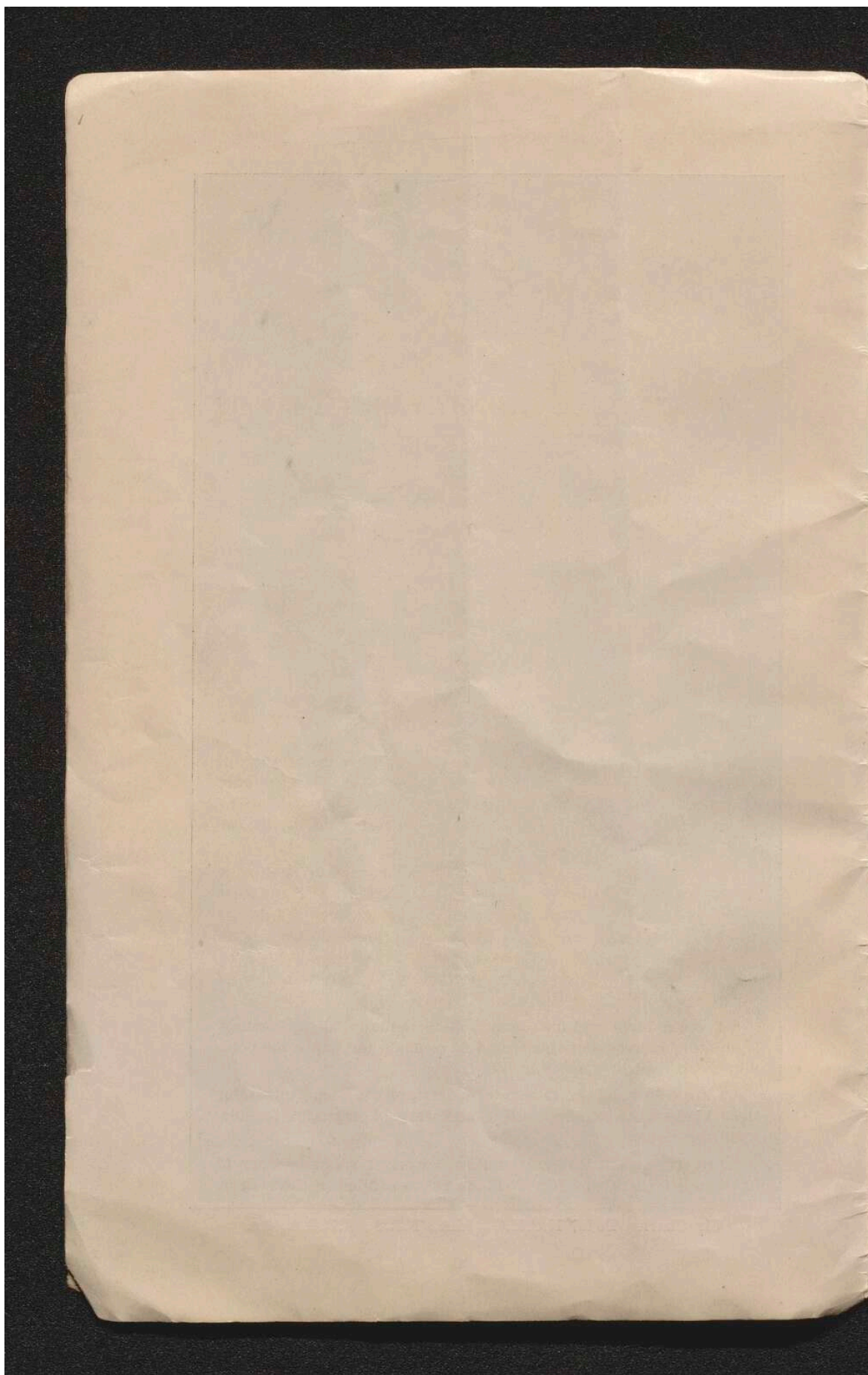
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1914.





Sir Charles Todd, K.C.M.G., M.A., F.R.S., F.R.G.S., &c.



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THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERS.

The Overland Telegraph Line.

Its early history by Mr. J. B. Richards, Assistant Electrical
Engineer, General Post Office, Adelaide.

INTRODUCTION.

In preparing this paper I need hardly tell you that I have obtained many particulars from the Departmental Reports, especially those of the late Sir Charles Todd, whose work now stands as a monument to his memory. Sir Charles Todd was indeed a very great man, with powers of organisation and administration far beyond the average. These qualities, coupled with a broad mind and a kindly disposition, made him an ideal chief.

The late Mr. R. R. Knuckey, who had charge of Section A in the centre of Australia, gave me very great and valuable assistance in writing the various incidents which occurred during the erection of the line. In carrying out a work of this magnitude a number of incidents occurred which have never been recorded, and I have taken this opportunity to include a few of them which might be of interest to you.

I could have obtained many more, equally as interesting, from other officers, but this would have made the paper too voluminous to read at a meeting like this.

I am also indebted to several officers of the Department for their kindness in lending me the necessary photographs to illustrate this paper.

In carrying out this great national work it was necessary to have good leaders, and Mr. Todd, as he was called in those days,





Top Row—W. McMin, R. R. Knuckey, R. A. Horn, A. G. Woods.
Bottom Row—T. Nash, C. Musgrove, — Bromley, W. W. Mills.

Group of Overland Telegraph Officers.

