

ought to be an inducement to constant watchfulness and precaution, and should urge us to instant investigation whenever the alarm is sounded of, "Something wrong with the gas!"

## THE EXPLORER'S CHRISTMAS IN AUSTRALIA.

BY T. BAINES, F.R.G.S.

It would be superfluous to inform the readers of the "Leisure Hour" that Christmas in the southern hemisphere is a season of warmth, of sunshine, and of open-air enjoyment. Of course, throughout all Christendom the occasion is the same. I have heard the magnificent hymn of the nativity sung in the churches of South Africa as it is at home, and I have heard also, in the island of Timor, two hundred Malay children mingling their voices with those of the Dutch colonists in the Angels' Song. But in the terrestrial festivities of the season in such regions the fireside enjoyments of England have no place. Friends and relatives interchange short visits to say a few words of kindly greeting, and picnic parties, in the lightest costume, escape from the heated town to spend the rest of the day in the coolest and shadiest groves.

My own reminiscences of Christmas-day recall many a wild scene from the stormy coasts of England to the populous towns and solitary deserts of Africa or Australia, in peace or war, in plenty or in starvation. Of these I have selected the Christmas of 1855 as the subject of my present sketch. In the early part of that year I had been appointed artist to an expedition to explore the north-west parts of Australia, and had proceeded to Sydney to join Mr. Augustus Charles Gregory, the commander. Two vessels were engaged: the barque *Monarch*, which took on board 50 horses and 150 or 200 sheep at Moreton Bay, and left us at the mouth of the Victoria River, and the *Tom Tough* schooner, which carried the sheep up the river, while Mr. Gregory crossed the country with the horses to the spot chosen as our main camp. Our little schooner took the ground in going up, and nearly became a wreck; but after twenty-seven days' beating about on the sandbanks was brought up to the main camp, and was there substantially, though only partially, repaired by the skill and industry of Captain Gourlay. A wharf was built alongside her of her iron pig ballast, and the remains of this will for many years to come indicate the locality of our camp.

It was in truth a pretty little spot, about eighty miles from the river mouth, beyond the rise and fall of the tide, although the water was brackish several miles higher, except in the rainy season, when the floods poured down as if to dispute the empire of the ocean. The mangroves which fringe the borders of the salt rivers, and which, in fact, perform an important part in the reclamation of land from the sea, by converting newly-formed shoals into soil fit to bear a higher class of vegetation, had not yet entirely ceased, but seemed mingling with and giving place to trees more proper to a fresh-water stream. Gum-trees of various kinds formed park-like groves upon the higher banks—some with that peculiar smooth white bark and graceful turn of limb, that caused our excellent doctor, the late J. R. Elsey, to think it so like a beautiful and well-turned arm, that he always experienced a desire to feel its pulse.

A small but clear and permanent spring, under a couple of gouty-stem trees—a kind of Baobab, named after our commander *Adansonia Gregorii*—supplied water enough for our own use. The surviving horses were driven further afield to graze and drink, and our

sheep, by the disaster of the river voyage, had been reduced to about forty. Rough poles with forks left on them, for the support of roof-trees or rafters, were cut as we cleared the ground, and a substantial store and dwelling-house was formed. The roof was stoutly thatched, and the walls were in a great measure formed of the bottoms, the sides, and wheels of our drays, most of the draught horses being unfortunately in the list of those that had perished. The oven was built under the large trees near the spring, and the forge under a similar group at a little distance. The dense foliage gave abundant shade, while the numerous white blossoms relieved its verdure; and the acid pulp of the succeeding fruit, boiled with sugar, formed a grateful medicine to the poor seamen when, from the destruction of their provisions, scurvy began to attack them. The young shoots of the wild vine also were gathered, and the negro who served as cook gave us them under the title of rhubarb pies.

