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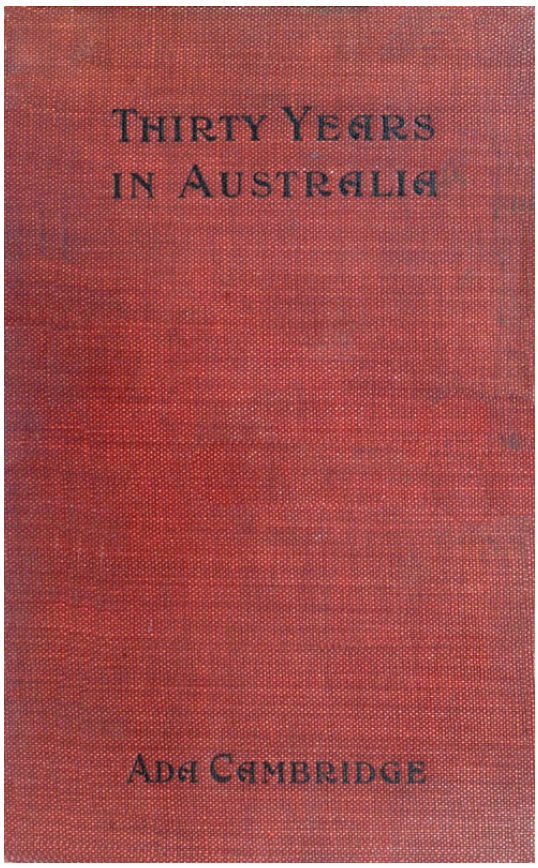

THIRTY YEARS IN AUSTRALIA

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BY

ADA CAMBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF "PATH AND GOAL" AND "THE DEVASTATORS"

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TO
MY TWO LIVING CHILDREN
AND THE DEAR MEMORY OF ONE
WHO WAS LIVING WHEN I WROTE IT
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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[1]

THIRTY YEARS IN AUSTRALIA

CHAPTER I

ToC

"ISLE OF BEAUTY, FARE THEE WELL!"

I knew nothing whatever of Australia when I rashly consented to marry a young man who had irrevocably bound himself to go and live there, and, moreover, to go within three months of the day on which the wild idea occurred to me. During the seven weeks or thereabouts of a bewildering engagement, the while I got together my modest trousseau, we hunted for information in local libraries, and from more or less instructed friends. The books were mostly old ones, the tales the same. *Geoffrey Hamlyn* was my sheet anchor, but did not seem to be supported by the scraps of prosaic history obtainable; we could not verify those charming homes and social customs. On the other hand, cannibal blacks and convict bushrangers appeared to be grim facts. As for the physical characteristics of the country, there were but the scentless flowers, the songless birds, the cherries with their stones outside (none of which, actually, is the rule, and I have found nothing to resemble the description of the latter), and the kangaroo that carries its family in a breast-pocket, which we felt able to take for granted. These things we did [2] believe in, because all our authorities mentioned them. G. had a letter from a college friend who had preceded him to Australia, reporting the place not wild at all, but quite like home. He instanced an episcopal dinner-party that he had attended, and a church dignitary's "three sweetly pretty daughters," who had come in the evening, and with whom he had sung duets. But at time of writing he had got no further than Melbourne—knew no more than we of the mysterious Bush, which I thought of as a vast shrubbery, with occasional spears hurtling through it. When we had assimilated all the information available, our theory of the life before us was still shapeless. However, we were young and trusting, and prepared to take things as they came.

G. was an English curate for a few weeks, and an English rector for a few more. It was just enough to give us an everlasting regret that the conditions could not have remained permanent. Doubtless, if we had settled in an English parish, we should have bewailed our narrow lot, should have had everlasting regrets for missing the chance of breaking away into the wide world; but since we did exile ourselves, and could not help it, we have been homesick practically all the time —good as Australia has been to us. At any moment of these thirty odd years we would have made for our native land like homing pigeons, could we have found the means; it was only the lack of the necessary "sinews" that prevented us. Such a severe form of nostalgia is, however, uncommon here, and would be cured, I am told, by a twelve months' trip. Certainly, in nine cases out of ten, where I have known the remedy tried, it has seemed infallible. The home-goers come back perfectly satisfied to come back. It is when they stay at home for more than twelve months [3] that they want to stay altogether.

G.'s brief curacy synchronised with our brief engagement. I was a district visitor in the parish which he served, and in which he was born. He became a rector on the wedding day. The charming rectory was placed at our disposal for the honeymoon by the real incumbent, our mutual friend, he and his good wife taking the opportunity to pay visits until we had done with it. We drove thither in the afternoon, and heard the bells ringing as we entered the village, and found the rectory-gate set wide and the white-satin-ribboned maids awaiting us on the doorstep of the beflowered house. We had two maids and a man servant; we had a brougham; we had a tiny hamlet of a parish in which (compared with what we have known of parishes) there was nothing to do—two services on Sunday, and a little business of coal and clothing clubs during the week—and where our parishioners dropped curtseys to us on the road, and felt honoured beyond measure when we went to see them. No wonder that, under the too totally opposite circumstances of clerical life as we have lived it here, we have looked back to that haven of dignified peace and ease with the wish—the stupid wish—that we could have had it always.

Nothing could have suited us better while we did have it. We were but four miles from our homes, and could see our people, who were to lose us in a month, while still ostensibly in bridal seclusion. A sister from whom I was separated for the whole of the thirty years, but who is with me now, to gossip, as we are always doing, of those old days, used to walk out before breakfast. [4] We would have a quiet sewing morning, getting forward with the preparations still so far from completed; then we would perhaps drive her home in the afternoon, and get an hour with my mother, who surpassed all the mothers I ever knew in her unselfish passion for her children, and

for whom my heart bleeds to this day when I think of what my going cost her—for I know more of mothers' sufferings in that way than I did then. She would be working her dear fingers to the bone over something to add to the array of zinc-lined boxes which were being fed by instalments in my deserted room, and I see now the flash of tearful joy that lit her fair, fine-featured face when I came with my poor crumb of comfort for her hungry heart. Intimate girl companions walked over to lunch or to play a game of croquet, or to make better use of the little time remaining to us; and we walked half-way back with them on the lonely road and through the leafy lanes. It was April and May, and, as far as I can remember, all fine weather—a last impression of English springtime that has lived with me like a beautiful portrait, an idealised portrait, of a dead and longed-for friend. "Oh to be in England now that April's there!" has been the yearly aspiration of my homesick soul, which takes no account of east winds and leaden skies, but only of chaffinches and apple boughs, just as Browning's did. My birds are the skylarks above those fen-meadows, and the flower I think of first my favourite lily-of-the-valley, of which I carried a great bunch, with the dew still on it, to the cathedral on my wedding-morning. And those golden May evenings, when we wandered back along the empty road, after setting our friends on their homeward way—I see them in some of Leader's pictures, which, if I were rich, I would buy to live [5]
with me, for that reason only. The friends could dine with us at the then usual hour, and still get home before the slow twilight passed into night—a thing impossible in this country. They were the last hours that we spent together—all young things then, but now grey and elderly, though I cannot realise it; three of them widows, most of them grandmothers, but never old to me, nor I to them. For more than thirty years we have not met, and there have been long gaps in our correspondence; but friendship has survived all, unchanged. They still write to ask when they are to see me, and I still write back to make provisional appointments which I can by no effort contrive to keep.

I was married on the 25th of April 1870. On the same date of the following month I left them all, never—as now seems only too probable—to return. We buoyed ourselves up through the anguish of the last farewells with a promise, made in all good faith, that I should come back in five years. My husband promised to bring me. "We must save up," we said to each other, "and have a holiday then." It was an easy thing to plan, but proved too difficult to carry out. After we became a family, going anywhere meant going as a family, and taking all the roots of its support and livelihood with it. Theoretically, I could have run home alone, if not in five years, in eight or ten—we could have afforded that—but practically it was as impossible as that we should all go, which we could never afford. So here we are still, and my poor mother, who lived to the last on the hope that we had given her, has long been in her grave. There is no trace of an English home to go back to now.

We went alone to London for two or three busy days. Friends of G.'s, whom I had never seen [6]
before, adopted us for the time, and fathers and mothers could not have done more for us. They furnished our cabin in the docks, and attended to our luggage—we saw neither until we went on board at Plymouth—and pressed help and comfort of every kind upon us. The ship's regulation against private liquors was set at naught by a great box that stood in our cabin throughout the voyage, placed there by the order of one of these friends. The box was a complete wine-cellar, containing, in addition to wines of the best and dozens of soda water, an assortment of choice cordials and liqueurs, the like of some of which we have not tasted since. There was a particular ginger-brandy—administered to me in the cold, wild weather of which we had so much—that we have tried to get at various times in vain. What we get is as moonlight unto sunlight compared with that ginger-brandy of the ship. I may say that the donor was a London wine merchant in extensive business. Not we only, but many a sick and shivering fellow-passenger had cause to bless his generous heart and hand.

Our last sight of this gentleman and his family was on Paddington platform, whither they had driven us after a festive farewell dinner, at which our healths were drunk and good fortune invoked upon our journey. We sat in the train, and they piled their parting presents on our laps. One of them brought me a fine pair of field-glasses to look at flying-fish and porpoises with—I use them now, daily, to watch the approach of family and visitors coming across Hobson's Bay; another rushed to the bookstall that had already supplied us with all its papers, bought a [7]
complete set of Dickens' novels, and tumbled them in armfuls upon the carriage seat beside us, just as the train was moving off. Australian hospitality cannot surpass that of those kind people, to whom I had been a perfect stranger two days before.

Most of the night, as we travelled down to Plymouth, I talked with paper and pencil to my beloved ones at home. For change of position, and to get better light, I knelt on the carriage seat for a time, spreading my sheet on the leather of the back. Our one fellow-traveller, a stout clergyman, dozing since we started in his distant corner, woke up to see what I was doing, and remonstrated with me. "Don't you think," said he, "that you had better try to sleep a little now, and write your letters in the morning?" In the fulness of my heart, I told him that I did not know how much of the morning might be left me, and the pressing reasons that there were for making the most of my time. Then he informed us that he too was to sail for Australia to-morrow, and by the same ship; and it immediately transpired that he was the person for whose sake that ship had been chosen for us. We had arranged a later start by one of Green's line, when a venerable archdeacon, visiting us at our rectory, urged us to change to one of Money Wigrams', because he knew of a Melbourne clergyman who was going in her. The clergyman had his wife with him, which our archdeacon thought would be so nice for me. With great difficulty we transferred ourselves, anticipating advantages that we did not get. The Melbourne clergyman—here revealed—was a good man, but an uncongenial companion at close quarters; his wife—she was his second, and had been the servant of his first—was more so, and a terrible stirrer-up of strife [8]

amongst the other lady passengers. She had embarked in London.

I remember the look of Devonshire in the early May dawn. My grandmother had died at Ottery St. Mary, and I loved the pleasant county and for years had wanted to explore it. But this was all I ever saw of its beautiful face—Ivy Bridge (was that the name?), one scene that has not faded, and the place where the railway ran close beside the sea. We reached Plymouth at a ghastly hour before anybody was up. At the hotel recommended to us by our latest friend we were shown into a room where the dirty glasses and tobacco ashes of the night before still defiled the air and the tablecloth. Here we sat until a bedroom was ready for us, when we went to bed—which seemed a most useless proceeding—until there was a fair chance of getting breakfast. A bath and a good meal pulled us together, and then we went out for our last walk on English ground. A charming walk it was, exploring that old town—I would give something to be able to repeat it—and a sweet conclusion to our home life. We returned to our hotel for a bite of lunch, hired an old man and a barrow to trundle our few things (the heavy baggage having been put on board in London) to the waterside, and after him a waterman and a boat, and got out to our ship lying in the Sound—the first we saw of her—at a little before noon, which was her advertised sailing hour. The newspapers called her a "fine powerful clipper ship of 1150 tons," and boasted that her saloon, which was "a very spacious apartment," could "accommodate forty passengers with ease." We were thirty-two and a baby, which seemed just to fill it comfortably. Such were the mammoth liners of those days. As we were rowed up to her gangway, bashful under the eyes of a number of keenly-interested spectators, whose heads hung over the bulwark, we thought her wonderful. [9]

The wife of our latest acquaintance received us on deck, but all she wanted of us was information as to where her husband was and what he was doing. We could not tell her; we had not seen him since our arrival in the town. She could do nothing but watch for him, fuming; and we went to our quarters and our discoveries of the comforts there provided for us by the thoughtfulness of our London friends. We had one of the only two large cabins on the ship; the other was the captain's; the rudder clanked between us and him, behind the bulkhead at the end of our wide curved sofa, where the pillow, tucked into a bright rug, was a full-sized feather bed, a wedding present that at first we did not know what to do with, but which soon proved the most valuable of them all, as it still is, in the form of plenty of soft, fat cushions all over the house. I spent a large part of my days at sea reclining upon this downy mass, which began below my shoulder-blades and sloped upward nearly to the ceiling; as I lay I could look out of and down from the row of stern windows that made one side of my couch, and watch the following birds and fishes—sometimes a shark beguiled with a piece of pork—without lifting my head. It was an envied place in the tropics, when the air swept free to the main deck through open doors; but in rough weather—and it was nearly all rough weather—the swing of the sea-saw was killing. It used to fling me out of bed over a high bunk board until I was black and blue with my falls, and it kept me sea-sick the whole voyage. [10]

We "settled up" our room according to our inexperienced notions, and at four o'clock we sat down to dinner in the "cuddy," still in port. Excellent dinners we had at that odd hour for dining, which was the regular hour, and really a very suitable one under the circumstances of sea life, breaking up the long day of which most of us were tired by the time the first dressing-bell rang at half-past three. The function practically occupied the afternoon, and, as I said, was carried out to the satisfaction of all save those who would never have been satisfied with anything. That the company could feed us so well, and lodge and carry us, for less than ten shillings a day argued good management, but I think they must have relied on the dead cargo for their profits. We were in Plymouth Sound on Sunday morning. On Sunday evening a party of passengers went ashore to attend church. "Mind," said the captain, "if a wind gets up while you are away, I shall not wait for you." But no wind stirred that night, nor all the next day, nor the next. Our clergyman friend (without his wife) darted to and fro, for he was confident that no ship would venture to leave a person of his importance behind, but we dared not risk it. We spent our time leaning over the poop-rail, gazing at the dear land, so near and yet so far, and thinking of our mourning relatives, with whom we might have been if we had known. When I was not doing that, I was writing to them. On Wednesday morning, the 1st of June—we had embarked on Saturday—the post-bag was closed for the pilot, and I looked my last on England through a grey sheet of rain.

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[11]

CHAPTER II

ToC

AUSTRALIA FELIX

The story of a sea-voyage thirty years ago, if it could properly be included in this chronicle, might interest the young reader, born since the era of the sailing ship, and to whom therefore the true romance of ocean travel is unknown. To me, who, if I could cross the world to-morrow, would choose the most civilised steamer I could afford, the memory of the *Hampshire* on her

maiden trip brings regret for beauty vanishing from the world, as the Pink Terraces of New Zealand have vanished, or the big bird-thronged hedges of rural England in my nutting and blackberrying childhood. All such losses have been amply compensated for, no doubt—I am not of those who, having outlived them, insist that the old times were better than the new—but they are losses, notwithstanding. The fine old sailing sailor-men and their noble seamanship, and the almost sentient responsiveness of the "powerful clipper" of a thousand tons or so in their hands—the spectacle of her with all her tiers of sails full, leaning to the breeze, or fighting storms, bare-poled, by sheer brain sense and the inspiration of the divinest unconscious courage that human history can show—there is nothing in the splendid new régime to touch the heart and the imagination as these did. I forget the hard-bottomed and treacherous bunks, the soon-carpetless, [12] soaked floors, the dancing table that shot fowls and legs of mutton into our laps out of dish and fiddle, the cold that one could find no shelter from except in bed, the terrible gales, the incurable sea-sickness, the petty feuds of the lady passengers; that is, I think of them as not worth thinking of, with the feeling that it was finer to rough it a bit as we did than to be pampered at every turn as sea-travellers are now, and in recognition of the fact that my sufferings brought me many pleasures that otherwise I should have been deprived of. The captain wanted to—only I would not let him—give me his own swinging cot. The head steward used to smuggle in mysterious parcels, which, when unwrapped, disclosed little dainties, specially prepared and hot from the cooking-stove, to tempt her who was said to be "the most sea-sick lady they had ever carried." The other ladies, when not immersed in their little social broils, from which my physical state and geographical position detached me, were kindness itself. One of them gave me that nearly extinct article, a hair net—it was the day of chignons, the manufacture of which was beyond me—and seldom have I received a more useful gift. With my hair tucked into this bag, dressing-gowned and shawled, I used to go up after nightfall to a couch on the skylight; there I would enjoy myself, feeling fairly well until I moved to go down again—amused with the little comedies going on around me, and enraptured with the picture of the winged vessel as I looked up through her labyrinth of rigging to the mastheads and the sky, and then down and around at the sea and the night through which she moved so majestically. Pictures of her sweeping through a dream-like [13] world of moonlight and mystery are indelible in my mind. Sometimes the moonlight was so bright that we played chess and card games by it on the skylight and about the deck. At other times we lay becalmed, and I had my chance to dress myself and enjoy the evening dance or concert, or whatever was going on. But at the worst of times—even in the tremendous storms, when the ship lay poop-rail under, all but flat on her beam ends (drowning the fowls and pigs on that side), or plunged and wallowed under swamping cross-seas that pounded down through smashed skylights upon us tumbling about helplessly in the dark—even in these crises of known danger and physical misery there was something exhilarating and uplifting—a sense of finely-lived if not heroic life, that may come to the coddled steamer passenger when the machinery breaks down, but which I cannot associate with him and his "floating hotel" under any circumstances short of impending shipwreck.

We sighted Cape Otway on the 16th of August. Seventy-seven days! Yet the Melbourne newspapers of the 19th called it smart work, considering the sensational weather we had passed through. More than forty ships were reported overdue when we arrived—a curious thing to think of now, with the steamers crowding every port keeping time like clockwork. The pilots that bring them up the bay can rarely enjoy the popularity and prestige of their predecessors of the last generation. The sensation caused by the knowledge that ours was on board, with his month-and-a-half-old letters and newspapers, filled with information of the happenings in the world from which we had been totally cut off for nearly a quarter of a year, must have been delightful to him. [14] We came out to breakfast to find him there, crowded about by the young men, the honoured guest of the company, one and all of whom hung upon his every word—particularly the gamblers who had had to wait till now for the name of the Derby winner. I remember that this item of news was considered the most important; next to it was the news that Dickens was dead.

Although we sighted land on the 16th, it was not until the 19th that we set foot upon it, so leisurely did we do things in those days. Contrary winds kept us hovering about the Heads for some hours. The pilot who came on board before breakfast saw us well into our afternoon dinner before he decided to tack through the Rip against them; we shortened the meal which it was our custom to make the most of in order to watch the manœuvre, which was very pretty. The captain was charmed with it, although there was one awful moment when the vessel was but her own length from one of the reefs—the noise of the wind had caused one of the yelled orders to be misunderstood—and it was amusing to note his joyous excitement as he marched about, rubbing his hands. "She's a yacht, sir," he bawled to the sympathetic pilot; "you can do anything with her." "You can that," the pilot answered, as he made his delicate zig-zags through that formidable gateway in the teeth of the wind—a feat in seamanship that the dullest landlubber could not but admire and marvel at.

And so we came to shelter and calm water at last. We anchored off Queenscliff and signalled for the doctor, who did not immediately put out to us, as he should have done. We had had such hopes of getting to a shore bed that night that most of us had stripped our cabins—the furniture [15] of which had to be of our own providing—and packed everything up; now we had to unpack again, to get out bedding for another night and find a candle by which to see to take off the smart shore clothes in which we had sat all day, eyeing each other's costumes, which for the first time seemed to reveal us in our true characters. We were ungratefully disheartened by this trivial disappointment, and retired to rest all grumbling at the Providence which had brought us through so many perils unharmed.

Next morning the ship seethed with indignation because the doctor still made no sign. What

happened to him afterwards I don't know, but the penalties he was threatened with for being off duty at the wrong time were heavy. He detained us so long that again our confident expectation of a shore bed was frustrated; for yet another night we had to camp in our dismantled cabin. The pair of tugs that dragged us from the Heads to Hobson's Bay, making their best pace, could not get us home until black night had fallen and it was considered too late to go up to the pier.

I suppose it was about nine o'clock when we dropped anchor. All we could see of the near city was a three-quarter ring of lights dividing dark water from dark sky—just what I see now every night when I come upstairs to bed, before I draw the blinds down. We watched them, fascinated, and—still more fascinating—the boats that presently found their way to us, bringing welcoming friends and relatives to those passengers who possessed them. We, strangers in a strange land, sat apart and watched these favoured ones—listened to their callings back and forth over the [16] ship's side, beheld their embraces at the gangway, their excited interviews in the cuddy, their gay departures into the night and the unknown, which in nearly every case swallowed them for ever as far as we were concerned. Three only of the whole company have we set eyes on since—excepting the friend who became our brother—and one of these three renewed acquaintance with us but a year or two ago. Another I saw once across a hotel dinner-table. The third was the clergyman who had been so kindly foisted on us—or we on him—before we left England; and it was enough for us to see him afar off at such few diocesan functions as we afterwards attended together; we dropped closer relations as soon as there was room to drop them. However, he was a useful and respected member of his profession, and much valued by his own parish, from which death removed him many a year ago. Quite a deputation of church members came off to welcome him on that night of his return from his English holiday, and to tell him of the things his *locum tenens* had been doing in his absence. He was furious at learning that this person—at the present moment the head of the Church of England in this state—had had the presumption to replace an old organ—*his* old organ—with a new one. In the deputation were ladies with votive bouquets for his wife; the perfume of spring violets in the saloon deepened the sense of exile and solitude that crept upon us when their boat and the rest had vanished from view, leaving but the few friendless ones to the hospitality of the ship for a last night's lodging.

However, in the morning, we had our turn. It was the loveliest morning, a sample of the really matchless climate (which we had been informed was exactly like that of the palm-houses at Kew), [17] clear as crystal, full of sunshine and freshness; and when we awoke amid strange noises, and looked out of our port-hole, we saw that not sea but wooden planks lay under it—Port Melbourne railway pier, exactly as it is now, only that its name was then Sandridge and its old piles thirty years stouter where salt water and barnacles gnawed them.

With what joy as well as confidence did we don our best clerical coat and our best purple petticoat and immaculate black gown (the skirt pulled up out of harm's way through a stout elastic waist-cord, over which it hung behind in a soft, unobtrusive bag, for street wear), and lay out our Peter Robinson jacket and bonnet, and gloves from the hermetically sealed bottle, upon the bare bunk! And the breakfast we then went to is a memory to gloat upon—the succulent steak, the fresh butter and cream, the shore-baked rolls, the piled fruits and salads; nothing ever surpassed it except the mid-day meal following, with its juicy sirloin and such spring vegetables as I had never seen. This also I battened on, with my splendidly prepared appetite, though G. did not. The bishop's representative—our first Australian friend, whose fine and kindly face is little changed in all these years, and which I never look upon without recalling that moment, my first and just impression of it and him—appeared in our cabin doorway early in the morning; and it was deemed expedient that G. should go with him to report himself at headquarters, and return for me when that business was done. So I spent some hours alone, watching the railway station at the head of the pier through my strong glasses. In the afternoon I too landed, and was driven [18] to lodgings that had been secured for us in East Melbourne, where we at once dressed for dinner at the house of our newest friend, and for one of the most charming social evenings that I ever spent. The feature of it that I best remember was a vivid literary discussion based upon *Lothair*, which was the new book of the hour, and from which our host read excruciating extracts. How brightly every detail of those first hours in Australia stands out in the mind's records of the past—the refined little dinner (I could name every dish on the dainty table), the beautiful and adored invalid hostess, who died not long afterwards, and whom those who knew her still speak of as "too good for this world"; the refreshment of intellectual talk after the banalities of the ship; the warm kindness of everybody, even our landlady, who was really a lady, and like a mother to me; the comfort of the sweet and clean shore life—I shall never cease to glow at the recollection of these things. The beautiful weather enhanced the charm of all, and—still more—the fact that, although at first I staggered with the weakness left by such long sea-sickness, I not only recovered as soon as my foot touched land, but enjoyed the best health of my life for a full year afterwards.

The second day was a Saturday, and we were taken out to see the sights. No description that we had read or heard of, even from our fellow-passengers whose homes were there, had prepared us for the wonder that Melbourne was to us. As I remember our metropolis then, and see it now, I am not conscious of any striking general change, although, of course, the changes in detail are innumerable. It was a greater city for its age thirty years ago than it is to-day, great as [19] it is to-day. I lately read in some English magazine the statement that tree-stumps—likewise, if I mistake not, kangaroos—were features of Collins Street "twenty-five years ago." I can answer for it that in 1870 it was excellently paved and macadamised, thronged with its waggonette-cabs, omnibuses, and private carriages—a perfectly good and proper street, except for its open drainage gutters. The nearest kangaroo hopped in the Zoological Gardens at Royal Park. In 1870, also—although the theatrical proceedings of the Kelly gang took place later—bushranging was

virtually a thing of the past. So was the Bret Harte mining-camp. We are credited still, I believe, with those romantic institutions, and our local story-writers love to pander to the delusion of some folks that Australia is made up of them; I can only say—and I ought to know—that in Victoria, at any rate, they have not existed in my time. Had they existed in the other colonies, I must have heard of it. The last real bushranger came to his inevitable bad end shortly before we arrived. The cowardly Kellys, murderers, and brigands as they were, and costlier than all their predecessors to hunt down, always seemed to me but imitation bushrangers. Mining has been a sober pursuit, weighted with expensive machinery. Indeed, we have been quite steady and respectable, so far as I know. In the way of public rowdyism I can recall nothing worth mentioning—unless it be the great strike of 1890.

We went to see the Town Hall—the present one, lacking only its present portico; and the splendid Public Library, as it was until a few years ago, when a wing was added; and the Melbourne Hospital, as it stands to-day; and the University, housed as it is now, and beginning to [20] gather its family of colleges about it. We were taken a-walking in the Fitzroy Gardens—saw the same fern gully, the same plaster statues, that still adorn it; and to the Botanical Gardens, already furnished with their lakes and swans, and rustic bridges, and all the rest of it. And how beautiful we thought it all! As I have said, it was springtime, and the weather glorious. There had been excessive rains, and were soon to be more—rains which caused 1870 to be marked in history as "the year of the great floods"—but the loveliness of the weather as we first knew it I shall never forget.

We finished the week in the suburban parish that included Pentridge, the great prison of the State—an awesome pile of dressed granite then as now. The incumbent was not well, and G. was sent to help him with his Sunday duty. The first early function was at the gaol, from which they brought back an exquisitely-designed programme of the music and order of service, which I still keep amongst my mementoes of those days. It was done by a prisoner, who supplied one, and always a different one, to the chaplain each Sunday.

At his house—where again we were surprised to find all the refinements we had supposed ourselves to have left in England, for he and his wife were exceptionally cultivated persons—we slept on the ground floor for the first time in our lives, all mixed up with drawing-room and garden, which felt very strange and public, and almost improper. Now I prefer the bungalow arrangement to any other; I like to feel the house all round me, close and cosy, and to be able to slip from my bed into the open air when I like, and not to be cut off from folks when I am ill. For [21] more than twenty years I was accustomed to it, sleeping with open windows and unlocked doors, like any Bedouin in his tent, unmolested in the loneliest localities by night-prowling man or beast. I miss this now, when I live in town and have to climb stairs and isolate myself—or sleep with shut windows (which I never will) in a ground-floor fortress, made burglar-proof at every point.

Bishop and Mrs. Perry had a dinner-party for us on Monday. That day was otherwise given to our particular ship friend (of whom I shall say more presently); with him, a stranger in the land like ourselves, we had adventures and excursions "on our own," eluding the many kind folk who would have liked to play courier. We lunched plentifully at an excellent restaurant—I cannot identify it now, but it fixed our impression that we had indeed come to a land of milk and honey—and then rambled at large. The evening was very pleasant. Whether as host or guest, the first Bishop of Melbourne was always perfect, and we met some interesting people at his board. Others came in after dinner, amongst them two of the "sweetly pretty daughters," of whom we had heard in England, and who did not quite come up to our expectations. They are hoary-headed maiden ladies now—the youngest as white as the muslin of the frock she wore that night.

We did many things during the remainder of the week, which was full of business, pleasure, and hospitalities, very little of our time being spent in privacy. The shops were surprisingly well furnished and tempting, and we acted upon our supposition that we should find none to speak of in the Bush. We made careful little purchases from day to day. The very first of them, I think, was [22] Professor Halford's snake-bite cure. We had an idea that, once out of the city, our lives would not be safe without it for a day. It was a hypodermic syringe and bottle of stuff, done up in a neat pocket-case. That case did cumber pockets for a time, but it was never opened, and eventually went astray and was no more seen—or missed. Yet snakes were quite common objects of the country then. I used to get weary of the monotony of sitting my horse and holding G.'s, while at every mile or so he stopped to kill one, during our Bush-rides in warm weather. English readers should know that in the Bush it has ever been a point of honour, by no means to be evaded, to kill every snake you see, if possible, no matter how difficult the job, nor how great your impatience to be after other jobs. That probably is why they are so infrequent now that any chance appearance of the creature is chronicled in the papers as news.

Another early purchase was a couple of large pine-apples, at threepence a-piece. We each ate one (surreptitiously, in a retired spot), and realised one of the ambitions of our lives—to get enough of that delicacy for once.

On Saturday the 24th, the eighth day from our arrival, we turned our backs upon all this wild dissipation and our faces towards stern duty. We left Melbourne for the Bush.

CHAPTER III

ToC

THE BUSH

It was not quite bush, to start with, because we travelled by railway to our immediate destination, and that was a substantial township set amongst substantial farms and stations, intersected by made roads. But on the way we had samples of typical country, between one stopping-place and another. First, there were the ugly, stony plains, with their far-apart stone fences, formed by simply piling the brown boulders, bound together by their own weight only, into walls of the required height. This dreary country represented valuable estates, and remains of the same aspect and in the hands of the same families, I believe, still. Gradually these stone-strewn levels merged into greener and softer country, which grew the gum-trees we had heard so much of; and presently we came to closely-folded, densely-forested hills, the "Dividing Range"—a locality to be afterwards associated with many charming memories—where snow and cloud-mists enwrapped one in winter, and from which the distant panorama of the low-lying capital and the sea was lovely on a clear day. But it was like eating one's first olive, that first acquaintance with Bush scenery; we had not got the taste of it. I cannot remember that we admired anything. Rather, an impression remains—the only one that does remain—of a cheerless effect upon our minds. Perhaps the weather had changed. [24]

There was no lack of cheer in the welcome awaiting us at our journey's end. Our clergyman-host met us on the railway platform with the face of a father greeting children home from school. There was a cab waiting, into which our traps were thrown, but we preferred to walk up to the parsonage through the streets of the clean little town, that we might study its unexpected points and see how enterprising and civilised the Bush could be. The parson's wife, aged twenty-one and four years married, received us on the doorstep of the cheerful house, and at once we were as perfectly at home in it as in our own. That was the way with all Australian houses, we found.

Sunday was certainly wet. The two parsons drove out to a Bush service in the afternoon, and we their wives had a bad quarter of an hour listening to the bell ringing for the evening one, while yet there was no sign of their return who had promised to be back for tea; the boggy roads and swollen water-courses so delayed them that it was on the stroke of church time ere they turned up. But next day the sun shone again, and we were taken for a drive over macadamised roads and shown things that corrected our opinion of Bush scenery. And that day, neighbouring clergymen, Sunday off their minds, came to make our acquaintance, all full of information and advice for us, all eager themselves for news from the "Old Country." Mrs C. gave them shakedowns on sofas and floor, to which they repaired at disgraceful hours of the night, because they could not stop talking. Where is that party now?—the merriest clerical party I was ever in. The host, our friend from that day, and godfather to one of our sons, was made a bishop, and died but a few months ago; his merry wife is a broken-hearted widow, crippled with neuritis. One of the guests, in after years still more intimately dear, became an archdeacon, and is now dead also. Two others are past work, resting in retirement until the end comes. We, the youngest of the group, bar one, are beginning to realise that the evening for us also is drawing on. [25]

It was here, by the way, that we had news of the commencement of the war between France and Prussia. It came by the monthly mail-boat, which was our one channel of communication with the world. This budget gave texts for the discussions that are so memorable for their vivacity and charm. A great day was mail-day in those times. Looking back, I cannot remember that we fretted much over our four blank weeks, during which the most awful and personally serious things might happen without our knowing it; but I do remember that when we got the cable many of us grumbled because it took away the interest of mail-day, which became to us as a novel of which we know the ending before we begin to read it.

Holiday travels ended on the last day of August. That night we started for the up-country post to which G. had been appointed, and where he was expected to begin his duties on the following Sunday. August 31st was a Wednesday, and therefore ample time seemed to have been allowed for a journey from Melbourne which the daily coach accomplished in less than a couple of days (and which is now done by the Sydney express in four hours). However, "the year of the great flood" was already making its reputation. Bridges and culverts had been washed away, and the coach-road was reported impassable for ladies. Men could wade and swim, assist to push the vehicle and extricate it from bogs—they were expected to do so—but the authorities in Melbourne advised my husband that the conditions were too rough for me. Consequently we took a round-about route, whereby it was still reckoned that we should get to our destination before Sunday. [26]

The C.'s saw us off during the afternoon—not back to town, but on by the railway which ended at the Murray. We were passed on from friend to friend until a group of kind men—whom I never saw before or since, but shall never forget—established us on board the little Murray streamer which was to be our home till Saturday. It was the mild spring night of that part of the colony, which embraces so many climates; and I can see now, in my mind's eye, the swirl of the brimming river that so soon after overflowed the town; the lights of the wharf and the boat, which spangled the dark sky and water with sparks from its wood-fed furnace; the generally romantic picturesqueness of a scene—one of a sensational series—which indelibly impressed itself upon me, an imaginative young person seeing the world for the first time.

I can only with an effort remember how uncomfortable that boat was; when I think of it at all, my mind fills with recollections of the deeply interesting experiences that came to me by its means. On that flooded river—so flooded that its bed, for the greater part of the way, was marked by no banks, but only its bordering trees—I saw blacks in native costume, the now rare kangaroo [27] and emu in flocks; black swans, white ibises, grey cranes; the iguana running up a tree, the dear laughing jackass in his glory; all the notorious characteristics of the country, and many more undreamed of. Most distinctly do I remember, the unceasing chorus of the frogs, and the solemn-sounding echo of the steamer's puffs and pants through the solitary gum-forests, especially at night. But we soon had to leave off travelling at night, on account of the many foreign bodies that the flood was whirling down—the débris of houses and bridges, trees, stacks, all sorts of things. Indeed, even in daylight the navigation of the turbulent stream was a most risky business.

Consternation fell upon us when Saturday morning came, and we were informed that there was small chance of completing the passage that day. This meant being stranded in a strange township, at some possibly low public-house, on Sunday, when the coach of our last stage would not be running, and the breaking of an engagement that was considered of immense importance.

"What shall we do?" we asked ourselves, and the question was overheard by fellow-passengers, anxious, as everybody was, to help us.

"It's a pity you can't cut across," said one. "From here to W—— is no distance as the crow flies."

Compared with the bow-loop we were making, it was no distance—a few hours' drive, with normal roads and weather; and just then the steamer stopped to take in cargo from a lonely shed, near which we perceived a cart, a grazing horse, and a man, evidently belonging to each other, [28] and on the right (Victorian) side of the stream.

"Would it be possible," one of us suggested, "to hire that cart and cut across?"

G. went to try, while I leaned over the boat's rail and anxiously watched the negotiations. They were successful, and we hurriedly collected our wraps and bags, our heavy luggage was put ashore, and the steamer passed on and vanished round the next bend of the river, which was all bends, leaving us on the bank—in the real Bush for the first time, and delighted with the situation. The man with the cart had guaranteed to get us home before nightfall.

We climbed over our boxes, which filled the body of the vehicle, settled ourselves upon them as comfortably as their angles permitted, and started merrily on our way. It was the morning of the day, of the season, of the Australian year, of our two lives; and I could never lose the memory of my sensations in that vernal hour. I can sniff now the delicious air, rain-washed to more than even its accustomed purity, the scents of gum and wattle and fresh-springing grass, the atmosphere of untainted Nature and the free wilds. I can see the vast flocks of screaming cockatoos and parrots of all colours that darted about our path—how wonderful and romantic I thought them! And what years it is since the wild parrot has shown himself to me in any number or variety! Like the once ubiquitous 'possum, he seems a vanishing race—at any rate, in this state. I suppose they still have sanctuary in the larger and less settled ones. I hope so.

However, we were not far on this promising journey when troubles began. The rain returned, and settled to a solid downpour, that increased to a deluge as the day wore on. The Bush track [29] became softer and softer, stickier and stickier, the dreadful bogs of its deeper parts more and more difficult of negotiation by the poor overweighted, willing horse, whose strength, as we soon saw, was unequal to the task before him. He got on fairly well until after the noonday halt, when he was rubbed down and fed—when we also were fed by a poor selector's wife at whose hut (in the absence of hotels) we solicited food, and who gave us all she had, bread and cream, as much as we could eat, and then refused to take a penny for it. But starting again, with rain heavier than before, the poor beast's struggles to do his hopeless best became more than I could bear. When I had seen him scramble through three or four bogs that sucked him down like quicksands, and it seemed that he must burst his heart in the effort to get out of them, I stopped the cart and said I would walk. My weight might not be much, but such as it was he should be relieved of it. G. also walked, but as he was needed to help the driver I left him and was soon far ahead, intending to give this negative aid to the expedition as long as I could find my way.

I had been told to "follow the track," and I followed it for miles. The Bush was drowned in rain, so that I had to jump pools, and climb logs and branches, and get round swamps, in such a way that I felt it every minute more impossible to retrace my steps. I carried an umbrella, but I was wet to the skin. I was quite composed, however, except for my distress on account of the poor horse, whose master's voice and whip I could hear in the distance behind me from time to time; and I was not at all alarmed. I had prepared myself for the savageness of a savage country. I [30] imagined that this was the sort of thing I should have to get accustomed to. Now and then I sat down to recover breath and to wring my sopping skirts, and to wait for the sound of the cart advancing, after the frequent silences that betokened bogs.

By the way, I hear nothing nowadays of those bogs which, in their various forms, made our winter drives so exciting—the "glue-pots," the "rotten grounds," the "spue-holes," worst of all, indicated by a little bubble-up of clayey mud that you could cover with a handkerchief, but which, if a horse stepped on it, would take his leg to the knee, or to any depth that it would go without breaking. "Made" roads and drainage-works seem to have done away with them this long time, for the other day I met a resident of the locality who did not know, until I told him, what a spue-hole was.

At last it was all silence. I waited for the cart, and it did not come. I called—there was no answer. At the end of an hour—it may have been two or three hours—the situation was the same.

What had happened was that the horse was at last in a bog that he could not get out of, and that bog was miles away. I could not go back to see what had happened. I did not know where I was. I conjectured that I had turned off the track somewhere, and that my husband was travelling away from me; that I was lost in the Bush, where I might never be found again—where I should have to spend the night alone, at any rate, in the horrible solitude and darkness and the drenching rain.

Appropriately, in this extremity, and just as dusk was closing in, I heard a splashing and a crashing, and my knight appeared—one of those fine, burly, bearded squatter-men who were not [31] only the backbone of their young country, but everything else that was sound and strong. He drew rein in amazement; I rose from my log and stood before him in the deepest confusion. Finally I explained my plight, and in two minutes all trouble was over. Bidding me stay where I was for a short time longer, he galloped away, and presently returned in a buggy loaded with rugs and wraps, and bore me off to his house somewhere near, telling me that he would return again for my husband, and had sent men to the rescue of the cart and horse, now so buried in the bog that not much more than his head and neck were visible.