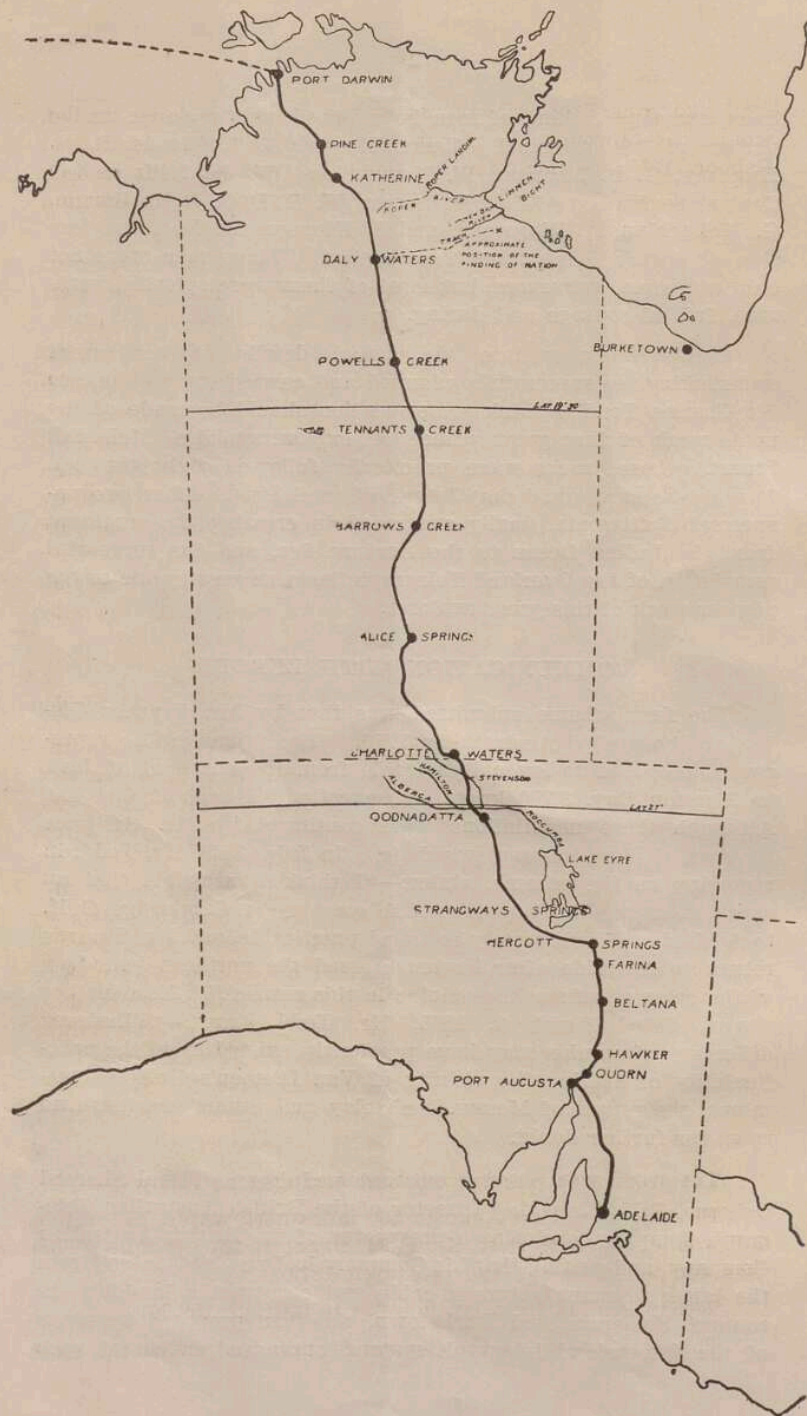
knew exactly the kind of men he required, and a glance at the names of his principal officers, Messrs. A. T. Woods, R. R. Knuckey, G. R. McMinn, W. Harvey, and W. W. Mills on the Central Section, and R. C. Patterson, W. R. Rutt, R. C. Burton, G. McLachlan, A. Ringwood, and S. King on the Northern Section, shows the wisdom of his selection. These men were not only competent surveyors, but most of them were splendid bushmen, full of courage and daring.

Before entering into the actual details of this great undertaking, so successfully planned and carried out by the late Sir Charles Todd, I think some mention should be made of the noble work of that great prince of explorers, John McDouall Stuart, whose tracks were practically followed right through. It will be remembered that John McDouall Stuart, after two unsuccessful attempts, finally succeeded in crossing the continent from the Indian Ocean to the Arafura Sea, and the successful completion of the Overland Telegraph line was greatly due to the pioneer work of this great explorer.

COMMUNICATION WITH EUROPE.

The first scheme submitted was that by Mr. Frances Gisborne, who visited Australia in 1859. The promoters he represented proposed to lay a light cable from the east end of Java to Moreton Bay, 3,780 knots, at an estimated cost of £800,000. Although these negotiations were continued by Mr. Gisborne for several years nothing was done. In July, 1859, Mr. Todd, in reporting on the scheme, states:—"I think it probable that an overland route (i.e. from the north coast, near Cambridge Gulf, to Adelaide) will ultimately be found practicable, and Mr. Stuart's return to Adelaide after having crossed the northern boundary of the colony confirms my opinion in this respect." In a further report, dated March 3, 1863, Mr. Todd states:—"Whatever difference of opinion may have previously existed as to the practicability of making the vicinity of Van Diemen's Gulf the terminus, the return of Messrs. McKinlay and Stuart can leave no room for further doubt.

In March, 1870, a letter was received from Admiral Sherard Osborne, R.N., Managing Director of the British Australian Telegraph Company, enclosing a prospectus of the British Australian Company, and stating that his Company had received orders from the latter to manufacture a cable and construct a land line to connect Singapore and Burketown, the then proposed terminus of the Queensland telegraph system, but as a portion of such



land line from Port Darwin, where the cable was to be landed, would pass through the Northern Territory, Commander Noel Osbone, R.N., as agent for the Company, was sent out to seek the sanction of the South Australian Government for the erection of these works.

In reply the Company was informed that the Government would prefer the construction of a telegraph line from Port Augusta, then the most northern telegraph station to Port Darwin. It was finally determined that the Government should erect the line, and a Loan Bill was accordingly introduced and passed, authorising a preliminary loan of £120,000.

It will thus be seen how successfully Mr. Todd had managed affairs up to this point for the Colony of South Australia. At this time there was a good deal of rivalry between this State and Queensland as to the landing place of the cable. The late Sir Charles Todd, however, was not to be satisfied with a small piece of land line to connect up with Burketown in Queensland, and all who knew him can imagine with what enthusiasm he entered into this great undertaking.

THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE TO PORT DARWIN.

