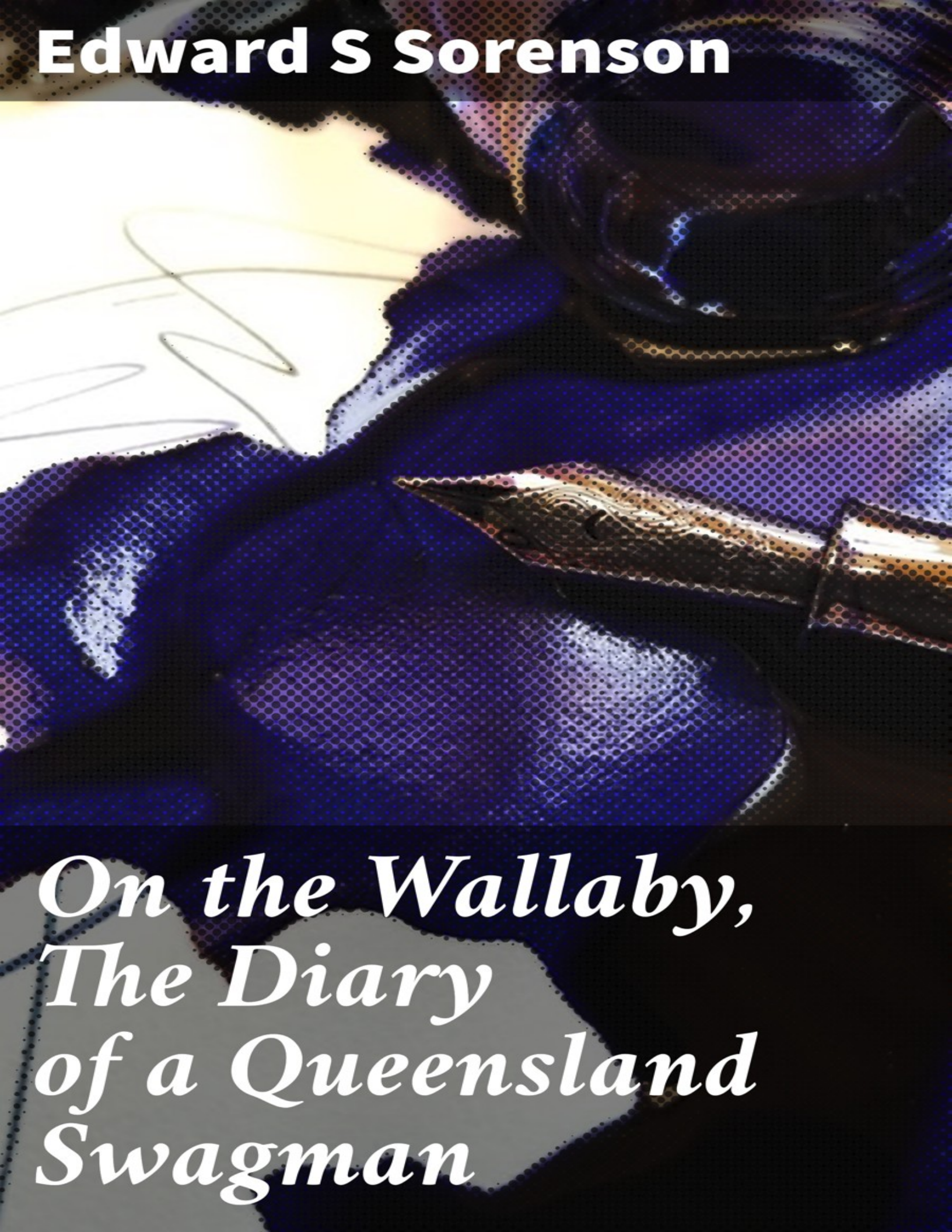


The background of the cover is a halftone illustration. It features a fountain pen in the foreground, with its nib pointing towards the left. Behind it, a hand is visible, holding a quill pen. The entire scene is set against a background that appears to be a map of Australia, with the landmass highlighted in a lighter color. The overall style is a classic halftone print, giving it a textured, dotted appearance.

