

The Malay Proas on our Coast.

CRUISE OF THE FLEETWING.

CONCLUDED.

We then went to the mainland to try our luck at shooting, but only got two or three pigeons. While wandering about, one of the party, (Robinson), found a lot of mangroves recently cut, so it was evident that the Malays were in the neighbourhood. While talking it over that evening, it suddenly struck us that the camp might have been on a little sandy island, between the large one and the mainland. Before daybreak next morning we were away to have a look, and sure enough on one of the snuggest little spots that could be imagined was the camp, and only been deserted a few days. The island is nearly covered with a tree that has a white wax-like flower, with a perfume something like orange blossom. On board as soon as possible and we steamed into a magnificent bay, not shown upon the chart, that part of the coast not having been surveyed. It forms the west side of the entrance to Arnhem Bay. We steamed in several miles, and had deep water all the way. The country at the back is hilly and there are some fine bold headlands, and from appearances deep water to the bottom of the bay. The bay is well sheltered, there being a number of islands in the entrance. The natives say that there is a passage into Buckingham Bay. No proas here so we turned round and steamed for Malleison's Island, the next nearest camping place. I had stationed a boy at the mast-head and about 10 o'clock we were delighted to hear him sing out, "I see canoe," quickly followed, "I see one fellow proa." We steamed in carefully, and there sure enough was my friend Bapa Paloe, anchored in a nice little cove, his smoke-house being out of sight and unless we had kept a sharp look-out we would have missed him. When at anchor they always lower their masts, and it is very difficult to pick the hull out from the land at times. I don't think that Bapa Paloe was pleased to see us ; but before

Paloe was pleased to see us ; but before we left next day, I am certain that he was satisfied that the South Australian Government intended business. I went on shore and had a good look round the reefs, and as it was low water, had a good chance of examining the bottom, and if it is as said that a live bottom is the place for pearl-shell, then there ought to be pearl-shell here. I picked up a pair or two of chicken shell and procured from one of the Macassars a fine pair of full grown shell he had found while diving near at hand. While wandering about we came on to a truly lovely little scene ; tall, irregular, hard granite rocks, covered with small oysters, having been climbed over we came into a small basin about 20 yards across, in it there was several feet of water beautifully clear and still. There seemed to be every colour of coral and seaweed growing into all sorts of fantastic shapes, shells and bright sand, and various sorts of fish swimming in and out of the little coral caves, and through the branches of the tree coral. At the beach a little distance from this spot, are the remains of a proa, wrecked about 10 years ago. At 12 a.m. next day we steamed away from Malleison's Island and had a splendid run through the English Company's Islands, and anchored in what we thought was the anchorage laid down to the southward of Cotton Island ; it getting dusk it was easy to make the mistake. We found out the difference however, although there was only a short distance between the two places, we being under the island near to Cotton Island ; but not named. The proper anchorage is mud and appears to be out of the influence of the tide ; but where we were, the bottom was very rough rocks and coral, and the tide ran I am quite sure five knots. After tea we had our lines out and had a fine catch of big red snapper. The place seemed fairly alive with sharks, and they played some mischief with our lines. On the 28th went ashore shortly after day-break and started wood-cutting, the beach being pretty well lined with Casuarina, and it is grand wood for steam purposes. The green ants usually made things pretty lively while cutting wood ; but

pretty lively while cutting wood ; but while at work here they turned up, or rather, fell down in great strength and made us particularly active. There is one satisfaction, there is after effect from the bita. It was delightfully cool when we landed, so I wandered inland a little and climbed a very steep hill, and a very pretty view I had. While wandering about the beach, found a rib of a proa and the sails, mast and yards of a large canoe complete. The tide being so strong we had great trouble to get the wood off, one of the boats being twice carried past the steamer, the first time the natives in the boat managed to make the land, the next time one of the boys caught the line thrown from the steamer and then jumped on board, leaving his mate in the lurch. We had to start after him in the large boat and a hard tug we had to bring him back ; but at last the captain eased away a life buoy, attached to the end of a long line, so we managed to haul up. It was dark before we finished. At 6 a.m. on the 29th made a start and made fair way to Cape Wilberforce. It was very interesting running there, the islands all of them are very bold and hilly, some most peculiar looking cliffs. As soon as we were clear of Brombys Islands, having passed between them and the mainland, we experienced a very heavy swell from the S.E. and soon after a heavy squall from the same direction, which made things rattle again. Just before we entered the straits, Pinder caught an immense fish on his tow-line. At 12.30 we steamed into Melville Bay and found two proas ; one of them, Onsing, I had issued a license to last December, the other, Dan Matoona, having run by, I interviewed him and by the time I had finished he was convinced that it would be desirable to call at Oojountambanoo in future before commencing operations on the coast. The country in the neighbourhood of Melville Bay is very hilly, and two of party, (old diggers), say that it is most likely country for gold. They say the same of Arnheim Bay, also that portions of the latter looked very much like coal country. At the smoke houses we found some specimens of ironstone, or quartz, and in one