Ah, those dear Bush-houses—so homely, so cosy, so hospitable, so picturesque—and now so rare! At least a dozen present themselves to my mind when I try to recall a perfect type, and this one amongst the first, although I never was in it after that night. They were always a nest of buildings that had grown one at a time, the house-father having been his own architect, with no design but to make his family comfortable, and to increase their comfort as his means allowed. And this must have been the golden prime of the squatter class in Victoria, for the free selector had but lately been let loose upon his lands, and the consequent ruin that he prognosticated had not visibly touched him. In the early stages of home-making, his home-life had been rough enough; but there was no roughness in it now, although there was plenty of work, and although the refinements about him were all in keeping with his hardy manliness, his simplicity, and sincerity of character. I used to be much struck by the contrast of his cherished "imported" [32] furniture with its homely setting—the cheval glass and the mahogany wardrobe on the perhaps bare, dark-grey hardwood floor—incongruities of that sort, which somehow always seemed in taste. Never have I known greater luxury of toilet appointments than in some of those hut-like dwellings. In the humblest of them the bed stood always ready for the casual guest, a clean brush and comb on the dressing-table, and easy house-slippers under it. And then the paper-covered canvas walls used to belly out and in with the wind that puffed behind them; opossums used to get in under the roof and run over the canvas ceilings, which sagged under their weight, showing the impression of their little feet and of the round of their bodies where they sat down.

The country-houses become more and more Europeanised, year by year. The inward ordering matches the outward architecture, and, although Australian hospitality has survived the homes that were its birthplaces, one hesitates to present one's self as an uninvited guest at the door with the electric bell and the white-capped maid, who asks, "What name, sir?" when you inquire if the family are at home. There is an off-chance that you may be unwelcome, or, at any rate inopportune, whereas it was impossible to imagine such a thing in what we now lovingly call "the old days."

I came in, an utter stranger, out of the dark night and that wet and boggy wilderness, weary and without a dry stitch on me, to such a scene, such a welcome, as I could not forget in a dozen lifetimes. The door had been flung wide on the approach of the buggy, and I was lifted down into the light that poured from it, and passed straight into what appeared to be the living room of the [33] family, possibly their only one. The glorious log fire of the country—the most beautiful piece of house-furniture in the world—blazed on the snowy white-washed hearth, filling every nook with warmth and comfort; and the young mistress, a new-made mother just up from her bed, in a smart loose garment that would now be called a tea-gown, came forward from her armchair to greet me as if I had been her sister, at the least. The table was spread for the dinner, to which the husband had been riding home when I encountered and delayed him; and what a feature of the charming picture it was! I remember the delicious boiled chicken and mutton curry that were presently set upon it, and how I enjoyed them. But first I was taken into an inner bedroom, to another glowing fire, around which were grouped a warm bath ready to step into, soft hot towels, sponge and soap, and a complete set of my hostess's best clothes, from a handsome black silk dress to shoes and stockings and a pocket-handkerchief. In these I dined, and, retiring early, as she had to do, found a smart nightgown, dressing-gown, and slippers toasting by my fire. And I sank to rest between fine linen sheets, and slept like a top until crowing cocks, within a few feet of me, proclaimed the break of day.

That day was Sunday, and G. had to preach at morning service some eight or nine miles away. So we were early seated at a good breakfast, and a light buggy and a pair of strong, fast horses were brought round, to take us in good time to our destination. Our host himself drove us, and incidentally taught us what Bush driving meant. I remember how we made new roads for ourselves on the spur of the moment to avoid bogs, and how gamely we battled through those [34] that were unavoidable; how we flew over the treacherous green levels that the expert eye recognised as "rotten," where, had the horses been allowed to pause for a moment, they would have sunk and stuck; and how finally we dashed in style into the township and up to the parsonage-gate, where a venerable archdeacon was anxiously looking for the curate whom he had almost given up for lost. The church-bell had not yet begun to ring. In fact, the family were still at breakfast when we arrived.

[35]

CHAPTER IV

ToC

THE FIRST HOME

We had to wait in lodgings for a few weeks, during which time we made acquaintance with the place and people.

Our lodgings were very comfortable. Sitting-room and bedroom, with a door between, our other door opening upon a big plot of virgin bush, alive with magpies, whose exquisite carolling in the early hours of the day is the thing that I remember best. There is no bird-song in the world so fresh and cheery. I seldom hear it now, but when I do I am back again, in imagination, at breakfast near that open door, drinking in the sweetness of the lovely September mornings which were the morning of my life. Never had I known such air and sunshine, or such health to enjoy them; and never do I feel so much an Australian as when I go to the Bush again and am welcomed by that fluty note. The spirit of happy youth is in it, and of those "good old times" which we old colonists have so many reasons to regret to-day. No song of English nightingale could strike deeper to my heart.

Speaking of breakfast reminds me of the luxury we lived in, in respect of food. Never was such a land of plenty as this was then, when no one dreamed of butter and beef at what is their market rate this day. We had young appetites, in fine order after the sea-voyage, and the more we ate the [36] better was our landlady pleased. It hurt her as a hostess and housewife to have any dish neglected. And she simply stuffed us with good things; the meal prepared for us two might have served half-a-dozen, and given bilious attacks to all. One mistake only did she make in the arrangement of her bill of fare—she gave us too many quinces; apparently they were a superfluity in her garden, as they have since been in nearly all of ours. At first they were a novel and welcome delicacy, but when we had had them at every meal for weeks—in jam, jelly, tart, pudding, and pie, with cream, with custard, with bread and butter, and inlaid in sandwich cake—we were so thoroughly sickened of them that neither of us have wanted to look at a quince since. We have given the fruit away in sacksful to our neighbours, season after season, all these thirty years, and not cooked one; just lately—tempted by a brilliant carbuncle-hued jelly presented to me by a gifted little cook in my family—I have suddenly re-acquired a taste for it (which G. says will never happen to him), and now for the first time we have no quinces in the garden. That is to say, we have quinces—as also pears and almonds and other fruits—but the thieving little town-boys that live around us steal everything before it is fit to pluck. And I may here add, in regard to this sad fact, that when we came to our town-house we found a notice-board up in the orchard-paddock at the back, offering a reward of £5 for the apprehension of "trespassers upon these premises." While it remained up, there was always a policeman outside the fence. It was the joy of our own school-boys to bamboozle him by scaling the fence at night or in some surreptitious [37] manner, pretending to be trespassers, and only when they had given him all the trouble and satisfaction of apprehending them, revealing their identity as sons of the house. But I could not bear this board—such an anomaly in the colony, as I had known it; I thought it horrible in any case, but on a clergyman's land quite scandalous; and I did not rest until it was taken down. Now I understand the meaning of it. No sooner was it gone than the policeman disappeared for ever. And the thieving boys took, and keep, possession of the place—at any rate, of the fruit; and of the flowers when they fancy them, as occasionally they do. The fowls are locked up in their house at night, and could defend themselves with audible squawks in day-time. The back gate is also locked. But those young villains make their own gates; they breach the defences by simply tearing down a few palings, and pass through the hole. We mend it up, or hire a man to mend it—more than the £5 of the reward must have gone in this way—and next night they break it open again, or make another in an easier place. Then quite calmly, and boldly they come in and out, sit in the rifled and broken tree or on the top of the fence to munch their spoil and "cheek" the poor maid who goes out to expostulate; and, the once zealous policeman steadily holding aloof (he has been appealed to for succour a dozen times in vain), we have no redress, except when we take the law into our own hands, which is an unprofitable proceeding. One of my ex-schoolboys administers justice occasionally, in a fashion to bring irate parents, and threats of summonses for assault about his ears, but he cannot be in two places at once, and his long absences from this place are calculated upon. As for Bob, the current house-dog, a fox-terrier of some intelligence, [38] he behaves like a perfect idiot in this case. He will bark furiously at the boys when ordered to do so, but will neither initiate the chase nor follow it up with effective action. My idea is that he takes them for permanent members of the establishment. Or "boys will be boys," he thinks. Or he has seen me bribe them to come and ask for fruit, instead of stealing it. Anyway the result is that we have no fruit for ourselves. Year after year we see our trees blossom and the young crop set and swell, knowing we shall gather no harvest beyond a few hard, half-grown pears, which can be stewed soft. If I want to make quince jelly, as now I do, I must buy the quinces.

But in the country there were no thieves—no locks and bars in use—no need for the policeman. The only raiders of the orchards were the birds, who had the right to tax us.

That town of W——, where we spent the first year of our Australian life, was a typical country-town of the better class, and at that period very lively and prosperous. The railway afterwards drained it of much of its local importance, which has only revived again in quite recent times—since the fat lands about it have become studded with dairy-farms and butter and tobacco factories, industries and population which have contrived to hold their own here and there against the crushing discouragements to which both are subjected. Within the last few months it has been made the seat of a bishopric.

We found a highly-civilised society. The police magistrate at the head of it—always a P.M. was at the head in those days, in the country-towns big enough to have one, and not only by virtue of his official standing, but by every right of personal character and culture, as a rule—was a (to [39] me) surprisingly well bred as well as kindly gentleman; and his wife was as nice as he. They gave bright evening-parties, at which he played the flute with a delicate skill, and he read largely and liked to talk of what he read; also he was an exemplary husband and father. In the group of pleasant households his was one of the most serenely pleasant, and so we felt it deeply when one morning, a few months after our arrival, the news of his sudden death was brought to us. He had risen that morning apparently in his usual health, and was in his dressing-room, making his toilet and chatting with his wife through the open door between them—she with a baby a week or so old—when she heard him fall; he did not answer her call to know what was the matter, and when she went to see she found him dead upon the floor. The catastrophe left her with six little ones to provide for, and next to nothing to do it with. The good husband and father, taken without warning in his prime (of unsuspected heart disease), had begun to make provision for the rainy day, but not completed the task. However, with pupils and boarders and what not, she made a splendid fight of it. The baby son did not long survive his father, but the five daughters grew up to testify to her good mothering and to reward her for it. They are now good mothers in their turn, sharing her society between them.

Next to the P.M. in the social scale came the doctors. There were two, English gentlemen both. One had emigrated for adventure and the goldfields, and spent good years seeking his fortune by short cuts, but had been glad at last to return to his profession for a living. He was courting a girl [40] of exactly half his age when we came upon the scene, and their wedding was the first smart function that we attended. The other doctor and his wife were new arrivals from home, like ourselves; they had landed but a month or two before us; and they were our special and best-beloved companions and friends. Alas! he too—one of the most delightful of men—died suddenly and dreadfully, shortly before the death of the P.M., also leaving six mere babies and a wife to whom he was perfectly devoted, as she to him. She came to stay with me after the funeral, and the almost simultaneous birth of my first child—the latter event hastened, it was thought, by the shock and grief that I had shared with her. She was the most uncommon woman I ever met, as she was one of the most adorable. Superficially, both in face and figure, with the exception of her beautiful hands, she was quite plain, and absolutely without trace of conscious fascination or coquetry—the only instance I have known of a woman of that sort being irresistible to every man she came across. The story of her engagement, as told me by her husband, was exactly appropriate to them both. He was leaving England for a foreign appointment, with but a few days to spare, when a friend or relative—a high church dignitary—wrote to beg a farewell visit, mentioning by way of special inducement that a charming girl was staying in the house. The doctor responded by falling in love with her on sight, in such a desperate and successful manner that she married him within those few spare days and accompanied him to his foreign appointment. Perfect love and bliss had been their portion ever since; it was an ideal union. They had the habit of driving up to our door, just as we were finishing dinner, and calling us, one or [41] both, to come out with them. The country was new to us all, and we spent many of the evenings of our first summer exploring it together. We made common cause as new chums, although they were such citizens of the world as to feel at home anywhere. Even the little ones in the nursery could put us to shame in respect of their cosmopolitan experience. It filled me with envy to hear them chattering their pretty baby French to their Swiss nurse. The mother married again some years afterwards. And not a man of her acquaintance but felt and said—as my own husband did—that the not-too-well-off bachelor who saddled himself with the almost penniless widow and her six children did by that act the best day's work for himself that he had ever done or was likely to do. He, we have been told (for it is many a year since she drifted out of our reach), followed the example of his predecessor in marital behaviour—waiting on her hand and foot, writing her letters and packing her trunks to save her trouble, and generally worshipping the ground she walked on. That also is considered matter of course. But I wonder how it is with her now? She is living still, I hear. And she is considerably older than I am.

Next to the doctors, the bankers—*i.e.*, the officials of the four or five banks which have branches in every town of any importance. The managers are handsomely housed, and live in the best Bush-town style; they are really the backbone of country society, it being to the interest of their employers that they should be popular with their constituents, as well as to a man's own interest to make life pleasant in a place where he may be settled for many years. The smart young bank clerks are the natural complement of the young Bush-town ladies, whose brothers [42] always go away; the clerks will be managers in time, and meanwhile are essential to the upkeep of tennis clubs and the success of balls and picnics. In W——, in 1870-1, the bank people were of very good quality—one household in particular, the heads of which belonged to two substantial colonial families of high repute (which they still enjoy); the lady here was a charming woman and hostess, famous in local circles for her pleasant parties, for which I frequently needed the evening dresses that I had supposed would be superfluous. Indeed, with one thing and another, I was gayer in that first year of "missionary" life than I had ever been in England.

There were bazaars and church teas and such things—quite as exciting as the private functions—at which our circle of friends and acquaintances was augmented by the leading tradesfolk, between whose class and that conventionally supposed to be above them the line of demarcation is always very thin, sometimes scarcely perceptible—and properly so, in these isolated communities. I keep in affectionate remembrance the wife of a stationer who was like a mother to me, the wife of a general storekeeper who often sat with me when I was lonely and needed looking after, and the wife of a chemist with whom I was in particular sympathy at the time. We sewed baby-clothes together, she and I, and the wearers of them arrived in this world within an hour of each other. My beloved first-born died at five years old; his birth-mate at about twelve, I think. The gate by which he went seemed awful enough, but the passing of the poor little girl was too dreadful for words. She was coming home from a visit one day in the charge of a friend: the creeks were flooded that they had to cross, and one of them swept away horse and buggy, and [43]
drowned the driver. He hooked his little companion to a branch or snag sticking out of the swirl, before leaving her, as it was supposed, to swim ashore for help; there she clung through the whole of the long night, from early evening to daylight next morning, and was then found—warm, the breath just gone, not more, the doctor said, than a few minutes too late. And there were people living about the spot who testified that they had heard her crying in the night, without knowing what the sound meant!

And as for the cottage people—the marked thing about them was that they were not "the poor." There was none with whom a clergyman or his wife could safely take the liberties so customary at home. When a sister-in-law, once my fellow district-visitor, came out to be our guest for awhile, and started to make herself useful by teaching our parishioners their duty on the traditional lines and by bestowing doles of old clothes and kitchen scraps upon them, she got some tremendous surprises—"insolence" that simply staggered her. No, what they loved was to bring us little presents of new-laid eggs or poultry or what not, and to charge us less than they charged the laity for what they did for us in the way of business. The whole attitude of parishes and lay people in this country towards their spiritual pastors is benevolent to a degree. The parental spirit, tolerant, indulgent, making allowances (in more senses than one), is here on their side. The schools teach their children for half fees; the doctors doctor them for no fees at all; the very shipping companies—some, at least—make special fares for them. And so long as they accept this rôle of the lame dog that needs helping over the stile, so long will there be that tinge of contempt [44]
and patronage which embitters these favours to some of us who receive them.

Coming straight from our dignified Cathedral life, with its high and mighty Church-and-State traditions, into this democratic Salem-Chapel-like atmosphere, we still found nothing to disagree with us—only one circumstance excepted, for which neither the country nor the parish was to blame. Pure loving-kindness and open-armed hospitality to strangers surrounded us on all sides but one, and the unexpected welcome went to our young hearts. The single disappointment came from a quarter whence it was least expected. But, as to that, bygones may be bygones at this time of day. I shall not tell tales.

The absorbing joy, to start with, was the making of the first home. The town was so well filled that it was a difficult matter to find a house; we took the first possible one that offered, after waiting several weeks for it.

A large railway station now stands, and for many years has stood, upon the site. Walking about the Bush in the vicinity, we used to find here and there in the ground small pegs which we were informed were the surveyors' marks for the line—the line which now runs all the way to Sydney, and thence to Brisbane, but which was then but beginning to be made.

The spot was quite on the outskirts of the township, and we passed from our premises straight into the Bush behind the house, which faced some open waste ground, analogous to an English common of unusual size, which divided us from streets and church. House, do I call it! Three tiny rooms, opening one into the other, the first into the outer air, a lean-to at the back, and a [45]
detached kitchen—that was all. We paid one pound a week for it, which certainly was an excessive rent for such a place. Excessive also were the wages we gave our first servant, an amiable but inefficient Irish girl—fifteen shillings a week. We were told that these were the ruling rates; if they were, they did not long remain so.

The landlord papered the front rooms for us—for those to be occupied in day-time we chose from a local store an appropriate pattern of brown *fleur-de-lys* on a green ground; we papered the back ourselves. I made the drugget and matting floor-coverings, the chintz curtains, the dimity bed-furniture—made everything, in fact, that was sewable, for, fortunately, I come of a long line of good needle-women. When I remember the time-honoured theory that a writing person is no good for anything else, I feel obliged, at the risk of appearing a braggart, to parade the above fact. I take pride in announcing that I never hired a sewing-woman—that, having made all my own clothes as a girl, even to the wedding-gown, I made all my children's, until the boys grew beyond their sailor suits, and the girl put her hair up. In fact, housework has all along been the business of life; novels have been squeezed into the odd times. It was many a long year before I had a dress-maker's dress, or went to such lengths of luxury and extravagance as to order carpets or curtains to be made for me. I have even manufactured sofas, with G.'s assistance, he making the very solid hardwood frames. We once had two beautiful ones, regular Chesterfields, entirely home-made, in one of the several auction sales that the distance between one home and the next have forced upon us; there was quite a rush to buy them. Only when the [46]
purchasers attempted to take them away, it was found almost impossible to lift them from the ground. The feather bed that had cradled me on board ship—we had two really, but the smaller one cradled servants for awhile—now took its permanent place amongst the never-failing

comforts of the house; I broke it up into pillows and cushions, a few of which covered, like charity, all the sins of amateur workmanship in our springless couches.

The room of our cottage that had the front door in it was the sitting-room, of course. Here we dined in full view of the street—had there been one—when summer evenings gave light enough; our doctor and his wife, pulling up their horses before the house, could see for themselves whether we were at the end of our meal or in the middle; I would go out with an offer of pudding or coffee sometimes, but as a rule I left everything and flew for hat and gloves. The room at the other end was our bedroom. The little cubicle between combined dressing-room and study. There was not space to swing a cat in any of them, had we wanted to swing a cat. There certainly was no room to swing the cradle, when that article of furniture was introduced; fortunately, we did not want to swing that either. We did not believe in rockers, and made a great virtue of necessity when we took them off.

But after all, humble as it was, it was a sweet little place when we had fixed it up. Bishop and Mrs Perry, paying us their first call, were enthusiastic about it. They had been making a long tour from country parsonage to country parsonage, which, notwithstanding the benevolence of parishioners, are as a rule struggling homes, "shabby genteel," in their appointments; and this [47] bright, simple, tidy (though I say it that shouldn't) little toy dwelling was, to use their own word, an "oasis" amongst them. One truth that I have learned from my manifold domestic vicissitudes is that you can make a nice home out of anything, if you choose to try. You do not really want all the things that you are brought up to think you want. Sometimes it is even a relief to be without them.

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[48]

CHAPTER V

ToC

DIK

All my recollections of the first home, and the one succeeding it, embrace the figure of a friend who was virtually of the family while we lived in them. He has so long been dead that I may with propriety refer to him more fully than I can speak of his contemporaries yet living, and it is a particular pleasure to do so in view of his nationality and of the times in which I write. For he was a Dutchman—and everything, almost, that a man should be. If he did no good for himself in Australia—his birth and training were against that—he did much for his country within the compass of his little sphere. He gave some of us a faith in and a respect for it that nothing in the South African struggle has been able to impair. I have been British throughout the war to the marrow of my bones, but in the worst of times have had to bear in mind that our veldt foe comes of the stock which produced that perfect gentleman. I have not otherwise compared them, but I can never think meanly of any Dutchman after knowing him.

He joined our ship in London, and during the voyage we noticed that he was a lonely traveller, silent and sitting by himself. We therefore made little overtures, thinking to cheer him for the moment, and not foreseeing what they would lead to. G. played chess with him a good deal; when [49] I was well enough to join them I undertook the difficult but interesting task of drawing him out of his shell, where his thoughts were. Although we learned from him that a knowledge of the English language was imperative in Holland amongst cultured people, it needed friendship to cast out of him the fear of making himself ridiculous by his manner of speaking it, which certainly was quaint. Without protestations on either side, friendship was established, and then he talked, and did not mind our laughing at him. We instructed him in our idioms and customs, and he us in his; some of the Dutch names for things that we learned from him are in domestic use to this day. I cannot remember that he overcame his sensitive reserve in respect of any other passenger, unless in the case of a childless married lady who was accompanied by her pet cat and dog. Pussy lived with her and her husband in their cabin, where the arrangements for its accommodation, and the cat's own intelligent adaptation to them, were so wonderful that it caused no annoyance either to them or us; the dog, for whom a high passage fare had been paid, spent his nights somewhere under the care of the butcher, but his days with his devoted mistress. Dogs were a passion with our friend, and there was soon an affectionate understanding between him and this one. He got permission to give it lessons, and at stated times went off with it under his arm to his own cabin, where they would be closeted together for an hour or two. Not a sound would we hear of what went on, but at intervals there was a public performance by the pupil, which, eye to eye with its teacher, would go through tricks and evolutions that a circus dog might envy. This was [50] the only instance I can recall of social intercourse on his part with anyone on board, save us.

He was intensely proud, with a temper behind his pride that could never be safely played with, even by his familiar housemates; life itself was a trifle compared with any point of honour in his code—to be given in its defence, if need were, without an instant's hesitation; but there was not a

trace of false pride in the whole warp and woof of him. This, however, goes without saying, since I have already said that he was at all points a gentleman.

And, back of his reserve and pride, which wore so cold and stolid an air, was a heart like a shut furnace. Rarely did the flame shine through his grave eyes, but it did when the moment of threatened parting came. "Tell me where you live," he said, as if asking for his life; "I must live there."

As soon as we knew, we told him, and a week after our arrival at W—— he turned up, together with a pair of beautiful (and very expensive) dogs. He boarded at the hotel, and came to us every day. And, so far as Australia was concerned, we were his family, and our house his home, thenceforth.

His name was Diederik, which we shortened to Dik. His other name was not undistinguished in his own country, as we learned from his family photographs and the casual but complete evidence provided by the conditions of our joint domestic life—not by direct statement from him, the most modest of men. The picture of his home in Leyden showed a beautiful old house on a tree-bordered canal; in this house, it seemed, each member of the large family had his or her suite of rooms and separate personal servant. "This is a brother of me," he would say, as we [51] turned over his album; and questions would elicit the fact that the person indicated held a court appointment at the Hague. Another "brother of me" filled an important post in the Dutch East Indies; he was governor—kontroleur 1st klasse—of Riouw. Dik was a younger son, born with that bent for wandering which is not confined to any class or nation. And his equipment for the enterprise to which he had committed himself was almost ludicrously elaborate. He had a perfect arsenal of deadly weapons—for the native savages and wild beasts, I suppose. Guns and small arms of all sorts and sizes, the finest of their kind, with tons of ammunition to match, enough to furnish forth a small regiment. I still have a stumpy little six-chambered revolver, which he insisted on my keeping by me, in case I should be molested while alone in the house; and I ought to have also a beautiful inlaid hair-trigger pistol, which was the instrument with which he taught me the art of self-defence. Daily he would call me from my sewing or cooking to shoot bottles off the yard fence, until my execution upon ounce phials satisfied him that I was able to protect myself from the marauding black or bushranger. He had a tool-chest which contained every tool, and large sets of most of them, that handicraftsman could need under any circumstances—even to a turning-lathe, with which, and a great hunk of ivory tusk, he used to make me buttons and sleeve-studs. As for "hempjes" and such things, they were in dozens upon dozens. And all that costly outfit to be so soon disintegrated and dispersed!

The first thing he did at W—— was to help us into our cottage, himself inheriting our lodgings [52] and the quinces from us. How useful he was! Until I had a maid—the last piece of furniture procured—he was up o' mornings to chop wood, draw water, boil kettles, and so on; and all day he was on the look-out for a job, the more menial the better. Tears, even now, are not far from my eyes when I open my old diary upon such items as these:—"October 31st. Dik beginning to make a garden for me." ... "December 7th. Dik up in the dark to catch fish for breakfast." ... "December 8th. Dik up early again to get me fish." Whenever he was at home this sort of thing went on, and all without the slightest fuss or gush, and with a frown for thanks. When there came the prospect of a most important domestic event, we had every reason to flatter ourselves that he had not the dimmest notion of it, from first to last. I made every scrap of baby-clothes myself, and he, being so constantly with us, must have seen me doing it; in fact, I abandoned the usual precautions just because he seemed too utterly dense to notice anything. He was nothing of the sort. It was part of his perfect gentlemanliness not by word or sign to show that he knew, even in his private talks with my husband, otherwise the talk of brothers. One evening he left for his lodgings, as usual, and the great business was comfortably disposed of before the hour of his return in the morning. G. and I, in the midst of our excitements, found a moment to laugh together over the tremendous shock of surprise that we were going to give him. But lo! when he came he manifested no surprise—only quite broke down in trying to express his thankfulness that it was safely over. He [53] was brought in to peep at the new arrival, and I felt like a scoffer at sacred things to have met with a jest that smileless and speechless emotion. On leaving my room, he dashed for his horse, tied to the front gate, and galloped off towards the town; thence in a few minutes he returned, bearing as his offering to the new master of the house a wicker cradle on the saddle before him! He must have looked a ridiculous object, but was lifted above all care for the opinion of the street. That was the cradle I had to wedge into such a tight place that rockers were no use to it. Later it was his joy to nurse the little one, to watch his first movements of intelligence, and speculate as to what period "his nose would come downstairs."

I ought to mention here that his attitude towards women was one of austerest respect and dignity. I shall never forget the blackness of his brow and mood when we returned one night from a day's outing, having left him to keep house for us. It appeared that our Irish maid had taken advantage of the opportunity to make tender overtures to him. She had come behind him as he was reading and smoking, stroked his hair, and addressed him as a "poor feller." I was not supposed to know anything of this, but got the tale from G., and was thus able to take steps to prevent such assaults in future. To me, for whom he had so deep a regard, Dik was a brother, without ever using a brother's familiarities. No man ever treated me with such absolute reverence and respect.

Between the 30th of that first October, when he was making me a road through the "common" that the continued rains had turned into a swamp, and the 7th of December, when he went a- [54] fishing for my breakfast, he made a start upon his own Australian career—the bright beginning that declined to so sad an end. By no fault of his, poor boy! unless his breeding was his fault. He

was young and strong—immensely strong—the typical big-limbed, burly Dutchman, eager to work and to rough it, afraid of nothing; he simply failed as I have seen dozens of young men of good family fail—as they all do, if I may judge by my own experience—who come out to make their fortunes under the same conditions. Had he been a skilled mechanic, he would have found his luck immediately; had he been prepared to pay his premium as a "jackaroo"—*i.e.* an apprentice to the run-holder, who charged £100 a year or so for imparting "colonial experience"—he would have been taken into one of those delightful Bush-houses that I have mentioned, and might have risen (without capital) to be a station manager. But as an amateur who did not know the ropes, his ideas of the situation gathered from books or evolved from his inner consciousness, Dik fared as I shall describe. I give his case because, in its way, it is so distinctly characteristic of the country, and as such may be instructive to the English reader.

Having received ourselves such extraordinary kindness and attentions from the squatter families of our parish (hundreds of miles in area), we thought it an easy thing to make interest for our friend; and so it proved—to a certain extent, which did not go beyond the rough regulations of the Bush, not yet grasped by such new chums as we. An old squatter accepted our guarantee for Dik, and told us to send him along. It was the busy shearing-season, when odd hands were [55] required. Joyfully we took home our news. Hopefully we borrowed a buggy, and ourselves drove him to the house of that old squatter, nursing-father that we imagined him. It was so far that we stayed the night, and we thought it odd to lose sight of Dik as soon as we arrived, and not to see him again to say good-bye; but we came away under the impression that, when not out on the run, he would be treated by the house as it treated us.

He left W—— on the 10th of November. On the night of the 19th he rode back, departing at dawn on the 21st, which means that he spent Sunday, his free day, with us. He was invisible for a time, while G. got him a bath and clean linen, and when he appeared he was taciturn and depressed, loth to talk of his experiences, which had evidently been a shock to him. Of course he had been sent to live at the "men's hut" amongst the all-sorts that at shearing season crowd that unsavoury abode. It was his place, but he had not known it; nor had we; and I for one was furious at the outrage, as I considered it, that had been put upon him. He had had fights, it appeared, with the lowest of the low—possibly decent work fellows, who had not understood him; he had come through personal foulnesses not to be mentioned in ladies' company. G. told me all about it afterwards.

On the 26th that job was done. He returned to us like a released convict, and we made much of him for a time. This would not do, however, and again he sought for employment. One night, in a [56] fit of desperation at the delay in finding it, he took a sudden resolution to go out into the Bush, with a swag on his saddle, and ask for work from station to station, resigned to the men's hut—to anything. I remember my feelings as I saw him start in the moonlight, just before I went to my own comfortable bed. He was going to ride all the cool night, and take his rest in the fiery day; for it was December now, and horses and dogs were as children to Dik. By the way, he left his dogs with us while on these expeditions. Their puppy exuberance got us into many scrapes, although I do not believe that all the tattered fowls brought to us by our neighbours, with hints that we should make their excessive value good, came by their deaths as we were told they did. Otherwise the keep of the playful creatures cost little or nothing, because they were fed mainly upon opossums. Nightly, after dinner, the gun or guns were taken out, and I don't know which enjoyed the expedition most, the sportsmen or the dogs. There were 'possums in every tree in those days, and Dik and G. were both good marksmen. When too dark to distinguish 'possum or gun-barrel, they tied a white handkerchief round the muzzle of the latter and located the former (already approximately located by the dogs) with the stable-lantern usually held up by me. An artificial light not only fascinates but paralyses the little animal, draws him like a magnet, and then holds him rigid, his large, liquid eyes fixed upon it, so that he is as steady to shoot at as a target at the butts. Under those circumstances he seems completely indifferent to his shrieking enemies at the foot of the tree, ready to tear him in pieces the moment his limp body thuds down [57] to them. Although our valuable pair flourished upon it, I am horrified now to think of feeding dogs upon such meat. Well, we could not do it now, if we wanted to. At that time 'possums were vermin to the white man, pests of the fruit garden (though we never found them eating fruit, but only leaves), like the parrots and minahs, from whom nothing was sacred. Not that they could have troubled us, for all the fruit we had was a double row of peach trees down one side of our back paddock. We had peaches of the finest quality literally in tons—and nothing else. In their season I would peel the flannel jackets from half a dozen before breakfast, and go on eating them at intervals all day (whereby I destroyed my taste for peaches, as it had already been destroyed for quinces, for the rest of my life); and the ground was so cumbered with them that we were grateful to the neighbours who came with buckets and wheelbarrows to get them for their pigs. The railway absorbed the peach trees with the cottage, and I buy peaches at the door to-day at a shilling the plateful. And the opossum seems in a fair way to become extinct—at any rate, in this state.

I still go, almost yearly, to rest from town life a a station in the neighbourhood of W——. The house—one of the first English-style houses in the district—is the same that it was thirty years ago, except that its red walls are mellower and its girdle of choice trees more grown and beautiful; and the dear family is the same, only the young ones now the elders, and a new generation in their place. On a late visit they drove me to W——, some eighteen or twenty miles distant; strange to say, it was the first time I had been into the town since those early days of [58] which I am talking, although I had passed it many times on the railway; and we started on our journey home in a soft twilight, prelude to a clear, faintly-moonlit night—such a night as, thirty years earlier, would have shown us an opossum in nearly every tree we drove by. It was country

road or bush-track all the way, and "Now, surely," I said, "I shall have the long-desired pleasure of seeing a 'possum again." I settled down into my front seat of the waggonette, laid my head back, and watched and watched for little ears sticking up, and bushy tails hanging down, which I should have been so quick to distinguish if they had been there. Not a hair—not a sign that a 'possum had ever lived in the land—all those lonely miles!

But a few nights afterwards I had my wish in rather a strange way. Being sleepless, I lit a candle at twelve or one o'clock, and tried to tranquillise myself with a book. The candle made a little halo about the bed, but left the rest of the room dim. One window was wide open, as I always had it; an armchair, with a cushion in its back, stood near the window. I heard no sound, but suddenly had that curious feeling of fright which precedes the discovery of the thing that frightens you; and, looking up, I saw two eyes, terrifyingly intense in their expression, glowing and glaring at me from the armchair. The thing crouched upon the top of the cushion, quite still, as if it had been there for hours. I thought it was a cat, and shooed and slapped my book; when it made no response to these manifestations, I knew it was an oppossum. The candle-light outside had lured him to its source, and he now sat lost in contemplation of the magic flame. I got out of bed and ran window-wards, in the greatest haste to be rid of the creature I had so long wished to [59] see; he crawled cringingly an inch or two, but I had to push him with the edge of my book off the cushion and the window-sill and out into the night. I could not imagine how he had got in, for my room was in an upper storey of the tall old house, the roof of the verandah some distance below; but, looking out in the morning, I saw that a course of brickwork, just about wide enough for a mouse, ran along the face of the wall, not far from the window, and that a great white cedar tree stood close to one end of it. I boasted at breakfast that I had seen a 'possum at last, but I am careful now, when I sleep in that room, not to burn a midnight candle with the window open.

To return to Dik. On the 18th he came back to tell us he had found a job. I do not remember what it was, but it is recorded in my diary that we had a gala dinner in honour of it. He returned again before breakfast on Christmas Day. G. had distant country services afternoon and evening, and the three of us went together and made a picnic of it, keeping our domestic festival for Boxing Day, in the night of which Dik left us, while we slept. But on the 28th of January that job also came to an end—not from any fault of his, but just because it was a little one and he had finished it. The neighbourhood was searched again, and he went work-hunting into New South Wales with no success. He had long ago sold his horse, and now he began to sell his other things —guns, tool-chest, lathe, non-essential clothes—throwing them away one after the other, for a mere song, in spite of our remonstrances. He left his lodgings for cheaper ones; later on we persuaded him to exchange these for a shakedown with us; but he was too proud to owe us bed and board, and only stayed in the brief intervals between his futile tramps, when he knew we [60] should be cut to the heart if he did not. It came to broken boots and ever-increasing shabbiness, to the shunning and slighting of him by persons who were not worthy to be named in the same breath with him, to his growing gaunt for want of sufficient food. "This in your hospitable Australia!" the reader may exclaim. Yes, indeed; and he is not the only one I have seen thus circumstanced, by many—only the others were mostly getting their deserts, which he was not.

One night a mysterious message was brought to G., who slipped out of the house in answer to it. It transpired later that Dik was lurking in the vicinity wanting to know if there were any letters for him. He had sent word secretly to G., not wishing me to know, because he was "not fit to see her any more." Of course, I was not going to stand that. We dragged him in, gave him a bath and clothes, fed him and talked to him—scolded him well, indeed, for his obstinate refusal to write to his father, a course that we had urged upon him until we were tired of the hopeless conflict with his preposterous pride.

However, he melted at last—that very night, I think. His confession was made and posted, and all we had to do was to hold on until the answer arrived. As it chanced, the only serious accident that I can remember happening to a P. and O. steamer on the Australian line (prior to the wreck of the *China*) happened to the one that had his money on board. Her letters were recovered from the sea-bed, but not in time to be of use to us; so there was yet another long delay. But eventually all came right. His empty pockets were filled once more, and a new career provided for him. He was to go to his brother in the Dutch East Indies, and become a planter of something. [61]

The change was so great and sudden that he did not all at once "know how he had it with himself," to use his own phrase. He wrote to us from Melbourne before he sailed (April 20th, 1872):—"You know me enough for being a bad hand in making speeches. What I want to let you feel is"—and he made a very touching one upon the subject of our friendship for him. Then he mentioned his state of mind. "The time passes quick away. At day-time I have plenty to do, and in the evening I am in the opera, what makes me a little jolly, but yet there is a kind of stupidity about me. I don't know what it is." From Galle he wrote at length, and with his old ease, describing his voyage in detail, and his fellow-passengers, of whom one was a wholesome annoyance to him. "When you are talking with somebody he always will put his nose between it, and the rest of the day he whistle tunes out of operas." In Ceylon he made a sporting expedition into the country, and "after you have seen so long the miserable Bush of Australia is this beautiful." He had some delightful shooting, in spite of the fact that, in consequence of having cut his feet against a "coral riff" while swimming, "the only way I could go shooting was on a pair of slippers." Then, with the Dutch mail from Singapore to Batavia:—"it was very pleasant for me, as you understand, to hear the Dutch again. Everything was so as it was at home, no more puddings on table, but delicious vegetables, and the bitterjes like the home ones." And he had once more that first thing necessary to a happy life, his dog; not one of those mentioned, which remained with us, but a new one. On landing at Batavia, "I give my hondtje a walk. This is a beautiful [62]

creature, and came all the way good over. From Melbourne to Singapore was it expensive. I had to pay five pounds for him." Here he met Leyden friends, with whom he "passed the time jolly," and who led him to a place where he "had to get a ticket to be able to stop in this country;" and "the last days," he writes, "I feel me quite different, more as I was at home, surely in better spirits as on our road to Melbourne."

His brother shepherded him for a short time—took him to a place or two, from which, when they left, were "fired from shore canons"—but, unfortunately, the resident was ordered home by his doctor, and Dik was left once more to his own guidance. He presently reported himself from Deli, where he was learning the business of a "nutmace" planter. But his teacher, he was sorry to say, had turned out an "offel snob," and he (Dik) had "little to make with him. I have my room and everything I want and pay him monthly, and when he is in a bad humour he can go his way and don't talk to him." When this gentleman "used one of his rough expressions to me," wrote Dik, "I got offel angry"—I can imagine it!—"and told him if he did so again he would know me better. You understand a fellow who stand that in his own house what he is. So you see I am not all right yet. But I am practising patience, fine thing, but offel tiresome." Incidentally he remarks, "I see you think I am sitting on Java, but am a good distance away from there;" and he gives much interesting information about Dutch colonial government and customs, which I have not space to reproduce. He wishes he had an Australian horse again. "These little things I am tired of; they are very pretty, but I am too heavy for them." He promises me a tiger skin, and mentions the [63] ever-to-be-regretted fact that he had found "no occasion" to have his likeness taken.

The next letter (Deli, March 20th, 1873) was all unclouded joy. He had left "that fellow" and was now "as jolly as possible," settled down in partnership with four other gentlemen of his own class, one Dutch and three English—"so you see there is no fear I will forget my English the first time." They had 250 "culies." "I have a field where 100 are working, and go there and see them work every day, with Victor my dog, named after Victoria ... so you see at last I come to a good place, and hope to stick to this ... if I don't get along will be my own fault."

Glad indeed were we to read those words! We wrote to tell him so. And the letter containing our congratulations came back to us long months afterwards, with this message scrawled across the envelope:—"Dead. Mr van K—— died in Deli."

The last document of the little bundle from which these extracts are taken is as graceful a piece of composition as was ever penned. The handwriting is Dutch, but the words are English, and I have never read an English letter that was more faultlessly expressed. It is his family's acknowledgment of what we did—little enough, but made much of in his home letters—for their beloved son, "to support his energies in his days of trial." From this we learned that he had been "seized with typhus fever, to which he succumbed on the 4th of June 1873, after ten or twelve days' illness."