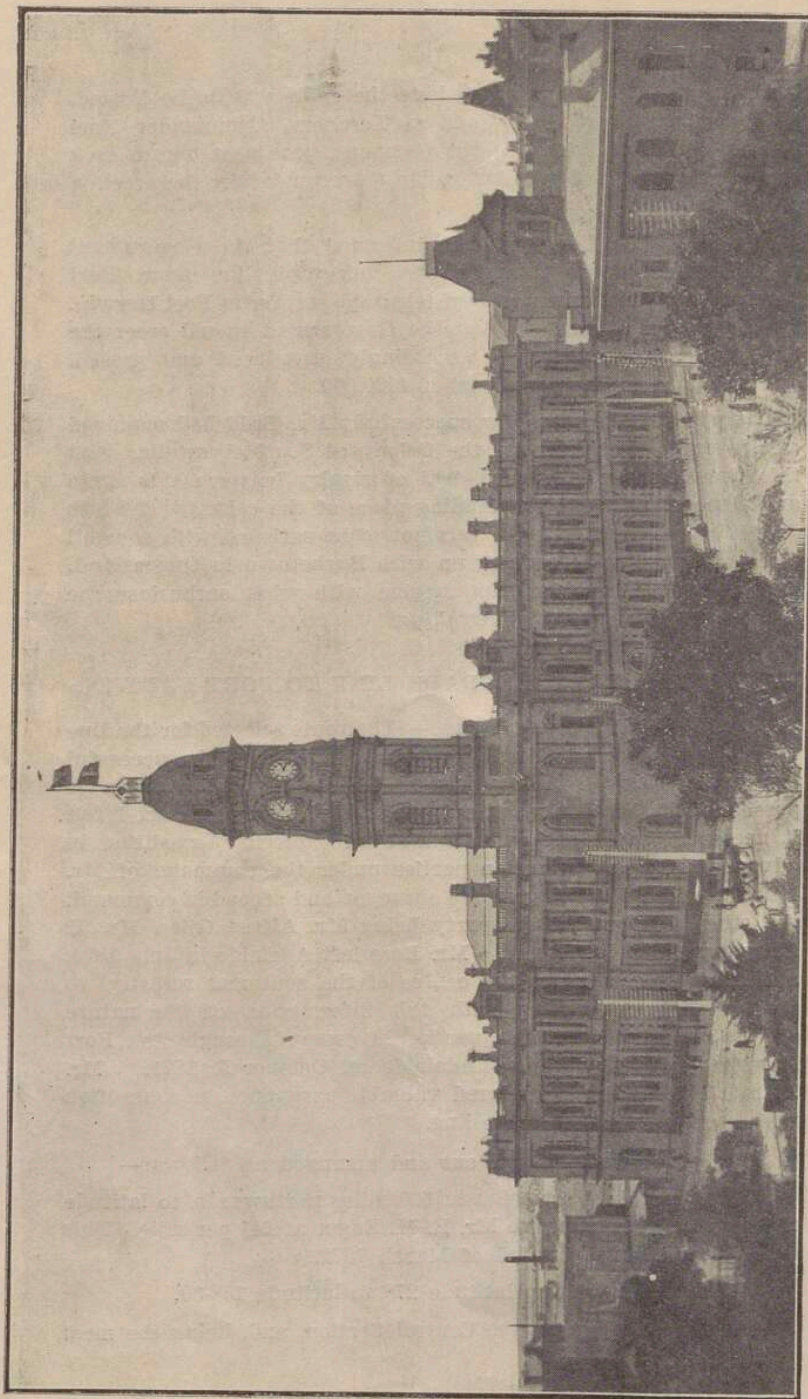
Mr. Todd in his report states:—"The route selected for the line was that traversed by Mr. John McDouall Stuart in his successful exploration through the continent. As the only information we possessed of the country was that supplied by Mr. Stuart I felt it necessary to fit out and dispatch an exploring expedition in advance of the construction parties under the command of Mr. John Ross, with Mr. Harvey as surveyor and second-in-command, the other members of the party being Mr. Alfred Giles, Mr. T. Crispe, and Mr. W. Hearn. Mr. Ross left Adelaide in July 1870, and after proceeding to the centre of the continent returned to the construction parties with full information of the nature of the country. Subsequently he went through to Port Darwin, and returned to Adelaide on October 5, 1871. Mr. Alfred Giles later on rendered valuable assistance in connection with the construction of the line.

The work was planned out and arranged as follows:—

First Section, Port Augusta 500 miles northwards, to latitude 27° was let by contract to Mr. E. M. Bagot at £41 per mile. This was completed by the end of March 1872.

Second Section from latitude 27° to latitude 19°-30.

This was known as the Central Section, and, being the most



General Post Office, Adelaide.

difficult was divided into five sub-sections and carried out by the Government with the following officers in charge:—

Section A.—R. R. Knuckey, latitude 27° to $25^{\circ} 30'$.

Section B.—G. R. McMinn, latitude $25^{\circ} 30'$ to $24^{\circ} 0'$.

Section C.—W. W. Mills, latitude $24^{\circ} 0'$ to $22^{\circ} 30'$.

Section D.—A. T. Woods, latitude $22^{\circ} 30'$ to $21^{\circ} 0'$.

Section E.—E. W. Harvey, latitude $21^{\circ} 0'$ to $19^{\circ} 30'$.

These parties were supplied with fifteen horse wagons, seventeen bullock drays, one bullock wagon, and five express wagons; in all about 165 horses and 210 bullocks.

In order to provide the officers and men with fresh meat a small party under Mr. Harley Bacon was fitted out with 2,000 sheep to take charge of a receiving and forwarding depot on the Finke River. I may mention the Finke River was named by John McDouall Stuart after Mr. Finke, a partner of the firm of Messrs John and James Chambers, who fitted Stuart out on his first expedition entirely at their own cost.

Mr. Todd further writes:—"It will give you some idea of the difficulties to be overcome and the distance to be travelled when I state that Mr. W. Harvey, who had charge of Section E. from latitude 21° to $19^{\circ} 30'$, did not reach the scene of operations until the 24th of May in the following year, having been eight months on the road. Mr. Harvey lost no time in getting to work, and the first pole was planted on June 1st, exactly a week after his arrival."

I will now give you a few incidents in connection with the Central Section, starting with Section A at latitude 27° .

It must be remembered that in order to carry out the work a certain amount of minor exploration had to be done before the survey could be made. It was first of all necessary to find permanent waters and also telegraph poles to build the line. In making these minor explorations, although at times carried out under great difficulties and trying circumstances, it must have been a very great pleasure indeed to the officers when they made discoveries of permanent waters, springs, and hills, to have the privilege of naming them after their friends in Adelaide. Mr. R. R. Knuckey gives a very interesting account in connection with this part of their work.

THE FINDING OF DALHOUSIE SPRINGS.

Mr. Knuckey writes:—"On our arrival at Ross's Waterhole we found the Macumba Creek ran nearly east and west instead

of north-west as Ross informed Mr. Todd in the first instance, so that creek was of no use to our further advance. The Macumba (native name) is formed by the junction of the Alberga and Stevenson Creeks; the Alberga comes from the west and the Stevenson from the north-west.