The officers and men built houses, huts, or bowers, according to their taste, covering them with sheets of bark or thatch, or with cool, fresh leafy branches, gathered every two or three days. The three sides not protected by the river were surrounded by a mound and trench, within which it was a standing order that no native was to be admitted. For though, as my sketch shows, we had occasional friendly intercourse with them, adding to the snakes or rats, or other small animals they cooked for themselves, gifts of bread or fat pork from our own stores, they were exceedingly capricious, and Mr. Gregory wisely judged it best to reduce the chance of any quarrel with our men as much as possible.

Alligators and fish of various kinds abounded in the river; lizards up to six feet long, cranes and storks, pigeons, parrots, and cockatoos, black, white, and rose-coloured, abounded in the woods, all serving as welcome additions to our fare. On an adjoining tributary, which I visited when searching for horses, and which Mr. Gregory named after me "The Baines River," I found the trees so thickly crowded with perching ducks as to convey the idea of the densest possible foliage. The rainy season commenced in November, and consequently at Christmas the country was covered with its richest verdure.

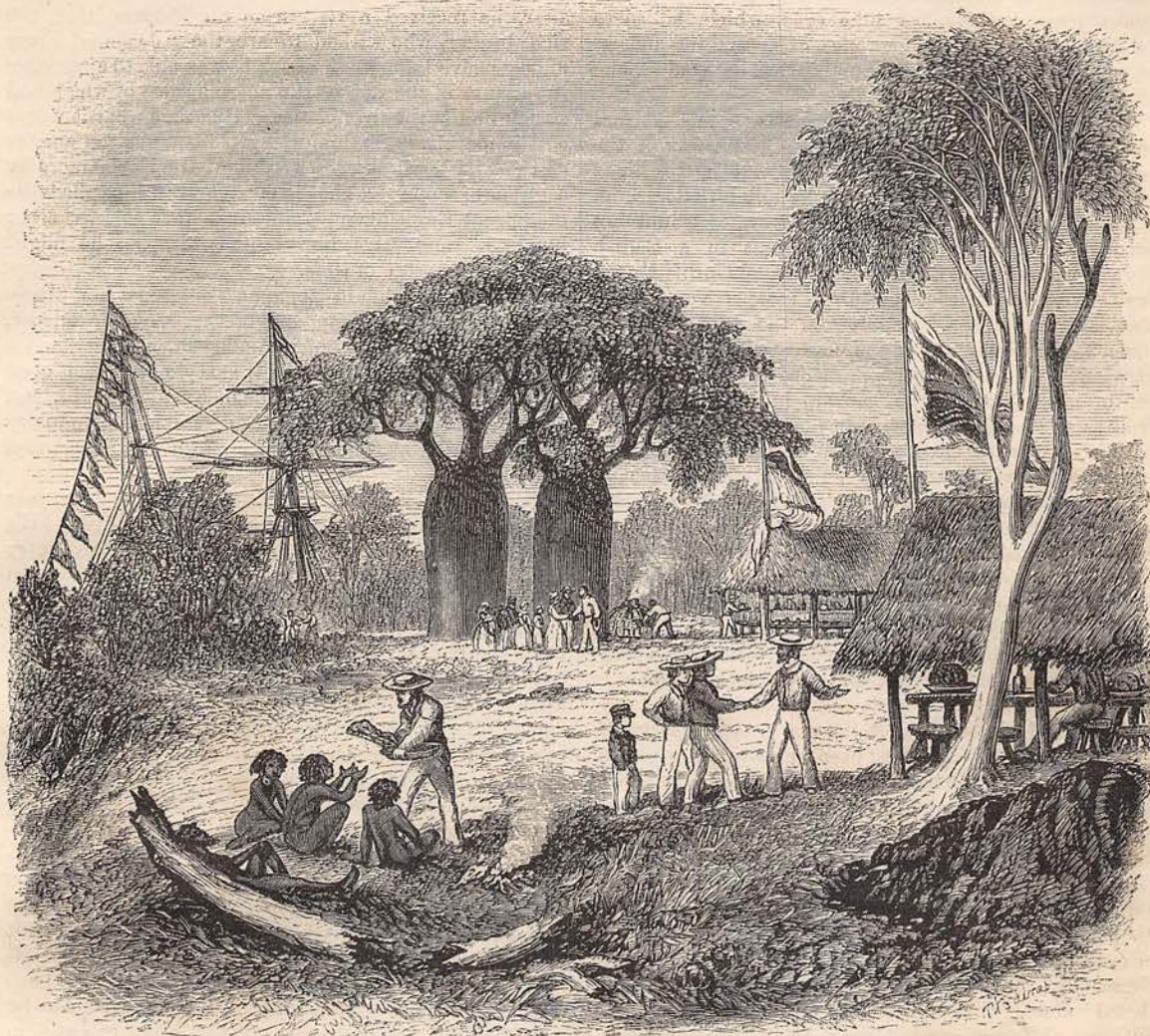
The labours of an explorer are neither few nor light. Even though he bears the rank of a scientific officer, he must not only mingle in the various occupations of the men, but in cases of emergency must take upon himself the most laborious part, teaching the unskilful, encouraging the industrious, and shaming the indolent or desponding by his example. There are times when even the rest of the Sabbath is disturbed by accidents unknown at home. But this is rather the exception than the rule, and most travellers, so far as I have seen, keep it, not merely as a day of rest, but also set apart a portion of it for some form of religious observance.