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[64]

CHAPTER VI

ToC

THE SECOND HOME

On the 26th of July 1871 we moved into our second home—not more than a mile or so from the first—Dik again helping us. The chance to get a little more breathing-space and elbow-room, much needed since we had become a family, fell to us through the death of our friend the police magistrate. That sad event left his widow with means too small to permit of her retaining her pretty home for a day after she was able to leave it. We took it from her, and lived in it for about four months—until G. was appointed to his first parish; after which our house was provided for us, with no rent to pay any more.

Distance lends enchantment to it, of course, but it is impossible that "Como" could have been other than charming, with its then surroundings. It had been the dwelling of two police magistrates, and the first and longest occupier had made the place, while his wife had been a gardener. My journal reeks of that garden. In the prime of the spring season (October 12th) there is an entry which credits it with "innumerable varieties of everything," including, naturally, "roses all over the house" and "our own asparagus for dinner every other day." The (even then) old house, masked with shrubs and hedges, surrounded by beds and borders full of sweets, [65] turned its face upon a wooded paddock, through which a path led out to the road; the ground behind fell steeply to the "lake" so ambitiously named—a large backwater of the river, preserved by the landlord (who allowed only himself and his tenant to shoot over it), and therefore the sanctuary of native aquatic fowl.

That lake was the region of romance to me. The sunrises out of its mists and shimmers, the moonbeams on its breast at night, that I used to step out upon the terrace-like verandah to feast upon—they are pictures of memory that can never fade. Flocks of black swans used to sail past

the kitchen door within reach not of a stone, but of a potatoe peeling; early and late the air was full of the quick beat and rush of wings—wild duck in hundreds and thousands going out or coming home. They quacked and scuffled in the thick reeds at night, as we walked near them. The two sportsmen could not resist the temptation to shoot more than we could eat. I have it down in my diary that on the 28th of July 1871 G. killed three teal with one shot. I saw it done, and it was no great feat, seeing that the little birds were so thick that their flight at the moment was like the flutter of silver cloth. In that watery time the lake was generally brimming. One night we were called up by the bellowing of the cow, and Dik and G. rode naked into the inclosure where her calf had been submerged to its nose by a sudden rise; they were only just in time to save it. We had a roomy boat, in almost constant use. A friend or two would come out to dine, and after dinner we would paddle them about in the moonlight—explore the "North-West Passage," which reminded me of a "fleet" in the Broads at home. We fished sometimes for next [66] day's breakfast; I believe they were catfish and other coarse things, but we seem to have eaten them contentedly; I remember how we used to light a candle to see to bait our hooks. And it was, of course, a very paradise for 'possums. So near the water they swarmed—water being no less attractive to trees, which crowd upon it wherever they can find footing. Under the trees around Como we and the dogs enjoyed such 'possum hunts as we never had elsewhere. It was mostly dark, and on warm nights dangerous—though we never thought of that—snakes being as partial to the water-side as 'possums and trees; many an one did we encounter when looking for something else, and we have seen them undulating in mid-stream like miniature sea-serpents.

But a greater danger than snakes attended these expeditions, as we discovered on a certain night (August 28th). The sportsmen were too well trained to be careless with firearms, but when you carry them in the dark through a thicket of saplings and stumps and prostrate logs, accidents are liable to happen. On this night we were proceeding Indian file, Dik leading, I next, G. protecting my rear, when Dik's gun, carried muzzle down, touched an invisible snag, which jerked it from his arm. In falling forward the trigger was struck or jagged with sufficient force to explode the charge. I saw down the barrel as the flame leaped out, apparently at my breast; and then we all stood still for some seconds, expecting horrors. When nothing more happened, and each was proved unhurt, we returned home very soberly, Dik himself much shaken. I then went to my room, took off the thick shawl in which I had wrapped myself against the night air, and [67] held it up before a light. It was riddled with little holes. I took it back to the sitting-room, and spread it between Dik's eyes and the lamp, and made some joke about his having tried to kill me. I never joked that way again. He could not have felt it more deeply if he had really injured me and done so on purpose. I don't think he ever got over it.

It was at Como that I had my first private snake adventure. I was giving my baby an airing in the garden when a call from the maid-of-all-work sent me hurrying into the backyard. A deadly six-footer (carefully measured afterwards) sat upon a few rings of its tail near the wall of the little dairy—a most enticing place to snakes—the rest of its body upreared to about the level of my waist, its head, with the flickering tongue, distractedly darting to and fro. I often worried about snakes when I could not see them; having this one in the open before me, I was not in the least afraid of it.

"You keep it there," said the girl—for there was no man on the place at the time—"while I go and get the clothes' prop."

For some minutes I stood within a few feet of it, the baby in my arms, cutting it off from its lakeside lair; and it must have been my formidable calmness which kept it from flinging itself upon me, as I have seen other snakes do when thus desperately at bay, although they will always wriggle out of a difficulty if a loop-hole is left to them. We killed it with the clothes' prop and put it under an inverted wash-tub, whence I proudly drew it in the evening when the doctor came to dinner. I gave him the history of the execution, and he read me a serious lecture. I promised him [68] never to "hold up" a cornered snake again.

But if I let myself go with snake stories I shall not know where to stop, so I will only tell one more, which has some features out of the common. This snake lived in the church of G.'s first parish. Its hole was visible to the congregation, and it used to show its head to them in service time (during the sermon, probably) and make them nervous. So it was sought to entice it to its destruction with saucers of milk. The parson used to lay the bait over-night, and go to look for results in the morning. Always the saucer was found empty, but for a long time the snake was not found. At last he saw it coiled asleep upon the white cloth laid over the chancel carpet, where the sun from the east window poured warmly down upon it. So he hewed it in pieces before the altar, as Samuel hewed Agag.

What alarmed me much more, though with less cause, than snakes were the blacks, which at that time wandered into one's life as they never did afterwards. Some remnants of the river tribes remained about their old haunts, apparently in their old state of independence. I had seen them from the deck of the steamer, squatting on the banks in their 'possum skins, or fishing naked from a boat that was simply a sheet of bark as torn from the tree; in W—— they trailed about the streets in some of the garments of civilisation, grinning amiably at the white residents, on the look-out for any trifles of tobacco or coppers that a kindly eye might give hope of. They are hideous creatures, poor things, and their attempts at European costume did not improve their appearance. The most extraordinary human figure that I ever saw was a black gin in a bird-cage [69] crinoline. She had something else on, but not much—only what would drape a small part of the lattice-work of steels and tapes, through which her broad-footed spindle legs were visible, strutting proudly. When I, being alone in the house, saw a black fellow evidently making for it, I used to think of all the horrible tales I had read in missionary magazines as a child, and wonder

where Dik's revolver was. He only wanted bacca, or an old rag of clothes, or a penny, or a bit of meat—bacca first, always; and there was nothing savage about him except his looks. Some of the stations in that district made a point of protecting and showing kindness to the blacks. On these they made their camps, and swarmed like the dogs about the homesteads, bringing offerings of fish, and receiving all sorts of indulgences in return. I visited at the one of those places which was most notoriously benevolent in this direction. The gins whose husbands had used the waddy to them used to come to the house to have their wounds plastered; the nursing mothers got milk and other privileges; some of the least lazy and dirty young ones were put into the family's cast-off clothes and taken into a sort of service—given little jobs of dish-washing and wood-chopping, for which they were overpaid in such luxuries as they most valued. I was deeply interested in seeing them at such close quarters, and studying their strange habits and customs; it was a valuable and picturesque experience. But there was not a lock or bolt on any door, and a half-witted black woman who was a particular pet used to roam into my bedroom in the middle of the night, to examine me, my baby, my clothes, my trinkets on the dressing-table—which was too much of a good thing. When I hinted as much to the hospitable family, they used to say easily, [70] "Oh, she's quite harmless." But I never could get used to it. After leaving W—— I saw little more of these disinherited ones, until many years later a few visited us in the Western District. These were refugees or escapees from a neighbouring Mission Settlement. Theirs was a tale of tyranny and injustice to melt a heart of stone. They had been compelled to sing and pray without getting any remuneration for it. "Not a farden!" said one black man, solemnly, with a dramatic lift and fall of the hands. "Not a farden!" I remember wondering how he had come by the phrase, since I do not recollect ever seeing a farthing in this country. The Australian despises a coin so petty. He treats it as though it were not in the currency. To be sure, the tradesman charges elevenpence three-farthings for many things, but an odd farthing on the total of his bill always becomes a halfpenny.

It was while living at Como that I "went to town" for the first and last time in many years. There is a gap in my diary where the happenings of November and December (1871) should have included this, but memory easily retains the correct impression of such a sharply-cut event.

We made the trip in a ramshackle little open buggy, consisting of a floor and two movable seats —a most useful country vehicle, upon which you could cart firewood or potatoes, when it was not wanted to cart human beings. We took a girl friend with us (the baby was left with the visiting sister-in-law), and our three portmanteaux; and one poor horse managed the journey in four or five days. We jogged along easily, as near the making railway as we could get, because the scrub had been cleared from that track more or less; camping in the shade at mid-day to lunch and rest [71] the horse, and putting up for the night in a convenient township, taking our chances in the way of hotel accommodation, which was of all sorts. Rarely could we bring ourselves to make full use of the beds provided for us; we slept, as a rule, outside of them, in blankets of our own improvising.

When not far from Melbourne we fell in, towards evening, with the most ferocious thunder-storm of my experience—and that is saying a great deal. All we could do was to get ourselves and the horse away from the trees and the buggy, over the tyres and metal work of which the lightning ran like lighted spirit, and then stand doggedly—the horse with head and tail between his legs, we three tightly clasped together, our faces turned inward and hidden—and silently endure until the fury of the elements was past. When it was passed, and we drove drenched and dripping to the nearest hotel, which fussed over us with fires and hot drinks, it was found that my little portmanteau (frocks folded close in those days) had been put into the buggy that morning wrong side up. The deluging rain, running inside the flap, had saturated all my best clothes! My wedding-dress was done for; my next best gory all over with the dye from cerise ribbons that had lain next it; muslins and laces a flimsy pulp. And the ruin was irremediable, except in the case of the latter (I sent the two silks to be dyed black, and they were returned after some months stiff and crackly, so obviously dyed that they were no use as frocks again). Literally, I had not a stitch to wear. My companion lent me clothes while my travelling things were drying, and when I got to Melbourne I could hardly put my nose out of doors. Instead of enjoying myself with my friends, I [72] had to scheme to hide myself from them—the only thing to be done, since I could not afford to repair my losses on the spot. As soon as G. had done his necessary business, we turned round and came home again.

We brought back with us the widow of that police magistrate who had dropped dead in his dressing-room at Como, and her baby. And we had the hottest of midsummer weather, and the fiercest of north winds. The tracks were deep in dust like sea-shore sand; our faces were skinned with the sun; we wilted on the hard buggy seats under our useless umbrellas; the poor horse gave up, and had to be left by the way. But all our concern was for the unfortunate infant. Whenever we came to sheltered water we used to get down and lay him in; we carried bottles of it with us to pour over him as we drove. We spent one night in a red-hot corrugated-iron hotel, and his mother and I sat up through the whole of it, taking turns at sponging him. He came through safely, although she lost him afterwards—her only son.

That abortive expedition was, as I have said, the last I made to Melbourne for a very long time. The Bush "township" became my world. When I speak of the Bush, it is understood that I do not mean a place of bushes. The term, with us, is equivalent to "the country"—the country generally, though particularly and originally its uncultivated parts. "The miserable Bush of Australia," poor Dik called it, and it has that character with many, I know; but—save, perhaps, at the first glance —it never struck me that way. In the exquisite lights, the clear distances, the fine atmosphere of this climate, Nature has to be beautiful, whatever she wears. I love her in this grey-green gown— [73] and I have been a bushwoman for twenty-three years in all. The trouble is, of course, that man,

who does not live by bread alone, lives still less on scenery.

We did not really settle down in W——. Life there was difficult and worrying on the professional side, and with every passing week we longed more to extricate ourselves from a position that we had seen at the beginning to be without promise of comfort or success. But on the social, the secular, side, we had nothing to complain of. We had not begun to miss the things we were cut off from, and the new experiences were delightful. So also with the domestic conditions. It was here that I mastered the rudiments of Bush housekeeping, and no lessons were ever more interesting.

I may say, at once, of my Bush life that, from the housekeeper's point of view, it has been full of comfort—always. This is, I suppose, chiefly because I have never had that servant trouble which seems to keep families in general in constant distress and turmoil. The Irish girl who took liberties with Dik was otherwise a willing and likeable person; the vinegary widow who followed her, and who, being the mother of a boy of twelve, made me put her down in the census paper as aged twenty-five, would have been considered an excellent servant in the most proper English household; and so would her successor, a smart lady who went to church o' Sundays in silks and velvets, and drank all our spirituous liquors that she could lay her hands on. And these were the slight, very slight, mistakes at the beginning. Since then I have had virtually unbroken peace. I have never had to "look for a girl," never been to a registry office, never wanted for the best. And [74]
I have never yet met the missus who could say the same. I have my own opinions on this servant question. They may be heterodox, but they work out all right, which is the main thing. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. At the same time I know that I have had exceptional luck. The dear servants and friends who did so much to make my life happy were born good.

One devoted nurse who was with me for many years postponed a fixed wedding-day three times, rather than leave me when she thought I needed her more than usual. "No," she said, inexorably, when I remonstrated with her on behalf of her poor young man, "I am going to see you better first." On the last occasion it was:—"I am not going to let you have the trouble of moving with only strangers to help you. I shall see you settled first." She married from the house at last, so collapsed with grief over the parting that she could not touch the wedding-breakfast we had prepared. The bridegroom sat about forlornly, while I struggled to rally her with brandy and water and (when I dared not give her more of that) tea; and she drove away with the cake whole in her box, drowned in tears. She was a strong-minded woman too, who as a rule never "gave way," whatever the rest of us did.

Another long-service paragon, an Irish woman with a warm temper, could not get on with the lady-helps—sub-housekeepers during the years that I had no health to speak of. "No, ma'am," she said, when their disputes were brought before me, "I'll do anything for you, but I won't take orders from a person who's no better than I am." Although servants like her were precious [75]
rarities, and lady-helps a drug in the market, I felt bound to stand by my representative—the intermediary whose position is always difficult; and so the result would be that the other got a week's notice there and then. It made no difference. She stayed on just the same, although I did not ask her. They all stayed on—only leaving us to be married, or owing to family circumstances over which they had no control. The present incumbent of the kitchen has occupied it for nearly nine years.

Living, *i.e.*, feeding, in Australia is proverbially good, although the cooking is often unworthy of the material. Few in the land are, perhaps I should say were, they who do (or did) not sit down to a meat meal three times a day. Fruit that in England was nursed in orchard-houses and counted on south walls we could batten on now; a few pence would heap the sideboard with grapes or apricots, but all was so plentiful that it generally cost us nothing. Wine was not what it is now, and we could not at once break ourselves of our English beer; but it was not long before we learned to prefer the product of the local vineyards, to which we shall remain faithful to our lives' end. We got it, as we do still, in large stone jars, at less than the price of Bass or Guinness. With a poultry yard and a cow, and John Chinaman's vegetables, even a poor parson could live like a prince.

Two or three times a week, regular as clockwork, "John" came to the back door with his loaded baskets of the vegetables in season, fresh and good, various and cheap. Europeans had not the patience to grow them where they had so many enemies; it did not pay to do it, while he did it for us on such terms; it has been so all these years, and is so still. You will hardly find a private [76]
kitchen garden, except on the isolated stations, where the gardener is nearly always a Chinaman. Every little township depends, for the food it can least afford to do without, on the industry of this man who, of all others, is the most despised in the community, and of all others—tradesmen, at any rate—is the most reliable. I never was cheated, or in any way "let in," by a Chinaman, and never found him discourteous or disobliging. Those who clamour for his extinction from amongst us do not realise what country folk would miss if he were gone.

Poor John Chinaman! so industrious, so frugal, so inoffensive and law-abiding—an example to the white citizen of his class—if ever I feel ashamed of Australia it is on his account. Its treatment of him, who seems to have no friend amongst the nations, is indeed a strange satire upon the traditions of the British race. One can see a certain reasonableness in the poll tax of £50, hard as it seems that one only of the various aliens amongst us should be thus penalised (and for his industry too); it is, doubtless, advisable that we should prevent ourselves from being over-run (seeing that the earth is *not* for all); but the law which constitutes one Chinaman a factory is worthy of the Dark Ages, simply. Here is a sample of the sort of thing that Englishmen, with the Union Jack over their heads, can read in their newspapers of a morning as calmly as they read reports on the weather:—

"Hop Lee, who keeps a laundry in Gertrude Street, was charged at the Fitzroy Police Court this morning with having worked after hours on Saturday, the 26th January, contrary to the provisions of the Shops and Factories Act. Constable P—— deposed that about 5.30 P.M. on the [77] day named he went into defendant's premises and found him ironing collars. In September 1899 the defendant was fined for a similar offence. As £5 is the minimum penalty for a second conviction, Hop Lee was mulcted in that amount and ordered to pay £1, 1s. costs.

"Sam Pittee, who also keeps a laundry in Gertrude Street, was then charged with a similar offence, also on the afternoon of the 26th January. The defendant having pleaded guilty, the Bench inflicted a fine of £1, with £1, 1s. costs."

These are not men employing hands, but poor cottage workers "on their own"; and the police—who cannot take them up for brawling, or thieving, or woman-beating—because they don't do such things—watch and spy, as perhaps is their duty, to see that they sit with their hands before them through all the cool hours, while the wash that customers may be clamouring for lies about them undone. One poor Chinaman was arrested and fined for—according to his defence in court, which it appeared was not listened to—ironing his own shirt out of factory hours. And when candidates for the Federal Senate and House of Representatives were making their stump speeches, a "Reverend" gentleman amongst them, now a M.H.R., shouted these words to his electors (to be quoted almost without comment in the papers next morning):—"Chinese should be either pole-axed or poll-taxed in such a manner as would make the country too hot for them."

Ah, poor country! By the mouths of dozens of her most patriotic children I have heard her sigh [78] for the old days (before my time) when a deputy of the Crown and a few soldiers and policemen were all her Government. And no wonder.

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[79]

CHAPTER VII

ToC

THE THIRD HOME

On the 1st of January 1872 G. ceased to be a curate. On the 4th—and with thankfulness, I must confess—we left W—— for our own first parish.

It comes back to me, as if it were yesterday, the departure from Como. One of the numerous kind friends who seemed sorry to part with us lent us a roomy buggy, into which we packed many things besides ourselves—the small treasures of the house that we did not like to entrust to the waggons sent on before us with our modest stock of furniture. The last offerings of fruit and flowers being stowed on the top of these, the last good-byes said, we set off at a quiet pace, and took the whole day to the journey. It was all Bush track amongst the hills, and the weather, for midsummer, was kind. Twice we made a camp in a shady spot, sprawled on the grass while the horse grazed and the billy boiled, and ate our picnic meal luxuriously; and for miles we walked beside and around the buggy, fern hunting and curiosity gathering on behalf of the sister-in-law, whose main interest in Australia was centred in these things. It was our intention to make a holiday of the occasion, and we carried the intention out. But, oh, how tired we were when at last we sighted our destination! That is the moment that I remember best, when we crawled down [80] that break-neck "gap" which was the gateway to our valley, and saw across it on the other side, sitting on a soft slope, with a great blue mountain behind it, the little stone church and parsonage-house which were our bourne. In pity for our worn-out horse, we three elders were afoot, hobbling stiffly and uttering involuntary moans of exhaustion; only the dear baby, from whom we had not had a cry, lay fast asleep in the bottom of the buggy, in no way upset by his adventures.

The picture is before me now, bathed in the last lights of the summer day. It is one of the most beautiful that Australia can show. A newly-arrived bishop, being in the same spot as we were, and also for the first time, said he could not understand how we, having been privileged to live in such a place, had voluntarily left it! for we had left it then, because, as we reminded him, man needs more than scenery to satisfy him in this world. The little township nests in its fertile valley, and from the top of the gap you look down upon it and see no prosaic details, only that it is in itself a detail, completing the charm of the natural scene, the scheme of colour of which the lovely mountain blue is the dominant note—that blue which flames celestial pink in parts when the sun goes down. An awful trap to the amateur Jehu was that gap in those days; we realise it now far better than we did then. A metalled road, cut out of the hillsides and fenced, now winds through it, but it still calls for a good driver and a strong brake. We used to blunder down it, as down a wrecked staircase, in the darkest nights, and think nothing of it; no, although we were [81] shown the spot where a coach, whose horses missed their footing, was hurled down the ravine to utter smithereens with all hands. The fact was that in those days and in that part of the country we had to do these foolhardy things all the time, or we should never have got about at all. When

confronted with a tight place—a gully almost as steep as a house wall, or a river which was continually changing its soon-washed-out crossing-place, without putting up a guide post—we just "started in" and chanced it. It was the custom of the country, and the custom which made its drivers what they are, skilful and fearless beyond any in the world, unless we except the Americans, who built the vehicles that we used, the only sort capable of such use as we put them to. I do not remember that we worried in the least over the dangers to life and limb that we saw quite plainly before us; we were too well used to them. Now, when we recall our exploits, we tell each other that nothing would induce us to repeat them.

Descending the Gap for the first time G. led the Bush-horse, which was an old stager if we were not, calmly taking things as they came; and the Bush harness, on which life so often depends, was equal to its responsibilities (the owner was to be trusted to see to that). So we arrived safely at the door of what looked like the principal inn—the place and we were as yet strangers to each other—and there we camped for the night. Beds were our crying need. Everything else had to wait until sleep had recruited us. We were fairly dead beat.

But next morning we were all alive and vigorous again, in a fever of impatience to get home—completely home. The vans with our furniture had not arrived; the parsonage was shut and [82]
empty; we had designedly kept ourselves and our movements unannounced, so there was no one to show us the way about. Still, we lost not a moment after breakfast in getting the buggy re-packed, getting the keys of the house and church, and driving thither—through the tiny town, over the bridge spanning the willowy creek, and up the hilly road—firmly resolved to sit down by our own hearthstone forthwith, for good and all. But we always did that. In all our movings and re-furnishings, the first proceeding was to go in ourselves; a shakedown and something to eat, and we set to work from the centre and not from the outside. It is far the best way. And if there is one thing I love more than another it is the whole process of shifting camp—odd as I am sure it must appear: I grudge to miss a bit of it.

What a morning we had! Although the vans had not come, there was plenty to do in examining the premises, planning out rooms, and utilising the contents of the buggy, now put up, with the horse, in our own good brick stables. We were charmed with our house, which was nearly new and very complete in its appointments. Its walls of dressed granite made it very sound and cool; it was papered and painted as well as it could be, and the garden and young orchard were laid out with the same care to have all of the best; while its situation was almost unmatchable. The outlook from the French windows and the verandah outside them down the valley of the town to the Gap beyond, and backwards to the blue range behind, was one of ever-changing but constant beauty; none of our eight Australian homes had a lovelier setting. The brilliance and purity of the [83]
mountain air enhanced the complexion of it all, as well as the healthful capacity of the seeing eye. Down that grassy slope to the front gate big bushes of spiræa billowed in the spring; their overlapping wreaths were enormous; their masses of white gleamed right across the valley, visible from the Gap road. Everything one planted seemed to flourish there, and particularly the vineyards on some of the hillsides. Fine wines went out from that little town, to win medals and honourable mentions at the industrial exhibitions of the world. The manufacturer combined the professions of vigneron and doctor—in our time the only doctor for many miles around. He was a German gentleman who had left his country to escape some difficulty connected with military service, and was debarred from returning thither by the knowledge that he would thereby land himself in a fortress. Not that he had any hankerings for the Fatherland; he might have been born where we found him, so attached was he to his little town and the interests he had gathered about him; he lived there for over forty years, I believe, and is buried there, in the hill cemetery above our old home. Cut off as he seemed to be from the intellectual world, he yet kept touch with it; with all the work of his practice and his wine-making, he found time for scientific studies, not reading only, but writing for magazines and newspapers; and his active mind was absolutely free and fearless. Of course he never came to church—his English wife did—but that made no difference in the relations between us. No one was more welcome to the house than he, and his company was the salt that gave savour to the social life of the out-of-the-way little place. In his old age he became an ardent spiritualist, much to my surprise and puzzlement, and he died in [84]
that faith. His death was described to me by the doctor who attended him, a mutual friend. The good old man was seized with something which his medical knowledge told him must prove fatal within a given number of hours. He made no fuss or bother about it, and allowed no one else to do so, but chatted cheerfully with his colleague until speech failed him, with no more emotion than if he was preparing to go to bed and to sleep as usual.

His vineyards—doubled and quadrupled as time went on—were carved out of virgin Bush, and that Bush was a paradise for wild flowers and ferns. From creek gullies close by I used to gather armfuls of maiden-hair for church decoration, some fronds of which, measured on the dining-room table, spanned the whole width from side to side. One Christmas Eve I made the church a bower of it; every window was veiled in the green lace. Unfortunately, it was withered by morning—the usual condition of church decorations, on the actual day of festival, in this country.

The church, which we also rummaged over without loss of time, was of a piece with the house. Here we found the same careful arrangements and completeness of equipment, the lack of which in other colonial churches had so much surprised us, coming to them with our English eyes and notions; the stamp of the mind and quality of the first incumbent was plain in every direction (he was an Oxford man, expatriated for his health). A year or two ago I was there again; it and the house had faded and been neglected, and I was struck by the unexpected smallness of them both; but even then they were a pleasant contrast to those at W——, as they were in '72. And regarding [85]
the beauty of their situation, I found that memory had played no tricks with the records.

In the middle of our rummagings we realised that we were starving. That air was the hungriest we had ever breathed, and we had no food with us except the baby's. G. was despatched on a foraging expedition to the town, and presently returned with bread, butter, cheese, beer, meat, and a frying pan, together with smaller trifles, all in his own arms and pockets—for he never minds what he carries or where he carries it—the sister-in-law and I having prepared a fire in his absence. Shortly afterwards we enjoyed the meal which stands out amid the records of the past as *the* meal of my life—my only excuse for mentioning it. Soon the parish woke up to the fact of our presence in its midst, and invitations and offers of assistance poured in upon us; but I am always pleased to think that we got that wonderful scratch lunch first. It is a delicious memory.

The vans came, and we settled ourselves. I find an entry in my journal for February 10th (1873), "G. and I making a dining-table." And, three days later, "G. and I making a sideboard." We must have done these things, or they would not be set down, but how we did them, and with what result, I have no recollection, although the two sofas, also made for this house, are as plain to the mind's eye as they ever were. We could buy furniture at the shops—"stores" we called them—of our little town; bullock drays, that took weeks to do the journey from Melbourne, kept us regularly supplied with all necessary goods; so that the explanation of our various dabblings in [86]
the art of cabinet making will at once occur to the reader. We had expended the capital of £50 with which we started housekeeping, and, if I remember rightly, the parson's stipend did not exceed £250 per annum. In a parish of the dimensions of this one, horses (as distinct from a horse) were indispensable, and they had to be fed and shod. A buggy (second hand) and a piano (on time payment) were here added to the establishment; likewise a second baby and a nurse-girl. To make ends meet, and at the same time to have things as one wished—nay, as one was determined—to have them, considerable ingenuity and invention were required. I flatter myself that we did well, considering our youth, and that we were new to the conditions in which we found ourselves; but still we had to learn experience in many directions at an unexpected cost in cash. It is extraordinary how quickly money melts in Australia, compared with what it does at home. The reason is not that living is dearer, but that the ways of this country are so lavish and free-handed.

It was about this year (1873) that I began to write for the *Australasian*—trifling little papers, at long intervals—not because I found any fascination in such work to dispute the claims of the house and family, but to add something to the family resources when they threatened to give out. I had no time for more, until one day the editor of the *Australasian* wrote to inquire what had become of me and my contributions, when it occurred to me that it might be worth while to make time.

The Sunday school was at the further end of the township—it was the common school on week-days—and I used to rush thither morning and afternoon on Sundays, and return breathless to [87]
attend to my baby and play the (American) organ in church. I trained the choir, visited every parishioner within reach, did all that hard work unfairly demanded of the parson's wife under these democratic systems of church government; besides the multifarious work at home—making and mending, cooking and nursing, and, as it appears, building sideboards and dining-tables. Moreover, the Free and Compulsory Education Act had come into force (January 1873), and as the State had to be satisfied that our little nursemaid, who was within school age, was being educated according to law, I charged myself with this job also, rather than lose her services for the greater part of the day. And I may add that the baby in arms was rarely trusted to this functionary, except for airings in the garden under my eye. All other attentions that it required I gave myself. So there was enough occupation for one not-over-robust woman, without the addition of literary work.

Touching upon this matter, I am reminded of a conversation that I had with Bishop Perry soon after our arrival. It was not the hardships of the clergy that troubled him, he said, but the killing strain upon their wives—literally killing, for he quoted figures to show the disproportionately high rate of sickness and untimely death amongst them. I rather think I have heard Bishop Moorhouse express himself to the same effect. Certainly my own long and intimate acquaintance with the subject leaves me in no doubt as to which of the clerical pair is in the shafts and which in the lead. It is not the parson who, to use the phrase so often in his mouth, bears the burden and heat of the day, but the uncomplaining drudge who backs him at all points, and too often [88]
makes him selfish and idle by her readiness to do his work as well as her own. Under colonial and "disestablished" conditions, he is not largely representative of the class from which our home clergy are drawn; as a general rule he comes from that which, while as good as another in many ways, and perhaps better in some, is not bred to the chivalrous view of women and wives—regards them, that is to say, as intended for no other purpose than to wait upon men and husbands. The customs of the profession accord so well with this idea that it is not surprising to find a pious man killing his wife by inches without having the slightest notion that he is doing so.

Amongst my colleagues of those days was a lady of exceptional culture and refinement. Her husband, a Bush clergyman like my own, was poor, of course, and they averaged a baby a year until the baker's dozen was reached, if not passed. The way she "kept" this family was such that I never saw a dirty child or a soiled table-cloth or a slatternly touch of any sort in her house. She taught the children as they grew old enough; I know that she did scrubbing and washing with her own hands. In addition, she did "the parish work."

One day, when she was run down and worn out, her husband told her that the organist, from some cause, was not forthcoming, and there was no time to procure a substitute. "So, my dear, you will have to play for us." He knew that she could do it, for she had often done it before; it was the merest trifle of a task, compared with those she hourly struggled with; but it was the one

straw too many that breaks the over-loaded back. She looked at him in silence for a moment, flung out her arms wildly, and, exclaiming "I can do no more!" went mad upon the spot. She had [89] to be put into an asylum, and the parish and the husband and the growing young ones had to do the best they could without her. The husband, I may say, was—apart from being the inadvertent accomplice of the parish in her destruction—one of the very best of husbands and of men.

Only the other day I attended a gathering of the friends of a lady to whose loved memory it was desired to raise some public monument. She, lately dead, had been our bishop's wife, and so the meeting was appropriately presided over by dignitaries of the Church. They stood up, one after another, to air their views. "I propose," said a worthy canon, with the most matter-of-fact air in the world, "that every clergyman's wife be a collector for the fund"—of course. I heard a sigh and a *sotto-voce* ejaculation behind me—"the poor clergymen's wives!"—and the incident exactly shows how their male belongings treat them.

I, however, have not been a victim. Before I was willing myself to lighten the double strain, I was compelled to do so, and the parish—as well as all succeeding parishes—had to put up with it. But very early in the day I evolved opinions of my own as to the right of parishes to exact tributes of service from private individuals in no way bound to give them. And I came to a conclusion, which I have never since seen reason to alter, that the less a clergyman's wife meddles with her husband's business (except between themselves) the better, not only for her but for all parties. After I could plead the claims of a profession of my own, my position in the scheme of things was finally and comfortably defined. Parishes, like clerical husbands, when they tyrannise, do it [90] unconsciously, from want of thought, and not from want of heart. At any rate, my parish, for the time being, never, so far as I can see, bears me any malice for my desertion of the female-curate's post, but quite the contrary. For whereas we should be sure to chafe each other if forced into an unnatural and uncongenial relationship, we are now the best of neighbours and mutually-respecting friends.

Having been a fervid young churchwoman at home, where I district-visited in the most exemplary manner, with tracts and soup-tickets and all the rest of it, for my own pleasure, parish work, when it became my business, was not at all irksome as such. And there was one part of it which was a source of great enjoyment during the three years that we lived in Y——.

It was the training of the choir. At first, with much nervousness and diffidence, I taught hymns and chants for an hour a week, and played them at the Sunday services in the midst of my little band, which had never conceived of higher flights. But ambition was generated in us as we warmed to our work. Recruits arrived from far and near, some of whom could read music, and we spread ourselves in an occasional anthem. There have been, and are, many thousands of choirs as pleased with themselves as we were, but never was there one more harmonious, in every sense of the word. To the best of my recollection we never had a tiff, and such was the attraction of our meetings that no weather—rain, storm, mud, darkness—could keep away the men (some of them quite elderly), who had to tramp miles through the Bush, after a hard day's work, to attend them. Especially in the winter.

For when winter came, and the church was cold, I had the practices in the house, with piano [91] accompaniment. The bright log fire—firewood is the one thing we have always been extravagant in, on principle—and the much-pillowed amateur sofa, and the chairs collected from the general stock and grouped invitingly, made the homely drawing-room a good, thawing sort of place for the storm-buffeted to come to and to sing in. Most carefully were wet wraps and umbrellas left outside, and boots rubbed and scrubbed on door-mats; and never did an evening-party show itself better bred. For that is what the choir practice came to—a "musical evening" once a week. We fell into the habit of clearing off the chants and hymns rather hastily, and devoting the bulk of our ever-extending time to experiments in the higher forms of part-singing. We were not experts, any of us, but we made up in enthusiasm what we lacked in knowledge, and ended by so distinguishing ourselves that the fame of our performances has not died out in the district yet. For although on pleasure bent, we kept an eye to business, and selected music with the secondary view of getting anthems out of it eventually. Our great achievement was Mozart's Twelfth Mass. It took us a long time, but we fumbled through it from beginning to end. And then we astonished the congregation with "Glorious is Thy Name," and "Praise the Lord, for He is Gracious," and other classic gems, as we got them perfectly.

It was my first attempt at choir-leading and—which I am sure is a very good thing for my reputation—the last. Thenceforth the parson wielded the baton. The choir that now is, which could sing the Twelfth Mass straight off as easily as look at it, if it had never seen the thing [92] before, would feel insulted at any comparison between their work and ours; but often, when I am listening to the evening anthem, the notes of those old voices, so fervid and sincere, float back upon the tide of memory from those old days, with a heart-melting power that these finished performances will never possess, for me.

A year or two ago G. was escorting me to my seat in the cathedral through a crowd pressing into the building to some special function—I forget what—and he was accosted by a fine-looking grey-bearded gentleman, with a lady on his arm. "You don't know who that is," said G., turning to me. I looked, and knew—one of those men who used to walk so far o' nights to attend choir practice, after working at his mine all day—seven-or eight-and-twenty years before. We clasped hands with some emotion and looked at each other, and the question that sprang to our eyes was, "Do you remember the Twelfth Mass?" It was as plain as print to both of us. Then we were swept apart before I could learn where he was living, or anything about him, except that the lady on his arm was his daughter.

I hope many more have survived and prospered, and that they will read these words so as to know how I remember them.

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[93]

CHAPTER VIII

ToC

THE MURRAY JOURNEY

This parish, although sparsely populated, was enormous in size; it stretched out in one direction more than a hundred miles as the crow flies. And when G. went that way he rode with a fat valise on the saddle and did not return under a fortnight, during which time we were unable to communicate with each other. It was the nearest thing to being a missionary that he ever came to. There are roads and thriving townships along that route now; in our time it was the wildest Bush-track, about which lay the homesteads of the pioneer squatters, at a day's journey one from another. These good men used to welcome warmly the infrequent parson, round up their hands for service in dining-room or wool-shed, fetch in the babies born since the last visitation, and any candidates for matrimony anxious to seize a golden chance. In the case of the latter it was not unusual for the whole process of proposal, engagement, and marriage to take place during the few hours that the clergyman was available.

We called this expedition "the Murray Journey," and once I took it with him. It was soon after we arrived in the district—the 24th of March. That morning his horse, with the long-distance bolster on its back, was saddled and he in his Bush riding costume of short coat, tough trousers, [94] and leather leggings, ready to set forth in the usual way. But I was ill just then, and when it came to saying good-bye he felt unable to leave me. At the same time, placards posted on trees and fences and school-house doors had made engagements for him which he could do nothing to cancel.

"Suppose you come too?" he suggested, as the best way out of the difficulty. "The change of air and the outing may be just what you need."

It seemed a good idea, and was acted upon at once. With a hopeful effort I prepared a portmanteau for myself, and another for my little boy, whom we proposed to leave at a friend's house (the sister-in-law having left us) until our return; and G. went down to the township to find a buggy. We had not yet provided ourselves with a vehicle of our own, although we owned a horse. Practically we owned dozens of horses, because the squatters were always pressing loans of them upon us, exchanging fresh for stale, paddocking any that needed to be turned out; and on this occasion the doctor, whom I have already spoken of, hearing of our enterprise and approving it, made an offer of a good animal which G. accepted. It was understood that relays, if needed, would not be wanting on the road. The buggy he hired at hotel stables for £5 the trip.

We started after luncheon, and in the evening reached a place where we were very much at home. It was one of the newer two-storey brick houses, with a double girdle of wide verandahs outside, and any amount of solid British furniture within—an imposing mansion for the times. It had enormous willow trees about it, which the owner had planted—he white-haired and a grandfather, but Australian born, as also was his wife. They were the oldest of old families, their [95] history interwoven with the very foundations of the State. Her father was killed by bushrangers, his father was almost killed by them, or by blacks—I forget which; and he showed me dinted gun-barrels and other trophies that implied a battle for existence on his own part in the stirring days gone by. He was one of the finest men I ever met. The never-ending—unless South African battle-fields have ended it—argument that the British type of physique degenerates in her colonial-born sons was made short work of in his neighbourhood. "Look at Mr B." the defender of his country would remark, and the abashed opponent was left without a word to say.

I had a day's rest under his wide, warm roof, which it was hoped would recuperate my strength for further efforts. On the 26th we started again, leaving behind us our little son and his nurse—leaving also the doctor's horse, which Mr B. pronounced inadequate. He had the shafts removed from our buggy, and a pole substituted, and gave us a pair of strong, staunch, sweet-tempered horses, which I have no doubt saved our lives on one occasion, if not on two. There was no discussion about it. They were simply ordered, and brought round when we were ready. And I do not remember that my mortal hatred of debts and favours stood in the way at all. The idea of being "under an obligation" to these men did not occur to one, somehow. The pleasure was theirs.

At 9 A.M. we set out, calculating to make the next stage by nightfall. The autumnal days were such that I could not describe them without rhapsodising, but the nights were dark, and closed in at about seven o'clock. Mrs B. stuffed luncheon basket and invalid comforts under the buggy [96] seat. Everybody did that when seeing us off. It was a pity I could not do justice to the good things we turned out upon the grass when we made our noontide halts. If I had been well, what feasts I

should have had, in that wholesome, hungry air. A normal picnic always finds me ravenous. As it was, my main support was milk, with a dash of brandy in it. Nothing heavier would "stay."

Now began the struggles which I know were so painful at the time, but which were so amply paid for. Our track was through the wild Bush, sparely bisected by the primitive bush-fence—two or three a day, perhaps—brush, dog-leg, chock-and-log, the post-and-rail reserved for the stockyards and home enclosures; and it soon began to climb rough hills and fall into abrupt ravines such as no sane driver would attempt to negotiate nowadays. Not we, at any rate. The hills crowded upon the river, and to get past them you either had to make a long and uninteresting detour inland or clamber over the shoulders that sloped sheer into the swiftly-running stream. We chose this left-hand route, and thus put the splendid mettle of our horses to full proof for the first time. Some of those "sidings" were so steep that while the staunch creatures clung to the track, digging their toes in at every step, the buggy hung at right angles to them down the hill; the least jib would have run us plump into the water beneath. I walked while I had the strength to do so; at the sharpest pinches we both walked; but there was too much of it. I had to mount when I could crawl no more, and tucking myself under the seat and covering my eyes, give myself up into the hands of fate. "Tell me when it is all over," I said to G. [97]

G. had the good character in the Bush of being "so unlike a parson," which meant he could ride and drive (accomplishments acquired at home, fortunately), and go anywhere without losing himself. In those endless miles of wilderness, faintly scratched with crossing and re-crossing bridle-tracks, nothing to guide him that was visible to me, he was, from the first, as good a Bushman as those to the manner born, as sure of his course as a sailor on the sea. Nevertheless, we fell into the disgrace (to an Australian Jehu) of being "bushed" that night.