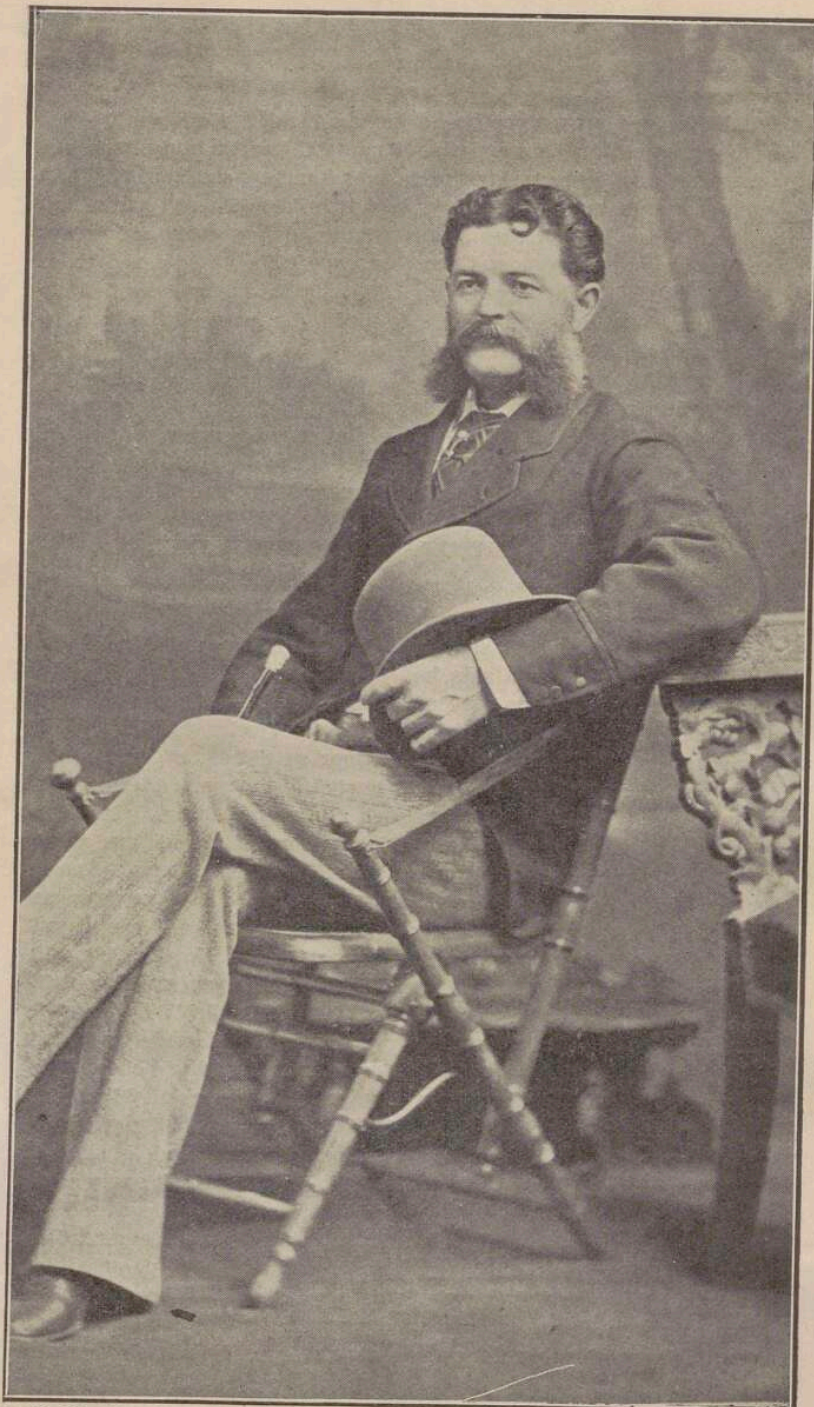
We followed a small creek coming in from the north, and on the second day camped on a very large waterhole, native name, "Arril-Currullina." Whilst camped at this place Mr. A. T. Woods made a trip to the north, and McMinn and I made a trip east. We were only away three days. Mr. Woods tried to find suitable country for a road to Marchant's Springs on the Finke River but the country he traversed was too sandy and full of claypans for a good road. Mr. McMinn and I explored the country to the east for mapping purposes only. Mr. Woods told us on his return that from a point on a low range of saddle-back hills, since named by me the Hawdon Range, he thought he detected the sheen of soda flats, and therefore if his premises were correct mound springs would be found there. On my next trip out I picked up Mr. Woods's point of observation and followed his bearing. At about 10 miles we found the soda flat and a small mound spring. About one mile north we came across another mound spring with good reeds growing around it. I named that spring "Bee Spring," after Mr. Tom Bee—Mr. McMinn's cadet. About $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from there we came on the main body of springs. As far as the eye could reach to the east the reeds showed the presence of the springs. To the north they were bounded by a low range of saddle-backed hills, and to the westward the same range extended, terminating in a point named Mount Crispe. The reeds where we struck the springs (I measured one) were 17 feet high and as thick as your finger.

We could hear a stream gurgling among the reeds, and as we had to camp there that night the horses had to be watered, so we cut down some reeds, made a corduroy road of them, and led our horses to drink into as pretty a stream of water as a bushman could wish to see, about three feet wide, 18 inches deep, clear as crystal, and fresh and sweet as mountain dew. We found the head of that spring. It was what we called a mud spring, that is the water (natural artesian wells) contained no sodium or magnesia, and therefore the overflow left no sediment. Now, before we left Adelaide, Lady Edith Ferguson, wife of Sir James Ferguson, the Governor of South Australia, had presented each of our parties with a box of books. These boxes contained all the standard novels of the day. Each box was different and there were

six bibles and six prayer books among them. Now we decided amongst ourselves that we would name the most important find after her, and these springs came up to our expectations. They are the greatest area of springs in Australia. There is any kind of water you like in them, salt, magnesia, hot, cold, and fresh, and so on that afternoon, December 21st, 1870, I christened them the Lady Edith Springs. As I was on the nearest section to Adelaide I sent in to our chief, Mr. Todd, the maps of the country as far as we had gone. Mr. Todd showed my map to Lady Edith, who wrote to us thanking us and asking us to change the name to her family name, Lady Edith was the daughter of the Marquis of Dalhousie, and that is how the Dalhousie was named. Mr. Knuckey further relates his experience after the discovery of the Dalhousie Springs until the discovery of Charlotte Waters.

THE DISCOVERY OF CHARLOTTE WATERS.

After leaving Dalhousie Springs the party followed a small creek running between a gap in the Hawdon Range. Two prominent peaks on the south side I christened Mt. Eva and Mt. Jessie. The peak on the north side had been named Mt. Crispe by Mr. Ross after Tom Crispe, one of the members of his party. On December 25, 1871, the three parties, Woods, McMinn, and Knuckey's, had their Christmas dinner at "Possum" waterhole, so named because Charlie Musgrove shot an opossum there; needless to say they did not have much Christmas cheer. McMinn and I, still keeping Marchant's Springs as our objective, went ahead, and picked up Harvey's Camp XIII., now named Woola-umpa, about 20 miles east of Charlotte Waters, but this track was no good, so we returned again. Then we went out again and tried a N.N.W. bearing which brought us to the Coglin, about 10 miles west of Charlotte Waters. From there we struck north, and picked up Stuart's track near Mt. Daniel, and Mt. Townsend, and the Goyder Creek; from this we forged ahead, and struck the Finke River at a place named Crown Point by Mr. Woods. We followed the Finke for about five miles and found Marchant Springs with the tree marked J.M.D.S. But we had not found any permanent water between Bullocky Camp and Marchant Springs, so we started back again, and, then as usual, every man is wise after the event, only a difference of a few degrees in a bearing, and we would have struck Charlotte Waters eight miles from Bullocky Flat. Traversing back, we missed the point again, and nearly got landed in trouble as our horses had been without water for two days, and our supply was exhausted. We struck the Coglin again; this creek has a trick of spreading itself out into



Mr. R. R. Knuckey, in charge of Section A., Overland Telegraph Line.

a flat and making again. We followed it all day. It was Sunday, January 10th, 1871, and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, McMinn said, "It's no good, Knuckey, we'll just camp until night, our horses are done, we will make for Bullocky Flat by the Stars." So we unsaddled and let the horses go. About sundown we noticed some bronze-winged pigeons flying over and keeping an eastern course. We knew that these birds always go for water in the evening, so we saddled up again and kept the direction of the creek, and after travelling for about five miles I caught sight of some reeds. My horse, "Bonnie Dundee," the quickest walking horse between Port Augusta and Port Darwin, forged ahead and I caught sight of the water first, but it was so clear my heart went down to my boots for I was afraid it was salt. I jumped off the horse and tasted the water, and you can imagine my delight when I discovered it was fresh. We watered the horses camped and made some Johnnie cakes, they consist of flour and water, mixed with a little salt. They are generally called "beggars on the coals." Whilst watching them cooking Mr. Knuckey, who was so delighted at finding fresh water, broke out into poetry with this result:—

The greatest enjoyment under the sun
Is to sit by the fire till the beggars are done.

