

## **Murders by the Natives at Barrow Creek.**

On Monday last intelligence was received by Mr. Little of frightful murders committed by natives at Barrow Creek Telegraph Station, which is very near the centre of the continent, and one of the most isolated places along the whole of the Overland Telegraph line. The intelligence received is as follows :—

“ February 23rd, 1874.

“ The Barrow Creek Telegraph Station was attacked by natives at 8 p.m. on Sunday, and John Franks, one of the station men killed; Mr. Stapleton, the station-master, seriously wounded; Mr. Flint, the assistant, slightly; and a friendly native very seriously.

“ The Station-master, assistant, and all the men were sitting outside the building smoking, and also talking to several friendly natives, when a large body of others rushed from ambush and commenced throwing spears.

“ The cause of attack is supposed to have been for the purpose of obtaining flour, which had been refused to the natives—except the aged, infirm, and those that worked—during the earlier part of the day.”

Mr. Stapleton, the station-master, has since died, and the wounded native, we believe, is not likely to recover. Of course there is no medical aid within hundreds of miles of Barrow Creek, and there is also no aid of any other kind nearer than the next stations—Alice Springs on the south, and Tennant Creek on the north. The position, therefore, of the assistant station-master, who is wounded, is something deplorable until such time as he can receive assistance from the other places.

The Alice Springs station, in the MacDonnell Ranges, is the best place undoubtedly for giving help, and no doubt Mr. Todd has already, by telegram,

Mr. Todd has already, by telegram, despatched a party from that place. The reason why he could do so effectively is that there is a large squatting station at Alice Springs, where Messrs. Bagot and Gilbert have taken up land; and therefore a few men with horses, if necessary, could be obtained from the squatters to accompany any of the Telegraph people who might be sent to the scene of the outrage at Barrow Creek.

From the Port Darwin end of the line there is nothing that can be done unless Mr. Todd be able to send along one or two men from Tennant Creek. But the fact is all the stations are short-handed, considering how much they are exposed to attempts from hostile natives; and fears were often expressed when the line was being constructed that loss of life would ensue if stations were left in the centre of the continent with only four or five men at each place. This, we believe, was felt to be the case by the authorities themselves, and at one time it was proposed to strengthen the telegraph stations by giving pastoral lands in the neighborhood to any persons who would stock them and occupy them. But the idea was abandoned, and the telegraph people were apparently becoming so familiar with the natives that all fear as to their want of more protection has since been gradually dying away.

Mr. Watson, however, who used to be station-master at Barrow Creek, had no confidence in the natives. We stopped at the station for a fortnight about eighteen months ago when crossing the continent, and ascertained from him that the blacks had behaved in a threatening manner on several occasions to people who were out looking for horses; and he therefore kept them at a distance from the station, and was very careful about his firearms. The building for the telegraph operators and their men was then just completed. It was a good solid stone house, covered with an iron roof, and was so built that the only entrance was behind, where there were large gates, which, on being closed, left no means of

was built, which were very strong, which, on being closed, left no means of entrance or exit excepting through very narrow windows, which were intended to be used as loopholes for firearms in cases of emergency. The back gates, however, struck us as being inconveniently close to a steep hill which overlooked the building, and from which any number of blackfellows might suddenly rush down. On the other sides of the building there was level country, well grassed and thinly timbered; but at a little distance there were other hills like the one already mentioned. These hills are of light-colored sandstone, and are all table-topped. What the place looked like when we saw it is described in the following extract from a report which was written at the time and published shortly afterwards:—

“On the 14th August we reach the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station—a good substantial stone building, almost in the very centre of Australia. The white ensign is flying gaily in front, a flock of sheep are browsing quietly at the foot of Forster’s Range, some well-fed horses are scampering about full of life and mettle, and a number of bullocks in the finest condition are looking peacefully on. In fact, as far as the country is concerned, a Station-master here might be another Rasselas in his Happy Valley, but at present the loneliness and isolation of the place must be very trying. Settlers, however, will probably come here in course of time, and even now explorers are on their way to connect Central Mount Stuart with the settlements on the western coast. We met lots of camels not far from this place. Our horses scented them afar off, and began to plunge madly; but peace was soon restored. The Arabs, in their long white burnouses, camped at a short distance from ourselves, and at sunset the voice of their Hadji sounded grandly in the Australian wilderness as he recited the allotted verses of the Koran admonishing the faithful, and bowing his head towards the holy Mecca. This Hadji is quite a character in his way. His fine figure and good voice would tell well in an opera chorus. He is eloquent and

an opera chorus. He is eloquent and energetic in all he does, and can pass from religion to business with a facility quite astonishing. He is never tired of praying, bargaining, flattering, and talking of the number of wives (at least four) which he shall be able to keep on his return to his native land. How he and his camels will turn out in the proposed exploration of new country is a

matter upon which there is much difference of opinion. In any case somebody will no doubt get through to the coast out of the number of explorers now starting."

We learn from Mr. Little that all the white men, with some friendly natives, were sitting outside the Telegraph building at the time of the outrage, and that the blacks rushed upon the party suddenly—some coming from one side of the building and some from the other. The first spear which struck Mr. Stapleton went through his body, and after that there were three spears driven into his bowels. The man Frank was speared through the heart, and died at once. Mr. Flint was speared in the thigh; and the black boy was struck by three spears. No provocation had been given to the natives, beyond the circumstance that Mr. Stapleton had refused flour to several of them—telling them that unless they worked they could not receive flour.

The first that Mr. Little heard of the matter was by the arrival of a telegram from Mr. Flint, who was, however, in such a state that it was difficult to ascertain the meaning of what he said. As soon, however, as the facts became known in Adelaide, Dr. Gosse attended at the town end of the line, and forwarded such advice as he considered necessary for the proper treatment of the wounded. But Mr. Stapleton became worse and died. This unfortunate gentleman had been many years in the public service. He was a Canadian, and came to the colonies with Mr. McGowan to be employed on the Victorian line. After some years he settled at Mount Gambier in South Australia as a farmer, and then left that

tralia as a farmer, and then left that occupation and entered the South Australian telegraphic service. He was one of the first operators who came to the Northern Territory, where he arrived with Mr. Howley and Mr. McMinn, and he was stationed for some time at the Katherine, whence he was removed to Barrow Creek. Before he came to the colonies he served on the telegraph lines of Canada, the United States, and Central America, so that he was an officer of great experience. He has—we are sorry to say—left a wife and four children.

On Tuesday Mr. Todd sent reinforcements from Alice Springs to Barrow Creek; and Mr. Tucker, station-master at Tennant Creek, also started for the same place.