Edward S Sorenson

*On the Wallaby,
The Diary
of a Queensland
Swagman*

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On the Wallaby, The Diary of a Queensland Swagman



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THE END

**Author of "Life in the Australian
Backblocks," "Friends and Foes in the
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49

ON THE WALLABY,

The Diary of a Queensland Swagman.

BY EDWARD S. SORENSON.

Author of "Life in the Australian Backblocks," "Friends and Foes in the Australian Bush," &c.

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Foreword

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The last serial story—"The Squatter King," from the pen of Edward S. Sorenson, which we published in the "Catholic Press," was an immense popular success. No one knows Australian bush life better than he, and among Australian writers he is, perhaps, the greatest favourite to-day.

We have been fortunate enough to secure the serial rights of his new story—"On the Wallaby: the Diary of a Queensland Swagman." This is a plain bush yarn, relating in humorous vein the experiences and adventures of a young man, who, finding himself stranded in Brisbane, where he knew no one, shouldered his swag and struck out into the bush to look for a job. His track from Breakfast Creek to beyond the Maranoa River, may be traced on the map, for he deals only with real places—and real people—and what he goes through is what the majority of swagmen go through. Always an optimist, he sees the humour of the situations, and his narrative is embellished with details of bushcraft, and with the yarns and the fun of camp fire and track.

CHAPTER I.

Setting out from Brisbane — Getting Directions.

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From the status of an "esteemed citizen" in comparative affluence to the humble lot of a swagman was not an easy transition, though the drop was an abrupt one.

I remember how ashamed I was at the start, though there was really nothing to be ashamed of in a man going on the track to look for a job, and carrying his bed and his wardrobe with him. It showed independence and grit. Nobody knew me in Brisbane, yet I fancied that everybody in the streets was looking at me as though I were an oddity in the human throng. I had strapped my swag up into a short bundle, and I carried it under my arm so that it would look like a parcel.

It was the 6th day of August, 1895—a fresh, inspiring morning, and grand weather for a walking tour. I was young, strong, and used to roughing it—good qualifications for the wallaby. Still, I felt very miserable that morning. I had been enjoying a long holiday—flying around and seeing life while the money lasted. The inevitable financial slump had left me stranded in Brisbane. Work was scarce; somehow it always is when I want a job. In any case, as a bushman born and bred, I had no chance in the city. The world of vast distances was my home; and having no other means of getting, there I pinned my faith to Blucher.

An old mate of mine, whom I had not seen for some years, was head-stockman on Colinton, a squattage on the Brisbane River, 80 miles from the city; so I decided to steer for Colinton to begin with, and from the outskirts of Brisbane I stopped every likely-looking person I met to get "directions." The man about town knew very little about outside; and though the occasional bushman I interviewed possessed some knowledge of almost every road one could mention, his instructions were not very easy to follow.

It not infrequently happens that a stranger is so befogged by the directions he receives that he has more trouble in keeping the right road by their aid than he would have had without them. The bushman, describing the road as he last saw it, which might be last week or last year, gives a rigmarole of details concerning the turns and hollows, the big tree, the dogleg fence, and the black stump; and while he is telling all this he is sketching out the map of it in the dust with a stick.

Loaded with this information you start, and perhaps you will notice something important which he missed, and that uncomfortable feeling of the lost one comes over you at once. If you don't see the bogged cow, or the dead tree (which has probably fallen down), the feeling increases. Presently all the little details get mixed up till you don't know anything, and you are in perpetual misery till you get to the end of those directions—or meet somebody who can relieve your anxiety in respect to turn-off roads and forked roads.

In giving directions nothing should be mentioned that is not absolutely necessary for the traveller to know, such as

well traversed branch roads and striking landmarks. Bugged cows and dead horses are not landmarks except for the time being. Some bush men overlook the fact that many objects which most impress him change with the effluxion of time.