After enjoying our meal, we solemnly filled our pannicans with water, and I named the "waters" Charlotte Waters after Lady Charlotte Bacon, sixth daughter of the Earl of Oxford (Byron's Ianthe). And this is how the Charlotte Waters were found and named.

On returning to camp I decided to make Charlotte Waters my headquarters and the site for one of the four central telegraph stations. After fixing the starting point of my section, latitude 27°—a quarter of a mile north of the Coglin—I started the survey, the men commenced cutting poles and erecting the line.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE BLACKS.

So far we had not come in contact with the blacks, but we knew they were watching us all the time, as whenever we rode to the top of a hill to take bearings we could see smoke signals going up all around us.

An amusing incident occurred. Mr. Aldridge and I were riding along the Finke River looking for telegraph poles when we came across a blackfellow having a drink at a waterhole. His spear was stuck in the sand and his shield was lying beside it.

The tramp of our horses roused him. He jumped up and stood for fully ten seconds like a statue carved from ebony. I began to get off my horse, but as soon as I lifted my leg from the saddle he gave one yell and left spear and shield, and we could not see the way he went for the dust he threw up.

After starting operations McMin and I proceeded northwards to fix the latitude of the junction of our two Sections. I then returned to Charlotte Waters, and on my arrival found that the blacks were getting more troublesome. They used to come prowling around at night, and eventually stole a tarpaulin which covered our flour, also an axe. We kept watch the next night but they did not come in. Next morning just after daylight 20 or 30 of them appeared on the opposite bank of the creek with all their war paint on. Our camp was 150 yards away. They were led by an old chief who tried his best to make them rush us, but they hung back.

The three of us were armed with revolvers and I had a Snider carbine. I walked towards them and made signs of peace; the old chief walked to meet me, and when about 80 yards distant he fixed his spear in the woomera and threw it at me and struck me on the right elbow, so I thought it was my turn then. I fired and hit him in the shoulder. He jumped in the air and they all ran down the creek like a mob of wild goats. The injured black came into the telegraph station subsequently and died about 12 years afterwards.

In 1911, after an absence of forty years, I was again at Charlotte Waters, and when in conversation with the Postmaster (Mr. Kearnan) an old blackfellow came up saying that he knew me, and told the Postmaster that I had built his wurly (the telegraph station). He also gave a very graphic description of the fight, how I had hit the old chief in the shoulder, and how frightened they were. Now it was over forty years since that black had seen me, but he recognised me at once. It can be readily understood that it was the first time the niggers heard the report of a rifle and the hit on the shoulder would create a lasting impression on their minds.

MR. E. FITCH'S TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

About August, 1871, I was camped on the Abminga Creek, about 16 miles south of the Charlotte Waters, building the southern part of my section, when we ran short of salt. I took E. Fitch with me, and two pack horses, and went to Dalhousie Springs

for a supply. There was some very fine salt there. We got there alright and camped and filled our pack bags. Next morning, I roused Fitch to bring in the horses, but found he could not move. He had caught a severe attack of rheumatic fever and was perfectly helpless. I had to empty my bags again. One of the horses was very quiet, so I saddled him, and put him in the creek close to the bank. I managed to get poor Fitch in the saddle, where I securely strapped him, and rode towards home. I had to go very slowly. That day I got him to 'Possum Waterhole, and camped there that night. The next day I got him as far as Blood's Creek. I intended to leave him there and gallop into the Abminga, only 11 miles away, but just as I had made him as comfortable as possible I looked down the creek and about a mile off I saw a lot of blacks' fires. They were out rat hunting, and I was afraid they would come up the creek early in the morning and find him before I could return with a trap to fetch him in. He was so bad then that I could carry him no farther. He used to beg me to shoot him and put him out of his misery. In the morning I waited until I saw the blacks going to the eastward and then I made for the Abminga as hard as I could ride. Fitch was lying on his back. I made a shade over him and placed my revolver and his own within reach of his hands. As soon as I arrived I sent Mr. J. H. Aldridge, my cadet, and another man with the express wagon, filled with grass, to bring him in, and we fixed up tent and bed to make him as comfortable as possible. Aldridge was not long away, and he told me that when he got to Fitch he was in a frightful condition. The ants were crawling all over him, in his eyes and mouth, he could not lift his hand to brush them off. The crows had gathered round him. He managed to fire his revolver, and, strange to say, he had killed one, and that frightened the rest away. He told me afterwards that, if he could have lifted his hand, he would have shot himself. Each of the parties had an electric magneto machine, and I gave Fitch some very severe shocks. In the medicine chest there were medicines for rheumatic fever, and these combined brought him around. He was ill for about two months, but got alright again. The last time I saw him he was letter carrier at Gawler.

The central Section, which was started in January, 1871, was completed by the end of the year.

Section A completed September 1871.

Section B completed November 1871.

Section C completed December 1871.

Section D completed December 1871.

Section E completed November 1871.

Mr. Harvey, after completing Section E, continued the work northwards, and eventually erected 82 miles of line in addition to his own section. Owing to the breakdown of the contract at the Port Darwin end, Mr. R. R. Knuckey, who was the first to complete his section (A), with a party of volunteers proceeded northwards to assist in the prosecution of the work, and ultimately reached the Roper River after an arduous and perilous journey through flooded country.

It will be seen that the most difficult and inaccessible portion of the work which was carried out by the Government parties from latitude 27° to $19^{\circ}.30'$ (a distance of 626 miles) was completed by the end of 1871.

Mr. Todd, in reporting on the Central Sections, mentions the good work of Messrs. W. Harvey, R. R. Knuckey, Gilbert McMinn, W. W. Mills, and A. T. Woods, all of whom, he states, rendered good service and carried out the difficult work entrusted to them with a zeal and intelligence worthy of all praise.