mens of ironstone, or quartz, and in one a speck of gold was distinctly seen. I then went to the watering place and found a crowd of natives, our own men having made friends. As soon as I landed a very fine, tall and well-made native, and who did not look particularly peaceable, came towards me very quickly with his hands extended, but under one of his arms he had a nasty looking Malay knife, I kept

him at arms length, one of our men came up and said that he, the big native, was "a big captain all same you," and at the other big captain's earnest desire we a sort of embraced ; but not quite. I invited him and his men on board and gave them tobacco, looking glasses, &c. I was a very fine big captain then, and the old chief, Cadado, put his arm round my neck and cast his eyes up as if he was invoking a blessing ; but I expect he was thinking if they had the run of the little house a short time, how comfortable he and his men could make themselves. Cadado remembered Robinson, who was one of the party who went to Blue Mud Bay some years ago, in the Woolner, to look for gold. The master of the proas complained that as soon as the rice was cooked for their men, Cadado and his followers took it. I talked to Cadado and told him if he interfered with the Malays, white men would come and growl. Also told Malays that they must defend themselves ; but if they used unnecessary violence they would be punished. Cadado promised never to steal again. I wish that we had had more time, for I firmly believe that we could have found this Dy Lompo, the place where the Malays get such quantities of pearls ; but having been out nearly three weeks, it was time to make a move homewards ; so on Sunday the 30th March, we made a start, and made a fair run through between Brombys Islands and the mainland, and when going through we experienced a tremendous sea, the tide being against the sea. By dusk we were in the neighbourhood of Alger Islands, but it was too dark to pick up the passage into Cadell Straits, so we anchored. and a miserable night we had.

the passage into Cadell Straits, so we anchored, and a miserable night we had, the steamer rolling very heavily. At daybreak the next morning we found that the tide the previous day had driven us several miles out of our course; but by 10 a.m. we were at anchor inside Cadell Straits, having entered by the passage between Alger Island and the mainland. Having to wait until the tide made, we went ashore and collected about five boat loads of wood. There is a nice stream here, which the natives say is permanent. The Malays sometimes camp here and fish for trepang; but at the other end of the Island is a regular camping place during the S.E. monsoon. Just as we were leaving, the natives brought their women down, the first we had seen since leaving the South Goulbourn Island. This is a sure sign of friendship. We made a start at 12 and by 3, anchored about the same place we did upon first entering the straits. Went on shore and started wood cutting for the last time, and with the assistance of a few blacks, soon had a good stack at high water mark. Close to where we were we found two great jets of water rushing out of the foot of a small sandstone cliff; many thousand gallons being discharged per minute; it was beautiful water, and the natives say that it runs all the year round. The natives brought us some very nice specimens of chicken shell procured in the straits. At 11 a.m. on the 1st April we had the steamer full of wood and water and under weigh once again, and had run through Castlereigh Bay by 5.30 p.m., and while running quite seven knots we caught a fine fish quite 25lbs. weight. After clearing the Crocodiles we shaped a course for the North Goulbourne, which we passed at 12 a.m. next day, and at dusk anchored under Valencia Island. On the 3rd under weigh and at 5 a.m. run through Bowen straits and anchored in Port Essington at 6 p.m. On the 4th gave the men a day's leave, and they went out and got a buffalo. Having taken in the wood which was all ready cut for us, we left Port Essington on the 5th, and at 3 p.m. on the 6th anchored in Port Darwin, having been absent 26 days.

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I think that there is little doubt that plenty of shell will be found upon the coast; but it will be with the diving dress only, the Macassars having fairly skinned the coast where it is possible for the swimming diver to work. I did not see a single native drunk this trip, and I think that the imposition of the duty has had this effect. After leaving Goulbourne Island, the natives we saw appeared a fine, healthy lot, and beyond small-pox marks, do not appear to be diseased, doubtless owing to the fact, that they do not let their women mix with the Malays, and the practice of circumcision.

There is little doubt that the visit of the steamer to the coast occasioned a considerable amount of surprise and alarm, both to the Malays and Mareges, (blacks) although previously informed, that such a visit would be paid and not seem to believe it. I believe that the Fleetwing is the first steamer that has ever been into Port Essington, and the next largest vessel that has passed through Cadell Straits, for I believe that the vessel that Cadell had was of greater tonnage, although not drawing so much water as the Fleetwing.