In mere miles it was a long day's journey; the difficult country made it a slow one, and it was necessary to "out span" for an hour in the middle of it, to feed and rest the horses. We started in the afternoon, watch in hand. "We shall do it," said G.; and then, "We shall just do it;" and then, "We've got our work cut out to do it." We counted minutes, and watched the glooming sky. The horses raced in and out amongst the trees and scrub while any shadow of trunk or stump could be discerned by the straining eye; then they slackened, checked, stumbled; branches broke under their feet and in the buggy wheels and swished our hands and faces; and we had to recognise that we were off the track, and that the darkest of dark nights had untimely caught us. We were not lost, because we could hear the dogs barking at the homestead that was our goal, but we were as good as lost—"bushed" for the night, although for some time we would not acknowledge it. If the reader asks what carriage-lamps were made for, I reply, not for Bushmen in those days. People living in and about the towns used them, in obedience to by-laws, and the coaches [98] travelled at night with grand hoods of light around their faces, top and sides; but country-folks despised such artificial aids, such enervating luxuries. They used to say they could see better without lamps than with, and we, being Bush persons, thought so too. On any ordinary night and fairly open track, we could manage to get along, but this night was not only moonless but starless, and thick with gathering rain. "Black as a wolf's mouth" well describes it. And we were in riverside scrub, which is always dense and confusing, traversing it, moreover (since it was not G.'s riding route, a still rougher one) for the first time.

G. got down and hunted with lighted matches for the lost track. When he thought he had discovered it he backed the horses and ran the buggy into a worse fix than before. This manœuvre was repeated several times. While I held the reins, he made little excursions by himself, and with the greatest difficulty found me again. The horses stood quiet and patient, just snuffing and jingling a little, and we tied them up and crept around the immediate neighbourhood together, hand in hand, until they in turn were lost—lost for many agonising minutes. Reminding ourselves of our responsibility for their welfare, and that we should have to pay goodness only knew what for the buggy if harm came to it, we decided, when reunited once more, not to part again. Bushed we were, and had to make up our minds to it.

So we unharnessed the gentle animals and haltered them, and let them graze and rustle round within safe reach and the limit of their tether, and we did what we could to ease the situation for ourselves. I was deadly sick and tired, and had to lie down somewhere. The floor of the buggy [99] being too short for a bed, we were driven to seek rest on the bosom of Mother Earth. We spread our one rug thereon, and covered ourselves with the shawl that had Dik's shot-holes in it. That shawl—a wedding present—was a dream of a shawl for softness, thickness, cosiness, a family treasure for ever so many years. Babies were rolled in it, and little invalids sitting up, and anybody who was shivery or ailing (disease germs and such things not being in fashion then); nothing was ever woven that gave so much comfort to so many people. It was in constant demand —"the grey shawl"—as the last safeguard against damps and chills, and so, as a matter of course, I took it with me on the Murray Journey. But it was wofully insufficient for the requirements of that cold March night.

A mouthful from G.'s pocket-flask warmed me for a while, and there was a romantic hour during which I lay and listened to the strange undertones of the Bush, charmed to have fallen in with so interesting an experience. It was, by the way, the only time that I ever "camped out," although I have wished ever since to do it again, when well in health and otherwise properly equipped. About two years ago I returned (for the first time since '73) to that neighbourhood, and arrangements were made for me and another enterprising matron to camp out with a party of engineers surveying a proposed road through a wild jumble of hills and glens, at what would have been an ideal spot. They were taking tents and beds, and nice things to cook at the glorious fire they would keep us warm with; nothing they could think of to enhance our enjoyment had been [100] forgotten. Alas! the rain came, and extinguished that project and my joy. On the afternoon of the

expected happy night, a host-that-should-have-been drove me over one of the old-time break-neck roads—but a real road now—and showed me the scene of the camp that never was. Peeping from the mackintoshes that he had heaped over me, I saw, through the driving rain and across a thickly-wooded gorge, a high, dim hill. There it was, more than half-way up—the loneliest eyrie. What a place to look down from at nightfall, at daybreak, and in the dead waste and middle of the dark! And not only the camp fire to make magic of it, but a moon!

On the occasion of our involuntary camp-out in '73 there was neither. I fancy we had used all our matches, but if not, we dared not have made a fire. Grass and dead leaves were still tinder to a spark, and a Bushman knows when he must respect that state of things. A Bush fire is more easily started than put out. So we lay and listened to the trampling and munching of the invisible horses, the scratchings and runnings and snoring growls of the opossums, and those imaginary footsteps that, to ears at the ground, were more distinct than either, until we ached with the hardness of our bed and our teeth chattered with cold. And then it began to rain.

We sought the shelter of the buggy, and covered ourselves with the rug and the grey shawl. We sat in the vehicle, where there was no room to lie down, leaning one against the other, dropping this way and that, sighing from our very boots, watching for a glint of dawn. It seemed a thousand hours before it came. As soon as we could find our way we went to the river to wash. How starvingly raw and cold that early morning was! And to this day I am sorry for myself when I [101] remember how I felt, after the sleepless, supperless, wet, sick night. I would have been glad to lie down and die, rather than face a pack of strangers. However, we harnessed up, and set out for the house for which we were bound. We seemed to have hardly started before we got there—a good "Cooee" might have rescued us over-night—and nobody was stirring, except a servant beginning to sweep.

A new baby had recently arrived—it appears to me, looking back, that in those days there was always a new baby in every house—so that the mistress was invisible for a time; but I was soon in kind hands of some sort, which helped me to tumble straightway into bed. For it was useless to attempt to observe any of the usages of polite society, under the circumstances. Daily, through that trip, I arrived in this condition, more or less, at some new strange house—an uninvited guest, too ill to talk to anyone, thrown at once upon the charity of the family, and of course filled with the shame of so ignominious a position; but I should have lost much more than I did lose if I had been well.

I slept till noon, while G. mended what he could of his broken engagements (there should have been a service over-night, and now the congregation had dispersed to its work); and after an early lunch we took the road again. I was firm in insisting upon keeping a tight hold of my husband, though I should die for it, rather than be left behind to be nursed, which he and everyone deemed the proper thing to do with me.

In the evening we came to the place that, of all places visited at this time, is the one I remember best and with most pleasure. A fine day, after the rain, was closing with a finer sunset [102] when we saw the house, so effectively situated on a hill-side sloping to the river, its pretty garden dropping down before, its neat vineyard and orchard climbing behind, that as a picture I hung it "on the line," there and then, and the gallery of memory holds nothing of the same age that has worn so well. It was a bachelor establishment—an awkward circumstance, at the first blush, but soon perceived to lack no advantage on that account. One young partner was away; the one at home came forth to receive us, with his nice, frank, gentlemanly air, that made such an impression upon me. I don't know who he was; I never saw or heard of him again; I have forgotten his name; but him I shall never forget.

He had made the most careful and graceful preparations for us. A dinner-party had been arranged, the guests to meet us being a squatter and his wife, of the same good class as himself, from the New South Wales side of the river, which they crossed in their private boat—evidently a voyage often taken—at the due hour. Sad to relate, I could not join that party, much to the host's concern and my own disappointment. The housekeeper bore me off to bed, and coddled me with arrowroot or beef-tea or something, while at the same time she supervised the serving of a meal which was described to me afterwards in tantalising terms. I was glad that my bedroom was close to the dining-room—probably opened out of it, like so many guest-chambers of the period. I could hear the pleasant, cultivated voices, the bright chat, broken by little silences during which the master of the house waited to hear how I was, and whether I could fancy this or that; and later in the evening I could follow the whole course of the service that was held in the same [103] apartment, and for which he had diligently gathered in every stray sheep within his reach.

As soon as dinner was over the other lady guest came in to sit with me, and stayed with me until it was time for her to re-cross the dark river to her own home and bed. We talked of our children, in low tones, not to disturb the adjacent worshippers. She, too, I never saw before or since—it was indeed a case of ships that pass in the night—but I have loved her always, and thought of her as a life-long friend. We promised to meet again. If she is alive now, I am sure she regrets, as I do, that Fate declined to give us another chance.

Refreshed by a night's rest, I rose early, and enjoyed my host's companionship for perhaps half an hour. He took me for a gentle stroll about the garden while breakfast was preparing, and I was sorry the half hour could not be lengthened to a day—or a week. But the exigencies of G.'s time-table drove us on. We had another day-long journey before us to the next port of call, and it was necessary to start betimes if we were not to be bushed again.

We travelled beside the river for some hours, and my recollections are of particularly lovely views. Doubtless the radiant morning gave them much of their charm—Australian scenery is

really a matter of light and atmosphere—and allowance must be made for that enchantment which distance lends; still, it was a pretty country. The Murray wriggles through its two colonies like a length of waved dress braid, and here it curved between hilly banks and woods whose fringes dipped into the stream. Primeval forest it was, too (except for that daily rarer brush fence), the free home of beautiful birds that may now be sought in vain within the boundaries of [104] the state; and a stream still populous with wild-fowl of many kinds. By noon we must have worked a little inland, for my journal says it was a creek we camped by for lunch; and in the afternoon, during which we skirted a little hamlet that is now a considerable town, we descended to country called "Plains" in the title of its presiding station—the house we reached safely just as night closed in. Here there was the usual new baby (which G. christened next day), and no hostess immediately visible; the governess received me—in the inevitable condition—and put me to bed.

Speaking of those Bush babies, I would point out that medical attendance was in the category of non-essential luxuries that are now necessaries of life in every class. When it cost a little fortune and the waste of days to get a doctor, the struggling Bushman's wife, as a rule, took her chance without him. Occasionally she was conveyed to a township which possessed one, and there awaited in lodgings the opportunity to profit by his services; but the majority of Bush women preferred to stay at home and make shift with the peripatetic Gamp, old and unscientific as she always was. There was no fuss made over these affairs. The wives took after their husbands, who could drive without gig-lamps in the darkest night. I remember, however, that the mistress of this last house had all but lost her life in her recent confinement. She was a beautiful woman, delicate in every way—not of the ordinary type of squatter's wife.

With her I rested for a day, while G. made business excursions on horseback, and we spent a second night under that roof. This brought us to Sunday—a typical Bush Sunday. [105]

A large family party loaded the waggonette which took us to morning service some miles distant. The place of worship, as usual in such parts, was the district school-house, called the Common School (the title "State" was substituted for "Common" when the Compulsory Education Act came into force, after which these buildings, enormously multiplied, were not so readily obtainable for what are called "sectarian" purposes). The school-house was utilised by the denominations in turn, all having been placed on the same footing by the withdrawal of State aid from the originally established (English) church, only the Roman Catholics standing out from the miscellaneous company. This seemed a sad "come-down" to us at first, with our hereditary reserve and exclusiveness in relation to "dissenters"—a word long eliminated from our vocabulary. The miner who, being invited to church, replied affably, "Ay, ay, I'll give ye all a turn," showed us our place in the colonial scheme of things, and we did not like it a bit. But we soon adapted ourselves. And G. and the current Presbyterian parson of the parish, that he could not call his own, used to study their mutual convenience in arranging country services, and give each other a lift when on the road together. A pity it was that the "dissidence of dissent" could not have been further modified—a pity it is, and must continue to be—for the existence of half a score of little conventicles struggling one against the other for the suffrages of one poor little town—the money question in each case dominating and determining every other—is not good for their common cause.

In the simple seventies and these remote outskirts of the world, one could still cherish the [106] ideals of that English prelate who said of Disestablishment that "it will nearly drown us, but at least it will kill the fleas," one could survey the Church purified, before the new vermin hatched. It was charming to see the country carts gathered round the lowly wooden building, the horses unharnessed, feeding under the trees; they had brought worshippers from many miles away, their sincerity as such proved by the trouble they had taken to reach the rendezvous, and by the heartiness of their demeanour while service was going on. The school forms, made for children, would bend, and sometimes break, under the heavy men, close-packed along them; the mothers peacefully suckled their babes as they listened to the sermon; the dogs strolled in, and up and down. Sometimes a dog had a difference with another dog and disturbed the proceedings, but unless this happened no one thought of driving the dear creatures out. They were the sheep and cattle dogs of the congregation, each inseparable from his master.

This sort of function it was that I attended on the morning of the one Sunday of that Murray Journey. A family present then convoyed us to their home—another solitary station—whence, after a good meal, they drove us to the second service of the day, similar to the first. We then drove ourselves to a third station (a delightful place, G.'s favourite camping-ground on every Murray trip), where, of course, I went at once to bed, G. "having church" for the last time in the evening, in the dining-room of the house.

Monday was a rest-day here. On Tuesday morning we made the necessary early departure, and [107] a few hours later met with the first of our two serious adventures.

It was soon after our picnic lunch, early in the afternoon. We were trundling through the eternal solitude, refreshed and content, enjoying our conversation and the brilliant weather, when we saw a Bush fire far ahead. Since we were not responsible for starting it, we hailed it as a welcome variation in the monotony of our drive. We hoped to skirt it near enough to see what it was doing. Bush fires were pleasing novelties in those days; now the faintest distant scent of them gives me a "turn" like a qualm of sickness. I shall explain why later on. This incident does not explain it, although it well might.

As we advanced, the area of conflagration opened out. It was an extensive fire, and in thick country. Not grass, but trees were roaring to the sky. Our anxiety to get close to it gradually gave

place to a wish that it were further away. Misgivings deepened as we drew near; alarm supervened. "It is right across the track," said G. at last; and so it was, and far to right and left.

The last thing we wanted to do was to turn back, and indeed the wings of flame curved in behind us even as we drew rein to discuss our chances—not until we had driven quite up to the blazing wall, in the hope of seeing through to the other side, and finding a crossing-place. To go into the unburnt scrub on either hand would have been madness, for nothing could have saved us had the fire caught us there. Every inch of earth provided fuel for it, except the narrow, dusty buggy track. To that we knew we must stick at all hazards, and a very hurried survey of our [108] unpleasant position showed us that there was nothing for it but to go on—to plunge into the flaming belt, and get out as best we could.

A few yards, we hopefully reckoned it: it turned out nearer half a mile. It might have been midnight, for all the daylight or sunlight that we saw during that dreadful passage: we were like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the burning fiery furnace, enveloped in a glare as of the infernal regions. The tree-torches over our heads dropped blazing leaves on us (the useful grey shawl again intervening): the grass-blades caught and curled up at the very tires of the wheels; the buggy sides blistered like our hands and cheeks. Not a word did we speak, except to urge on the horses, on which our lives depended, and which we are convinced they saved.

They shivered and jumped and snorted a little when the flames came very near, or they were touched by a spark, but never for a moment gave way to the panic which would have been natural, and which would have destroyed us all. Digging their heads into their chests, obeying voice, whip, and rein, they strained along doggedly, keeping the track as they had done on the steep sidings, until they brought us out at last into light and safety. Such nerve and courage I never saw or heard of in horses, which can stand almost anything better than fire at close quarters. But this pair were unmatchable.

We staggered into port, and tried, with our parched tongues, to tell the tale. Never shall I forget the shock I received from the behaviour of the person interviewed. The thin veneer of his sympathy for us was as glass over his solid and shining satisfaction at hearing how his waste land was getting cleared—at no expense to him. I thought I had never met a more heartless man. [109]

Then, after a night in the humble *chalet* of two young fellows, just starting squatting for themselves in a romantic nook of the hills—who ought not to have been asked to entertain a lady, but did it most hospitably with the best at their command, we passed on to our next adventure.

It was another lovely morning, and the usual bottle of new milk and private spirit-flask compensated somewhat for the chops I had not been able to eat at breakfast. It was a beautiful if rough drive down the hills to the river-flats and another little hamlet that is now a full-grown town, with a railway to it. On the way we stopped to watch the evolutions of an eagle-hawk, which had caught up an opossum (stupid as an owl in daylight), and was sailing through the ether with it, fiercely chased by all the other birds of the neighbourhood. They call these great creatures eagle-hawks, but they are wholly eagles, to all intents and purposes. I have seen one swoop over a terrified flock, claw up a good-sized lamb, and soar away with it as if it were a mouse.

Leaving the township, we came presently to a river—the Mitta, in flood. And here our incomparable horses, which had saved us from a fiery, saved us from a watery, grave—possibly. G., it is true, was a good swimmer, but I was not, and the worst might have happened. Drownings of venturesome travellers, under the same circumstances, were frequently reported in those days.

That river had to be crossed. There was no bridge, of course, and not a soul within miles of whom to make inquiries as to the fording-place. The only thing to do, therefore, was to take the [110] last one known, while anticipating—rightly as it proved—that it would be found washed out and gone. "Oh, you can't cross there now," they told us, after we had done it.

I and all our belongings were gathered upon the buggy seat, skirts tucked round me, railing and portmanteau tightly clutched; G. knelt on the cushion of the driver's seat, and we plunged in. Deeper, deeper, deeper, until we swayed and rocked and swung round upon our axis, and the current took the horses off their feet and began to drift them down. But their heads still pointed to the old landing-place: with all their strength they held back against the stream; and swimming steadily, got us ashore without an upset, and, with a tremendous spurt and scramble, up a bank that would have tried the mettle of a South African bullock team.

It was the last "pinch." By noon we reached the wide-spreading roofs of a house which was simply a free hotel for every passer-by—that house where even the blacks were made welcome, one of them having the run of visitors' bedrooms in the night. There G. left me, returning after a few hours with our little boy and his nurse and the doctor's horse. And the following day we were at home.

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[111]

CHAPTER IX

ToC

LOCAL COLOUR

I often wonder what G. would have done if he had been a weakly man or an indifferent rider. There were lengthy periods during which he practically lived in the saddle, getting out of it merely for meals and sleep. For a time we kept records of the totals of miles covered per week or per year, but, these matters ceasing to be notable, we lost them long ago. And it is better not to trust even to his memory to reproduce them, for I am certain that no figure near the truth would be credited by the English reader.

The following is the programme for a monthly Sunday in W——, where the breaking-in began:—Up at 4 A.M. Breakfast at a station twenty-five miles distant. Morning service five miles further distant (in an open shed, the congregation sitting on wheat-sacks or what not). Dinner near by, and ride of twelve miles to afternoon service. Tea, and ride of five miles to evening service. Ride of seventeen miles home. Of course he could have started on Saturday and returned on Monday, but he never spent a night away from his own house unless absolutely compelled. I used to wake from my first sleep at the sound of the cantering hoofs, pop on my dressing-gown, and go and hold the lantern for him while he made his horse comfortable, and then join him at his well- [112]
earned supper. He was always fresh at the end of this tremendous day, or, at anyrate, not more than pleasantly tired—generally more disposed to sit up and gossip than to go to bed. The horse, too, which had carried him all day, though glad to reach his journey's end, was undistressed. It was by no means an exceptional day's work for an Australian horse.

Only once do I remember seeing G., at the end of one of these Bush excursions, thoroughly knocked up. That was in furnace-hot midsummer weather, when he had been out all day in a north wind. He had been sent for to take a burial service, and was first driven twenty-five miles to the station where the body was lying. Hence the funeral party, on horseback and in black clothes and hats, proceeded at a slow foot-pace another twenty-five miles to the station where the family burying-ground was situated. Here, at the grave, one mourner fell, sun-struck; the rest were more or less prostrated. G. rode those terrible twenty-five miles, and the same distance back to the first station; there he had a meal and a short rest, and then rode home in the night, which was pitchy dark. The temperature was still over 100° and the wind in the north, and the whole thing proved too much even for his strength. He was really tired out, for once. But that was the only time that I remember him being so (from riding) in all the years that I have known him.

I may mention another funeral with some old-time features about it. The summons came one evening, from a long distance, and the man bringing it left directions for G. to follow in riding to the appointed spot next day—for he had but just arrived in the district, which was all unknown [113]
land to him. The man promised to meet him at a certain swamp of some miles in extent; the funeral would have to skirt round this swamp, but there was a track through it, known to the initiated, by which a rider could save much distance; he had, however, to be a good rider, on a good horse, because it was a quicksandy sort of ground, and a guide was necessary. G. managed to find this place and duly met his guide, who upbraided him for not being there earlier. The man then led the way through the swamp, at a pace as near to flying as possible, to avoid being sucked in; if a horse rested his weight on the ground for a moment, he began to sink. They were awful places, those. I once saw G. (I was riding behind him) caught by one unawares. The instant he knew it he rolled off the saddle and back to *terra firma* like a streak of lightning, and eventually he got his horse out too; but it gave me cold shivers to think what might have happened. Though, as I never heard of anyone being engulfed entirely, I suppose there were bottoms somewhere.

On this occasion the guide tore along at the pace I have mentioned, kicking up the sticky stuff behind him; G., obliged to ride in his tracks and close at his heels, was smothered in the shower, and when he joined the funeral procession was a cake of black mud from head to foot. Arrived at the cemetery, it was found that the grave had not been dug—not begun to be dug—and the party had to sit around for three hours while this necessary business was transacted. A hospitable soul amongst the mourners took G. to his neighbouring shanty, cleaned him down a bit, and gave him eggs and chops and tea and all the usual kindness. Word was brought to them when the grave [114]
was ready, and they returned to finish the proceedings.

This cemetery, although remote and small, was a public one; that of the other funeral was private. I have known several of these family burying-places, made in the first instance for the pioneers who "took up" the land—crown land, become freehold and virtually entailed—now occupied by their descendants; some of them are used still. Only a short time ago I was visiting one of the old homes, a wealthy station, administered by the third generation of its possessors; and, walking about the grounds after luncheon, I was shown the cemetery, with its rows of head-stones and monuments and its fence and gate, like a section cut out of any well kept municipal burial-ground; only this lay amongst garden-beds and orange-groves, in full view of the windows on one side of the house. Hither had been brought back the daughters who had married and gone away. "And here," said my white-haired host, "we," indicating the family group of which he was the centre, "shall all come, I hope." I trust there will be no law made to prevent it. Technically unconsecrated, as I suppose they are, these little family burying-places have a peculiar sacredness, to my thinking, not belonging to the common gathering-places of the dead; the difference is as between a bed at home and a bed in a hotel.

One friend of ours, bachelor-owner of one of the finest properties in the wealthy Western District, ordered that he should be interred on the top of a hill on his estate, and that no monument was to be erected over him. His wishes were carried out. G. read the burial service at the lonely grave, which is marked only by a cairn of stones.

Some of the Bush weddings of those early times were as unconventional as the Bush funerals. [115] Our verger and odd man about the church at Y—— (we took him over from our predecessor) could not read. G. called upon him one day to say the responses at a marriage service, there being no other congregation, and he pleaded this disability. "Well, at least," said G., "you can say 'Amen' can't you?" Oh, yes, he could do that. And he did—with a vengeance. Every time G. paused to take a breath, no matter where, a loud "Amen!" was shot into the breach. Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?—"Amen!" There was nothing for it but to race through the ceremony, and "Old Jimmy" was not required to officiate again.

G. was often nonplussed in this way, by finding ignorance where he expected knowledge as a matter of course. Once he started to read the Litany in a strange place for the first time. Dead silence followed the opening sentence. In a low voice he directed the congregation what to do, but nothing would make them do it; evidently they had never had the Litany before, and did not know what to make of it. In the end he had to read the whole alone. I myself came upon a crowded class of Sunday-school children who did not know who Noah was. I was trying to stuff them with that legend of a submerged world, and I put the question encouragingly: "Now, who was the good man whom God spared when all the rest were drowned?" Rows and rows, dozens and dozens (they filled that flower-stand-like arrangement of stair-seats running up the wall, which the village school provides for the infant scholars) of blank little faces were interrogated one by one. "Can't you tell me? Can't *you*?" No, none of them could. At last one bright little boy [116] spoke up. "I know, teacher!" "Ah, then you tell these other little boys and girls. Who was it?" He shouted triumphantly, "Robinson Crusoe!"

There was a Bush wedding that would have made quite a romantic story, if I had thought to write it. G. was on the Murray Journey, and it was one of his engagements for the outward route. Cantering along through the Bush, he was met and accosted by a drunken old man, who asked him whether he was not the parson and on the way to marry So-and-so. G. informed him that he was. "Well, don't you do it," said the man. "I'm the girl's father, and she's under age, and she can't marry without my consent, and I won't give it." G. rode on, and at the appointed rendezvous met the young couple, a nice modest girl and a respectable-looking young man. Documents were produced for filling up and signing, and G. asked for that necessary one which he feared would not be forthcoming. It was not. The bridegroom-elect pretended that it had been mislaid —"bluffed" all he knew, poor fellow—but he could not produce it, and without it there could be no marriage. The bride, being in her teens, must have her father's written consent, and this father had refused it. They tried to persuade G. to marry them without it, but, as he told them, it was more than his place was worth; the law was plain and had to be obeyed. They retired for a while to discuss the unhappy situation, and then the bride came back alone, weeping, to renew the useless appeal. She had a wretched life with her drunken father, who ill-used her, and her lover had prepared for her a good and happy home, and oh, couldn't G., for once and in consideration of the hard circumstances, stretch a point? He was sorry enough that he could not. All he could [117] do was to promise to see them again on his homeward journey, and to marry them then if in the meantime they had been able to soften the father's heart. But when he returned he found the situation unchanged; the old ruffian's heart was flint. The end of it all was that the poor young things, using the legal knowledge acquired from G., went off to another colony and another clergyman who knew them not, to whom the bride gave her age as over twenty-one. G., when he heard of this, did not make it his business to denounce the desperate young criminals.

He celebrated another Bush wedding—and there was a wedding party to it—in the destined home of the happy pair. It was a bark hut, with a mud floor and as yet without a shred of furniture in it. The papers were filled up and signed on an up-ended cask. At another marriage feast all the guests were drunk to start with. They offered him a glass of neat brandy in which to drink the health of the contracting parties. In all sorts of places, and at all hours of the day and night, he has been called upon to weld the bands of holy matrimony; the evening—after dark—is the time preferred by those casual couples who do not bother about wedding garments and the other conventional displays.

I once got a pathetic glimpse of one of these belated functions; it was performed for G. by a *locum tenens* in one of our country parishes. "Why," said he to me, before going into church, "why do these people make a point of being married in the vestry and not before the altar?" They had pressed this point with such earnestness that he had yielded to it. His idea was that they did not feel themselves smart enough for the usual observances, although there were to be no [118] spectators; but even to him it seemed an absurd one. We knew them well—that the mother, authorising the marriage as the only surviving parent, was a highly-respected lady, and the bridegroom a steady young man, long a member of her establishment; the bride, who was very young, was her only child. The hour and the place chosen, and the secrecy of the whole affair, puzzled us, though we might easily have guessed their meaning. I happened to see the vestry door open on the conclusion of the ceremony. In the bright patch of light suddenly flung upon the screen of darkness stood mother and daughter, locked in each other's arms, apparently weeping bitterly. "Tell me," said the officiating minister, when he came in, "tell me how this business turns out," and he left us next day for his home in Melbourne. The first thing I heard was the news that the girl had been married, all unbeknown to her friends and at some distant church, several months before the date on which I knew she had been married; everybody told me this, and of

course I did not contradict the statement. Four or five months later I met her in a railway carriage, and she had a bouncing baby in her arms. The strict moralist would have been horrified to see how proud of it she was, and how blooming and happy and satisfied she looked.

Strange to say, evening weddings are *de rigueur* in the upper circles of the place where I now live—the only place thus distinguished, so far as I know. Soon after we came here a particularly "swell" wedding took place—that may have set the fashion—the hour of which was fixed at 8 P.M. The bridal robe, with its court train, had been sent from London, the gift of a wealthy sister; it [119] was a wonderful white brocade shot with silver threads, and certainly shimmered in the gaslight as it could not have done by day. The gorgeous costumes of the guests also "lit up" with great effectiveness, as did the elaborate decorations of the church. It was really a dramatic spectacle. And the church was almost pulled to pieces by the crowd who went to see it.

And so now all the butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers have their weddings at night. Business is over, and they can revel thoroughly while they are about it. And outsiders, being also free to enjoy themselves, come in shoals to see the fun. Gates have to be locked and defended by brute force like barricades against besiegers, and the police are welcome when they deign to grace the scene. We hate this custom, which for several reasons is not nice to think of, but cannot alter it. Fashion is always irresistible when there is no law to the contrary, and canonical hours are ignored in this country. In the Bush, in the old days, persons got married at night only because they were ashamed to do so by day, or because they had no choice.

Another more purely social function of the Church had its Australian peculiarities, so marked at times as to obscure the lines of the original model, followed with such religious care. I allude to the time-honoured tea-meeting. I shall never forget how the first one that I attended on this side of the world astonished me.

It was while we were at W——, and the occasion was the laying of the foundation stone of a church at a mining township some twelve miles off. A large party of us, headed by our archdeacon, had a pleasant drive to the spot during the afternoon; on arrival our buggies were [120] variously disposed of amongst the local residents, who, after the business ceremony, welcomed us to the hall or schoolroom where the festive tables were spread. I had seen the festive tables at home—bread and butter, substantial whitish cake, currant buns—and expected some approximation to that immemorial bill of fare, which to me was all one with the Rubrics.

I did not know—though I soon learnt—that the poorest Sunday-school child would not look at it. For the Sunday-school treat—just so much on a lower plane than a tea-meeting as boys and girls are inferior to men and women—you must have nothing plainer than ham-sandwich; that is the basis on which to build the rich edifice of sweets. Ham it must be, and no meaner substitute. So, at least, it was when I took active part in such affairs; for I know that once, when we thought to economise with beef, an irate mother came to ask us what we meant by it. The children never had been put off with beef, and she considered it a burning shame. One year, when the "treat" food was provided, as usual, by the ladies of the congregation, each cooking to outvie the rest, I took upon myself to remonstrate with them for *their* cruelty—in stuffing the poor children with unlimited cream-cakes and meringues. Yes, actually meringues, on my word of honour. But that, I must admit, was an exceptional circumstance.

Nowadays, as I am informed, things are not quite the same. For instance, the current Sunday-school attached to this establishment makes its annual sandwiches of ham, beef, and German sausage, in about equal parts, and I do not hear of any complaints. It is a large Sunday-school, and therefore not so much all one family as those little ones of the past: and ham is something [121] like a shilling a pound; and town ways are not as Bush ways. In town it is a common thing to employ a caterer at so much per head. So that we may say the times have changed. But the children, wherever they are and whoever makes it for them, still pack rich puff pastry on the top of their sandwiches, and rich plum cake on the top of that, and miscellaneous "lollies" on the top of all, until there is no room for a crumb more; and what happens to them next day, and the day after, is a question that yearly agitates my mind. Quite unnecessarily, I suppose. Their little stomachs are hardened to it.

So the aspect of my Bush feast—the tea-meeting tea—may be inferred. Chickens and turkeys, hams and tongues, pies and sucking-pigs, jellies and trifles—in short, all the features of an old-fashioned wedding breakfast or a ball supper were there, except the wine. You had, naturally, to drink tea at a tea-meeting—if you wanted to drink anything with such oceans of whipped cream. But the tea is the only remaining link between the Australian tea-meeting and the English one, unless the English one has changed greatly since my time.

A purely social function, did I call it? It had, of course, its *raison d'être* if only to "draw the people together," which is its last excuse (the first always "goes without saying"). On one occasion a tea-meeting was attached to a movement for getting some parochial work done, of which part of the parish approved and part did not. Speeches for and against were made when the tables had been cleared, and G. spoke for the side that he personally espoused. The local paper, which was on the opposite side, reported his speech in the following ingenious manner: "The reverend gentleman was understood to say" so and so (substantially what he actually did [122] say), "but what he meant to say was" so and so (what the local paper and its party thought he ought to have said).

The great tea-meeting of all is what is called the Diocesan Festival. It is held annually, at the time of the sitting of the Church Assembly, which is our House of Convocation; and all the leading (English) Churchmen of the diocese, lay and clerical, take their part in "running the show." The Melbourne Town Hall is filled with tea-tables, individually donated by parishes or

private families; Church of England people, and many besides, flock thither and pack the place to suffocation before six o'clock, at which hour they sit down to eat and drink, having paid eighteen pence per head for the privilege. When tea is over there is a great struggle for room to remove the tables and their furnishings, but it is done somehow, and only benches and chairs left for the evening assembly, augmented by many not present at the tea. During this interval the cathedral organist gives selections on the great instrument that was the city's pride in the seventies and eighties, but now needs more money than City fathers care to give (for mere artistic purposes) to bring it up to the requirements of these times and of a self-respecting performer; then, when all is ready, the orchestra platform fills with big-wigs—governor, bishops, "special attractions" bespoken long before—and stirring speeches fill the rest of the bill. It is a great carnival for pious folk, and not without interest for mere ordinary beings like myself; and the substantial profit resulting from it is one of the mainstays of the "Bishop of Melbourne's Fund," which is the general fund in aid of general diocesan distress.

[123] Substantial profit, it is needless to remark, is the first object of the promoters of all these entertainments, so many and various—tea-meetings, bazaars, "sales of gifts," Bruce auctions, cake fairs, concerts, etc., etc.—and has to be so while the voluntary system and poor human nature exist together. Each event is contrived "for the benefit of the Church," a term well understood by all its members, who will contribute pounds of money and endless time and trouble to such affairs sooner than lay an extra shilling or two in the offertory plate. Every parish is running its little money-making enterprise at short intervals, the other denominations, whose parish it is also, doing the same. Sometimes there is an unfriendly competition between the churches, smart dodges to take the wind out of a rival's sails; more often they have a tacit fraternal arrangement to aid each other, or at anyrate not get into each other's way. You will hear it said at a ladies' working party, "What a shame of the Catholics to take our conversazione night for their concert!" Or, "The Presbyterians sent a lot of things to our bazaar, so it is only right we should help them with theirs."

The concert is the commonest of these events. It costs, in money, time, and trouble, less to get up than the others. Domestically, this is a musical country, and local performers are never hard to find. My natural impulse is to stay at home when the miscellaneous amateur is abroad, but sometimes, when I have steeled myself to endure him or her, I have been rewarded beyond my expectations or deserts. One thing stands out from my experiences in this line that is worthy of note—the high average of excellence in the quality of the amateur voice. I am convinced there [124] are as good fish in the sea as the Melbas and Crossleys that have come out of it, judging by the number of little girls, hardly past childhood, whom I have seen come upon the stage in parish schoolrooms and rural shire-halls, and proceed to give forth full, ringing notes that, for power, would do justice to the Albert Hall or the Crystal Palace, and with the right training (as I think) might do anything. I believe it is the climate that accounts for it—the air that throat and lungs have grown on; and if so, this is the place for the speculator in such wares to come to. Expert fossicking might reveal a new Kimberley to the world.

Still, in spite of these occasional surprises, the parish concert—after so many of them—is apt to pall upon the too-accustomed ear. One looks to the human interest for entertainment, rather than to art. In what I believe was the very first parish concert that I went to, this element largely predominated.

It was held at a hamlet some eight or ten miles from head-quarters, and we drove to it in a party, taking several of the performers with us. Before business began, our *prima donna*, a young married lady, confessed to not feeling very well; she said she had been eating fruit, which had disagreed with her. However, she went through the two hours' programme unflinchingly, and so acquitted herself as to rouse no suspicion of the fact that she herself was perfectly aware of. She was a tall, handsome, resolute sort of woman, who, finding herself in a horrible dilemma, determined to brave it out. "I *had* to do it," she said to us afterwards, "or else upset everything and make a disgraceful exhibition of myself. And I thought there would be plenty of time." But she had miscalculated in this respect, as it is so easy to do, and the situation had grown desperate before she was nearly through with her last number; I noted her damp brow and [125] deeply flushed face, and wondered at the unsmiling look in her eyes when they met mine; her accompanist also was put about a little here and there; nevertheless, she made a finish of her song before she bowed to our applause and bowed herself off the stage. Then a word went round amongst the matrons which filled us with dismay and concern. The doctor's horses were put to his buggy, and the doctor and his wife and Mrs T. were gone ere "God Save the Queen" was finished. When the rest of us got home afterwards, it was to hear that our *prima donna* had become a mother rather less than two minutes after gaining the shelter of her own house.

I think that was the most interesting concert I was ever at. Others who were there, remembering it with equal vividness, say the same.

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[126]

CHAPTER X

ToC

Sad indeed was the breaking-up of that pleasant home at Y——. It followed upon, and was a consequence of, the death of our little daughter, when she was nearly a year old.

These are the times when the Bush dweller feels his geographical position most keenly—when he needs the best medical advice and cannot get it. I do not say that our dear old German doctor was not a good doctor in his way, for he was; but practically nothing had been added to his knowledge since he was young, and in this case he confessed frankly that he was altogether at fault. He had never met with a similar one—nor have I; and after looking up all the authorities at his command, even to the papers and notes of lectures of his student days, his honest mind would not pretend to have made itself up. His professional credit was not so dear to that man as truth. "I don't know," he said in so many words. And how often I have wondered whether, if we had been rich, we could have found someone else who did! Would a special train and a thousand guinea fee have saved her?

These are questions that shock some of my clerical friends, mothers amongst them. "It was the Lord's will," they say, and seem to think that settles it. A few months ago I was spending an [127] evening with a young curate and his wife, whom I had not met before; they were ardently religious people, in their own line, and they had recently lost their only son. The mother gave me the history. He had had an internal tumour or something of the sort, a growth that steadily increased, and which the doctors had plainly said must be removed if his life was to be saved. The parents replied—and they repeated the words with such proud confidence that they were right words—"No, if the Lord intends him to get well, he will get well without that." And instead of the operation—urged by their incumbent, who also gave me these facts, as well as by other friends—they had prayer-meetings at the bed-side. The little sufferer, described as a bright boy of nine, swelled and swelled until he died. "The Lord needed him," said the mother to me. And "We feel so honoured to have a child in Heaven." She made my blood run cold. I can never have shocked the "good" people more than that ultra "good" woman shocked me.

We left nothing to these chances. When whooping-cough came to the township, I took extraordinary precautions to keep my children from catching it. The epidemic was nearly over when the little boy fell a victim, and then I watched day and night to prevent contact with the baby. Quite at the last (the lady I have spoken of would have some remarks to make on this) my efforts were defeated; the baby took it in spite of me. She was a healthy and happy little soul, and at first her case seemed just an ordinary one. But after coughing for a week or two, she ceased to cough suddenly, and fell into strange fainting-fits; they seized her so silently and swiftly that I [128] hardly once saw her go into one, although she was in the room with me, and my eye, as I thought, never off her. A cry from her nurse or somebody would cause me to jump as if I had been shot, and there lay my little one, wherever she happened to have been sitting or crawling, exactly like one dead—grey, limp, eyes sunk, lips drawn back, neither breath nor heart-beat discoverable. We would snatch her up and rub her and give her brandy; and after some minutes, more or less, she would struggle painfully back to life, and as soon as respiration returned begin to shriek in the most terrible manner, and keep it up until completely exhausted; then she would drop asleep, remain asleep for a whole day, perhaps, and awake placid and cooing, ready to be fed and played with, apparently as well as ever. At intervals of a day, or two days, she had perhaps half a dozen of these fits; then she had one that lasted nearly three hours. All the while that she lay in our arms, we having no hope that she would revive again, a thin stream of what looked like grey water trickled from one nostril; it was the only sign of life. The old doctor, having done all he knew, sat looking on, as helpless as we. However, again she struggled back, and, getting breath, began that quick, agonising shriek which was so maddening to hear and impossible to stop. The doctor put his hands to his ears. "I can't stand it," he said; "I must go outside. Call me if you want me." After awhile he went home, but the shrieks lasted the greater part of the night, gradually, as her strength wore out, dying into hoarse wails and moaning off at last into exhausted sleep.