Any one who has not had experience of Central Australia can hardly imagine the difficulties these men had to contend with in a country almost waterless, without roads or bridges, and in many cases miles of sandhills and spinifex, but these men were determined to succeed, and when the hardest work is never too hard success is assured.

While everything proceeded satisfactorily on Sections 1 and 2 the same could not be said of Section 3, which extended from latitude $19^{\circ}.30'$ to Port Darwin. This section was let by contract to Messrs. Darwent & Dalwood, but the contract broke down, principally owing to the want of transport power after about 225 miles of poles and 156 miles of wire had been erected. This was a serious disaster, and must have been a great disappointment to Mr. Todd, who expected to be able to communicate with Port Darwin in January 1872, and as the cable was then laid communication would have been established with England.

Nothing daunted, Mr. Todd at once organised a fresh expedition under the command of Mr. R. C. Patterson, who was then Assistant Engineer. He left Melbourne by the *s.s. Omco* in August, 1871, followed by a fleet of vessels (the *Himalaya*, *Golden Fleece*, *Laju*, and *Antipodes*) conveying 170 horses and 500 bullocks. This expedition met with further disasters. Mr. Patterson arrived at Port Darwin during the hot months, the country was bare of feed, and long stages had to be worked over without water. Before wells could be sunk, a wet season of remarkable intensity set in, consequently all work was stopped. 20.9 inches

of rain fell in December, and 18.2 in January up to the 24th. Very serious losses of stock took place, 30 to 40 per cent. of the bullocks dying. Mr. Patterson had to send Mr. Little to Normanton, and thence to the nearest telegraph station (Gilbert River) in Queensland to telegraph for further assistance. This second disaster must have been a terrible disappointment not only to Mr. Todd but to the Government of the day. It was then decided that Mr. Todd should go round to Port Darwin to take charge of the work. He left for the Roper by the *s.s. Omco* on the 3rd January, 1872, with 80 horses, and was followed by the *s.s. Tararua*, with 77 horses, and arrived at the mouth of the Roper on the 27th of that month, where he was met by Messrs. Patterson, Little, and Captain Sweet. No time was lost in landing the cargo and horses.

A small paddle steamer, the *Young Australian*, had been purchased and sent around from Port Adelaide to navigate the Roper River. On the arrival of the *Omco* and *Tararua* nothing had been heard of the *Young Australian*. Mr. Todd then decided to take the *Omco* up the river as far as possible so as to land the horses. In order to do this he had to sign a bond making the Government responsible for the vessel.

On the evening of his arrival the vessel was 15 miles up the river, and a few days later the horses were landed 50 miles above the mouth of the Roper River.

The *Young Australian* turned up on February 3rd, and took a quantity of cargo, which was transhipped from the *Omco*, to the Roper landing, 90 miles from the mouth, careful soundings being taken on the way. Later on the *Tararua* arrived, and taking advantage of a fine freshet, managed to land the horses and cargo at the depot without accident. Even then Mr. Todd's troubles were not over, a protracted wet season keeping him at the depot for some weeks, and, as it was feared that the working parties near Daly Waters, of whom nothing had been heard for some months, would be out of provisions, a supply was sent them on 50 pack horses. Ultimately all teams were sent away with full loads.

Mr. Todd then proceeded to Port Darwin in the *Young Australian*. On completing arrangements at that place he returned to the Roper River, leaving there on June 13th to travel overland. He spent some time with each working party, thoroughly inspecting the work and putting all stations in good working order. The two ends of the wire were joined on 22nd August, 1872, near Central Mount Stuart, where congratulatory messages were received and acknowledged from His Excellency

the Governor, the Right Hon. Sir James Fergusson, Bart., the Government, Foreign Consuls, and friends from the whole of the colonies.

It can be easily imagined that the late Sir Charles Todd and his officers were a very proud and happy family on this eventful day.

In addition to the construction of the line substantial stone stations of eight and nine rooms had been built at the Peake, Charlotte Waters, Alice Springs, and Barrow Creek, and temporary huts of three rooms at Tennant's Creek, Powell's Creek, Daly Waters, and Yam Creek. At Port Darwin a large stone building was erected, consisting of a central building and two wings for the accommodation of the cable staff as well as our own. The cost of the buildings at Port Darwin was £6,670, of which the Cable Company paid £3,547.

All this work was accomplished in less than two years. The total length of the line was 1,975 miles, and the cost, including repoling with iron poles, buildings, &c., £479,174 18/3.

The work was of a most substantial character, but the white ants, especially north of Tennant's Creek, were very numerous, and so terribly destructive that it was considered advisable to have certain sections repoled with iron poles while the teams were in the country. Arrangements were accordingly made, and 6,000 iron poles obtained from England and shipped round to the Roper River. In order to carry out this work the following stock and plant were left by Mr. Patterson at the Roper River landing:—

174 horses,	17 bullock wagons,
325 bullocks,	13 bullock drays,
16 horse wagons,	32 saddles, harness, &c.
4 spring drays,	

Mr. Todd completed his ride overland and arrived in Adelaide on October 30th, 1872. Banquets were held in Adelaide, Sydney, and London on 15th November to celebrate the event.

REPOLING OF THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE.

Mr. R. R. Knuckey was placed in charge of repoling the first section, from Elsey Crossing to 30 miles south of Tennant's Creek. A party, consisting of 60 men and three officers, left Port Adelaide on 9th April, 1873, by the *s.s. Rangatira* for Sydney, where they transhipped to the *Lord Ashley*, sailing from there on the 23rd of the same month. The party arrived at the Roper River on 12th May, and landed all poles and stores at the depot.

Everything went prosperously, the teams were dispatched with the loading without delay, and the work of erecting the iron poles was commenced within two weeks, and completed in September, 1874.

During the course of repoling the line, from Providence Knoll to Tennants Creek, Mr. Knuckey had to organise a party and make a search for a man called Nation, who was lost in the ranges in the Gulf country. His story of this search is a very interesting one, which is as follows.

STORY OF NATION.

"One afternoon in July, 1874, I was talking to Mr. Howley, the Stationmaster at Daly Waters, when we noticed a stranger riding along the Roper road. As he came up we walked out to meet him. He looked very worn and thin. He asked for the Stationmaster, I pointed him out, and he handed him a note which he wished to be telegraphed to Mr. Scott, who was then Government Resident at Port Darwin. The note read—"Am nearly starved. We have eaten all our horses excepting the one Elvey is riding. I have about 20 lbs. of dried horse flesh left. Do not know exactly where I am. Elvey is going to ride west until he cuts the telegraph line. Can you help?" Mr. Howley immediately sent the message to Mr. Scott, and we took the poor fellow in and gave him a feed, and then got his story.