It was remarked by Leichardt, as well as others, that it was a good thing to let the men look forward to holidays, say on the principal festivals of the Church, or on the birthday of the sovereign, and to make whatever addition is possible to the usual fare. I believe he celebrated the birthday of the King of Prussia by mixing a little fat in his damper. And I have given a handful of raisins to an honest, hardworking fellow who was desirous of doing nothing all day in memory of St. Patrick.

On Christmas-day, 1855, although our meal was frugal, it was still not scanty. The regulation plum-pudding graced our board; the remnant of our little

flock furnished us with fresh meat, a bottle of wine, by permission of the doctor, enabled us to drink the health of absent friends; and tea and coffee, with sugar, but without milk, and skilfully-made light cakes, followed;

which wealthy friends or elevated position confer, he succeeded in reaching an eminence in the world of art which has gained renown, not only for himself, but for his country.



CHRISTMAS-DAY IN NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA.

and the men enjoyed themselves in reading or other quiet amusements.

I am not now giving a history of our expedition, yet I think the reader will feel sufficient interest in it to be glad to hear that Mr. Gregory explored the whole course of the Victoria River, and traced another stream, which he called Sturt's Creek, 300 miles farther into the interior—that he discovered in the vicinity of the Victoria three million acres of good pasture land, and that on his return he was rewarded by the reception of the gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

#### THORWALDSEN THE SCULPTOR.

THE recent publication in Paris of a life of this celebrated Danish sculptor,\* affords a good opportunity of laying before our readers some points of his history most worthy of note. Possessing none of the advantages

Albert Bartholomew Thorwaldsen was born in Copenhagen, November 19th, 1770. His father was a native of Iceland, to which his paternal ancestors also belonged. His mother was the daughter of a Danish pastor. His childhood was unmarked by anything striking, except the delight which it gave him to be allowed to go to the workshop of his father, who was engaged as carver of figure-heads in the royal dockyard at Copenhagen. To assist in this work, as soon as he could handle the requisite tools, was a great source of pleasure to him.

In accordance with the privilege enjoyed by the children of the Government *employés*, Thorwaldsen was sent to a public school at the age of eleven. He does not appear to have made much progress with his learning, but his talent for drawing and art attracted the notice of Abildgaard, the historical painter, who, perceiving his capability of becoming something better than a ship-carver, sent him to the Academy, where he rapidly gained distinction, and took the best prizes. His earliest works were characterised by a certain amplitude and magnificence of form, but there was

\* By M. Eugène Plon, with illustrations of his works.