She slept the entire day, and I sat by the cradle and watched her, sopping several handkerchiefs with those foolish tears which I am supposed to weep for the pleasure of it and [129] could help shedding if I liked. Then, towards evening, a little hand began playing with the cradle-frills, and the happy little coo that used to wake me of a morning broke the silence of the room. I could not believe my eyes and ears. We sent post-haste for the doctor. Well, there she was, looking as if nothing had happened. And for three weeks thereafter she had no more fits, but ate and played, and throve and fattened, apparently better than she had ever done in her life.

"Whatever it was," said the doctor, "that last attack has carried it off. You will see she will be all right now."

At the end of the three happy weeks that seemed to prove him right, I gave a little musical party. He brought his flute, and we were in the middle of a more or less orchestral performance, when I fancied I heard a cry from the next room—a cry with that peculiar sharp edge to it that I had so learned to dread. I rushed to the cradle, the doctor after me, and we lifted the child up and examined her. "Oh, she's all right," we said, with long breaths of relief; "it was only our noisy music that disturbed her." We placed the nursemaid on guard, and went back to the drawing-room, and for the rest of the evening made less noise, while she made none, but slumbered peacefully.

In the morning she woke up as usual; that is, I did not know when she woke. She hardly ever cried to be taken up, but played with her bed-clothes and her toes, and gurgled and gabbled to

herself until I chose to lift her into my bed. She was in the most blooming condition. From the time that I dressed her, until breakfast was ready, she played with the cat on the dining-room [130] floor, and a vivid memory of the day is of the smothered chuckles of the two servants while G. was reading prayers, because of the hilarious and irreverent shouts and crows with which baby enlivened the proceedings. When breakfast came in she was carried out. At the door her nurse held her up and told her to say good-bye to her father and mother. The bright little creature, perfection in my eyes, with her sunny curls and blue eyes and the little face lit up with the fun of going through her tricks, kissed her hand and waved it, and nodded and farewelled us in her baby language, and the door closed upon our last sight of her in life.

It was my habit to take her for an airing after breakfast, while the servants helped each other with the housework, and this particular morning was a glorious one, the crisp, sunny winter morning of Australian hill country, with the first hint of spring in it. I got her little cloak and hood and went to the kitchen to fetch her. The kitchen was large and airy, opening upon the garden, and her cradle was sometimes placed in a corner there, where she could be watched by the servants, who were both devoted to her. It was there now, and she was in it. "She seemed sleepy," said the elder girl, "so we laid her down."

"She must have been awake earlier than usual," I thought, and, stooping over the cradle, I saw her, as I believed—and still believe—sleeping quietly, carefully tucked up, the little golden head laid sidewise on the pillow. It was not her bed-time by an hour or two, but her habit of not telling me when she started the day seemed to explain the too early sleepiness. I told the girls they were right to put her down, and went off to the housework on my own account. Some time later the [131] elder servant came to me where I was busy, G. being with me. "Oh, ma'am," said she, gaspingly, "I wish you'd come and look at baby. She's so pale!" G. almost flung me aside lest I should get to the door first, and dashed to the kitchen. We both knew instantly what had happened. The servants had not left her for a moment; she had not made a movement or a sound; she could not have known what had happened herself, which was something to be thankful for. One of her strange fits had seized her—the one, at last, that she would never come out of. Her father snatched her up—lying exactly as I had left her—and called for the brandy; we tried to pour it down her throat, where not a drop would go, until she grew quite cold and rigid in our arms.

It was the first of these almost insupportable bereavements, and the effect on my health was so severe that a complete change of surroundings was considered necessary—to get me away from the house whose every nook and corner was haunted by such agonising visions of what had been. G., for his part, could no longer stand the Murray journeys, involving such long and complete separation at a time when we needed so much to be together. So he cast about for a more compact parish, and one offered that fulfilled the requirements—and more.

It was so far away from Y—— that we had to sell our furniture and begin at the beginning again. At this auction the amateur sofas went, and from that time I bought sofas. The new drawing-room was graced with a "suite" in green rep—such was our taste in pre-exhibition days—and the sofa was of that curly shape which prohibited repose. By filling the upper concave end [132] with my big cushions I could make head and shoulders comfortable, but then there was no scope for legs and feet; and one had to anchor one's self with the right hand to the sloping and slippery framework of the back to keep from rolling off. I never did appreciate that ingenious design, and the suite was no sooner in its place than I found even the colour of it annoying. To improve the effect I made holland covers for every piece—pretty chintzes were unprocurable—and at least a fresher and brighter air was imparted to the room; but I was not sorry that we had to have another auction at the end of three years' companionship with the suite.

In other ways this fourth home was a great change from the other three. We were now down in the flat, settled, macadamised country, only twenty miles or so from Ballarat and fifty from the metropolis—quite "in the world." I say "down," but it was a colder, wetter, snowier place to winter in than any other that we have known on this side of the globe—seventeen hundred feet above sea-level.

Apart from the trouble I have spoken of, and a bitterer one of the same nature that was soon to follow it, and the further misfortune of a carriage accident from the results of which I suffered for many years, my life at B——, socially considered, was more to my taste than had been the case before in Australia, or than has been since. For there I first discovered the resources of the colony in its intellectually-cultivated class, and enjoyed the society and friendship of some who represented it at its best—members of a small, inter-related, highly exclusive circle of about half a dozen families, who had had time and the means to read, travel, and generally sustain the [133] traditions of refinement to which they were born.

Chronologically, they were the first gentlefolk of the land—"Rolf Boldrewood" speaks of some of them in his *Old Melbourne Memories*—and they still merit the title in another sense. The clans have dwindled, indeed, but not all the original heads have fallen yet, and I have not heard of a *mésalliance* amongst their descendants. If they do not marry with each other, they marry with their kind. As with the Salisburys and Buccleuchs and modern London Society, they remain uncontaminated by the influences which have made our own little world of fashion a faint copy of the big one at home. Money, which "runs the show" elsewhere, is no passport to those dignified homes, dating from "before the gold," in which I have spent so many happy hours.

My own passport to it was a little tale in the *Australasian*—my first to run as a serial in that paper. It is gone now, and was never worth keeping, but as a story about the colony, written from within, it aroused interest in its anonymous author at the time, amongst those whose eyes were keen to note literary events, small as well as big. My friend, "Rolf Boldrewood," had not yet

received the worldwide recognition that he now enjoys; he was a "Sydneysider," and supposed to belong to his own colony. Poor "Tasma" had scarcely begun her brief literary career; Mary Gaunt, and others now on the roll, were mostly in their nurseries or unborn. So that I had the advantage of a stage very much to myself, which of course accounted largely for the attention I received. And of all the pleasure and profit that I derived from my long connection with the Australian [134] press, nothing was more valuable to me than the uplifting sympathy of those readers I have mentioned, who were also as fine critics as any in the world.

The first night at B—— gave me the key of the position. The one socially "great house" of our new parish entertained us. Its owner, an old Wykehamist and cadet of a noble Scottish family, who, having practically built the church, and being its main supporter, stood for what would have been the patron of the living at home, himself fetched us from Ballarat, driving the wonderful "four greys" that were as well known as he was. Never shall I forget my first sight of that sweet old house in its incomparable old garden—of the sunset from the plateau along which we drove to it from the lodge gates, the picture that has delighted me so many, many times. And never shall I forget my reception, the dinner, the evening, the sensation of finding myself suddenly and unexpectedly in a place where brains and good breeding alone counted, and nothing else was of any consequence. From the hour that I set foot in that house the situation, as it concerned me personally, was completely changed. I found, if not my level, the level which suited me.

Another house of the charmed circle began to help to make life interesting for us both. It lay within comfortable driving distance, and its family had recently returned to it from extensive travels about the world. The actual structure, to which I paid my first visits, was a modest relic of the fifties, but already there was arising from the crest-of a neighbouring hill the most desirable country house, in its own style, then built or a-building—to my thinking, at anyrate—the final dwelling-place of the owner of the surrounding land, who had been its owner from "before the [135] gold." It was after this home of taste had been completed that we held our famous International Exhibition of 1880, which first taught us as a community the rudiments of modern art; and I remember the satisfaction with which the mistress of G—— wandered from court to court, and found no exhibits more pleasing, in their respective classes, than the treasures she had gathered for herself in foreign parts. Whether it were a Persian rug or a Venetian wine-glass, her specimen was, in her opinion, unsurpassed by any picked model of the like manufacture; in which I agreed with her. There is no lack now of what are generally described as artistic things; hundreds of Victorian homes, big and little, may in the tastefulness of their appointments outshine G—— to-day; but it was otherwise twenty years ago. At that date, when we stay-at-homes were all for gold and white wall-paper and grass-green suites (but the reader bears in mind that I put holland covers over mine) in our drawing-rooms, I believe G—— was unique in the colony as the first example of the new order. I may say here that we became rapidly æsthetic afterwards, because it is our constant habit to follow English fashions ardently as soon as we get an idea of what they are.

I had not been long in B—— before I heard of the flattering notice excited by my story—*Up the Murray* was its name—and by the discovery, on the part of our neighbours aforesaid, that the humble author was living where she was. Arrangements, unbeknown to me, were made for mutual introductions and acquaintanceship, and one day I was invited to join a driving party from our "great house"—which I wish I could describe in less vulgar terms (but to call it B—— would [136] be confusing)—to meet half-way upon the road a driving party from the other. The day was beautiful, and I see now before my mind's eye the panorama of the spring landscape. We halted on the brow of a hill—the four greys dancing themselves into complicated knots and being dramatically disentangled with the whip-thong—and down below the carriage from G—— toiling up the stony Gap track towards us. How well we learned that road afterwards, going to and fro continually either in the vehicles of our friends or in our own. If I have ever done anything to earn a respectable place in my profession I owe it to the awakening and educating influences that surrounded me at this time. My intellectual life was never so well-fed and fortified.

Of Melbourne Society, so called, I knew little as yet. My "set" held much aloof from it, gathering only its own affinities into the charming house-parties that brought whiffs of the gay world to us from time to time. Although I was now so near to it, I do not think I paid one visit to the metropolis while we lived at B——; invitations I had, but the inclination was lacking. I was satisfied as I was. We made expeditions occasionally to Ballarat, then, as now, the second city of our state, where a small group, long since vanished, of the old families still resided, to attract our particular old family thither, and where on our own account we had a few clerical and other friends to welcome us. One of these expeditions was typical of several.

The date it stands against in my diary is September 10th, 1873—the time of budding spring. Our "squire," with a part of his family, arrived at the parsonage in the lovely morning, with the [137] "old carriage," as it was called—a deep-seated, roomy vehicle that I can hardly give a name to, but which was the easiest and cosiest that I ever rode in. G. and I joined the party, and we started on our long drive. It took us about three hours if we did not stop by the way, but these excursions would have been very incomplete without the roadside picnic. Picnics were our joy, also our *forte*, and the country is made for them. So we stopped when we met the groom who had been sent ahead with fresh horses—the "old carriage" was heavy, and not built for Australian roads—and we lunched under the gum-trees with that exquisite appetite that we never know indoors. Then, at our leisure, on again until we trundled into the streets of the golden city—which, I may remark in passing, is a truly charming city, and to my mind ought to be the Federal Capital, if only because of its cool and bracing climate (although it is also almost exactly central for all the states as well). But in discussing sites for the future Washington, no one seems to take

into account what an effect upon legislation a languid air and mosquitoes of a night may have.

We spent the balance of the afternoon shopping, and were then deposited, with our evening clothes, at the house of one of the historical few—perhaps the most witty and world-cultured of them all, certainly the brightest company. He had been much in France, I think; he spoke often of Paris, with the air and knowledge of a born Parisian; his singing of French songs was as un-English as it could be. It was always said of Colonel R. that he would never be old, and I met him the other day on a tram, and in the course of our ride together found him as mentally alert as [138] ever, although he confessed to me, with a comical dolefulness, that he was some years past eighty. He still wore his smart, "well-groomed," gallant air (accent on the first syllable of this adjective, please), and was as ready as of old with his pretty compliments.

We dined with him and his wife, and then went all together to the Academy of Music (newly built) to hear Ilma de Murska. She was a small, fair-haired, glittering person, with a frilly train like a pink serpent meandering around her feet, and the way she trilled and rouladed was amazing. After the concert we had a merry supper, and then—by this time indifferent to the flight of the hours—changed our clothes and prepared for the homeward drive. We had but one pair of horses now for the whole journey, so that it was necessary to take the hills at a walk, and we reached B—— at about four in the morning. We inside the carriage could have slept almost as easily as in our beds, but we were obliged to keep awake to watch the swaying bodies on the box. It was funny to see us winding scarves round our squire's ample waist, and tying him to the low rail behind him, without disturbing his slumbers. These precautions would have been useless, however, had not one of us stood ready to clutch his sleeve at critical moments. On finding himself too sleepy for our safety, he had given the reins to his little son, who was a perfectly competent substitute. But that it was thought well to tie him into his seat to prevent them from dragging him over the dashboard, he could at nine or ten years old drive four horses so well that I preferred to trust myself to him rather than to any casual man, if I was to ride behind them.

It was upon one of the hills between B—— and Ballarat that the accident took place which [139] impaired my health for many years; but then no member of this family was driving. We had just started after our picnic lunch on the second stage of the journey, and had come to the top of a steep bit of road that had a sharp turn at the bottom, when something went wrong with the brake. The huge, top-heavy vehicle—one we called "the caravan"—ran upon the horses, which, as usual in Bush harness, had no breeching to back against, and there was nothing for it but to send them downhill at full gallop; they did their part, but the sharp corner was too sharp for us, and as we swung round it we swung right over. It seemed an inevitable thing, yet I am convinced that our squire would not have allowed it to happen. He was taking a brief rest inside the carriage, with the ladies, and so got a broken arm and a dislocated shoulder, which, together with the disgrace of the catastrophe, much incensed him. We used to get into marvellous tight places under his devil-may-care handling of his notoriously wild, half-broken horses, but never without coming safely out of them; they were the occasions of proving what a miraculous whip he was. Once a wheel came off when the team were in mid-career, and in the twinkling of an eye he had so turned the other three wheels as to balance the waggonette upon them until its occupants could get out. One day four other horses were rushed up a broken hill track amongst trees to some mine workings on the top, and as there was no turning space here they had to come down backwards. We were showing the country to some officers of an Italian man-o'-war, and the dumb dignity with which those men went through the ordeal spoke volumes for their breeding as well [140] as for their nerve.

But I feel clogged and dulled while talking of this place. I do not want to go on talking of it, but to get past it to scenes that are not forever associated with sorrows that do not bear thinking of. It was a pleasant dwelling-place, indeed, but now it remains, even at so great a distance off, but the stage setting of the second domestic tragedy, so much more terrible than the first—the death of our eldest son when he was five. He was one of those bright and beautiful children of whom people say, when they are gone, "He was too good for this world," and "He was not meant to live"—that was the first thing my friends said to me, or I should know my place better than to thus speak of him; and every year and day your child is with you adds that much more of strength and depth to the love whose roots are the very substance of the mother's heart; and the bitterest thing of all is the suffering you cannot alleviate, and not to lose them at a stroke, which I had thought so supremely dreadful. After ailing nothing all his life, he took scarlet fever in its worst form, struggled against it with all the power of his perfect constitution and brave and patient temper, rallied and relapsed, got dropsy, and died by inches—conscious nearly to the last, and only concerned for his mother's tears and the trouble he was giving people. If he had been humanly restive under the agonies that he must have borne I could myself have borne it better; it was his heroic patience and unselfishness—that "Please," and "Thank you," and "Don't mind," and "Don't cry" which only failed when he could no longer force his tongue to act—which seemed the [141] most heart-breaking thing of all. "If you had read of this in a book," they said who helped to nurse him, "you would never have believed it;" and so I may expect incredulity from the reader to whom I now have the bad taste to tell the tale; but whenever I have thought of his conduct during that last and only trial of his short life, I have realised to the full what he would have been to us if he had lived. People say to me, "Oh, you cannot tell how he might have turned out." But I can tell.

Well, if he had lived he would have been a man of thirty now—married, doubtless, and perhaps

to some woman who would have made him wretched. There is always that pitfall in the path of the best of men. Also the success that must have attended the possession of such mental powers as his would have been a danger. "Don't you teach that child anything until he is seven at the least," our old German doctor was continually warning us, and we did not; but somebody gave the child a box of letters, and he could read the newspaper before he died. If you recited to him, once, a long narrative poem—"Beth Gelert" or "The Wreck of the Hesperus"—he would go off to his nurse or somebody and repeat it from end to end, almost without a mistake. He had a passion for mechanics, and, having seen a railway or mining or agricultural engine at work, would come home and, with bits of string and cotton-reels and any rubbish he could lay his hands on, make a model of it in which no essential part was lacking. The frequent appeal at the study door, "Just a few nails, please, daddy, and I won't 'sturb you any more," was the nearest he came to teasing anybody.

Well, he died at five years old, and the common impulse of all who knew him, including his fool of a mother, was to say, "Of course!" I was childless for a fortnight. Then another little daughter came, as it seemed, to save my life. [142]

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[143]

CHAPTER XI

ToC

THE FIFTH HOME

We left B—— in 1877. The diocese of Ballarat had been carved out of that of Melbourne, hitherto bounded by the boundaries of the colony; and the knife had lopped off a portion of our parish, leaving only enough to support a "reader," who is supposed not to want anything to live on.

We passed then into the new diocese. And, to begin with, we did a stupid thing—possibly two stupid things. G., after consultation with his bishop, accepted a living without seeing it. A charming photograph of the parsonage, and the knowledge that it was situated in a pleasant district, within a short drive of our then metropolis, Ballarat, seemed to make a preliminary inspection unnecessary, especially as the financial soundness of the parish was guaranteed. We had dismantled our house at B—— and packed our furniture for L—— before personally making acquaintance with the latter place. Then—for I was fretting to see and rummage over my new home with a measuring tape in my hands—we arranged to drive over. It was on a Saturday that we started, in very wintry weather; and all our subsequent lives might have been different if only it had been summer or a fine day.

We spent the night in Ballarat, and after breakfast drove to L——, timing ourselves to get there for morning service, G. having taken duty for the day. It teemed. There was hardly any congregation in consequence, and the church was dark, cold, and dismal. Amongst the absentees was the organist, and I was called upon to play the selected music, without preparation, to a few watchful critics. They gave us a kindly welcome after service, and invitations to dinner and tea; after which we were able to inspect the parsonage in privacy. It had been empty for some weeks, and rain had rained on it for days. The picturesqueness of the photograph had been wholly washed away. We should have made allowances for all this, but when we found one room with the paper peeling from the wall, and another showing a wet patch, and when we sniffed the fusty, mouldy, shut-up air, we exclaimed to each other, "A damp house!" and there and then determined that it was impossible for us to go into it. We had lost two children; nothing should induce us to imperil the safety of the third. [144]

At dinner, and again at tea, our entertainers apologised for the exceptional weather, and assured us that all was quite otherwise as a rule. The parsonage needed fires for a few days, perhaps a patch on the roof, possibly the clearing of leaves and birds' nests from the water-pipes. They answered for it that, when in order, it was a perfectly healthy house. I daresay they were right, for we never heard that the family of the clergyman who subsequently jumped at it took any harm while living there. But the possibility of its being damp was enough for us; we dared not risk it.

It was with some difficulty, and not without unpleasantness, that we backed out of the engagement we had deliberately made. It was our unexpected luck not to suffer more than we did. In the end, instead of declining upon a lower level in the matter of the next appointment, it fell to our lot to be promoted to what I think was considered at the time the most important country parish in the diocese. [145]

Here, at anyrate, there was no fault to find with the parsonage house, unless one objected to its lonely situation—which we did not. As a parsonage house it was unique in Victoria, and I believe in Australia. The wayfaring stranger might have taken it for but another station homestead, on a smaller scale than most; as a fact, he frequently did, in the person of the professional sundowner.

We did not go there at once on leaving B——. Our first welcome was to one of the "mansions" in its neighbourhood—the seat, as it might be called, of the new squire of the parish—and such was the treatment we received in it that we remained there as visitors for nearly half a year. The lady of the house was young, and we became friends. She said, "Why should I be here by myself, while you are over there by yourself? Let us keep each other company." Never did I live in such utter ease and luxury. Men and maid-servants to wait on one at every turn, and to pet the year-old baby so that even her nurse found her place a sinecure; a dear old housekeeper continually pursuing me with "nourishment"; daily drives with my hostess, alone or with a cavalcade of more ephemeral guests—so numerous that we seemed to have a dinner-party every night; no domestic cares; no parish work—the conditions were not only pleasant, but most beneficial to my health. Meanwhile G. worked the parish from this base, using the horses and buggies of the [146] establishment as if they were his own.

From July 25th, 1877, to January 8th of the following year, we lived this feather-bed life. Then our friends set us gently down upon our own premises—there had been a doubt as to whether they were to be our own, up to this time, which partly accounted for the delay—and started us in life again on our own base. A Brussels carpet from one, a set of tea-things from another—it was like the going to housekeeping of the newly-married. The buggy that finally took us to our fifth home was found on arrival packed with toothsome tokens of affection which the housekeeper had stuffed in at the last moment.

That fifth home was a survival of the old, old times—quite the beginnings of the colony. In those old times, before townships were, the princely pioneer squatters (our late host the chief), wishing to have their church represented amongst them, made a first gift for the purpose of one hundred acres of their fat lands and a house—the nucleus of this house. It was an inalienable endowment, not to any parish—for there was none—but to the incumbent for the time being; so that afterwards, when it came to belong to a parish, whose centre of town and church was six miles off, the vestry could not turn it into money, as they desired, so as to bring their parson to headquarters.

The first incumbent—a D.D. eminent in the Church and in the history of the Western District, a pioneer himself, whose name is now perpetuated in a Trinity College scholarship—began his long ministry as a missionary at large. He saw all the changes that turned that fertile wilderness into the garden of Victoria, studded with wealthy homesteads and prosperous towns, while sitting, as [147] Dik would say, upon his own valuable bit of it, living the same pastoral life as the squatters around him. The reader will remember that the term "squatter," with us, means roughly the landed gentry; in its original sense the word has no meaning now.

In his old age Dr R. went "home" for a holiday, leaving two curates in charge. Shortly before he was expected back, came the news of his death, and, after a sorrowful time of inaction on the part of the mourning parish, G. was selected to take his place. It was always impressed upon us that it was to take his place, not to fill it, which nobody could do.

For six years we lived as he lived. Then the authorities six miles off decided to put an end to the old *régime*. Incumbent No. 3 had to be brought into line with other incumbents somehow. His property could not be sold, but apparently (with his consent, I presume) it could be let; for let it was, as soon as we had vacated it. Tenants of a class to suit the house needed more than a hundred acres of land with it, so it was let to a farmer, an ex-free-selector, whose selection adjoined. He took up his abode in what we called the "old part"—the original house (our kitchens, store-rooms, etc.), to which, according to Bush custom, another and better had been attached, the two being connected by a planked, bark-roofed, trellis-walled passage; and he used my drawing-room and our other living-rooms to stack his produce in. And the parson went to live in the town, beside his church—in a corrugated iron house that was run up for him.

I am glad it was he—not his predecessor. There is no ill-nature in this, seeing that he doubtless [148] congratulated himself also. For he could get daily letters and newspapers, immediate access to the stores, the schools, the church, the doctor, and next-door neighbours; whereas we were often in straits owing to our six miles' distance from them. Between us and the road lay a (to us) bridgeless river—it is called a river—which it was necessary to pass to get to church and back, and at the best of times its banks at the crossing-place were so steep down and up again that I dreaded the spot on a dark night, after going through it in safety hundreds of times, and after all the breaking-in to such things that I had had. Its flood-water used to overflow into what we called our "lane," the unavoidable approach to the house, covering the fences on either side in the lower parts, which between-whiles were either soft bogs or rough ruts and ridges like those of a frosted ploughed field. Owing to these lions in the path, we had few visitors in winter. In summer there were Bush fires—of which I will say more presently.

Then there were long waits for the doctor in dire emergencies, and per-mile fees (if the doctor were non-Church-of-England, or you could successfully save yourself from taking charity) for his tardy attendance. Our groom nearly killed a pair of horses one night—when a commonplace domestic event was impending—trying to make them do twelve miles in time that would but comfortably cover four. One day my nurse and I found a white speck on the throat of the youngest baby, when no man or buggy or even wood-cart was at home. While I looked at my devoted colleague in despair she began briskly to gather and tie on our respective hats. "We have to get him to the doctor somehow," said she. And off we started, and carried him (he was then [149] twenty-one months old), turn and turn about, the whole six miles, all up-hill, since there was practically no alternative. As it chanced, the doctor, when we got to him—dead beat as ever women were—laughed at the baby's throat; but the incident illustrates some of the drawbacks of our isolated life which were not suffered by our successors.

Household supplies had to be laid in wholesale—sacks of sugar and flour, chests of tea, boxes of kerosene and candles. We had to make our own bread, and our own yeast for it; we had to kill our own mutton and dress it; gather our own firewood and chop it. This meant keeping a man (for the first time); beside whom we had a general servant, a nurse, and a young lady companion.

The kitchen party were not at all lonely in these wilds. They had friends on the neighbouring stations and farms, with whom they foregathered in their leisure hours; they had many picnics and excursions to the town; they gave a ball every Christmas (which rather scandalised a section of the parish, although the rigid etiquette observed at them might have been copied with advantage in higher circles), and were tendered balls in return. At ordinary times they seemed sufficient for themselves. Sitting in my detached house of an evening, I would hear cheerful sounds from the other building, and, being mysteriously summoned thither, would find the groom, with his concertina, playing reels and jigs for the little ones to dance to, the dancing-mistresses standing by to enjoy the achievements of their pupils and the surprise they had prepared for me.

A new member was added to the household in a singular manner. The selectors with families needed a school. To get a school, Government had to be assured that so many children—twenty-five or thereabouts—were entitled to it; and the parents came to ask if we would aid them to make up the number. Our three were babies, and we certainly did not mean to foist them on the State for their education, but we somehow reconciled it with our consciences to sign the requisition on our poorer neighbours' behalf. Thus they got their school—a tiny white wooden building, and one teacher. The building, consisting of schoolroom and teacher's quarters, was set up on the public highway, just outside our outer gate, on the bank of the so-called river (where the bridge was), a night camping-place of all the teamsters and drovers on the road; and the teacher appointed to live there, beyond call of any other house, was a good-looking young woman. [150]

She came to us one day in great distress—perplexity, rather, for she was far too sensible to make a fuss. She could not, under the circumstances, live alone in her school quarters, and she had tried in vain to find lodgings in the farmers' cottages: they were all too small and full. What should she do?

She was an extremely nice girl, and, finding we could solve her difficulty in no other way, we took her in ourselves. Strange to say, the experiment answered admirably. In the servants' house there was a large spare room, which had once been Dr R.'s study. We put a screen across the middle of it, made a bedroom behind and a simple sitting-room in front, and there installed her. She attended to her own little housework, and the servants took her in her meals from the adjacent kitchen—a job to which they had no objection in the world; and she used to sit in her basket-chair on their common verandah and pass the time of day with them when so inclined, and adjusted herself to the position generally with perfect taste, just as they did. To us personally she made no difference whatever, except in her services to the children. She paid us the trifle that covered the cost of her board, and as a further return for hospitality took the two older little ones to school with her once a day, taught and specially shepherded them while there, and brought them back again. So, by accident, we kept faith with the Government after all; and anything like the rapidity and thoroughness with which all the drudgery of the three R's was got through in that little school-house I never saw. I used to walk over the paddock of an afternoon to see the process. We made a new track across the paddock with our goings and comings, the home-returning before nursery tea being usually a family procession, led by the baby's perambulator. We were amused one wet winter to find Miss C. and her charges making a bridge of a bullock's carcase that conveniently spanned a muddy rift. They went over it, they said, until the ribs bent too much and threatened to "let them through." [151]

Besides the milking cows of the establishment, we always had a herd of bullocks on the place. We bought them as "store," intending to sell them as "fats"—intending, indeed, to make our fortunes as land-owners and cattle-dealers. Our hundred acres were notoriously one of the rich patches of the district, coveted by our wealthy neighbours as badly as ever Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard; anything could be made of it—on paper.

Alas! the usual fate of the amateur farmer befell us. Perhaps we were not there long enough. Certainly we had the worst of luck in the matter of seasons. It was one long series of droughts, punctuated by those floods already alluded to, which came at the wrong time to benefit the grass. The store cattle would not make fat, on which we could make profit; the precious "water-frontage," when it became a rope of sand threaded with water-holes, unfenced one side of the property, allowing the stock to stray at large. The stock, also, by degrees became largely composed of unproductive horses, those happening to be G.'s special weakness and temptation. He had an assortment, continually being added to, for his own riding, and we had two concurrent pairs for the buggy; the groom had one or two for his constant journeys to the post, and there was one for the wood-cart. They were for ever going to be shod, or they met with accidents and had to be replaced. The most valuable that we ever possessed was pricked in the haunch with a point of fencing wire—a wound almost invisible to the naked eye—and died of lockjaw from it. [152]

Finally, we let fifty acres to a real farmer at £1 per acre. He strongly fenced this off, and grew lovely crops of corn on it. And I think that was about all the "increment" we enjoyed.

Here we learned something of what Bush settlers have to suffer in our frequent years of drought. We had a large underground rain tank, with a pump to it, but there were times when it seemed a perfect sin to wash. Our selector neighbours had only their zinc tanks and the river—muddy, and fouled by creatures alive and dead; and the nurse and children used to make it an

object of their summer evening walks to carry little cans of water to their friends, to make at least one nice cup of tea with. It was regarded as a handsome present. Hydatids raged over the [153] country-side. Two of our servants (who married each other, and went to live at the school-house by the river, in Miss C.'s empty quarters) were crippled with the disease.

"The reservoiring of rain-water is the greatest economic question in South Africa," says the Subaltern in those charming *Letters to His Wife*. "At present little or nothing is done to combat drought." The same here, to the very word and letter. Another thing he says:—"After all, it is the atmospheric conditions that make the veldt, and give their character to its children." That applies as exactly to the Australian Bush.

A young soldier of ours came home from the war the other day. He had been in seventy-five engagements, and might reasonably have felt a little sick of South Africa. But no. "When it is all over, I am going back there to settle," said he. "The climate and the country—somehow they just suit me."

Those hills around us, in formation like bread-dough turned out upon the board and just beginning to sink—low and softly wavy, like the Sussex Downs—were as good as tropical seas for the sun to set on, and better. Such lights! Such tints! Such purity! Apply to them the Subaltern's description of the uplands of the Orange River Colony—of the sunset that he saw as he rode to Bloemfontein—and there you are. I need not add a word.

We were very close to Nature at this place. The wild things lived with us even more intimately than at Como. Opossums did not keep to the river; they loved the fruity old garden, and stuck to it in spite of dogs and guns. Driving home o' nights we used to see them sitting on the house [154] roofs, silhouetted against the sky, and they used to keep us awake with their talk to each other in a tree near our bedroom window. On one occasion we were roused by the nurse calling to us that a 'possum had come down the chimney, and was flying round the nursery and smashing everything. A candle and a stick soon ended the career of that enterprising little animal.

We had all the birds of the country flighting over us in the grey dawns and the golden twilights. The lovely gabble of the cranes and the wild swans comes back to me whenever I think of the place. My diary records that on one occasion we had a young native companion, "roast, with forcemeat," for dinner, and that it was "delicious." Also that, two days later, we experimented upon a swan, and found it "not so good." The gun, of course, went out for duck and snipe and quail in their season, to vary the too-constant mutton. They were not easy to get, for this is no true game country, but those huge sheep stations, with their lonely dams, were practically wild country for them.

In the elbow of the river at the corner of our paddock we used to watch for the platypus, which had a home there, under the broken banks. Four of these precious rarities were shot in the six years—we are sorry for that now, but were proud of it at the time—and the house smelt horribly while their dense, oily coats were being stripped off and dressed. The same river provided a beautiful set of furs for my friend at M——; they were made of the golden-brown skins of water-rats, caught and cured for her by her butler. There, too, we used to sit amid the evening mosquitoes, and angle for black-fish and "yabbies." It was a corner much beloved by school-boys [155] of our acquaintance with Saturday afternoons or long twilights upon their hands. One young fellow, the son of a lawyer in the town, spent many patient hours there, all alone; but we, prolonging his enjoyment by the offer of a meal or a bed, would sometimes look on at his tranquil sport, amused by his methods. When he needed to bait a hook, he bent the crown of his head earthward and took off his cap gingerly, afterwards combing his rough locks with his grubby paw. He kept his worms there, between his cap lining and his hair; it saved the trouble of a bait-can. When he caught a fish, he slipped it into his pocket, where it tangled itself with his handkerchief and oddments in its dying throes. We were somewhat nicer in our proceedings. Neat little blobs of meat at the end of strings were let down into the water, and when the tiny cray-fish fastened upon them they were lifted delicately into the air, the whole art consisting in not frightening them into dropping off until the bank was under them. Nothing messy or murderous or offensive to the sensibilities of women and children—until the black creatures were boiled red for tea or breakfast, and that was done by the cook in private, and we tried not to know anything about it. A few dozens of them, warm from the pot, with bread and butter, made a delicious meal.

But Nature took toll of us in return for what she gave. Eagle-hawks, that hankered after the lambs, and their lesser brethren that were interested in the poultry, hares that loved young vegetables with the morning dew upon them, nocturnal wildcats, and the tame cats gone wild that were far worse than they—for them, too, the gun was kept in readiness, and, alas! I grieve to [156] say, the trap. Once we had an extraordinary visitation of caterpillars; a dense, enormous mass, marching straight in one direction, taking everything as it came. We were in its path, and, until it had disentangled itself from the premises, were simply overwhelmed. We barricaded all doors and windows; we tried, like so many Mrs Partingtons, to sweep back the living waves with brooms—in vain; those little, soft, green things were as irresistible as the sea. We ran about, shuddering and in tears, while they crawled up legs and arms, and down necks, and amongst our hair; we went into the dairy to find them lining roofs and walls and drowning all over the cream in every milk-pan—went to bed to find sheets and pillows thick with them. No plague of Egypt could have been more agonising while it lasted, which, fortunately, was not long. They did not even stay to eat the garden up, as the grasshoppers did when similarly out on a big march. Some end they had in view and pursued relentlessly, without a pause. It was a phenomenon never, in my experience, repeated or explained.

But the terror of terrors was—fire. The land was rich, the years were droughty, and we the innocent victims of a systematic incendiarism directed against somebody else. The somebody else was like the Russian Government, all palace and diamonds at the top and all black bread and taxes at the bottom; or like the Government that we here groan under, which acts upon the theory that the more you cut down trade the more money you will get out of it. A station that "marched" with our Naboth's vineyard had a black mark against it.

[157] Why does the Australian pastoralist provide free board and lodging for every loafer that comes for them, instead of kicking him out and telling him to go to work? Because he knows how easily and safely the loafer could avenge himself if sent empty away—and how well the loafer knows that he knows it. There is a tacit understanding between them. The wise blackmailer is easy in his demands—the regulation allowance and no more—and the blackmailed is glad to purchase valuable good-will at no greater cost. It is one of the oldest institutions of the country, which even we upon our hundred acres would not have dared to flout. Our wealthy but frugal neighbour did, as we were told, and reaped the consequences—which would not have mattered much if the undeserving poor had not stood in the path of the reaper. Thus, for weeks together, G. and his man never put up their horses at night until they had circled round and round the place, looking for little trails of dead sticks and straw carefully led into a fat paddock that was not ours, as a fuse to a mine. One Sunday night, on the way home from church, without looking for them—because they were all alight, though refusing to burn effectively without a wind—he found three.

This was in what we call the "fire year." That summer we had ten in almost ten consecutive days, each of which menaced the mass of old sun-dried woodwork in which we lived. Two horses stood ready to mount at the first signal, every homestead around being similarly prepared. We slept with blinds up and windows open, and anyone waking would at once jump up and go out and look into the night for the dreaded flare. No matter where it was, or when, the men were off to it with the speed of professional firemen; and if it was near, or the wind towards us, we women [158] started to make bucketsful of tea to send out to them. Helpless with a new-born baby, I used to lie and smell the smoke and listen to the flap of the bags, and wonder what was happening, and nearly died from want of rest. One morning one of us unluckily remarked that "actually here was breakfast nearly over, and no fire!" Scarcely were the words uttered before the groom appeared with his "Fire, sir!" and the next instant both were galloping across the downs, to join other horsemen converging from all points of the compass upon the same spot. It was Saturday morning, and that battle lasted into Sunday, when we could have walked, we were told, ten miles in a straight line from our back door without going off burnt ground. One other morning, when I was well enough for a drive and wanted to do some shopping, and it seemed safe to leave home for an hour or two, G. took me to the township. We were hurrying through our business in the street when a man came up and said to G., "There's a fire over your way, sir." We had a pair of very fast horses, and we flew down those hills in record time. Reaching home, we found our good neighbours pouring water over the charred posts of the garden fence.

Of course, this was not all incendiarism. Even the aggrieved sundowner is not so bad as that. Under suitable conditions, nothing is easier than to start a blaze that flies out of your hand before you see the spark. A castaway bottle, a little ash knocked out of a pipe, will do it. My own eyes have proved to me from what a small cause a great conflagration may result. A cavalcade of [159] vehicles from M——, while we were staying there, was on the road to church; it was a well-used, fenced Bush road, all dust and wild peppermint weed—a fire-break in itself, one would have thought. But I, in the second buggy, saw a flicker under the wheel of the first; it ran from one scrap of tinder to another and was away over the country before one could draw breath. "Like wildfire" is the best image for speed that I know. It used to pour over those grassy rises just as released water does, a spreading black stream with a scintillating yellow edge; not a menace to life as in forest country, but sickening to the heart of one who knows his home to windward of it, and knows the frailty of the most carefully-prepared "break." The buggies were stopped, the men in their Sunday coats out and after it on the instant, but there was no church that day for any male of the party except the parson. An examination of the spot where the fire started showed that the buggy wheel had passed over a wax match. The unwritten law of the Bush is that no matches must come into it, at these times, except the wooden ones guaranteed to strike on the box only.

The "fire year"—or the fire summer rather (1879-80)—is literally burnt into my memory. Now, when I smell Bush smoke I feel as I would at the sudden sight of blood in large quantities. All those old scenes come back, and the old terror of the nerves, which were strained so long that the effect upon me was something like what in pre-scientific days was called going into a decline. My strength refused to return after the birth of the child that arrived in the middle of the ordeal, so that at last I had to be sent away out of sight, sound, and smell of the place, to give me a [160] chance to recover. But the worst was over before I went. We were sitting at tea one night—evening dinners, by the way, had early been given up—when there suddenly fell upon our ears the sound of rain pattering. We nearly jumped from our chairs; we looked at each other, beyond speech; and then I burst into a fit of hysterical tears—some of the happiest I ever shed.

In the evening a neighbour rode over—for the first time, as he remarked, without his sack on the saddle, and for the first time on any errand unconnected with its use. We had all been keeping guard of our homes for weeks that had seemed years, friends meeting only on the field of battle—as heroic a field of battle as those that our "contingenters" went to, and better than the playing-fields of Eton as a preparation for them; but we were free at last. And we could hardly realise it. All the evening we sat, almost in silence, inanely smirking at each other and listening to the rain. It was too sweet a sound to drown with talk.

The "old parsonage" was (allowing again for the enchantment that distance lends) a charming home; but it had that against it. I have been glad ever since to live where there is nothing more to do than turn the gas off at the meter when one goes to bed.