One person whom I approached with the stereotyped question was working on the road near Breakfast Creek; a big, jovial laughing-eyed man whose occupation suggested an intimate acquaintance with the thoroughfare.

"Want to go to Bindelby?" he repeated, leaning on his shovel. "Nothing easier. Keep straight along, and you won't miss it. Though what you want to go to Bindelby for I don't know, seein' it's only a house in a little square o' land that wouldn't keep more 'n a horse an' a cow or two, an there's no job there for a workin' man to-day or tomorrow, or any other day."

"It's just a stage on my way," I explained. "Are there any turn-offs?"

"Well, yes, a few. But stick to this road till you see it run into a gate. Go through that—you'd better open it first though. It swings to your right when you're pullin' it to you. Shut it. Then turn round an' keep along the road again. It wriggles a lot, in consequence o' dodgin' trees an' one thing an' another, but stick to it, an' you'll find it's a road to be depended on. Never mind the branch roads—keep off 'em, or they 'll take you astray."

"Well, are there any particular landmarks?"

"Lemme see. You'll cross a gully running like a stranded eel. There's a spotted bullock feedin' alongside it. That's five mile. Next, you'll see a kangaroo sittin' bolt upright on your left. That's eight mile. Then you'll see a big hole on your

right. But don't bother about fillin' your billy there. There's no water in it. . . . That's half way. Next, you'll come to a lot of trees on a hill. There's some parrots on the outside one."

"When were you along there?" I inquired.

"Three years ago." He spoke quite seriously. "Byan'by you'll strike a big flat, with a dead dog on it. Three miles from that there's a house with two chimneys, an' smoke comin' out of one of 'em. That's Bindelby."

As I walked on I fell to thinking, not so much of the man with the shovel, as of old Tom Raglan, who lived in my own native district across the southern border. I had occasion one day to go to his place, of the exact location of which I was not certain, and on the way I asked a road-maintenance man where I must turn off the highway to reach it.

"D'yer know that track that turns off th' other side o' the tee-tree swamp?" he asked me.

"Yes."

"That's not it. There's a red hill a bit farther along with a stump on it. The stump's got a piece knocked off the side where a waggon hit. I think it was Dooley's waggon. I did hear there used to be a stone just beyond it, but I believe Dooley picked that up last time he was along to shy at Anderson's bull. He's an ugly brute, is Anderson's bull, an' he's nearly always about that red hill. I remember—"

"Yes; but about the road to Raglan's?" I reminded him.

"There's a track turns off just over the red hill," he said. "That goes to Denehy's selection."

"And where does Raglan's turn off?"

"Two miles past Denehy's road you'll see where Nolan was bogged with a load of timber last week. Nolan keeps a

pub down at the junction. I've seen the time when Nolan—"

"I've known him since I was a boy," I hastily interrupted. "I'm in a hurry to get to Raglan's."

"I'm comin' to Raglan's. When you pass the mud-hole you'll see a road runnin' like this."

He squatted down and commenced to perplex me with a bushman's map, drawing a line with his finger to represent the main road, others to represent branch roads, parallel and intersecting lines for fences, dots for trees and squares for houses—some of them three miles off the road, and all hopelessly out of sight. Then he told me to turn off at an ironbark tree that had a limb sticking out like this (another map), and pass a log lying like this (another map), when the road takes a turn, and runs like that (more map). "You'll have all straight sailin' then," he concluded.

I rode off. It was 27 miles to the place. I found it and delivered my message to Mrs. Raglan, as "Tom was away workin' on the roads." I returned next day, and as I passed the maintenance man he asked "Did you find Raglan's?"

"Yes," I said; "Tom Raglan wasn't at home, though."

"Did you want to see him," he asked, with quickened interest.

"I did. I had an important letter for him. I left it with the missus."

"Hang it," said he. "I'm Tom Raglan!"

CHAPTER II.

Rules of the Track—A Diverting Hour with a Veteran.