It appeared that Nation and Elvey had joined a Mr. De Latour, who was bringing a mob of 100 head of cattle from Gibson Station, on the Flinders River, Queensland, to Port Darwin. At a place named Settlement Creek, about 60 miles west of Normanton, they had a disagreement; Nation and Elvey decided to go on alone. They had two saddle horses, and two pack horses with sufficient provisions, they thought to enable them to reach the Roper River, where they expected to find a township, but they wandered into the Coast Ranges, and got out of their bearings. After eating all their rations, they had to kill and jerk their horses for food. They had killed all with the exception of one, and Nation, who was a man of about sixty years, could go no further. He decided to camp in the Ranges and let Elvey go west for help. Elvey steered west. On his 18th day out he luckily struck Mr. J. H. Aldridge coming up with the last loading. Mr. Aldridge gave him food and a fresh horse, and sent him in to the Daly Waters Station.

It was decided by the Government that I should make a

search for Nation. As we were getting ready to start, De Latour, the man they had left at Settlement Creek, and a young lad of about 18, rode up with a lot of horses. These two had driven the cattle as far as the MacArthur River, where they had to leave them. The natives were troublesome, and they struck west. In the meantime, I had been trying to get from Elvey the route he followed. He told me he had left his mate (Nation) in a very stony range, and had followed that range for about twelve miles, he then went west for a day and a half, and was pulled up by a big river running north, and from where he struck it he could see the sea. From this point he followed the river for about 20 miles, and then crossed it on a bar. Now, from what Latour had told me about the track and Elvey's description of the big river he had crossed, I at once concluded it was the Limmen Bight, named by Leichardt. Not having a map of Australia with me, I telegraphed Mr. Ringwood, who was then Assistant Astronomer, to send me the latitude and longitude of Leichardt's crossing at the Limmen Bight. I received this, and determined to make a bee line from Daly Waters to that point. If I was right I would pick up Elvey's track. Latour decided that he would go back with us and get his cattle.

I took W. Woods, one of my best bushmen, and Elvey with me. We got on very well until the fourth day out, and then we struck the Hodgson River, a tributary of the Roper. We had great difficulty in crossing the river, it ran through cliffs of basalt. Our next check was the Gregory sandstone ranges. They are not ranges, simply the abrupt ending of the Barclay tablelands. We travelled the tablelands, and then all of a sudden came across a precipice about 70 feet high, red sandstone. We had to travel three miles along the cliffs before we could get down to the low country. When we got to the base there was about a quarter of a mile of the most extraordinary country I have ever ridden through, pillars of red sandstone ranging from 30 to 50 feet high, and packed together so closely that, in places, it was as much as we could do to get our horses through. On the top of some of these pillars was balanced a stone, and they looked as though they would fall off with the slightest touch or sound. We got through very quickly, and I don't think we raised our voices above a whisper until we got clear of them. We were really afraid that some of these stones would fall on us. After continuing on our course for two days, W. Woods, all of a sudden, jumped off his horse and called out, 'here is Elvey's track,' and so it was, plainly discernable. I was very glad, for I had found when making up my work that we were only 20 miles from

Limmen Bight, and finding this track proved my theory that Elvey crossed Leichardt's crossing was correct. I got from Elvey his track from where he left Nation to our camp. I plotted out his track as well as I could, and steered for the place where I fancied Nation was, and struck the Limmen Bight Crossing. There are four conical hills at that place which Leichardt named the Four Archers, after the Archer Brothers, well-known squatters in Queensland. In a large creek I found a tree marked with a letter 'L' (Leichardt's tree). Next morning we started on a bearing of 70°, and camped that night on a creek which I named the 'Rosy,' after my sister in Victoria. The next day, keeping the same bearing, we crossed another fine creek, which I named the 'Aldridge,' after Mr. J. H. Aldridge, and camped that night at another fine running creek, which I named the 'Nation.' We were then only about a mile west of a very high rough-looking range, and Elvey informed me that that was the range in which he had left Nation. Looking at the range with my field glasses, I fancied I saw a gap, and the next morning I climbed a tall Indian pine close to the camp, taking my field glasses and compass with me. I could see the gap fairly well, and, taking a bearing to it, came down, saddled up, and we started on our journey. In less than two miles we struck the gap, and after riding about a mile through the range we came across an open piece of country. I had not ridden 100 yards, before I found the track of Elvey's horse. As soon as Elvey saw it he said, 'I know where I am now, the old man is not far off.' He struck spurs in his horse, and started full gallop along the foot of the range. Woods and I followed slowly, and when we had gone about a mile we found Elvey leaning on his horse's neck, crying like a child. 'Too late. Too late,' was all he could say, and alas, we were too late, for there covered up in his blankets was poor Nation dead.

He had evidently felt his end approaching, and made his camp up in a decent fashion. In his hand was his diary, which he had religiously kept. The last entry was made 11 days before our arrival, and the last words ran, 'I am getting very weak, and I think I shall die before night. The cold has been mounting upwards from my feet, and when it reaches my heart I know I shall die. Beneath the tree at my head there is a box containing 35½ sovereigns. I have managed to crawl down to the spring and fill the two quart pots with water. I do not wish to die thirsty. I die forgiving all my enemies, especially De Latour, who brought me into this trouble.' Well, that message made us all feel very queer, but work had to be done. His body could

not be moved, so we made an enclosure with long rails and short ones, until his body was covered. I cut his name in one of the quart pots, and also cut a cross in the tree at his head, and we then rode sorrowfully back towards Daly Waters. On the return journey, when camped near the MacArthur River, we had a brush with the blacks; one night, whilst enjoying a smoke before retiring, Latour and I were discussing our plans for next day. Latour had just retired, and I remained finishing my smoke. I heard a suspicious noise, and called out, 'look out boys, they are on us.' Latour fired his revolver in the direction of the sound, Woods fired the Snider rifle. The flash of the gun and its loud report scared the blacks, and we could hear the clatter of their spears as they ran away. A watch was kept until daylight, and then we discovered that we had a very close shave, they had come within thirty yards of us. Three of our horses were speared, and one so badly that it had to be destroyed. If I had not been a smoker we should have all been killed. Next day we continued our journey to Daly Waters, and eventually reached that place without further mishap."

This story of Nation's, sad as it is, unmistakably shows how readily those in the early days risked their lives to blaze the track for others. No doubt poor Nation and his companion, good bushmen as they were, had every confidence in reaching their destination, but they lacked the scientific knowledge necessary to carry them through. In reading Mr. Knuckey's description of his finding of Nation, one cannot help being very deeply impressed with his great natural aptitude for the bush, and this piece of work will always be remembered to his credit.

CASUALTIES AND ATTACKS BY NATIVES.

In an undertaking so extensive as the erection of nearly 2,000 miles of telegraph line across the Continent, the greatest part of the distance being through unknown country, it would have been strange indeed if there had been no casualties to report. There were, however, very few. Five deaths were recorded during the construction of the line. C. W. Kraegen, operator, perished from thirst; C. Palmer, teamster, from consumption; J. Hareus, lost in the bush whilst looking for horses; one man from fever, and one drowned. Generally speaking the health of the men was good, and great praise is due to the late Dr. Renner for the manner in which he carried out his duties.