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[161]

CHAPTER XII

ToC

THE SIXTH HOME

The charms of solitude at "The Old Parsonage" were outweighed by its disadvantages when I became that miserable creature, the confirmed invalid. The fire danger which made me nervous in summer was bad for health; the silence and loneliness of the winters, when nobody came, were worse. My husband, of course, was much away from home; the servants lived in their detached house; and so good and capable were they that for a time—after the elder babies began to go with Miss C. to school—I saved the expense of my dear little lady-help, who, however, came back to me later on. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I could get hold of my own children. Their devoted nurse and mine, already mentioned, watched us like a cat to keep us apart, lest their exuberance should fatigue me. The hour before tea (not afternoon tea, but the solid evening meal) was grudgingly conceded to us. Maria—she, like Dik, is dead, and I may give her the name now held in so much love and honour—would then bring them, beautifully brushed and garbed (she used to put clean socks and pinafores on them twice a day, although there was nobody but ourselves to see them), to my sofa side, and permit us to play together, provided we behaved ourselves. All the while she hovered in the doorway to see that I was not clambered over or [162] roughly handled in any way, and long before time was up would advance to sweep them out, with her "Come now, I can see that mother is getting tired." She saw it before I did. They were as good as gold, thanks to her splendid training. Never were such model children—until the day that, as a broken-hearted bride, she parted from them, when they "played up" in a manner to drive the house distracted. When they had their little aches and pains, and I used to beg Maria to let them sleep in my room, she would not allow it. Many a time have I surreptitiously carried a fretful child to my bed, and settled down with it comfortably, as I thought, and then had it gently but firmly taken from me, despite my expostulations. I had, at anyrate, the comfort of knowing that no mother could tend them better than she did, and the theory of the household that I was not strong enough to stand anything had some foundation in fact. But my inactive life—although I still got through a large amount of sewing and novel-writing—and my many hours of brooding solitude, had their own bad effect upon my broken health. There came a day when I declared, with tears, that if I had to spend another winter in that place I should go melancholy mad.

So I did not spend another. G. also had had enough of it. And particularly he wanted to get back to the Melbourne diocese, from which he had been automatically expelled. But although he had been automatically expelled, his old diocese held him to be a legal stranger when he applied for re-admittance. It had a regulation, since abrogated, that no clergyman from outside could take a living until he had served unbeneficed for a year; and no exception was made in his peculiar case. [163] However, we freely paid the price to get our way—exchanged our substantial parish, secure for life, had we so willed it, for a humble curacy, which might lead to anything or nothing—and on the 16th of November 1883 left the old parsonage for a home that was the greatest possible contrast to it—a grubby little terrace house in a low part of one of our premier cities—a house we had to take as the only one in our new parish that was then available. Our principal occupation and amusement during the short time that we lived there was hunting for another, which fortunately we had not found when the summons came to us again to move on.

But there was an interval between the uprooting in the Western District and the re-planting in this cramped spot—for the children and me. The elder ones were placed with some friends who kept a kindergarten at the seaside, and the baby and Maria accompanied me on a round of visits which lasted into January of the following year. This was perhaps the gayest period of my life, in spite of increasing invalidism. Socially it was the most brilliant era that Victoria has known in my time, and I was so placed that the best of everything came my way. The house that was my town head-quarters for many years then possessed its magnet of a daughter—now on the roll of the grandees of England, by her marriage an aunt to Royalty—and wherever she was, there was good company and plenty of it, for she had her pick and choice. And there for the time being was I also, for we were close friends, as we remain to this day, none of the usual arguments of the world against it having had any effect upon that faithful heart.

And this reminds me to make—as in these intimate disclosures I have an opportunity to do—a [164] little explanation. When I wrote a novel called *The Devastators*, I knew that I was laying down a rule contradicted in my own circle by two glaring exceptions. This bright and beautiful woman is one of them; the other is a person still nearer to me. I had to apologise to both of them when that book came out. From their childhood they have been exposed to flatteries that should have

spoiled them utterly; both have proved unspoilable. In the case of one of the pretty faces, it does not even care to look at itself in the glass; the mere ordinary vanity of the ordinary female is lacking. So that to this large extent my theory of the effect of physical charm upon its possessor is discredited. While I am glad to state the fact, I am sorry to remain of the opinion that such exceptions are exceptions, and that the rule is still the rule.

With the elder of the incorruptible pair—the younger was then a small child—I had great times in Melbourne, varying my social revels with a visit to the doctor twice or thrice a week. The distinguished globe-trotter was plentiful at that time. Lord and Lady Rosebery, amongst others, were touring the colonies and the houses of some of my friends. At one I spent three days with them. At another I had a still more interesting week-end with Archibald Forbes. He came nearest to the popular newspaper presentment of him, but I have little faith left in printed history when it deals with the inner lives of my illustrious contemporaries; from which it logically follows that I am a hopeless sceptic in respect of the printed history of the past. "It may have been thus," think I, when I con the so-called authentic records of my race in this or that particular, "but I wish I [165] could have been there to see for myself."

It is not for me, a fellow-guest, to play reporter, but some incidents of those occasions when I could study England and Australia in conjunction upon the domestic stage may be mentioned without offence to taste or hospitality. For instance:—One fine afternoon the house-party, which included the Roseberys, went out to the tennis ground of the establishment. When we arrived there we found the beautiful grass court, kept like a bowling green, in the possession of a crowd of strangers, holiday trippers of the 'Arry and 'Arriet type; they had invaded the grounds from the railway near by, had found racquets and balls, and were in the middle of an exciting game. Did they scurry away, scared, on the appearance of the smart folks from the house? Did anybody order them off, or even request them to desist? Not a bit of it. They calmly continued their game, which took a long time, while we sat down meekly and waited. When they had quite done they trooped away without a word, and then Lord Rosebery wearily took up his racquet and started in. Typically Australian as this incident was, I cannot imagine it happening to those older great houses spoken of in a former chapter—houses of no particular size, as far as their material fabric is concerned, and with no liveried servants attached to them, but of a dignity secure of public respect, even in this disrespectful country.

Male house-servants, by the way, and men's valets, seem to me quite out of harmony with the domestic traditions of this land. With us they mark no caste, save that of wealth, and belong mainly to those who do not know what to do with them. I have sat at breakfast with a regiment of [166] men in full-dress livery in waiting round the table—a degree of state that, to the best of my belief, an English duke dispenses with—and this in a house with no morning-room to go to when breakfast was over, but only the same gilded and satiny drawing-room used over-night; and where guests who had never done such a thing in their lives might find themselves put to sleep in the same room with strangers. A young titled Englishman, to whom this happened, cut his acquaintance with the place in consequence, although his entertainers never knew it. My "old families" are very chary of these exotic innovations, and, whatever one's aristocratic leanings, it does hurt one to think of an Australian man—synonym for simple and hardy manliness—submitting to be dressed and coddled by a trousered lady's-maid, and to think of another Australian man condescending to that sort of servitude. But no Australian man does condescend to it, I am sure; the Australian valet, as well as his liveried house-mates, is an imported article.

Against the lady's-maid in petticoats, who outnumbers him a hundred to one, I have nothing to say—quite the contrary. She is a "grateful and comforting" institution in this country, so far as I have known her, and three representatives of her class are on my list of friends. I like a lady's-maid myself at times, and my own Maria took up the *rôle* as one to the manner born when she and I were visiting "the quality" together. She packed and unpacked, and sewed tuckers, and laid out my evening clothes, and was as jealous of my dignity and her own, amongst strange servants, as if we had been grandees all our lives. I was envied the possession of her. "How do you come to [167] have a woman like that?" said a person of wealth and consequence to me one day. "Why doesn't she go to the good houses? She would be snapped up anywhere. She could command any wages she liked to ask." "Well," said I, with a serene smile, "you offer her a better place. I will not stand in her way if she likes to take it." Maria's father was overseer of a great station, and she had never been in service until she came to me. I knew no bribe short of a husband and home of her own would entice her to leave me.

Charming associations surround the spot where I foregathered with the great war correspondent. There is a Mount—for it is not quite a mountain, while it is much more than a hill—situated forty-four miles from Melbourne and about seventeen hundred feet above it. In its natural state every inch was covered with forest trees and scrub, so that our mutual friend and host, who was one of the first to make a residential suburb of it, had to chop out a hole in the dense growth upon the steep hill-side to see where he was, when prospecting for a site on which to make a home. That home, when I began to frequent it, had become the show-place of the district. The pretty house made no pretensions to be more than a cottage, but the garden was notoriously one of the loveliest in the land. Its owner was a gardener born; he came up twice a week to his family from his business in town and his bachelor quarters at the Melbourne Club, and revelled in his darling pursuit through all his leisure hours. His head gardener was an importation from famous gardens at home; he had a salary of £200 a year, a house in the [168] grounds, and two men under him; and all their work was exquisite. The garden dropped down and down, from the terrace that had been cut for the house to stand on, to an artificial lake at the bottom—velvet lawns and precious trees and shrubs, with a "fern gully" on one side of it, where

you stepped down a glade dark with arching fronds, protecting thickets of innumerable rare varieties, from New Zealand and elsewhere, kept moist and cooled by a perennial cascade of crystal-clear mountain water, punctuated at intervals by pools with goldfish or water-flowers in them. In the spring that fairy tunnel was carpeted with lilies of the valley in myriads—the only place where I have seen them growing in this country, except in flower-pots. Up under the verandah roofs red bells of lapageria used to hang like a drapery, and the treasures of the unpretentious glass houses into which the sitting-rooms opened were beyond count. It was a fitting environment for one of the finest flower-painters of her day—known far beyond the limits of these realms, as, indeed, so is the place which reared her. Many a globe-trotter would recall it if he chanced to read these words. The Prince of Wales and his brother, when they were boys, stayed here; their noble chief took the opportunity to choose a wife for himself out of the house, a sister of the gifted lady who painted flowers so marvellously, and with whom Archibald Forbes fell—in a strictly platonic fashion, of course, for she was already married and he about to become so for the second time—so deeply in love. He raved about her in an English magazine article after he got home. He said she was ... but there is the article (in a bound volume) to speak for itself.

It was winter when I went to this house to meet him. Beautiful as the place was in warmer [169] seasons, abloom with flowers, when one sat under trees to read, and, looking up from one's book, looked down again upon the glimmering city and the sea fifty miles away, I think it was in winter that I liked it best. Oh, it was cold! Wrapped about with mountain mists or with whirling snow, it was like an Alpine *chalet*; but one came in out of this weather to great wood-fires with cushioned basket-chairs beside them—a fire to each room—and that was an effect that could not have been surpassed. It poured with rain on the night I speak of. I was staying at a neighbouring country-house, and joined the Saturday party coming up from town at a wayside station. A son of my host, who had been through the Russo-Turkish war with Archibald Forbes—one on one side, one on the other—was with them; and fine company they made, with their deadly reminiscences. They had met on the bloody field of Plevna, the most vivid incident of which, it appeared, was a banquet upon a looted German sausage (I think it was) when both were starving.

We passed, in dripping mackintoshes, across the little platform lonely in the scrub—there is a considerable station there now, and the Mount is populous with country-houses—to the covered waggonette awaiting us. Up the steep and miry Bush track, then like any other Bush track, the poor horses strained and struggled, slipped and fell. The men had to get out and do the climb on foot. It was pitchy dark, and the trees closed us round. But presently we turned in at a gate and passed through the perfect garden to the lighted house—the blazing bedroom fire to dress by, the glowing drawing-room hearth to gather around afterwards, the exhilarating dinner and evening [170] talk. Mr Forbes had just come from New Zealand, and that country had enchanted him. He had roamed the earth—Switzerland, Norway, the Rockies, the Yosemite, all the famous beauty spots—but never, he declared, had he seen anything to match New Zealand scenery. A coach drive through the Otira Gorge had simply turned his head. The husband of the flower-painter had captained British troops in the Maori wars, and the house happened to possess a fine collection of New Zealand photographs, bound in several volumes. These I spent a long Sunday morning over, while Mr Forbes descanted upon the pages as I turned them. I made a promise to myself and him that not many years should pass before I saw the originals of those pictures, but—as a matter of course—I have not seen them yet. In my sadder moments I am convinced that I never shall. There was no church upon the mountain then—only a little school-house where, on alternate Sunday afternoons, an Anglican clergyman took a turn with his Presbyterian brother; on such occasions we ladies of the house brushed through the bracken-fern and woodland scrub to the humble tabernacle. My hostess played the harmonium; the potential Personage of the family led the singing. But on this wet and wintry Sunday we stayed at home. I had much friendly intercourse with our chief guest, and we corresponded afterwards. This was about four months before the gay time which included the Rosebery episode.

The diversions of that gay time soon palled upon me. I was glad to exchange my camp in town—lap of love as well as luxury though it was—for a home of my own, however 'umble. We collected [171] ourselves in the little terrace house, which managed to hold us, a governess for the children included; and as soon as she had made us as comfortable as she could, Maria's ill-used young man came for her, and we lost a friend who could never be replaced. The 20th of February 1884 was her wedding-day, and no obsequies were ever celebrated with more pangs and tears.

Miss P., the new governess, was a treasure notwithstanding. A curate brother (he is a portly canon now), who wanted her for his housekeeper, reft her from me three months afterwards; and she is married, I hear, this long time, and I hope the man who has got her appreciates his luck. She had a handful with those children after Maria's influence was removed, but the way she managed them (in that confined space) made me envious of her moral vigour and the texture of her nerves.

When they were all disposed of for the night she and I used to take walks together. In my state of health, especially in the hot weather—and that was a particularly hot place—dressing and calling were too much for me; I waited until after dark, and then went out in about three garments, the most delightful costume that I ever wore in my life, and one to which I look back now with regret and longing unspeakable. Oh, why can we not relieve the inescapable fatigue of life in that way always, and not only for a few brief hours in thirty years! It was the heavenly fashion then to wear a long, light, loose paletot of China silk—the early dust-coat, before it had been spoiled. It buttoned at the throat and all down the front to the hem, which cleared the ground by about three inches. It had roomy pockets outside; the sleeves were roomy also; there [172] was no need to wear a dress under it, nor anything whatever round the waist. I did not, and so

walked with the sensations (as I should imagine them) of a disembodied spirit.

Night after night, in this delicious liberty, we roamed that city everywhere. It is a big city—the third in the state—with its due proportion of dens and slums, of drunks and larrikins, but there was not a hole or corner that we feared or had cause to fear. She, calm, strong, protective, was the man of the pair; I, with my hand on her arm, could wish no better. It was our joy to wander in the most out-of-the-way places, and to find a new one if possible every night. We watched trains from black railway embankments; we sat in the public gardens away from lamps and out of call of people; we poked into blind alleys and prowled over deserted mines—and we were never molested or annoyed by anybody or anything. One day we read, with high indignation, a letter in the newspaper which represented the town as so rowdy at night-time that it was not safe for decent people to be abroad. I became a newspaper controversialist myself, for once, in order to confute that gratuitous liar, who, I am quite sure, was not a decent person. The manners of our people may not be superfine, and in fact they are not—there was no justification for the fastidiousness of some persons who could not see any good in Archibald Forbes because he drank his tea out of the saucer instead of the cup—but in the conduct at the back of manners I have always found them decent to the decent, in whatever walk of life.

The pokiness of the poky house did not trouble me, but its situation was detestable. Never will I live in a terrace house again, if I can help it. I used to hunt in vain for a quiet corner to write in, [173]
for I am not like my friend, "Rolf Boldrewood," who can calmly pursue his literary labours in a roomful of noisy family. If I settled myself at the rear of the premises, the maid next door would take the opportunity to sing in her back-yard at the top of her voice, and, in view of the performances of the children in mine, I was not in a position to expostulate. If I fled to the front, I was distracted with the rattle of the street and the horrible jingle of a public-house piano out of tune. In the stilly night one had sometimes to bury one's head in the bed-clothes to avoid hearing the conversations of the husband and wife in the next house. Their window was close alongside ours, and we had to open them in summer to enable us to breathe. Twice a week or so G. used to go out with his broom and pail of disinfectant, and, starting at the top of the terrace, flush and sweep the main gutter of all the houses down to the bottom—and then was summoned for creating a nuisance, because the overflow of a neighbour's nastiness, from an unreachable source, was detected in our ground. We had good reason to believe that this deadly insult (to persons who made domestic sanitation a fad, if not a passion) was contrived as a punishment for his impertinence in meddling with other people's drains. One or two of them used to stand at their yard doors and look at him sourly while he was doing it, but it was the only way of cleansing our own.

In spite of these drawbacks, our sojourn here was pleasant. There was no hardship in being curate to such an incumbent as Archdeacon M'C., beloved by all who knew him. The taste of town life was sweet, after so many years of rural isolation. My friends were near, dropping in [174]
continually, between one train and another, as they passed up and down on the railway; and, best of all, there were the most "filling" library and reading-rooms, conveniently near to me, that I had ever had the run of. My pleasantest memories of this particular year are of that institution and the grave, grey, bookish old librarian, who did all he knew to make it delightful to me. Though I never saw him after '84, he has his place in the little company of true friends made for life; "gone, but not forgotten," as the obituary column says of a baby buried yesterday—I have not forgotten him in seventeen years, nor ever shall. We used to talk books by the hour when he was disengaged. He hoarded volumes for me in the secret recesses of his desk, and of the new publications coming in I always had my choice before they were put upon the shelves. It mattered not that I was entitled to but one or two at a time, the more I would accept in excess of my allowance, the better he was pleased. Sometimes he left them at my door on his way home to bed, although my door was out of his road. And I never was at a loss for recreation with those reading-rooms to browse in—green pastures and still waters for the fattening and refreshing of mind and soul. They alone would have made any place good to live in.

Just before Christmas, 1884, Bishop Moorhouse offered G. the parish which was our favourite of the whole series—for six months. A clergyman in England, belonging to one of our old families, already mentioned, had a wish to return to his own people. He offered himself unconditionally to the Bishop of Melbourne, who responded by appointing him to this parish, up in the northeastern [175]
mountain country, in the neighbourhood of our early homes; and G. was to take charge of it until its incumbent-elect was ready. The latter, finding it beneath his expectations, and being simultaneously offered a London living, decided, after long deliberations, to remain where he was; and we, who went there for six months, stayed nine years. It was so congenial a place, that when (June 12, 1885) news came up to us that the Board of Nominators in Melbourne had elected G. to the incumbency, we said to each other that we had nothing left to wish for. To be safe and settled once more had been our anxious desire for some months; we now felt that if we had had our choice of all the districts and dwellings in the diocese, we could not have suited ourselves better.

But first we had to pay toll—heavy toll. My health continued to fail, so that I could not enjoy my pretty home, and the end of years of stop-gap doctoring was the announcement that it was useless, and that radical measures must be resorted to. On March 9, 1886, I was deposited in a private hospital in Melbourne, fully aware of the fact that my case was considered serious enough to make it as likely as not that I should die there. Of all the black hours of my life, I think that was the worst—when my husband had said good-bye to me and gone back to the children whom I dared not hope to see again, and I was left to my hard fate (on a very hard bed) amongst cold-eyed strangers to whom I was of no account whatever, except in the way of business. Once, when

I was a child under governesses, I took a violent fancy to go to boarding-school; I pestered doting parents until they reluctantly acceded to my wish; but no sooner was it realised than I began to [176] weep and pine away with a home-sickness that could only be cured by fetching me back again—I think at the end of the first quarter. That brief experience of exile from the Place of Love faintly foreshadowed my mental sufferings—worse than the physical ones, which were indeed no joke—under this bitterer separation; yet both school and hospital did their best for me, and were governed with all the kindness and good-will that discipline and the general conditions admitted of.

For months, that seemed years, I was imprisoned in the latter place—even now I cannot pass it without a shudder, a thrill of thankfulness to be outside instead of in—and I was then sent forth with a reprieve only, and not a full discharge. The nurse, strange to say, gave me the hint that I should probably "die of it" shortly; the doctor, appealed to for the honest truth, first abused the nurse for her indiscretion, and then endorsed her view. But nurses and doctors have their human limitations; even they don't know everything. The kindly reader may like to hear that I not only did not die of it, but am in no danger of ever doing so.

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[177]

CHAPTER XIII

ToC

THE BOOM

I am not going to disgust the patient reader with sick-room talk. But certain facts connected with my hospital life bear directly upon the object of this book, which is to reflect in my trivial experiences the character of the country as modified by its circumstances from year to year.

I had to pay £6, 6s. per week while an inmate of the house. This sum did not cover medicines or washing, but board and nursing only. The doctor who gave me chloroform three times charged me £5, 5s. on the first occasion, and the same on the second; then his conscience pricked him, I suppose, for he made me a present of his further services. The surgeon's fee of £105 was comparatively moderate. *Per contra*, I had a skimpy bed and room, and just the necessaries of life as far as nursing was concerned. My nurse had too many other cases in charge to give more attention to me than was surgically necessary; for little spongings and pillow-shakings, a clean handkerchief, or such trifle of comfort, I had to depend upon my friends when they were allowed to see me. In dangerous crises a night nurse had me in charge; at ordinary times a lay girl slept in my room. I moped in loneliness through the greater part of the day, not knowing when I was well off, until one morning the doctor asked me if I would mind having a patient in with me, as [178] the house was full. I weakly consented, although horrified at the idea, and my one luxury of privacy was taken from me. She was another surgical patient—another poor mother weeping all the time for her children—and my sufferings on her account, which included the total banishment of my friends from what was still my own room, had such a bad effect upon me that they were soon obliged to remove her. With regard to diet, I could hardly have cost more than the cat. Fish, rabbit, cow-heel (not poultry) were the strong meats of my convalescence; most of the time I was on broth and gruel—when not sucking milk and soda from a spout. Nevertheless, I was no green victim to experienced rapacity. None of those in whose power I was—unless it were the chloroformist, who, I have been assured by competent authority, did exceed his rights a little—took any unfair advantage of me. The lady at the head of the establishment was a woman of the very highest character, and is still my dear and honoured friend; and the last of the facts I will give in connection with this case is the fact that she could not make the hospital pay, even on such terms, and although she worked herself to skin and bone to do it.

Why? Because this was the merry Boom time, when rents were what we now call "fabulous"—houses letting at three times the present rates—and the general cost of living in proportion. Her expenditure, kept down to the lowest limit, was so heavy that her large receipts would not cover it.

It is not for me, who never could do sums in my life, to give opinions on matters of intricate finance that have proved beyond the grasp of the most hard-headed experts, but no story of the country, or of anyone living in it during the years when the great Land and Company Boom [179] occurred, would be complete without some description of that amazing episode. I can, at least, give an interesting fact or two from what I know.

While I was still in my hospital bed, one public authority—not listened to, of course—was telling the mad land-speculators that already more allotments had been put up for suburban residences than would suffice to house the population of London. "When the rage was at its height, and land-sales and champagne lunches were *de rigueur* on Saturday afternoons, every available bit of land in the suburbs was bought up by syndicates ... orchards were ruthlessly cut down, gardens uprooted, hedges broken down, and surveyors set to work to mark out streets and small

allotments, while the astonished owners received small fortunes for the title-deeds. Numbers of these *nouveaux riches* are now—this was written in '92—"touring in Europe, or living comfortably at their ease on competencies thus acquired." But some—friends of my own amongst them—handed over their properties to be thus devastated for a further and higher sale, and got only a first instalment of the purchase-money, or none at all; the "bottom fell out" of the Boom before they knew it. While those who bought and were too late to sell again—"witness," says the writer I am quoting, "the suicides, the deserted homes, the present penury," domestic tragedies beyond anything that "the pen of fiction" could produce.

One affair caused much excitement in clerical (Church of England) circles. Our cathedral was a-building. Dr Moorhouse had started the work, after a strenuous fight on his part for the site it now occupies—in the very heart of the busy city, which time has proved to be the right place—as [180] against one more retired and picturesque, the land in both cases being Church property from the days of old. The work, as far as it had gone, represented about £62,000, "when hungry syndicates were casting about to find city blocks, then considered of unassailable value," and it was announced in the papers that £300,000 had been offered for the unfinished building and the land. "The authorities were informed that even half a million might be forthcoming, if they would appoint a committee to confer upon the subject," and, oh, how that golden bait tantalised us all—or nearly all! Bishop Moorhouse was gone to his see of Manchester, but there were still a few men strong enough to breast the tide. "A fatal odd vote," as it was called, saved us, the voter making himself for a short time one of the most unpopular persons in the community. "Business men will remember bitterly in the future, when funds are scarce, that the sale of the cathedral would have represented a perpetual income of £15,000 to £20,000 a year," wrote one of the many good Churchmen who voiced their feelings in the newspapers; and he said that those business men would be justified in refusing help to the foolish ones who had "persisted in building on a veritable gold mine," when those dark days came. The temptation was scarcely put aside before the collapse occurred, and then, oh, what a sigh of thankfulness went up from us all that the cathedral was there still!

When it was known by the high financiers behind the scenes that the bottom had fallen out of the Land Boom proper, then the company-promoting began. Some idea of the energy that at once poured itself into this channel may be derived from the statement that within one year 270 new [181] companies were registered in Melbourne, having an aggregate nominal capital of fifty-two millions. These were the traps, baited with the names of men in high positions, notorious for piety, respectability, and business acumen, into which walked that long procession of honest toilers who, with their little savings in their hands, aimed, not to make a fortune, but a comfortable provision for old age.

Here is a sample of the kind of thing that might be found daily in the newspapers—it is from the prospectus of the Centennial Land Bank, Limited, Capital, £1,000,000, in 200,000 shares of £5 each:—

> "The following statistics as regards the present values in kindred institutions speak for themselves, and it is scarcely necessary to point out the fact that this Company cannot fail, with proper management, to have equally good, if not better, returns:—
>
> Australian Property and Investment Company, £5 paid; present value, £8, 15s.
>
> Henry Arnold and Company, £5 paid; present value, £12.
>
> Standard Financial Investment and Agency Company, £1 paid; present value, £7.
>
> Mercantile Finance and Guarantee Company, 25s. paid; present value, £4, 19s.
>
> Freehold Investment and Banking Company, £2, 15s. 6d. paid; present value, £10, 7s. 6d.
>
> Real Estate Bank, 50s. paid; present value, 73s.
>
> Australian Deposit and Mortgage Bank, £25 paid; present value, [182] £46.
>
> All the above have been paying dividends at the rate of from 10 to 50 per cent."

Is it any wonder that a spider's web of this description was simply black with flies? Poor old maids, widows, parsons, school-marms, small tradesmen who had laboriously put by a little—they tumbled over each other in their eagerness to put a splendid finishing-touch to the work of their industrious lives. They could not believe in frauds and swindles at the hands of such men as they who enticed them to irreparable financial ruin. Of the companies named in the Centennial Land Bank prospectus, all, as I read in the records of the time, came to grief, and "the names of four of them figure in the list of 133 limited companies that the *Government Gazette* supplies as having had to wind up their affairs during the twelve months from June 1891 to June 1892 inclusive."

I said I would not meddle with figures, which are not in my line, but I am tempted to give just a few more while I am about it.

Purchasers (at slightly under £1100 per foot) of land in Collins Street, on which a draper's shop had been burnt to the ground, refused £2000 per foot for their bargain. Another block, with

frontage to Collins Street, was bought for £65,000, and sold a few months later for £120,000. Other premises purchased for £25,000 were sold four months later for £55,000—£2000 per foot. The Equitable Life Assurance Company of New York paid, I believe, £2500 per foot for the fine site on which they have erected the finest commercial building in Melbourne. It was the same in [183] the outside suburbs, where as yet they were not suburbs at all. At Surrey Hills land worth 15s. in 1884 rose to £15 in 1887. A "moderate estimate" of the sales of the latter year was officially reported as over £14,000,000. But one of the best indications of the violence of these ups and downs is afforded by a comparison of the advertisement-columns of the newspapers one year with another. In 1888 the Saturday issue (for several consecutive Saturdays) of a morning journal averaged 170 advertisement-columns of fine print; in 1892 (also for several Saturdays) the average number was 67. It was calculated by "one of our leading financiers" that the "shrinkage" which occurred in stocks and shares, together with the shrinkage in silver (which had had a world-famed boom of its own), from 1889 to 1892 totalled "the appalling sum of £50,000,000." It only remains to add that the population of the entire continent did not total 4,000,000.

G. and I were amongst the fortunate ones who had no spare money to play with, and so, when the crash came, we were in the position of the cathedral—where we were—poor but free, not mortgaged body and bones for "calls," like so many that we knew. Still, we had to bear our little share of the general calamity. About a week after the State Proclamation of five days' compulsory Bank Holiday—disregarded by the only two banks which (with the exception of one little one) passed unscathed through the storm—and when it was supposed that Government had thereby checked the epidemic of bank disasters, G. was paid his stipend, and on the stroke of three o'clock made a wild rush to deposit the money before his bank shut for the day; *his* bank being [184] above suspicion (to him), whatever others might be. He just, and only just, managed it, and the doors that closed on him a minute afterwards remained closed next morning. And so, as that money was for many a day beyond recall, I had to make mine do for both of us, until I in my turn was rendered penniless. With the narrow-mindedness of my sex in business matters, I withstood the appeals of the manager of my own bank, who assured me that his little all and the combined possessions of his whole family reposed therein, and transferred what I had to the Government Savings Bank, as being an approximately safe place—while inclined to think that a hole in the ground or a tea-pot or an old stocking would be safer—until things should have settled down. When they did settle down, I opened my account with one of the two great banks that had proved themselves impregnable.

From a newspaper of May 20th, 1893, I take the following:—"Counting in all stoppages up to Tuesday last, about £55,000,000 of Australian money is now locked up in suspended banks of issue—not counting the amounts locked up in about fifty bursted land banks, building societies and investment companies, and leaving the Mercantile"—this was the particularly scandalous boom-bank—"out of the calculation altogether.... Within a year 64 per cent. of the working capital of Queensland has been locked up, 60 per cent. of that of Victoria, 55 per cent. in New South Wales, and 40 per cent. in South Australia." So it appears, if these figures are correct, that there was still one colony worse off than we were.

But it was not 1893—it was 1886—when I was in hospital, and the "high old times" were in full swing. When I came out, to remain for a long time under the necessity of reporting myself to the [185] doctor at frequent intervals, I was again, at those frequent intervals, in the thick of the distractions of our still gay capital, where it was the aim of my friends to make me forget that I was going to "die of it" or to persuade me that my medical adviser was a fool.

I was not in the fevered crowd of those who "ran" the boom and made the smell of money so rank in the nose; but it was high tide in the fortunes of the landed gentry, and, indeed, generally speaking, of the whole community. All in their degree were rich and lived lavishly; the upper classes seemed wholly given over to pleasure-making, and their appetite for social diversion was catered for as it never was before or since. It was now that I heard so much good music, saw so much good acting, met so many interesting travellers, enjoyed the greatest race-meetings in the history of splendid Flemington, the hospitalities of Government House in its best days, the most memorable entertainments of a time when nothing but the first-rate was tolerated. I look back now and wonder at my keen appreciation of it all. But it never took much to make me enjoy myself, and I was younger then.

Out of the crowded spectacle, which in memory resembles the dream of Verdant Green's father after the first visit to Oxford, the Centennial Exhibition stands most conspicuous. As first conceived, it was to cost £25,000, because the buildings of the Exhibition of 1880 were still there to work upon. Being a Boom enterprise, it had not gone far before it was estimated that £70,000 would be needed to complete it properly. When the bill at last came in, it totalled £250,000. "A costly blunder," it is called in these soberer times. Costly it was certainly, but a blunder—no. Not [186] to us who made it our haunt and rendezvous, our palace of pleasure in a thousand forms. I should think that no money ever spent gave so much direct enjoyment to so many people.

Ah, those days! Those days! I too had had my little boom on the Australian press, and it was not yet over; bad times were still undreamed of, the London Syndicate had not yet taken possession of the fiction columns, pounds were freely to be had (I received £197 for the serial rights of *A Marked Man*) where now shillings are hard to come by; and my children were still under the expensive age. So that the cost of two long journeys for a day or two in town seemed not worth considering, and I appear never to have considered it. We were all extravagant together. We made hay while the sun shone, if ever people did.

Therefore, looking back upon those gay times, I have not to regret that I missed anything (except Madame Norman-Neruda), whatever else I may regret. Living nearly 200 miles away I

had all the good of the Exhibition that I could have desired; more would have meant satiety. Scores and scores of those orchestral concerts (under Frederick Cowen's conductorship) I must have attended, first and last; there were two a day, and they gave you the best music of all countries, and you only had to stroll into the hall and sit down and listen, as if in your own house. It was here that I learned to be a Wagnerite, after several unsuccessful attempts. By finding a very quiet corner, and listening with my eyes close shut and a fan before my face, I discovered [187] the secret; now there is no luxury in life like a Wagner concert—other music, even other great music, that I am bidden to place higher, seems by comparison what other novels seem beside George Meredith's best (the Meridithian will understand me). As it has chanced, all the Wagner that I have heard since Exhibition days has been rendered by the still more highly-trained orchestra of Mr Marshall Hall, ex-Ormond Professor of Music in the University of Melbourne; and, as a musician, we have never had his equal amongst us here, and are never likely to have his superior.

The Art Galleries of the Exhibition were more to us than the Concert Hall, for we were more in them. Amongst the Loan Pictures, of one country or another, we met our friends; here we sat on soft lounges to muse upon our favourites, in more or less congenial company, or we let the pictures alone and gave friendship the whole field. There were times in the day—the place was open from 11 A.M. to 10:30 P.M.—when persons who desired privacy had no difficulty in finding it at fifty different spots; wherefore it was a very paradise for lovers. And you could live there all day long, with every comfort, including free education worth years of school. It was delightful to show children biscuits and hats and wire-mattresses a-making under their very noses, and when they were tired of that to take them to see the seals fed in the cool Aquarium, or up on the hydraulic lift to survey all Melbourne from the great dome. The meals are a delicious memory—the little lunches and dinner-parties, the afternoon teas (for nothing) in the dainty tea-pavilions— [188] all flavoured with the holiday spirit, the bright talk of meeting friends. And the saunters to and fro, and up and down (fatiguing, no doubt, but I have forgotten that), always with something beautiful to look at, something interesting to do, and generally with a comrade of your heart to talk to about it all! When the place was shut at last, we wandered forlorn and lost for a long time. We were spoiled for humdrum life.

The Centennial Exhibition—our "Great" Exhibition—marked the climax of the Boom, of what we erroneously call the "good times," when we were rich and dishonest and mercenary and vulgar. The end was not far off. A few more luxuries awaited us, of which the one that recalls itself most vividly to my mind is Madame Patey's singing of "Alas! Those Chimes," from *Maritana*. This was on 27th November 1890. On the 25th June 1801 I saw Sara Bernhardt in *Theodora*. She it was who rang down the curtain. We were able to give her a good season, to treat ourselves once more regardless of expense; then, upon the heels of her departure, the bubble burst. "Thank God," I heard a man say, "that we got Sara first." It was our last chance for many a long day.

But the best thing that ever happened to Melbourne Society, as I have known it, was the snuffing out of the lights of that feast, the coming of that cold daylight to the revellers. A better example of the vulgarising effects of wealth, and of the refining effects of being without it, was never packed in a neater compass.

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[189]

CHAPTER XIV

ToC

THE SEVENTH HOME

Towards the end of May 1886—against professional advice, to which we opposed our private opinion that the best way to get well was to get rid of the homesick cravings that were beyond doctor's reach—I was transferred from my hospital bed to one in the house of a dear Melbourne friend, where I lay in all the luxury that love and money could provide, and with portions of family around me, for a few more weeks; until at last it was considered that I might make the long journey to my home in safety. I had a bed in the railway carriage, and reached the goal of my desires at midnight, when the long-motherless bairns were asleep. Thereafter, although weighed down at times with the thought of my supposed impending doom—never really out of my mind, and constantly spurring me to extreme efforts to turn the available time to the best account, in the interests of my prospective orphans—I persisted in getting well and in enjoying myself accordingly. Indeed, the charm of life at this period—only to be understood by those in like case, who have been so near to losing it—is a bloom upon the retrospect that is likely to misrepresent it in these pages. Beauty is in the eye and heart of the beholder more than in the thing beheld. However, I can only paint as I have seen, and the reader will make allowances. [190]

Certainly Home No. 7, which was in the near neighbourhood of Homes 1, 2, and 3, was a trifle dilapidated. G.'s successor there, when he first saw it, called it a "shanty"—he came from the

modern suburban villa which we now occupy, and was used to high ceilings and electric bells—and he thought (until the rain ceased and the sun came out) that it would be impossible to bring his family to quarters so mean by comparison with what they were accustomed to. But they were good enough for us. The most we asked of the vestry was to keep roofs weather-tight; for the rest, we felt ourselves equal to making a satisfactory abode out of a far worse shanty than that. Indeed, we had done so more than once.

All the paint was off it, and the soft grey of the dissolving wood-work was in perfect harmony with every other detail of the composition; I used to dread to turn my back on the place, lest the parish should take a notion to smarten up while I was away, although I knew that the time was near when something would have to be done. They could only have put staring patches on their old garment, which would have made it hideous. It was so beautifully, mellowly "all of a piece" now, that I begged G., who rather hankered after painters and carpenters, to keep their hands off, if he loved me. "It will last our time," I said, as he drove the amateur nail, and I saw to it that old age did not mean dirt; and we made it do that—barely. The back of the house was level with the ground, but the front was in the air, so that its verandah was a balcony and you descended from it to the garden by a flight of twelve steps; before we left we had abandoned the front [191] entrance because it had become impossible by our unaided efforts to keep those steps in place. Also the verandah floor in places was dangerous to walk upon; the constant watering of flower-pots and palm-tubs had rotted it through. And the ivy, cut into a hood round one of the drawing-room windows, rioted out of bounds. On the whole, I was glad to go when the time came—to our sunny, airy, far-too-public villa with the high ceilings and the electric bells, which will never suit me as well. We had grown too dilapidated to keep tidy, too picturesque for health.

After our time—and soon after—an opportune legacy to the parish was devoted to the work of restoration, and enabled the restorers to make what they called a good job of it. I saw the place the other day, and it is now almost like a common house. The ivy is all cleared away; so are some of the trees which, while I knew they were too many, I could not bear to have touched; the verandahs are sound and painted, the rooms light. My æsthetic soul grieved over some details of the change, but my hygienic conscience admitted that the whole change was a good one.

Many things were gone from the garden, which in our time had sheltered us from every prying eye. The thinning of the trees and bushes had left spaces bare but for pine-needles and cones, and exposed the house to the gaze of the passer-by. Great screens of laurel used to stand this way and that, and some had been taken down; a magnificent lemon-tree had disappeared—but I think that was our fault. We sunk a kerosene tin, with small holes in the bottom, in the earth beside it, and filled the cavity with water whenever we thought of it, so that moisture was always [192] percolating to the roots; and the result of this treatment was such splendid growth that the tree doubled and trebled its size in two or three seasons. The fruit was enormous and weighed it down. I used to break off a branch bearing a cluster of half a dozen or more, and by the time I had carried it to a friend in the town my arm would feel as if I had been carrying a pail of milk; and I was ready to teach anybody the true art or lemon-growing. But after a few splendid years the tree suddenly got tired: I suppose it had worked itself out; and then it dwindled steadily, despite our care, and we left it ragged and sick. It must have died of that illness. Another lemon-tree, treated in the same way, lives still, in a sticky, threadbare fashion, but this bears a small, half-sweet fruit, whereas its neighbour was Lisbon of the finest quality. Evidently lemons do not object to that vigorous climate, where it snows in winter, for our doctor up there, whose recreation is fruit-farming, has a fine grove of young trees, the produce of which has already gained top prices in the market; but oranges will not climb so high. Within a few miles, however—at W——, near Home No. 1—they grow to perfection.

The two things in the parsonage garden which make it unique are there still—the avenue and the slabbed pathways. The avenue, from the front door to the front gate, is of some kind of pine that runs up in a straight mast to a great height and then branches like an umbrella; here it makes a roof to the descending aisle. And the aisle is paved with shallow steps of the silvery granite which is the very substance of the hills. No one step matches another; all are rough-hewn and of about the same width, but they are long or short, thick or thin, just as it happens, dropping [193] down and down in a manner as informal as the architecture of Nature herself; and the same arrangement obtains where it has been necessary to make footholds round steep corners. Those original alley-and-stairways were an inspiration of the designer, who probably had no design but to face his tracks with something that the rain would not wash away; but how often has the amiable Philistine urged us to get the vestry to "make proper paths!" They will do it some day, and then I hope no reader of these pages, touring in the locality, will look for Home No. 7 in the expectation of finding it. But, all the same, that garden was a trap to the stranger on a dark night.