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While having my mid-day meal at the foot of a hill beyond Breakfast Creek I was joined by a veteran whose very hide bore evidence of an extensive knowledge of western latitudes. Old and grizzly, unkempt and travel-stained, he was "goin' in." He strode jauntily up to where I sat, nibbling a blade of grass as he came.

"Well, young fellow," he said, unslinging his swag and depositing it carefully in the shade. "How goes it?"

"All right, so far," I answered.

He looked at me closely for a moment. "You don't seem unfamiliar to me," he said, thoughtfully. "What might your name be, if it's a fair question?"

"Edinbury Swan," I replied. He shook his head. "Never bumped that before. I'd certainly remember it if I had. Unusual name!—How long have you been at this?"—critically eyeing my hat. It was a black and white boater such as young fellows wear about town.

"Only to-day."

"To-day? Phugh! I said that myself 35 years ago. That's a tidy while before you left the dockyard. . . . 'Taint none o' my business what sent you adrift; but you ought to get another hat. You're right out of the fashion here."

From that he drifted into a dissertation on the ways and customs of those who tramp the long roads in search of

work, and incidentally gave me much gratuitous advice. His name, as I learned from his habit of now and again using it himself, was Jack Blunt.

"Th' main problem you've got to solve," he continued, "is the grand art of livin' sumptuous on nothing a year. That isn't very difficult, as every squattage supplies swagmen with rations, exceptin' an odd hungry place that don't respect the honoured customs of the country. But don't be in a tearin' hurry rushin' up to the store. Do a quiet beat round, an' land yourself in the kitchen about meal time. You'll perhaps get a feed, an' some tucker to take with you. Then you want to go to the boss with your bags—big ones. No use thinkin' you'll get 'em filled if they're small ones. You won't, he's nearly sure to be into his last half bag o' flour. Never mind that. Half a bag's more 'n you want.

"By-an'-bye you'll want tobacco. Now, th' golden rule on th' track's this: Never cadge off a footman, or the one-horse bloke. The cove who has two nags is good game. So are drovers an' carriers, and anyone who's in a billet—particularly th' chap at th' store. Nail him. Don't wait till you want a smoke. Seize every chance you see till you get a supply in. Got a match on you? When you can't carry any more tobacco, accumulate matches. Bless me soul, safeties!"

After lighting his pipe, he resumed:

"You'll have to change the style of your clothes. Got any with patches on? Then keep an eye about you an' cop the first bit of stuff you see an' patch your oldest pair o' pants with it. No holes in 'em? What's that matter? The patches will cover the places where the holes ought to be. Those will

be your ration pants. You only want two more pair—track pants an' Sunday pants. Sunday is the day you're in a town; if it isn't actually Sunday, it's Sunday-pants day, anyway.

"Lemme see, now. You've got tobacco and matches and tucker and rations. Well, now, young fellow, you want a job. Reach me that firestick, will you? You're a midlin' poor hand at makin' a fire. I can tell you that much. Would you mind shovin' my billy in a bit. Your best track is the stock route. You'll find it convenient to meet drovers even if they're full-handed. It's one of the beautiful customs of the bush for the drovers' cook, like the shearers' cook, the rouseabouts' cook, the cattle-musterers' cook, and the lamb-markers' cook, to receive the weary wayfarer with open arms, and send him away rejoicin'. Feel your way along, and make for places where there's a busy crowd; and if there's nothing for you to do, you'll find the scenery worth lookin' at wherever a lot o' men dine together. When you go to a squattage, find out from the men if an extra hand is wanted for any particular kind of work. Whatever the work may be, it's your profession. Been at it all your lifetime, though you can turn your hand to other things, besides."

At this point his billy boiled, and, laying his pipe aside, he made his tea, after which he unpacked an astonishing load of assorted provisions. These he laid out carefully on the grass to the accompaniment of an appropriate recitation:

Place side by side with johnny-cakes or damper
Three bags containing sugar, flour and tea,
A billy and some meat, and swaggie's hamper
Will, with a pannikin, completed be.