From the first every effort was made to maintain friendly relations with the natives, and, generally speaking, with fair success. There were, however, occasional outbreaks of hostilities of

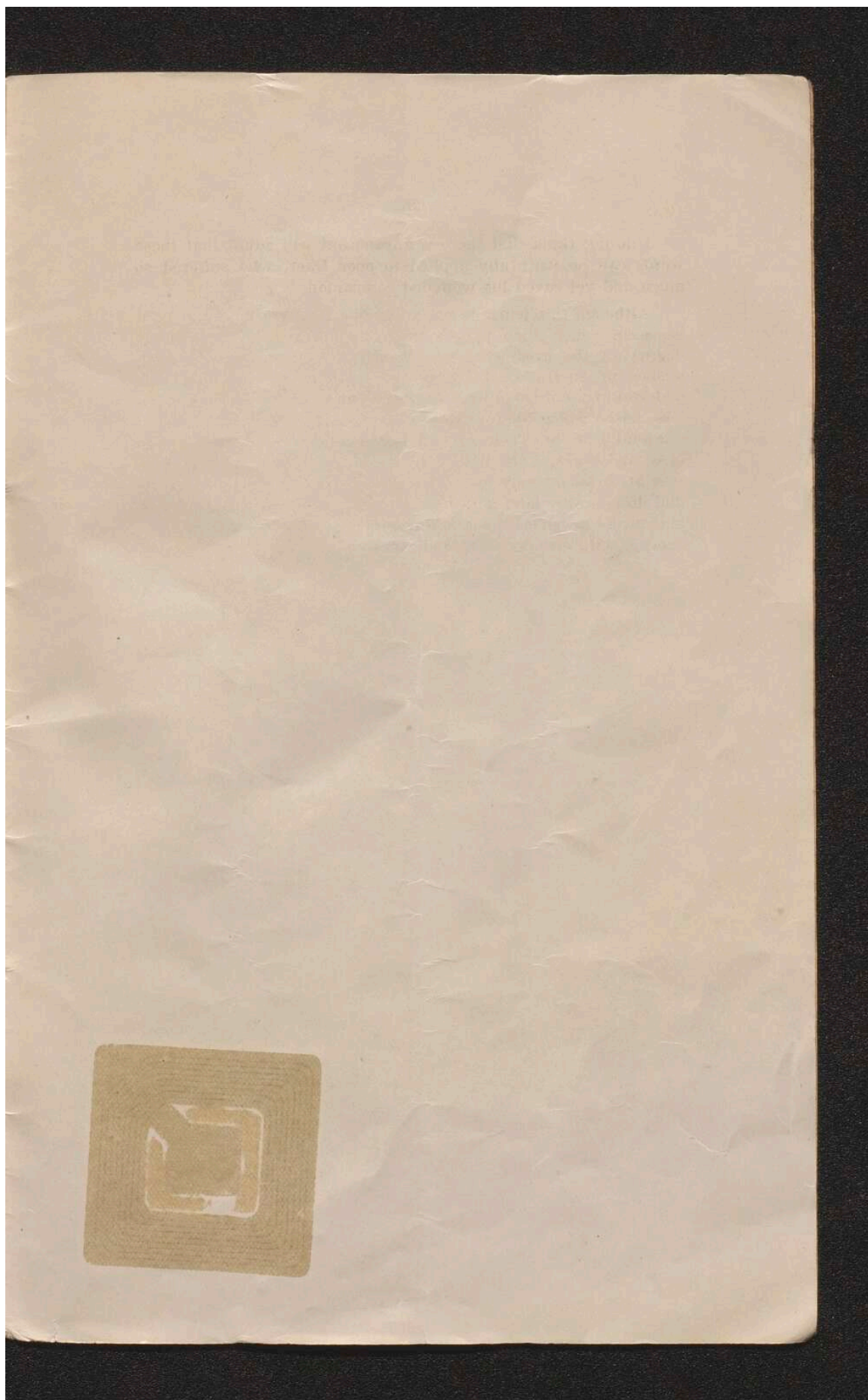
a more or less serious nature. On February 24th, 1874, at Barrow Creek the staff, consisting of Mr. Stapleton (Stationmaster), Mr. Flint (assistant), and six station hands, including a native boy, were sitting outside the station building smoking when they were suddenly attacked from the eastern side of the station by a large body of natives, who first speared Mr. Stapleton. The men rushed for the entrance gate at the rear of the building, but were driven back by a shower of spears, Mr. Flint being wounded. John Frank, a lineman, was mortally wounded, and the native boy was wounded in three places. The men then ran round the building and reached the gate. Once within the walls of the building, which was planned to afford every security from attack, the men armed themselves and poured a volley through the loopholes of the station, speedily clearing the ground. The wounded lineman expired a few minutes after the affray was over, Mr. Stapleton lingered until next day, when he expired, and Mr. Flint, after much suffering, recovered.

The next year, on 16th June, 1875, the Stationmaster at Daly Waters, Mr. C. H. Johnston, with a party of two men and two black boys, left his station to search for horses on the Roper River, where they arrived on the 29th. Shortly after arrival Mr. Johnston went down to the river to bathe, one of the men (Daer) went for water, and Rickards, the other man, remained in camp. Daer, turning towards the camp, saw a native, without any warning, spear Rickards. Daer at once ran to warn Mr. Johnston, who was in the water, but found he had already received two or three wounds. While assisting Johnston Daer himself received a spear wound on the bridge of the nose, and with difficulty, using Johnston's revolver, compelled the native who attacked him to retire. Mr. Johnston died from his wounds next morning. Daer, with Rickards, who was severely wounded, returned to Daly Waters, a distance of 185 miles. Daer, who had the broken spear in his nose, and which penetrated into his mouth, had to attend to the team and his wounded companion. During the long and tedious journey back to Daly Waters he suffered frightfully from his wound, and died on August 7th, shortly after his arrival at Daly Waters. Rickards eventually recovered.

And if you be done to death, what then?
If you did the best you could,
If you played your part in the world of men,
The critic will call it good.
Death comes with a crawl or comes with a pounce,
But whether he's slow or spry
It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
But only, how and you die!

I do not think that there is anyone but will admit that these words can be truthfully applied to poor Daer, who suffered so much and yet saved his wounded companion.

Although this paper is not an engineering one in the general sense in which such papers are understood, yet it is a short history of the greatest telegraph engineering feat ever accomplished in Australia. In those early days it was a stupendous undertaking, and could not have been successfully carried out unless those responsible for the work possessed the highest engineering qualifications. Their administration, organisation, resourcefulness, and courage, through many scenes of danger and privation, was at times severely tested owing to the many disappointments and disasters by land and sea, but the late Sir Charles Todd and his officers never lost hope, meeting every difficulty with renewed energy, until success was finally assured.



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