I remember on one occasion being awakened from my first sleep—my hours are early at both ends of the day—by terrifying bumpings and crashes amongst the thick bushes and down the treacherous paths. G. was at a meeting in the town; maid and lady-help had both followed the children to bed; it was nine o'clock or thereabouts, when any other house would have been still alive. My fears of burglars or stray cattle were dispelled by the voices of lost and floundering men calling to each other. Supposing the servant about, I left her to attend to them, but it was a long time before they brought up at the dining-room verandah. There she argued with them at length, and presently tapped at my door.

"It's two gentlemen from Melbourne, ma'am." Like Maria, she was most particular in giving me that title so rare in this country.

"Didn't you tell them Mr C. was out?" I called.

"I did, ma'am. And they want to see you." [194]

"Didn't you tell them I had gone to bed?"

"I did, ma'am. But—"

"Well, go and tell them again that I have gone to bed." The idea of that statement, once made, not being sufficient! I was indignant.

She went, and talked to them again; she returned with a pair of visiting-cards, and protested, as she lit my candle, that the gentlemen would not go. I read the names, and knew them, although the owners were strangers to me. One was a University Professor. (N.B.—Since this was written he has joined the majority, one of the greatest losses to the country, outside the University as well as in, that it has sustained for many a day.) I decided to get up.

"Put the lamps in the drawing-room, and tell them I will be there in a minute." And I whisked up my hair, tossed on a tea-gown, and went forth to receive them. "We were determined to have you out," said the Professor to me years afterwards, and dwelt upon the extraordinary difficulties that he and his friend had had to overcome to compass that end. Glad enough was I, and still am, that they succeeded. No talk that I ever had is more refreshing to remember than that which I enjoyed until past midnight—especially after G. came back from his meeting to divide us into pairs. There are books and ideas that can never suggest themselves without bringing it all to mind. The garden is haunted by the figures of those groping and resolute men.

There, too, walks the ghost of that dear vice-regal lady whom we all remember with such love. I see her slowly mount the rugged path under the pines, glancing from side to side upon the half-wild growth with pleasure in her artistic eye; coming for that quiet talk which municipal dignity [195] would have baulked us of, and the memory of which is precious now that I am never likely to have another. I read somewhere not long ago, in gossip of old Holland House and the charming society that once gathered there—by one who was of it—that she was lovely as a budding girl, and remarkable for her air of high distinction; immediately I thought of her as she looked that day, coming towards me under the trees. Like the rest of us, she is growing old now, but she will always have that beauty and that air, the blend of a gentle nature with gentle blood.

An account of this visit from our then Governor's wife may be worth giving, if only to illustrate municipal dignity—Government authority—as it is conceived of in these parts.

She had honoured me with a private friendship—unsought by me—for some time when, in the ordinary routine of state functions, arrangements were made for the Governor to visit our town, she accompanying him. It was an exceptional compliment, conferred for the first time, and the excitement throughout the district was intense.

When the time approached she wrote to ask me to meet her on her arrival, and I was duly at the station when the decorated train arrived, but far, far away on the edge of the crowd, which built a solid rampart between us—official representatives of the town, their families, and the processions they had organised to receive and escort the vice-regal party—and by no means could I get nearer. In normal times I had every reason to feel myself a respected member of the community, but I was now to be taught my place municipally as it were. My representations were [196] simply not listened to; I am sure they were not believed. That vice-royalty could harbour a thought outside the official demonstration was inconceivable to them. I could see my friend's tall head turning from side to side as she sought for me over the bowing heads of people presenting bouquets and reading addresses of welcome, but I was not tall enough for her to see me; so I gave up the struggle for that day, and went home and had a bath—it was ragingly hot—intending to send her a note of explanation later. As I was putting myself into an old, cool gown, word was brought to me that she was coming up the garden. I went out to her as I was, and she spent an hour or two, of happy memory, with me—the only resting time she had throughout her visit—leaving me to my customary quiet evening and early bed, while she returned to the hotel to the state banquet and reception that filled the first day's programme.

That of the next day (December 30, 1885, and a burning north wind) was packed with engagements in a fashion that took no account of a woman's strength—and a delicate woman at that. There was first a monster picnic to the show view of the neighbourhood, twelve steep miles up into the hills; it was to start as early as nine or thereabouts, feast sumptuously and make speeches when it got there, and return in time for two more afternoon functions, at two separate public institutions, and a concert in the evening. It was arranged overnight that I should accompany my friend to the picnic, and after she left my house she notified to the proper authorities her wish that I should be allotted to the carriage selected for her. Next day she told me the result. The answer of the town was that it was very sorry, but it could not be done. *The* [197] *order of precedence had to be observed.*

I was at the hotel at the appointed hour, and she was already in her seat—she had chosen it, under the circumstances, on the box, between the Governor and the driver—and the body of the vehicle, a large open brake, was packed with municipal ladies, every bit as "good" as I was, of course, but all strangers to her. Behind the vice-regal carriage stood a long line of other brakes, rapidly filling up. I sat down on a bench under the hotel verandah to watch the process and await my turn. My dear lady in the distance made a gesture which signified "Where are you going to be put?" I shook my head to indicate that I had not the least idea. Then the cavalcade started, and soon all the splendid four-in-hands had vanished in a cloud of dust—and I was still sitting under the verandah, I and a friend staying with me, a daughter of that house where I encountered the midnight opossum. It was discovered then that there was still a remnant left behind, and a buggy was brought out, a scratch pair harnessed to it, and we and a few more odds and ends, as it were,

cleaned up.

Of course we were hours late at the rendezvous. When we arrived the banquet was in progress, the Governor's wife sitting amid her court, which occupied every chair, and looking almost as difficult to get at as she had been at the railway station. I made no attempt to get at her. My companion and I sat in our own buggy, and a nice man brought us plates of turkey and trifle, and tumblers of champagne, and we enjoyed our lunch and our liberty and the whole proceedings. By-and-by the Governor came to tell me that he expected me to accompany his party back to [198] town the next morning. I had that to look forward to.

On our return from the picnic, and when near the gates of the first institution that was to be inspected, the cavalcade halted and word was passed back to me that my lady in the leading carriage wished to speak to me. I went to her. She was dusty and sunburnt, and very tired. "Go home," she said, "and rest. You can rest—I can't."

I went to Melbourne with her next day—the very hottest day, I think, that I was ever out in. She had been unable to sleep, she said, and was almost prostrated by the weather and her fatigues. In the state carriage we could lie down on blue satin sofas, in the lightest indoor clothes, and a maid in a little ante-room had cool drinks and sponges and such things in readiness. The Governor held a cloth continually soaked in water over an open window against the fierce north wind, to try if by evaporation he could freshen the air; but it remained oven-like for all his efforts.

At last, when we were halting at a wayside station for a train to pass, a minister was sent for from the compartment where he was travelling with the suite, in some kind of official charge of the expedition.

"Do," said his liege lady, "do please go and ask them if they will hose the carriage." She was fainting with the heat, and this seemed to her the best way to get relief—as it would have been. He hurried off, much concerned at her distress, to, as he said, see what he could do. Presently he returned, and said—my own ears heard him—that he was very sorry, but it could not be done. "*It would blister the paint.*"

She was idolised throughout the colony as no Governor's wife ever was before or since, and [199] with good reason; and the people who, as in this case, were supposed to be entertaining her, were neither mean nor selfish, nor intentionally rude. I am sure the idea that they were not treating her with the highest consideration never crossed their minds.

Other friends, departed or no more, are indissolubly one with that old house and the old garden in which it stood. How many phantom faces flit amongst those shades? Every block of stone, every step of the verandah stairs, has a figure or a group. They sit in twilight, in moonlight, musing alone or talking together—the deep, intimate talk of those resting hours. There is a bishop amongst them with his pipe—he, too, now on the other side of the world, but with a green memory here that will not wither yet awhile. And still other friends, that never talked, except in a language that few trouble to learn.

For originally the garden was a "Zoo" on a small scale. The first parson was a rabid naturalist, who experimented with new breeds of birds and collected snakes for the study of their habits and customs. We were warned that one of their habits was to escape frequently, and that we should probably find house and grounds alive with their descendants, but we did not; only two put in an appearance upon the premises in nine years. Two large aviaries remained of the birds' village that once was when we took possession; we kept flower-pots and tools in one, and for a while I had turtledoves in another—not for long, since cages are an abomination to me, however big. Both are cleared away now, with their leafy screens. But the wild birds love the place—or did love it. It was mainly for their sakes that the axe was not laid at the root of any tree while we [200] were there, and they came to it from far and near—far, I should say, since one rarely heard a bird-note, not even that of the once ubiquitous magpie, on the surrounding hills—and set up housekeeping in peace and privacy, and in larger and larger numbers every year.

How soon they know where they are welcome! And it is the same with all dumb things. I am convinced that there is scarcely a creature living which does not prove itself possessed of quite human intelligence as soon as one begins to make a friend of it. They walk under our feet and scatter from our path in fear and trembling; their minds are cramped and starved by their hunted, down-trodden, tragical lives; they are shut up within themselves. But show them a little kindness and understanding and comradeship, and the results are astonishing. I have tried it often enough to know. I have had such things as toads and hedgehogs scrambling after me about garden paths, preferring to burst themselves rather than lose the chance of my company. Some white rats presented to my children were let out of their cage to enjoy themselves in an enemy-proof room, and had not been thus indulged for a week before their endearments became overpowering. A widowed dove was my companion for several years, and fell sick and refused food if parted from me, which was only when I went out of the house; and then it would follow if not guarded carefully, and was killed at last in a tangle of street traffic through which it was hunting me. In this very house at B—— I was silly enough to make friends with a mouse that had a hole in the hearth by which I used to sit alone at work. All I did was to put a crumb or a spoonful of milk between me and it. Soon it took to sitting in its porch—we could just see its little [201] snout twiddling—to watch until the family were all gone from the room, and to running out to me fearlessly the instant the door was closed behind them.

This was in the dining-room. Opposite its glass doors, across the verandah and a path, there was an arrangement of granite blocks to shore up the ground where the hill had been cut away to make a level for the house, and in the interstices of this rough wall more mice lived. We were

quite unaware of the fact until I had begun petting the hearth-dweller, when they suddenly popped out from their burrows as bold as brass. I could not resist giving them a crumb or two, and their subsequent behaviour convinced me that their indoor neighbour had communicated to them the fact that there was a friend at court. As I sat at meals, in broad daylight and sunshine, the French window open between us, I could see them sitting on their thresholds, staring across the gap with all their eyes. "You will rue this," said the person in authority, and I soon did. We became all at once inundated with mice. Alas for the eternal tragedy of life! A cat was introduced. One morning I was writing at the dining-table, with my back to the hearth, when a tremendous clatter of fire-irons made me jump out of my chair. I flew after that young tigress, and I got her prey from her, but too late. My pet died in my hand—and I am never going to take any notice of a mouse again.

Of all my dumb companions here—those humble fellow-creatures of ours, the possibilities in the way of social intercourse with whom (I will not say "which") are amongst the happy surprises reserved for an enlightened future—Toby was the bosom friend. [202]

Toby, although he was only a dog, shall have a chapter to himself. The reader who is not a dog-lover, being hereby forewarned, can skip it.

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[203]

CHAPTER XV

ToC

TOBY

All I know of his breeding is that he had none. His mother, a drawing-room pet and the only acknowledged parent, was a little long-bodied, dainty bundle of silver-grey silk that swept the ground; he, fully twice her size and height, with a compact, sinewy frame and a close, wire-haired, rusty-black coat, was more in the style of the useful out-door terrier that loves a scrimmage in the street and is rough on rats—mere dog, in short, and a despicable animal from the fancier's point of view. But when I saw him first—he was brought to my bedside during illness, as a present more likely to cheer me than anything else—I thought I had never seen a sweeter pup; and I do not hope to meet again, still less to own, a brighter, smarter, dearer creature than he afterwards became.

There was nothing of the trick dog about him, and with respect to striking exploits he was less distinguished than several of his predecessors in my regard. One of these, for instance, was part-proprietor of a town and a country house, both of which were kept open and habitable (caretakers in one while the family occupied the other), and there was a considerable railway journey between the two. My canine friend preferred, of course, to live with the family, but if [204] they happened to hurt his feelings he quietly trotted to the station, picked out the right train, and thereby conveyed himself to his alternate home, where he remained until the trouble had blown over. The railway officials at both ends knew him well, and he them, but they declared that, even at the crowded station of the large town, he was capable of finding his own train without their assistance. This same dog knew when it was Sunday simply by count of days—at least, he would seem to know before anything in the house could have told him—and took his measures accordingly. He was always missing between breakfast and church time, and always known to be in hiding under a seat of the family pew during divine service, although an order prohibiting his attendance had never been repealed. Another dog friend used to wait for his mistress on doorsteps when she did errands or paid calls, and one day she left a house by a different door from that by which she had gone in, forgetting that he was there. Missing him during the day, finding that he was not at home all night nor all next day, she became frantic with fears that something dreadful had happened to him, sending messages of inquiry in all directions. After a hunt in more likely places, he was discovered on the doorstep where she had left him. It had been snowing and blowing, and he was starved with cold and hunger, but he had not budged. I knew a dog that nearly died at his post in the same way, and quite lately the current dog of this establishment spent a cold night at the local cemetery gates, waiting for a master who had gone home unbeknown in a mourning coach the day before. Dozens of incidents equally remarkable occur to me, but not in connection with Toby; who, however, if he did not do any very wonderful [205] things, was capable of doing them. As with inglorious Miltons amongst ourselves, he simply lacked opportunity.

What entitled him to be remembered as I remember him was his splendid force of character and his absolutely faithful heart. He was, indeed, energetic to a fault in nearly all directions. No dog walked that he was not game to tackle, and no cat, except his own cat, whose successive kittens he nursed as if engaged for the purpose, was safe for a moment within range of his alert eye; while to see him careering round the paddock after frenzied poultry, or throwing the garden bodily over his back when burying his bones and digging them up again, was to understand in

some degree why he was not exactly popular with the powers of his world. But the ardour of his affection for, and devotion to, his particular owner was a thing to shame human friendship at its best. I can never think of it without thinking what life would be if men and women loved each other like that.

Full of business as he always was, I think he never lost the run of his mistress for an hour when she was at home, unless he were tied up for misdemeanours or otherwise forcibly restrained. A thing of whalebone and quicksilver, of tireless energy and vivacity, he schooled himself to the conditions of indoor companionship, and would lie all day at my side, eyes watching for the merest glance from mine, tail poised for a joyous thump the moment he received it. When I sat out of doors, and he thought I was quite safe not to go away, he would amuse himself in the vicinity in all sorts of cheerful ways. He always took a deep interest in fowls, and a favourite game of his was to draw an imaginary circle round a selected hen, and by working along that line [206] to keep her from breaking out of it. He did it so neatly and at such a distance from her that she was not seriously alarmed; but when, every time she started for a new point, she found him there ahead of her, her disconcerted cluck and bewildered aspect were extremely funny. The current kittens were also toys that he delighted in; he and the mother cat would spend endless time and ingenuity in carrying them away from one another and fetching them back again, all in the most friendly fashion. Of course, he accompanied me everywhere in my walks abroad. Some readers of these pages will recall his wit and his persistence in following me into houses where I was paying calls after doors and gates had been closed against him. How he did it we sometimes could not tell, since he was neither a professional burglar nor a kangaroo; and, of course, I ought to have brought him up not to do it, as not to do a few other things that I weakly allowed for the sake of the love that prompted them.

At night, when not on that chain which we both disliked so much, he preferred to sleep on my doorstep—I had an outside doorstep, where a French window opened upon the raised verandah—deserting the kennel in which he could have been dry and warm. When I was alone—he always knew when that was—the worst weather would not keep him away; but when the rain, which occasionally was sleet and snow, beat on him, he would scratch and whine to be let in; and then I would be inclined to wish that one or other of us had never been born. It was a torment to hear him and refuse his plea, but the most doggy person must draw the line somewhere; besides, if I had admitted him once, he would have suffered for my indiscretion many times, as also should I. [207] So I used to shout, "Go to bed, sir!" with a make-believe severity that had no more effect than to send him dejectedly flopping down the verandah steps, to creep up again before he had reached the bottom. But generally he was good and quiet. I used to wake sometimes to hear a subdued sniff under the door, or the thud of a soft body flinging itself ostentatiously upon hard boards. These were his ways of reminding me, in case I doubted it, that he was there.

Unfortunately, as before remarked, he was not popular with the household. I daresay it was my fault. There are such differences of opinion about dogs in our family that we never do have one without quarrelling over it, more or less. Poor Toby was the domestic scapegoat. If a chicken got roup or a stray cow walked over the flower-beds, he was the suspected culprit; every muddy boot-print, every unmentionable insect that came into the house, was laid at his door; and to smell an unpleasant odour was at once to connect it with his coat, and not with cabbage water in the kitchen or a neglected drain.

I went out a-visiting for a week or two, and when I returned found that he had been given away. He was still on the premises to welcome me in his vociferous manner, and the news was not broken too abruptly: but I had to hear it before the following afternoon, which was the time fixed for his departure. It appeared that in my absence he had taken up with some friends of ours whom he had often called upon with me, particularly attaching himself to the eldest schoolboy son, and had virtually been living with them nearly all the time. They were but temporary dwellers in the town, and about to leave it; and as he had greatly endeared himself to the [208] numerous children, and was rightly supposed to be unappreciated in his own house, they had asked to keep him and take him with them. Evidently the request had been hailed as delightfully opportune, and unhesitatingly granted by those who had no authority to dispose of him.

"Now, you know," it was said to me, when, after something of a scene, I was considered in a fit state to be reasoned with, "that Toby only makes discord and dissension in an otherwise united family. He will interfere with the fowls, and dig holes in the garden, and bring dirt and fleas into the house; and then, when he is put on the chain, you don't like it and make a fuss. Here's a splendid home for him, where he'll be as happy as the day is long. The T.'s, who have just as much as they can do to feed their own children and pay their own travelling expenses, would not add him to the party if they were not really fond of him; and you can see, by the way he has been haunting their place, how fond he is of them. It is for the dog's own benefit as well as ours, and we shall never get such another chance."

Well, I saw that. When you love a creature, dumb or otherwise, its own happiness is what you consider first, and every proof had been given that his new proprietors would be good to him. In this case, as in so many cases, the benevolent heart went with the slender purse; Toby himself was well aware of it. And so I consented to let the bargain stand. I had promised to see my friends off at the railway station, but now cancelled that engagement, sending them a message to say that, though they might take Toby, I could not see him go. They told me afterwards that he went quietly; I daresay he did, not knowing what was happening and how we should feel about it [209] at our next meeting.

I had no expectation, at the time, of any next meeting. But a year or two later, while having a little travel for my health, I found myself in the large town whither he had been taken when torn

from me: and, of course, I made it my business to find him there, if possible. I did not know where his people lived, the streets were strange to me, and I have no bump of locality whatever, so I started soon after breakfast and gave the morning to it. By about lunch-time, after many inquiries and misdirections, and much fatigue and exasperation, I discovered the house in a very far-out suburb. But, before I discovered the house, Toby discovered me. He had not seen me, I am convinced—had either scented me in the distance or recognised my (to human ears inaudible) step—when he uttered his first ecstatic yell and hurled himself over the gate; I was still half a street's length off when I beheld him tearing towards me as if discharged from a giant catapult. Literally, I could hardly see him for dust. We fell into each other's arms forthwith, and I must have looked, to the casual spectator, as if engaged in a death grapple with a wild beast.

His young master appeared, and I managed to shake his hand and ask if he lived there, and how his mother was. He took me in to her, and she was delighted to see me; his father and the family joined us, and said how good it was of me to look them up, and of course I must stay to dinner, and how were all at home, and so on; but it was dumb show—we could not hear ourselves speak. Toby nearly lifted the roof with his uproar of welcome, and seemed to have lost the power to stop himself; every breath was a shriek, so full of the fury and passion of joy that it seemed like [210] to choke him. This sounds like exaggeration, but really is not, as those present with me will testify, supposing they read this tale. Since they never can have seen a dog so conduct himself before or since, I am sure they will remember the circumstance. He clawed me frantically, hugged my knees with his strong forelegs, grovelled at my feet, licked them, rolled over them, rubbed his dear snout, his ears, his shoulders, upon every part of me that he could get at, contorting his body in the most grotesque and violent fashion, as if in the throes of some mysterious convulsive fit. In short, no hatter or March hare was ever so entirely mad and off his head and beside himself.

I confess I was almost as great a fool; seeing which, the kind household bore with the deafening racket as long as we chose to make it—ten minutes, perhaps, which must have had the wearing power of ten hours in that small room. Then, out of pity for my hostess, who was invalided at the time, and to give human friendship a chance, and because really a continuation of that Bedlam hubbub would have been too much for anybody's nerves, I consented to a suggestion that Toby should be removed for an interval. His young master took him as far away as the limits of the premises allowed, and shut as many doors upon him as there were to shut. "Now we can talk," said my hostess, with a sigh and smile of utter relief.

So we talked; and as friends who had not met for a long time, as mothers whose respective children were the most important objects in the universe, we had a great deal to talk about. We could have gossiped about our families and affairs for a whole day quite contentedly, and should [211] have made excellent use of the two or three hours actually available—had Toby permitted. But he wailed and howled in his shed in the backyard, and no doors could smother the distracting sound. We pretended for some time that we did not hear it, while I answered questions at random, incapable of fixing my thoughts on anything but him. Finally the strain became unbearable, and the prisoner was released upon my giving an undertaking that he should reasonably behave himself.

He returned like a whirlwind, but, after a brief struggle with himself, submitted to what he perceived was necessary, and stood under my hand, trembling, whimpering, thrilling in every fibre, his nose on my knee, his liquid eyes fixed on my face with such an intensity of adoring love as I never saw in any other pair. If the pressure was relaxed for a moment, he leaped like a steel spring in an india-rubber ball, because he could not help himself, and if I ventured to look at him he yelped with delight; but he quieted down by degrees, lay on my skirt, leaning against it in a way to drag the gathers out, licked my fingers, and was quite happy.

To please us both he was allowed to stay to dinner, and by this time he was so far restored to his sober senses that he went to others beside me to ask for food; and the confidence with which he begged from each in turn showed that parents and children were all his trusted friends—that this home, unlike the last, was an ideal home for a being of his persuasion, the unattainable paradise of the average dog. This is my one comfort when I think of Toby now.

Having other engagements, I was obliged to say good-bye to my entertainers immediately after [212] the mid-day meal. But it was generally felt that, in spite of his calmer demeanour, there must be no good-byes to him. Stratagem was resorted to, together with tit-bits of roast beef to lure him to a part of the house whence he could not see me go; and as soon as the coast was clear I made off with all speed, taking care that no door should creak, no gate click, no tip-toe footstep leave an echo behind me.

Alas! he heard. No, he did not hear—he *knew*. I was not fairly into the roadway before he began to shriek with all his might, and now the shrieks were as full of anguish as they had previously been full of joy. I never heard anything so heart-thrilling, so heart-breaking in my life. He was again shut up, and even his strength was not equal to tearing down the walls that held him, though I am sure he did his best. I wonder sometimes whether he hurt himself in that paroxysm of despairing fury, how long it lasted, and what he thought when he was let out and found that I had not answered his cry, but left him without a word.

All the way down the street, and down the next street, and into the third, as far as the air-waves carried, I heard his voice at the same pitch. I stood still again and again, agonised by the sound, and *now* I cannot imagine how I resisted it. I was hundreds of miles from home; I was staying in the sort of house that one cannot easily take liberties with; and, at the end of a holiday, my purse was almost empty; besides, Toby was no longer my dog, whatever might have been his

views to the contrary, and I knew that his reappearance with me on my return to my family would be objected to in the strongest manner. These trivial circumstances overcame the impulse of my heart, and I passed on. [213]

It is years and years ago, but I have never forgiven myself, and never shall. Whenever I think of it—only I cannot bear to think of it—I suffer pangs of regret and remorse acute enough to bring tears to my eyes and make me miserable for a whole day. It sounds silly, I know, but the fact remains. Oh, what things we would do—and not do—if we could have our time over again! I am not so rich that I can afford to throw money away, but I would give many hard-earned pounds to reverse that deed. How readily he would have been given back to me, and suffered to re-establish himself in his old home, had I properly represented, and myself properly realised at the right moment, that our two hearts were set on it; but I let the chance slip, and—his people leaving soon afterwards for parts unknown—never had another.

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[214]

CHAPTER XVI

ToC

THE GREAT STRIKE

This is another chapter that some readers may like to skip. If talk about a dog is too trivial for those who do not care for dogs, talk about strikes and such politico-industrial matters—especially by one unlearned in the subject—is calculated to bore intolerably the person who merely seeks in these humble pages a little amusement for an idle hour. But our great strike, which in point of time belongs to this portion of my narrative, was part and parcel of my Australian life, and no picture of that life can be made clear unless I sketch in a line or two to indicate surrounding social circumstances of the larger kind.

When our vice-regal lady, already spoken of, was about to leave us, it was inevitably desired to make her a parting gift. Subscriptions were invited, and I gladly accepted the privilege of contributing thereto. That is to say, I calculated what I could afford and prepared my cheque. Then I was stopped by a move on the part of the official promoters; they notified that the names of all subscribers would be published, obviously with the intention of stimulating them to generosity, which it did in many instances. It had the opposite effect on me. Since it was under the eyes of the receiver that this parade of the givers was to be made, and since there were certain to be sneers—though it was small-minded to care about them—at the self-advertiser with social ambitions, I had not the courage to enroll myself. And the money I had set aside I sent to the funds of the great Dock Strike in England, which was going on at that time. [215]

I mention this fact so that the poor working man and his friends may not gather from any remarks I may make on the subject of Australian labour conditions the mistaken idea that I am out of sympathy with his cause. The contrary has ever been the case, and I hope always will be; as a worker myself, I feel beyond measure for those who are unfairly hampered in what is so stern a struggle at the best. It has been the religion of my youth—poorly practised, I confess—to stand by the down-trodden as against those who in their prosperity walk over them; but whereas I was once fanatical in the matter, I am cooler-headed now. Increasingly ignorant as I know myself to be, I understand many things better than I did in 1889. And such enlightenment as I have grown to in respect of the case of the working man has been given me by himself.

One thing that I have learned is to pay no regard to popular definitions. The working man at the London Docks is so entirely unlike in his circumstances to the whole body of working men here that it seems an absurdity to use the same name for both. The one is possibly the poorest of his class; the other, I should think, is beyond question the richest. And half our working men, so-called, are not only misnamed but grotesquely named; they are no more working men than Paul Kruger's republic was a republic.

A few facts may be adduced to show this. But indeed the one bare fact that this great, rich continent is in possession of less than four million people, who say they are not able to make a living in it, is proof enough. [216]

The "starving unemployed" are never out of our streets. Yet, to quote newspaper comments on this chronic situation—words continually repeated, consistently unheeded, although no one can contradict them—"the country is languishing for the labour congested in the Metropolis. Private enterprise is dying, being slowly killed by Government competition. Dairymen are turning their farms into sheep-runs because they cannot get labour; fruit in the orchards is rotting on the trees or on the ground from the same cause. The selectors in Gippsland especially are crippled; they find it impossible to get their land cleared. But everywhere through the state there is the same complaint of scarcity of labour.... The Government has raised the rate of wages to seven shillings a day ... the labourer naturally prefers the Government stroke, and can be tempted away from that easy and pleasant way of passing his time only by an increased rate of wages. That increased

rate very few industries can afford to pay; thus all enterprise is crushed." So that one sees where the main responsibility lies. It is not all the fault of the spoiled children when they turn out badly.

This one of several political Frankensteins now has its creator by the throat. The "Organised Unemployed of the City" do their best to make the life of the Government a burden to it. They will not leave the city even for the Government stroke (synonym for work scamped and shirked, the pretence of work) elsewhere—on account of their families, they say, whom they cannot expose to [217] the rigours of Bush life. "What," cried a shocked deputationist to a courageous Minister of Railways who had ventured to suggest that course as better for the families than having their husbands doing nothing in town, "you don't mean to say that a man should take his wife into the Mallee with him? Well, any man who wishes a woman to live there in a tent with her husband has no respect for humanity." The Mallee was "a hell upon earth," and—on account of the ants that crawled upon the sleepers—"the sleeping accommodation beastly."

An independent inquiry amongst a crowd of "starving unemployed" outside the Government Labour Bureau had some curious results. One "young fellow" who had been railway cutting, "finding, after a fortnight's trial, that he could not earn more than thirty shillings a week, left the job and came back to join" these mendicants. The reporter of this instance added that "fifty others left at the same time and for the same reason." Another had thrown up a job of eight shillings a day on the familiar plea that his wife and family were in Melbourne. Asked by the inquirer whether he could not have taken them with him to Camperdown—one of the finest settled districts in the state—he answered "Yes," but "he could not carry along a quarter-acre allotment." Another "did not care where he worked, but he must have twelve shillings a day."

The same issue of the paper which enlightened us in this way as to what starving means to some folks, published the following:—

"The contractor for the supply of road metal to the Coburg Shire Council has informed the [218] Shire Engineer that he cannot obtain sufficient stone-breakers for the necessary work under his contract. At the meeting of the Council last evening the recommendation of the engineer that the matter be brought under the notice of the local parliamentary representatives was adopted." The only comment to make upon this paragraph is that Coburg is not even country like Camperdown, but a part of Melbourne. Stone-breaking, it is to be inferred, is too much like hard work.

This also is public and uncontradicted testimony:—

"It has been represented that many of the men who are clamouring for employment are unfitted for heavy navvying labour but are eager for light work. Mr Andrew Rowan, proprietor of St Hubert's Vineyard, put this desire to the test yesterday. He wanted twenty men to assist in gathering grapes ... and he went to the Labour Bureau to obtain them. They were offered a fortnight's work at nine shillings per week, with good quarters and food, and free passes to the vineyard. Out of 150 men who were outside the Bureau, only eight promised to go, but actually only four proceeded to St Hubert's by the appointed train."

Exactly the same result of a Government effort to make acceptable work for a large body of the unemployed occurred a few days previous to this present date of writing.

But I must hasten to say that these State-made drones—these spurious workers, deliberately manufactured by Government out of material from which the genuine article might have been made—are not all the family of labour in this house of ours. They are not even all the [219] unemployed, worse luck!

What, I wonder, are the numbers of those who starve—really starve—in secret because the law forbids them to work for less than seven shillings a day, which they cannot earn with service not worth the half of it—all the old and slow and weak, but yet self-respecting and self-reliant, whose honest bread the Minimum Wage Act has taken out of their mouths? One is sick of the continual begging of these victims to inexorable inspectors and Boards to be allowed to work for thirty shillings a week—for twenty-five—one poor tailoress, who had supported herself with her needle for fifteen years, stood up in court and begged with tears to be allowed to work for twelve shillings and sixpence, which she said would "keep" her—and seeing the invariable brutal verdict given against them. I cannot bear to talk about it.

And there are all those outside what may be called the official working class, to which even these compulsorily-idle unfortunates belong—salt amid the rottenness that wastes our young nation almost before it has begun to live. How many of the fine young fellows who went soldiering to South Africa have looked to that country for home and work when soldiering was done? I could name a round dozen amongst my own acquaintances. As a fact, they and their civilian comrades are pouring thither as fast as they can get passage money and a hundred pounds together; every ship that sails that way is packed with them. "There is no opening for them here," say the fathers and mothers who, when they were young, fared so differently; and they scrape and screw to give their boys a chance. Well will they prove the quality of their manhood if they get it, as the "contingenters" amongst them have already done. But imagine [220] going from a country like Australia to a country like South Africa (as it is now) for a chance!

Take again the youths of our cricket-fields—who, however, are one and the same. Hard, quick-witted, thorough, "playing the game" in every sense of the term, there is no evidence about them of deterioration from British standards; rather the contrary, indeed, for the generous climate and comparative brightness of life have added buoyancy to the hereditary temperament, the good that happy circumstances always bring to the originally wholesome nature. And those young men are the diluted second generation of the race I knew in the old days—the pioneers, who feared blacks and bushrangers far less than the "starving unemployed" fear ants.

See also the gallant Bushmen who go out into the wilds to "take up" land, and who stay there, fighting with bare hands not only against the forces of virgin Nature, but under fiscal burdens heavier than are borne by any other class; who scorn to ask alms of the State which they serve so well, and who bring up hardy children to the same fine traditions of manly self-respect. Think of these men having to "turn their farms into sheep-runs because they cannot get labour"—working themselves so hard, early and late, as they do (for at least that is allowed in their case)—while unworthy loafers are cockered up with "Government works," often devised on purpose for them, and fancy wages that they do not pretend to earn!

Above all, there are the women. In the old times the Bush wives, from the highest to the lowest, made their homes, so to speak, with their own hands. The squatter's wife, who later came to her [221] town house and her carriage, did "all her own work" cheerfully "when she had to do it," and is rarely ashamed to acknowledge the fact—refers to it, indeed, with a wistful tenderness of voice and heart that plainly tells how she compares the hard times with the easy ones. And after that cataclysm already described—the Bursting of the Boom—when the revels of riches were so rudely interrupted, as if somebody had turned the gas off suddenly, what did we see? The girls who had never had to work, who had seemed to live entirely for pleasure, who appeared to us eaten up with the frivolity of their luxurious lives, as soon as their great houses fell, instead of sitting down to mourn and weep, overwhelmed with the shame of such a tremendous social "come-down," turned to, like Britons indeed, to help their ruined fathers and to support themselves. In no faddy, fine-lady fashion either. They took the work that they could do, with no false pride about its being trade or otherwise, and at this day you may see them still at it, calm and business-like, never wanting favour on the score of having "seen better days," never so much as reminding one that they have seen them. They run many tea-rooms, or wait in them, or make cakes for them; they keep various little shops, are milliners and dressmakers, typewriters, dentists, all sorts of things.

It was significant that our great Labour War developed with the Boom, and that the defeat of the insurgents coincided with the downfall of the rotten edifice that had towered so high. They were correlating forces, the Boomsters and the Strikers, and worked together to pull our house about our ears, as effectually as if it had been their conscious purpose to do so. When the fight [222] began the aggressors had no wrongs to right, no worthy cause to fight for; on the contrary, they were in a position to make them the envy of their class throughout the world. They had but eight hours' toil for a day's wage of eight shillings to ten shillings and more; universal suffrage; payment of members in a Parliament where the labour vote was paramount; and behind them that immense trades-union organisation which embraced the whole continent, and as a governing power had but a handful of troops and a few hundreds of police against it. What was left for the working man to claim? I have searched the records for a justifiable cause of the effects that made our strike unique in the industrial history of those times, and I cannot find any. The only ostensible grievance on the pastoral side was that a few squatters proposed to reduce wages when wool was "up" and cheated their men by selling them poor food at high prices; on the maritime side that ships' officers found themselves, not ill-paid, except as all sailors are ill-paid, but paid less than the unionist (and therefore more privileged) seamen under them. If there was any other ground for hostilities it nowhere appears, and as a fact hostilities were in progress long before the two grievances mentioned took shape.

We laughed at a funny little incident that occurred at the beginning of the year, not realising all it signified. A baker in a poor suburb had a faithful servant who did not belong to the Operative Bakers' Society. Discovering this, the O.B.S. demanded his dismissal. The baker refused to dismiss him. The O.B.S. then detailed two delegates in a buggy to follow the baker's cart on its [223] rounds, and to prevent the delivery of his bread at every door. Upon which the baker armed himself with a gun, and in another buggy followed the delegates, threatening to shoot them at each attempt to interfere with his business. The little procession was the delight of the streets for some hours, I believe, when the delegates retired from the contest to take out a summons. The baker was haled before justices and fined—but only ten shillings, in consideration of his gun having been empty, and of the "considerable provocation" that he had received. What became of the baker's man I do not know, but I can guess.

Another case, with nothing laughable about it, was that of a poor, small farmer, who did all his own work. To him came the secretary of the Slaughtermen's Union, demanding to be informed who killed his pigs for market. When the farmer admitted doing it himself, he was told that unless he joined the Union, and paid up all back fees, his pork would not be allowed to be sold in the Melbourne markets. He wanted to know whether the S.U. had leased the markets, or how else they proposed to bar his pork. Simply, he was informed, by "calling out the slaughtermen from the sheds of any salesman who dared to sell for him." Thus this poor man had to join the Union, at a cost beyond his means, to make himself liable for strikes and other things that he disapproved of, or starve. And thus did Unionism, designed to frustrate tyranny, play the licentious tyrant in its turn—not in thoughtless passion but methodically and on principle, wresting the liberty of the individual from him by brute force.

Instances of this kind multiplied daily, and slowly roused us—long-suffering people as we are— [224] to a perception of our case as Britons who never would be slaves. This was slave-driving pure and simple; a bit of the Middle Ages back again, when men were denied their elementary rights and had no redress. The reign of ignorant tyranny passed, as it was bound to pass, but it has left its mark on the national character. The habit of the high hand comes out in all sorts of ways—in our treatment of our Chinese fellow-citizens, in the despotic attitude of our Federal Government, which regards foreign nations as pirates and our coloured brothers as vermin unfit to live. And how the habit of being bullied has demoralised us is shown by our acquiescence in a state of

political bondage that hardly leaves us free to blow our own noses in our own way.

There was no limit to the extravagance of Unionist demands, most of them ultimatums couched in Kruger-like terms. As, for instance, this letter addressed to a ship captain who had dispensed with the services of a misbehaving member of the crew who happened also to be a delegate of the Seamen's Union:—"Dear Sir,—I am instructed by the members of the above Society to state that we intend to have our delegate, —— ——, reinstated on board the ——. If he is not reinstated by the return of the ship to Sydney, the crew will be given their twenty-four hours' notice." The agents of the Company replied on behalf of the captain that the man had been discharged "because a change was considered advisable in the Company's interests," but that there was "no objection to his joining one of the other vessels of the Company." This mild and generous answer was of no avail. The Union called out the crew, and forbade its members ever to ship under the offending captain in any vessel whatever. It was the tone of voice in which the "other side" was [225] habitually addressed. The Mill Employés, who would have all their managers—gentlemen with salaries of £300 and £400 a year, not one of whom could have been replaced from their ranks—forced to join their Union with them; the Stewards and Cooks, who would have their members on ships exempted from the punitive regulations attached to losses of plate, and so on; the Tinsmiths and Ironworkers, who would abolish piecework—always hateful to the political working man; the Implement-makers, who would make ten shillings a day the minimum wage and required other privileges—all formulated their demands in the terms of the Seamen's letter. Indeed, the most painful part of the business was the callous rudeness of the methods pursued, which openly made the redressing of wrongs of less importance than the humiliating of the adversary on whom, as it were, the tables had been turned. Of course, it is here that one must admit the two sides to the question, and make allowances for the one that is not one's own. Still—even if we would have done the same under the same circumstances—the element of personal insult was deplorable. That indignity put upon the captain who was not allowed to know his own business, or do it, was repeated with others as often as occasion offered. There was a member of the Engine-drivers' and Firemen's Association who, being appointed a delegate to some meeting or other, left his work and went off to attend it without troubling himself to ask leave of absence. He returned after five days, and was dismissed for his act of insubordination. Upon which his Union notified his employers that if they did not reinstate him the workers at his trade would be called out. No [226] just-minded person, whatever his sympathies, can condone such unfair and un-British tactics of war.

These, however, were but the sporadic skirmishes of the campaign. The great engagements were two—they went on together and intermingled—the Shearers' Strike and the Maritime Strike. I think the records establish clearly that the Shearers began the trouble. Coincidently the Marine Officers (not all the captains—at anyrate, not those of my acquaintance—who do not desert their posts under any circumstances) put themselves, which practically meant the ships as well, under the "protection" of the Trades Hall—put themselves really under the domination of the men they were supposed to govern, that they might force the hands of their masters as the latter had done; but it was the Shearers' announcement, already made, of their monstrous intentions that showed the ship-owners what they were in for, and the necessity for putting the foot down at this point. Having, as they expressed it, "made concession after concession, for the sake of peace, until they found that the ever-increasing requirements of the labour bodies threatened to take the control of their business entirely from them," they now refused to treat with their officers as unionists, taking all the consequences of so defiant an act. It was a fight for existence that had come upon them and the Pastoralists, who between them represented the staple interests of the country; and they combined their forces and stood up to continue the argument with the weapons of the other side. They too formed Unions.

But it was the Shearers who began it. Long before the shearing season, the squatters had been [227] commanded to employ none but Union men, and had continued to employ non-unionists, although sparely, just to show their independence. The squatters, with the farmers, and indeed all the country dwellers who have settled homes, are the steady-going Conservatives of the community, some good reasons for which will be obvious to the thoughtful reader. Country interests seem always—which is a great pity—opposed to town interests. There is a "country party" in every parliament, and in the navigation of public affairs it generally makes bad weather of it; but this is not due to the quality of its representatives so much as to their deficient quantity, to the fact that it is too busy at home to take such part in politics as would qualify it to meet the other side on equal terms. But it is a tough-fibred, stout-hearted breed of men, that has not accustomed itself to being bullied. And it said—and stuck to it with truly splendid gallantry—that no men or body of men could be allowed to abrogate "the right of all to work peaceably under the laws of their country." Very well, said the Shearers' Union in the inevitable manifesto, then "not an ounce of non-union wool shall go unfought from Australasia." "All right," rejoined the Pastoralists, in effect, "do your worst."

Consider for a moment the Pastoralists' case. They too were men working for their living—we have no leisured class here—and few of them but had suffered from droughts and bad times, and depended on their clip to ease financial embarrassments. "A ring of capitalists conspiring to crush labour" was how they were constantly described by the strike leaders, but nothing was further from their intentions than to ruin themselves if they could help it—the patent result of [228] hostile action at this time. They only accepted that risk because there was a higher thing than money at stake. The Shearers, on the other hand, were exceedingly well off. Good men could get £30 for a few weeks' work, and then have the bulk of the year for other avocations, or go on earning at that rate for months together. And the shearing was not only the sheep farmer's harvest, it was the country's as well, and all the interests of the country were bound up with it.

But the strike leaders said that every ounce of wool that came from a station on which so much as one non-unionist (a Chinese gardener was sufficient in one case) was employed, was to be boycotted by the whole strength of the federated labour organisations, and they light-heartedly set out to do it. Very soon after the commencement of active hostilities they claimed "the aid of the labour unions of England, whom in their hour of need Australia aided so well"—as to which it may be said that of the £20,887 sent to the London dockers up to 20th November 1889, only £5817 was contributed by the trade societies; the rest was the gift of soft-hearted non-unionists like myself, who did not bestow it to ask it back again.

The great shipping companies—I think the British India was the first—were ordered to refuse non-union wool as cargo. When they protested that they were mere public carriers for the world, and that such a local matter was no concern of theirs, the Wharf Labourers were called upon to refuse to load it or "come out" in a body. Bakers, butchers, and other trades were not to supply those vessels which touched the forbidden thing. When clerks and other non-professional persons took up the abandoned work, the usual picketing and persecution ensued—the conventional [229] routine of strikes in all countries. The odds just here seemed hopelessly against the defenders, the sheer force of numbers overwhelming. The Seamen's Unions, with which the Marine Officers had cast in their lot, had cast in theirs with the Shearers and others, or, rather, their leaders had done so for them; and the crews came out, officers and all, at a few hours' notice, as they were "called" one after another, although the passengers might be on board and perishable cargoes doomed. "Wharves deserted" was a flaring headline in our morning papers, and the number of vessels named as compulsorily "laid up" rose daily. The campaign, from the unionist point of view, progressed without a hitch.

Until the gas-works went on strike. "All the men at the works come out," was announced to us one morning, and night brought an uncertain dimness to the streets and a realisation of what was happening—the plunging of our great city into darkness, while flooded with this dangerous element of mob rule.

This did seem a little too much, and the worm turned. There were meetings of the Cabinet, and a wholesale creation of special constables. It was announced by Authority that "order must be maintained at all hazards," and that it was resolved "to bring 100 members of the Mounted Rifles, with their horses, and 100 members of the Rangers from the country districts into Melbourne without delay." It was ordered that these troops "be kept on duty at the Military Barracks, St. Kilda Road, and not brought into the city unless occasion should demand it." But the Governor issued a proclamation which warned all concerned that a state of legal "riot" had arrived, which [230] called for legal measures.

The strikers were nonplussed. First, they did not believe in it; then they felt furiously insulted; then they "went for" revenge headlong. That is to say, the strike leaders did so, not only because such was the natural course for them to take, as enemies of society who had had soldiers set at them, but because it would have been as much as their places were worth to admit that they had over-reached themselves. Powerful they must remain at any cost, or, as far as they were personally concerned, the game was up; and for the remainder of the fight, as we saw it, they used all that splendid loyalty and confidence which was, as it were, trust-money in their hands, to this one end. If the gas-works could not be taken by assault, they could by mining. The order went forth that "no more coal ships owned by the Victorian steamship owners be loaded." The ship-owners being to a large extent the coal-owners, the wide-reaching effects of this move can be imagined; every poor family felt them. With a stroke of the pen the Labour Congress in Sydney called out not only "all the miners from the Western mines," but "all shearers, rouseabouts, carriers and others *in any way connected with the wool industry*"—plain wool now, and never mind who took it from the sheeps' backs. This was the last card of those desperate gamblers—to destroy the wool industry bodily, £20,000,000 of the "living" of 4,000,000 people—and it finished the game they had already thrown away, so far, at anyrate, as Victoria was concerned. During the following year, 1891, there was a tough struggle in Queensland, where shearing began with the first month. The Amalgamated Shearers had hoped that Pastoralists (now amalgamated too) [231] would "yet see their foolhardiness, and come to some satisfactory arrangement in favour of the portion of their new rules, which are obnoxious to the Shearers;" but the Pastoralists did not. Freedom! Freedom! was still their cry, and they had more strength to back it now. And when the disappointed ones took to riding about the immense colony in armed bands, firing grass and wool-sheds, turning (at anyrate, threatening to turn) out rabbits, and laying obstructions on the railway lines that carried non-union workmen, then troops and guns were sent to all the endangered places as far as they would go round, so that at last the defence was passed on to the Queensland Government itself, which had to end the duel. But it was in November 1890 that the Trades of our colony, in meeting assembled, were informed by their leaders that the strike was at an end, and they must make the best terms they could with the employers. And our soldiers had not to be sent anywhere. The moral effect of their known proximity and purpose, the disgrace of it, was enough to calm the disorder of the town. Strike leaders took care to give them a wide berth, and the men, who were not cowards, showed by their attitude of insulted dignity how this strong measure on the part of Government brought home to them the lengths to which they had gone. The captain of a mail steamer once sketched for me the comical picture of his big ship lying off a certain hostile shore, under the protection of a British gun-boat that he could have "put into his pocket"; so this handful of uniforms—militia at that—sufficed to check that mighty organisation of tens of thousands which so far had stuck at nothing. They did it by merely [232] "keeping on duty at the Military Barracks," without showing a nose outside the barrack gates.

I do not know whether they were disappointed that no more was required of them, but I think

they were, for it was their first chance of service in the field—as much as they would ever get, it appeared at the time. Certainly they responded with alacrity to the call for them, and "stood by" for action with the air of men enjoying themselves. Tents were pitched in the Barrack Square, and the little camp seethed with the excitement of its sudden importance. This feature of the great strike was one of much personal interest to me, because the barracks were a haunt of mine at this period. A beloved friend, now in her grave, was there, the wife of the colonel who created the Mounted Rifles, who commanded the Second Victorian Contingent in South Africa, a fine soldier of a race of soldiers, and now a C.B. in Imperial recognition of the fact. Since the breaking-up of my town home at Toorak, on the death of its head, whose daughter she was, her official quarters had been its substitute; and many indeed are the happy memories that flood back upon my mind when now I ride past the massive granite pile without stopping as I used to do. As a family residence it was not considered a success. The Barrack Square, seemingly walled off, was not walled off enough for officers' little boys; the tall rectangular rooms were gloomy, the stone stairs cold and prison-like, the back-yard a mere well in the masonry—although the colonel kept his shooting dogs there, and tried to keep a cow; the basement a haunt of rats that ate our boots and shoes while they were down to be cleaned, and one of those public stenches that Melbourne still keeps amongst her institutions (though this particular one has been eliminated) [233] so close under the windows that it was necessary to shut them when the wind blew a certain way. But it was an interesting place to visit at, apart from the friendship that has hallowed it to me. The bugle of a morning sent thrills through my waking senses, with its associations of the past. The stately bustle of military business, trampings and clankings, and the omnipotent word of command—the pleasant officers dropping in so often, the reviews, the tattoos—all had their charm for me, because then I knew only the picturesque features of soldiering, the romantic side, which I think now it will never wear again for anybody.

And there never was a more interesting time at the barracks than that which saw these country troops massed on the parade ground, waiting to be summoned to so new and strange a duty. Their colonel was a man notorious for plain speaking as for plain acting; the straight word and the swift blow (if necessary) were his, and a perfect scorn of consequences. In military affairs especially there was no mincing matters. Business was strictly business. So he told the men, who might at any time be called out to suppress civilian rioters, what they were to do in the terms that they were accustomed to. An orderly patience was to be maintained up to that point where the line had to be drawn; if that were passed, then, said he, simply, "Fire low and lay 'em out."

To "fire low" was, I believe, enjoined under the given circumstances by the regulations, and to "lay 'em out' is a colonial expression covering a wide field. His men understood him perfectly, and [234] nobody within barrack walls had an idea of the potential sensationalism of his words. But somebody repeated them outside; the exasperated unionists got hold of them and found a plausible grievance in them, and they seem to have been immortalised by the tremendous rumpus that ensued. Here were poor innocent working men, and here was this bloodthirsty swash-buckler inciting their own brothers to slay them. Was the country going to allow such an outrage to pass? Not if they knew it. The colonel had to stand a sort of military trial for his offence before the avengers could be appeased. It came to nothing, but gave him as a scapegoat to the revilings of those with whom soldiers had become so unpopular. They hissed him in public places. They soothed the soreness of their other reverses by trying to make his life a burden to him. But it only hurt him through his wife, whose bright, good life it saddened deeply for a time. "Fire-low" or "Lay 'em out" took the place of his Christian name in the public mouth, and they keep it still, only that now the bitter nicknames have come to sound almost like terms of endearment.

For when the South African struggle came to widen our outlook in so many directions, there was such a unanimous call for him all over the country that it cannot be supposed that his one-time enemies did not join in it. He was not chosen to lead the First Contingent, and the crowds through which it passed from us loudly voiced their sympathy with him in the untoward circumstance. I saw him go with the Second, and the cheers that followed him from the barracks [235] to the ship were heart-stirring to listen to. It was thought that he was riding his own charger, which was safe on board, and his borrowed mount was almost denuded of its mane and tail by the enthusiasts who wanted a hair as a memento of him; he was nearly dragged from the saddle by the press of parting hand-shakers. It was the same when he came back, only more so. Every returned soldier was mobbed by his friends, but the frenzied "There he is!" and "That's him!" when the big colonel turned a corner into view, and the resultant roar of welcome, proclaimed the popular as well as the peculiar hero.

The military intervention in the struggle of the strike appeared decisive, but to deeper causes must be ascribed the modifications in the situation that remained after the dust of combat was cleared away. Labour Unions in this country were taught to "play the game" as soldiers would never have taught them. It was the civilians who manfully refused to knuckle under, who risked all for honour and the public good, to whom, more than to any other cause whatever, we owe a dozen years of industrial peace. And if that same wholesome spirit of true patriotism would arise again to put down a form of tyranny that has become quite as oppressive and ruinous as the Unionism of old....

But we shall see that too, some day.

[236]

CHAPTER XVII

ToC

OVER THE BORDER

My experiences of life in Australia, long in time, have been narrow in space. Of the thirty years of this chronicle, not six months were spent outside Victoria.

In earlier times I paid little visits to Albury, just over the border. We drove from Y—— in our first buggy, which was bought there, taking the babies to a house that was full of playmates for them, and where a couple more or less added nothing to the family cares. Looking out of my window one morning I realised why this was so. In a back-yard below, on a kitchen chair, sat the hostess's young widowed sister-in-law, who lived with her and was the mother of two; these two, my two, and the dozen or thereabouts of the family proper, sat or stood round her like a class in school, and from a huge basin on her lap she fed the lot, each in turn, a spoonful at a time, round and round, until the supplies were exhausted. The serious faces of the little ones as they opened their mouths wide one after the other showed they were not at games, but performing a duty they were accustomed to. When I went down to breakfast I was quietly informed that the children had had theirs and gone out to play. But I think my clearest memory of Albury is of the splendid [237] Fallon vineyards and cellars, in which one morning a hospitable proprietor offered us tastes of his famous brands in innumerable little glasses, which politeness constrained me to "sample" at all costs. Taking but a sip of each, I reckoned that I must have swallowed a quantity fully equal to my daily allowance for a fortnight; and we drove home in the sun directly afterwards. I am proud to say that, although not a seasoned vessel, I passed the ordeal undisgraced even by a headache —my late host had confidently predicted it—otherwise I should not tell this tale.

Then I once went to Tasmania—for four hours. This was not very long ago, and I have ever since been awaiting opportunities to extend my acquaintance with that charming place—so green, so cool, so rich in the quality of its earth and all that springs from it, rightly entitled to its name of the "garden island" as far as my skimming eye could judge. Being out of health, I had taken one of those sudden longings for the sea which come over me at such times, an instinctive animal craving after the natural remedy for my complaint; and I had a friend in the captain of a smart steamer plying to Tasmanian ports. An invitation to a trip, as a privileged passenger, was too tempting to be refused. Thus I found myself one morning, tucked up in pillows and a 'possum rug in a long chair on the bridge, eating my breakfast of fried fish and coffee while I gazed at the Tasmanian shore, which we skirted between ports for several hours. We were near enough to discern the little farmhouses in the nooks of the hills, the little figures of milkers and carters, and housewives hanging the wash on the clothes line; and there was a beautiful coach-road running [238] up and down and round the corners amongst the trees that I shall never be satisfied until I have driven over. I have spoken of it to those who have, and they tell me that imagination cannot conceive of it as more beautiful than it really is, given the right season and weather.

By-and-by we turned a corner ourselves and steered into a channel that presently opened out into a little inland bay, a little port, connected by a toy railway with Launceston. Its little town and wharves, where other ships were loading and unloading, occupied a section of the wooded hills enclosing it; elsewhere the green basin-rim was dotted with nestling homes, and their orchards and gardens. It was towards noon, and I was called to an early lunch, after which the captain appeared in mufti to take me for a walk. We were through the streets in a few minutes, and on a quiet road lined with great holly-hedges, a mighty tree of which, one blaze of scarlet, stood in a garden where the earliest spring flowers were sprouting from rich brown earth such as I had never seen on this side of the world. We followed the course of the bay as it narrowed in amongst the hills until it became a mere woodland brook burrowing under the bushes. The grass was lush and dewy, and the colour of the soil, where the path revealed it, as delightful to English eyes as the colour of flowers. It was too early for more than a sprinkling of these, but I filled my hands with ferns and other vernal treasures that told me what a Paradise the land would be in a few weeks if that was a fair sample of it. We "hustlers" of the mainland think it a fine place to visit in the hot weather, but far too dull and behind-the-times to live in; but to those who love [239] Nature and a quiet home, and find their intellectual resources in themselves, what an ideal environment! "Here," said I to the captain, as we strolled back to the ship, "is where I should like to spend my last days—to rest when work is done." The idea obscured for a time the settled plan of my life, which is to get "Home" somehow before the final event. We sailed in the afternoon, and from the bridge I watched the fading of the green land as I had watched its unfolding, but feeling now that it was my friend for life. Now and then you look into a face which gives you the masonic sign of a natural affinity, absent in fifty faces that ought to be more dear; thus it was with Tasmania, which captured my heart at the first glance.

The furthest and the chiefest of my few jaunts abroad was to the mother-city of the mother-state—Sydney. And there is no place like Sydney. I am firm on that point, although I am a Victorian, in whom such an admission is rank heresy; and a son of mine who has spent several Long Vacs. there—in summer, when I would not go near it—is even more decidedly of the same mind. It was in the year following that of my illness in hospital, and while I was enjoying my fresh

lease of life, that I took the journey after several false starts.

The captain—an intimate friend in private life—of an Orient liner telegraphed to me his arrival in port, the hour of his departure for Sydney, and the information that cabins had been reserved for me. Two of them, I found when I got on board. As I did not travel with a maid I took but one, which afforded twice the accommodation that I had paid for; even that I only occupied for a night. It was a stormy night, and at daybreak the captain and stewardess surveyed from the [240] doorway a wretched object in the lower bunk, and it was ordered that I be brought upstairs to the commander's quarters. His cabin on deck had been my drawing-room the evening before; it now became my lodging altogether until we reached port. In the fresh air blowing through it, and after a light meal of champagne and biscuits, I recovered my equilibrium, and was able to thoroughly enjoy myself all day. Then the captain betook himself to the chart-room, where he had a bed that the weather did not allow him to use, and his servant wedged me in with pillows as I lay, still wearing the becoming and comfortable dressing-gown of semi-public life. I had promised not to undress, in view of his intention to fetch me up to the bridge when the little world below had done with us, that I might be gratified by the sight of a storm at sea under circumstances quite outside the common experience and never likely to occur again in mine. It was officially a "full" gale, and the newspapers of the next morning reported the velocity of the wind to have been up to eighty miles an hour. It was, moreover, the depth of winter and the dead of night. The turmoil of the sea was tremendous, but it did not upset me now; I was quite well and happy, swinging to the heavy roll and pitch of the ship in the soft but tight clasp of my wedging pillows, thankful that no feeling of sleepiness came to waste the time that was storing such romantic impressions. Presently the skipper called at the half-open door. He had oilskins and a woollen scarf, into which I was buttoned and tied; he dragged me out into the storm, and somehow we staggered and struggled over the swimming deck and up the stairs to the bridge and the chart-room, where I spent half of the most wonderful night of my life, with him and the helmsman and [241] the spirits of the Deep. The picture of that midnight sea could not fade from my memory in a thousand years. Looking down from our high platform in the air at the bulk of the vessel under us, big mail steamer that she was, the thought of her as man's work, effectually defying, as it seemed, the whole weight of the Universe, was more inspiring than words can say. Still more wonderful was the fortitude and vitality of two ships that passed us, fighting against the furious wind and not being hurtled along before it as we were. I was sure they were foundering, but not a bit of it—they were only going to be late at their destination.

We were early at ours, passing through Sydney Heads at daybreak before pilots expected us. When I went down to my cabin to dress I found my belongings stowed on the upper bunk and the rest of the room wet from the deluging seas that had swept us through the night. It was raw and grey now, but calm within the harbour, the loveliness of which did not reveal itself to me immediately. I was too rushed to get my hair done and my shore clothes on to have time to look for it. Here we have three hours of smooth water on which to make landing toilets; Sydney has but a few minutes. When I returned, cloaked and bonneted, to my late host, his successor was with him, awaiting me; and I was soon at breakfast on shore, making the acquaintance of what I believed to be the most charming city in the southern hemisphere. Well, at anyrate, it is incomparably charming to me. Of course, if I had gone there as a friendless woman, to struggle for a living in cheap lodgings, I might have pronounced it ordinary—even horrid, a term that I once actually heard applied to it by a mole-eyed person to whom it had never given a good time. [242] Or if I had gone again, to get second impressions. Or if the weather—that arbitrary dispenser of joy and beauty—had not been as heavenly-sweet as it was for all the three weeks of my sojourn there. My letters from home reported rain, snow, dull skies, bad colds, a thorough winter of discontent; I was out every day in sunshine tempered with cool sea winds, an exhilarating freshness that made a bit of fur and an evening fire comfortable; and the wild flowers of spring were beginning to speckle the hills—cascades of something like white foam surrounded a rocky lunching camp on a memorable occasion—although it was only July.

I cannot recall one hour that does not bring pleasant thoughts to mind. Even at night I lay with the gleaming harbour under my eyes whenever I liked to open them to look, and I loved the strange experience of having my room flooded as with a search-light by the revolving beam of the great South Head Light. As an early riser I habitually wake at dawn, and then I watched the moving ships—a pastime I could never weary of—until called to my bath. They curved in and right up to the thresholds of our doors—that is one of the features of this harbour which few others can match. The masts seem to grow out of the streets, and you can step from the deck of a great liner to your cab as easily as from one room to the next.

At breakfast the programme for the day was submitted, and always it had been carefully compiled so as to comprise as much variety of pleasure as possible. I was taken on a cursory tour over the city the first day—round the Domain and through the main streets and beauty-places, to [243] get that first good impression which has so much to do with the after ones. I was enchanted with Sydney—even with the narrow and twisted thoroughfares that are the mock of all good Melbournites; they give "bits" of architectural composition delightful to the uncommercial eye. In the evening we went to the theatre, and afterwards to Parliament House, where the debaters came between whiles to speak to us, and where I enjoyed a quite new and intensely interesting experience up to one o'clock in the morning. Next day I was at the Prorogation, and members entertained us with champagne in private rooms, and I was shown parliamentary life behind the scenes. I remember Lord Brassey was there, a visiting yachts-man, whom we did not then anticipate would be anything more to us. As the hero of *The Voyage of the Sunbeam*—then lying in Farm Cove, open to sightseers—I looked at him a great deal, and also at the author of that book, who at the ceremony sat just before me with her little daughters. She was having her last

taste of travel and of life.

The afternoon of the same day brought quite a change of scene. That very nice man, the current American Consul, came to fetch us to a function that was after my own heart—the "send-off" of a popular American actress by the San Francisco mail. I cared nothing who the honoured person was; to assist at the departure of a ship was enough for me. In a carriage piled with flowers we drove to the quay, and there took tender for the *Zealandia*, lying in Lavender Bay. Before the arrival of the heroine of the occasion I investigated the ship that was to carry her—wondering if the day would ever come when such an one would carry me. Then the crowd gathered until all one's wits were needed to avoid being crushed in alley-ways and corners. The [244]
distinguished traveller did not impair the effect by arriving too early; her company preceded her, also her humble husband, hugging her jewel-box to his breast as he hunted for the purser to take it from him and deposit it in the strong-room, and while still unrelieved of his responsibility naming to us and the general public the enormous sum that it was worth. When at last she came—such a small and ordinary-looking, every-day woman compared with the glittering stage vision of the previous night—she was nursing and guarding a strange bundle of her own, which, when opened in her cabin, disclosed a little native bear that she was taking home to make a pet of. The wallet that was to be its travelling house was lined with fur and had been carefully constructed for the purpose, and a consignment of the animal's natural foods was amongst her luggage. We crowded into her room, where more champagne flowed, not always into the right receptacles; bouquets were presented—they heaped her bed—and speeches made. Then visitors were rung off the ship, and sat round in their various small boats to cheer and wave handkerchiefs while the *Zealandia* got under way, and then chased the stately liner as long as they could keep up with her. Our golden-haired friend was kind enough to stand where we could see her, and was still hugging the fur bag with the little bear in it as we looked our last. When we regained the Consul's carriage he took us a drive round the Domain for the balance of the afternoon, that loveliest hour when Sydney glows pink in the setting sun and the whole scene is steeped in a dream-like haze that I never saw in any other place. I suppose the smoke and other breathings of [245]
the city, blending perhaps with exhalations of the sea, weave that wonderful veil. It is certain that the paintings of a sinking sun upon distant ranges in the country are never so beautiful as when there is a Bush fire about.

Next morning to Lane Cove—the first of the unforgetable series of excursions about that harbour which indeed the wildest boasts of its shore-dwellers could never do justice to. In the bright winter weather, which to all intents and purposes was spring—the mean temperature of Sydney, by the way, is two degrees above that of Nice, and roses are never out of flower the whole year round—I suppose I saw it at its best. We landed from the steamer on a bosky and solitary shore, and basked awhile on beach boulders encrusted with oysters, before climbing the steep paths to look at views. My son tells me that when he goes on these excursions with his young parties they take bread and butter and their pocket-knives with them, so that they can sit down to a meal of oysters at any place or time. There was another charming drive in the afternoon; in the evening theatre again, and a midnight visit to a great newspaper office, where I was initiated into the mysteries of newspaper production by all the modern processes, including that of photographing by electric light.

Next day to Coogee—an ocean shore, with great breakers thundering on it. Here lived a literary wife and painter husband in a little wooden house perched high upon the cliffs, where I think we lunched. A Saturday night party of authors, artists, and press-men—my host was a distinguished member of the latter clan—completed another day in the most brilliant manner. Talk of good [246]
company! I smile when I compare that party with any Society party that I ever attended. But no comparison is possible.

It is one of my delightful memories of Sydney, that it had this intellectual kernel at its heart. I might not have found it in a lifetime had I entered the social life of the place by any other door, and so I hardly like to say that we have nothing of the kind in Melbourne, where my opportunities of search are limited. But friends of my own profession, who know the resources of both capitals, agree in the opinion that there really is nothing like it here. The number of representatives of letters and the arts, to whom mind and not money is the essential thing, may be as great, but there is no cohesion amongst them. They are lost in the general crowd. The little guild in Sydney was a compact and living body, and carried out its objects in uniting together with a sincerity rarely to be met with in the history of clubs. Subscriptions were not the first consideration—nor the second, nor the third; the question of its outward appearance was of the least importance. No gilding, no formality, no æsthetics—liberty and ease, any sort of a chair, a pipe and the right companionship—that was the idea; and it was good indeed to see the traditions of the intellectual life respected in that way.

I was its guest at a conversazione on the Wednesday following the Saturday supper-party. The intervening time was filled with fresh and bright sensations—more harbour trips, alternating with rambles about the old quarters of the town, the "Rocks," Argyle Cut, the Observatory, those blind streets and steep stairs from one tier to another, which struck me as so romantic and un- [247]
Australian; and the Arts Club's entertainment made the best possible contrast and relief to these. We did not dress too much. I was advised that my skirt must clear the ground, and for the rest a modest fichu and elbow sleeves seemed the most that good taste permitted. We set forth on foot in the cool darkness, comfortably untrammelled, and on arrival were received by our friends of the previous Saturday and many more, who piloted us through a series of little rooms, which were soon packed to the point where a dress-train would have rendered its wearer altogether immovable. We squeezed from place to place, a step at a time, ever meeting somebody or

something to make us positively enjoy the heat and crush. Chairs and necessary tables, a piano, a blackboard, a raised platform or two, comprised the furniture of the homely suite; its ornaments were sketches pinned all over the walls, and the scientific and artistic things that covered the tables, outspread for the ladies' amusement. The mural decorations were fine. Phil May was a leading light of the society, and the grimy and bedaubed plaster laughed with his conceits at every turn. Amongst them was a portrait of the then Governor of New South Wales, Lord Carington, as an utterly disreputable vagabond. With no name to it, it was such a speaking likeness of him, as he would have been if he could have metamorphosed himself into such a character, that no one mistook the subject for an instant. It was a focus of mirth the evening through. I wonder what became of it? It might have been disrespectful, but it was a work of art, and I think he who had inspired it would have valued it as much as anybody. When, amongst other entertainments, this gifted artist—and his equally (I used to think more) gifted colleague, [248] "Hop" of the *Bulletin*, who, still remaining with us, has not shared his comrade's fame—drew "lightning sketches" on the blackboard with a lump of chalk, we saw pictures that it was indeed a wicked waste to destroy for ever a few seconds after they were made. Consummate artfulness as well as art was employed, for the strokes were so put in that we could not make head or tail of them until only the crowning one or two were needed; then suddenly the multitude roared as with one throat, and someone in the audience sat up in confused astonishment, while everybody else turned to look and laugh at him. The last touch of the chalk had given us his portrait to the life, with a shade of caricature more or less, but unmistakable. I have always looked back to those lightning sketches, so witty, so good-natured, so extremely clever, as the most refined form of entertainment that I ever enjoyed, and certainly the most generous. In other rooms were music, recitations, microscopes, and such things; and everywhere kindred spirits were intermingling and intercommuning. The ungarnished supper was carried on trays over our heads—coffee and sandwiches, and cakes and tarts from the pastry-cook's—and distributed to hands and mouths with much difficulty and various mishaps; and at last we broke up and broke away, and trotted home through the beautiful fresh night, still exhilarated with all the mental champagne we had imbibed, leaving our hosts, as we were secretly informed, to make a night of it on their own account over pipes and whisky.

There was yet another Saturday party—the party of them all. We started out to it in the sweetest weather to be found on earth, sunny and fresh, the living light of the sky the colour of [249] nemophilas and the sea like liquid diamonds under it—poor similes both for the glory of that spring-like winter morning. On foot from Pott's Point to the Quay, by boat to Mosman's, up the ferny sandstone hills to breezy heights where I stood enraptured to look upon the Sound and the Heads and the Pacific outspread below, and down a crooked woodland path to a sequestered beach, we took our way: and if there had been nothing to get to at the end, the walk alone would have been a joy for ever. But on that lonely bit of shore, backed by the steep hills, fronted by the open gateway of the Heads, stood "the Camp"—the camp, if I may be allowed to remind the reader (with apologies, owed twice over, to the camp's proprietors), which I sketched in my novel, *A Marked Man*, written while the impressions of the place were fresh in my mind. The proprietors were two members of the Arts Club—men with homes and families in the city—who made this their private resting-place and holiday resort. They had gathered a choice assortment of their fellow-members on this occasion; they were "giving a party." But no woman had been allowed to take any hand in the affair; their wives were as much guests as I was; their cook was their old sailor caretaker, whose huge blocks of cold roast and boiled, hot potatoes and plum duff, bread and cake from his own camp oven, required no kickshaws to supplement them. It was a banquet for the gods, with that sauce of sea air to it. The permanent tent, combined sitting- and bedroom, was the drawing-room of groups of us in turn; we crowded on the covered-up truckle beds and the floor (of pine boards, well raised from the sand) for afternoon tea; at lunch we sat [250] on planks under an awning, at long plank tables, like children at a school feast. It was a perfect "spree," but at the back of the merry trifling was that deep intellectual enjoyment of cultivated minds rubbing together which is so rare in social gatherings. We strolled in twos and threes along the lovely little beach, and sprawled under the bushes, and talked, talked; a few games had been provided, but there were no blanks to fill with them after lunch had crystallised us. The walk back to the boat was the best of all. The sun was setting as we climbed out of the glen of the camp, and, looking back from points of vantage as we rose, we saw the moon swim up over the North Head—black as ebony above the pale glitter of the water, while all other visible land was wrapped in that beautiful rosy haze which so glorified every feature of it. Then the great South Head Light began its revolutions, pouring over us and the darkening path at intervals of a minute. I do not know how far that long ray reaches, but I know that it is brilliant in the eyes of the homing traveller for hours before his steamer makes the Heads.

It was on the following morning that we took boat for Watson's Bay, and stood near the lighthouse to look down the sheer wall at the foot of which the *Dunbar* was wrecked, one only of her living freight surviving to tell the tale. It was awful to think of that event with the scene under one's eyes—the jagged cliff face going down and down, the thundering whirlpool raging at the bottom of it; and this was a sunny Sunday morning, and that was pitch-black night, so thick with rain and storm that a careful navigator accustomed to the port could not see the beacon lit [251] for him. But it was not, I think, the present light; it could not have been.

Those out-door excursions and intellectual entertainments—and I have not named the half of them—come first in my memories of this time; they are the pictures "on the line"; but around them were packed many social incidents of a less special but still interesting kind. We went to men-o'-war parties, which are always charming—the German *Bismarck* in particular was splendidly hospitable—and the American Consul took pleasure in giving us dinner-theatre

evenings. Between whiles we gave parties at home, and filled the interstices with drives. And so every day was a full holiday, and I was always well, and the sky was always blue and the sun shining. And so, when people ask me what I think of Sydney, I tell them that it is an earthly Paradise. Nothing will shake that conviction—until I go again.

I returned home overland, rather than descend to the status of an ordinary passenger on a steamboat to whose captain I was unknown, and I left my glass slipper on the Redfern platform. "Would you," implored a strange lady at my carriage window, as the express was about to start, "oh, would you mind taking charge of this little girl, who is travelling to Melbourne alone?" She handed up a child, and what could I do? I said I was not accustomed to taking charge of myself, that I had never made the journey before, and was not going as far as Melbourne; but she was sure it would be all right. What a night I had, with no sleeping berth available! And in the dark of the raw morning, when we were bundled out at Albury and into the hands of the Customs' officers, while looking after the child's luggage I lost my own, and did not recover it for months [252] afterwards. And then I landed at W——, chilled to the bone and exhausted with my fatigues, and had to wait many hours for the B—— branch train; and finally reached home to find winter again and all kinds of arrears of work awaiting me. I sat down to mend the stockings, and two days later there was snow upon the ground.

After all, that was the best part of it.

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CHAPTER XVIII

ToC

THE END OF BUSH LIFE

In 1893 our long country life came to an end. For years we had been hankering after a Melbourne parish, and at times, I must confess, had done a little canvassing for the vote and interest of the influential, under the well-founded impression that Providence helps those who help themselves; but it is very hard, when once "out of it," as the country-clergy describe their case, to get in, and we had come to consider our chances of metropolitan preferment as about equal to that of the camel which would pass through a needle's eye. Then suddenly it came to us, unsought.

There are three ways of reaching the goal, in our diocese. To be elected by the Board of Nominators is the regular way. When a parish falls vacant the Board meets to fill it from a prepared list of eligible candidates. The diocesan nominators have probably agreed upon their man; the equal number of parochial nominators have almost certainly done the same; the Bishop, acting as chairman, has the casting vote. There is generally a friendly discussion, in which one side or the other may allow itself to be over-ruled, but the result may be fairly calculated upon when the parish representatives are united and resolute, and not too unreasonable in their choice. Since they pay the piper, they naturally demand to call the tune, and considerations of [254] justice no less than of peace make it inadvisable to force an unwelcome instrumentalist upon them. What the parishes want is the man they know—the man on the spot, that is—and let him be as young and smart as possible. Seniority and long service have no part in the merits of the case, so far as they are concerned. The old Bush parson who, in his favourite phrase, has borne the burden and heat of the day, and sees himself deprived of what he regards as his legitimate reward, is not the man for them; for the efficiency of a church in this country is in the last resort a matter of money, which is also—it cannot be denied, nor can it be helped—the matter of first concern to its official guardians. A good man is desirable, of course, but not if he is too old and out of date to draw the large and lively congregation necessary to the maintenance of a satisfactory income. This is the squalid way in which the voluntary system works, and I often wish the advocates of Disestablishment at home could live under it for a few years. On the other hand I know the defects of the arrangement I was brought up to. I remember a half-witted rector of my child's days, occupant of a family living, who used to run belated to the reading-desk dragging on his surplice over his hunting pinks and tops, or leave us to wait for him in vain while he carried his Saturday diversions too far afield to get home for Sunday; and another who left all to a poor curate while he lived on the income of his fat living in foreign parts; and still another—the son of a bishop, who had bestowed the plums of the see upon him ere he was grown up—whose long retinue of liveried servants was an object of interest to me at church, and who, one of the last of [255] the big pluralists, still alive in old age when I left England, was too high above his parishioners to be approached except through the humble curate. There are faults in both systems—in all. And as for the one I am speaking of, which leaves the old worker unpaid, and gives the prize to the beginner who has not earned it, I for my part do not see that any great wrong is done. That the world is for the young is Nature's own decree; if we, who are no longer of that fortunate company, cannot see it, we ought. We too have been young, we should remember, and have had our favoured day—that day when we had as good a chance of getting the better of our betters (if

they were our betters) as those who supersede us now. But what I started to say was that the regular path of promotion to a Melbourne parish is to be elected by the Board of Nominators, and that that path was virtually closed to us—not because we were old, for we were not, but because we were so distant and little known.

The second way is to be appointed directly by the Bishop. But, with few exceptions, the Bishop can choose for himself only in the case of parishes too small to have their own nominators, or not bothering to have them, or not qualified to have them because their churches are still in debt. A church must not only be built, but paid for, before it can be consecrated, the act of consecration carrying with it full parochial rights. These lame ducks of parishes did not come into our account.

The third way is by exchange. This was our way.

G., being in town, fell in with the incumbent of the place which is now our home. He had occupied it for many years, without thought of leaving it; but his wife was convalescing from severe illness, and the doctor had advised that she be taken from the sea to a bracing inland [256] climate. The climate we had to offer seemed the very thing—and I may say here that it proved so, even beyond expectations—and the suggestion of an exchange, coming in the nick of time as it did, was hailed as a special interposition of Providence. That was exactly what we thought it.

About a week after G.'s return, Canon S. came up to B—— to investigate. It rained hard, and he was a little dashed at first; he called the picturesque little house a "shanty," though not in our hearing. But when the weather cleared he brightened with it, and I think I may say that he never had another regret in connection with the place. The vestry was consulted, and the three parish nominators gave consent. A few days later the Bishop gave his. Then G. went to town, to be "passed," in his turn, by the vestry of the other parish, and a night or two afterwards, as I was going to bed, the telegraph boy brought me a message from him:—"All satisfactorily settled."

The invalid came up, and we established her, with a daughter, in the nicest lodgings we could find. She was a dreadful wreck, apparently past being mended by any climate, but the next time I saw her she beat all the records of persons of sixty-five for joyous energy and youthfulness. "I wake up in the morning," she said to me, "and wonder what it is that makes me feel so happy." It was the same with her husband, several years her senior. "I can walk twelve hilly miles, and take a service, and walk back again," he bragged, his figure and step and fine-featured old face alert and alive. "I am twenty years younger than when I came."

Certainly B—— deserves to be one of the sanatoriums of the world, and it is the fact that [257] English doctors, who knew its virtues, sent several hopeless invalids to us, either to make miraculous recoveries or to prolong for years in tolerable comfort some life not worth a month's purchase at home. One of the latter cases I lovingly recall to mind—that of a gifted young fellow who, with mother and sisters, had rooms in our chief hotel year after year, although he came to us in apparently the last stage of consumption. He was a dear friend of mine, and a loss to the stock of intellect and genius in the world. "Don't you think I'd better stop this?" he once said to me as we were taking a Bush walk. "I am keeping my mother too long from her home and the rest of her family, and doing nothing to compensate her for what I cost." He meant that he had only to cease breathing that life-giving air to bring on the inevitable end, and that the sooner it came the better for those who were exiled for his sake. We discussed the matter quite fully, and in the quietest way, and I persuaded him that it was better to go on, on their account and his own, at least until the effort became too painful. He died amongst us at last, but none of them regretted those saved years which he unquestionably owed to the B—— climate. A consumptive friend of his came out to try the cure, and became so well that he thought himself proof against further danger, and went home again—to die. Another consumptive, whom winters on the Riviera and in the Engadine had failed to benefit, lived in B—— for, I think, five years, and from the day he came gained much ground and never lost any; he was an active townsman, hard put to it to find enough to do, and seemed to enjoy life as much as any of us. Unfortunately he had a delicate wife, a [258] sufferer from acute asthma, for which a milder climate was required. The rare and vigorous climate of our hills was pronounced to be as bad for her as it was good for him. She grew worse and worse, and so they struck camp and went down to live by the sea—and there he died. Of course he might have died if he had stayed in B——. On the other hand, he might have been alive now.

But the best proof I can give of the healthiness of those parts is the case of three brothers, the elder of whom entertained me on my first visit into the remoter wilds of our first parish. Originally they were four brothers, sons of a highly-placed English clergyman, all four smitten with consumption, out in Australia to save their lives, if possible. One was too far gone and died before he could get a start; another, being at the time in apparently sound health, was killed in a buggy accident many years later; the remaining two are still enjoying life, as hale as the average old man of their age, and indeed more than that. The elder, on that memorable drive to his home amongst the Murray ranges, told me he had left England with but one lung. "I used to feel it when digging or climbing hills," said he, "but now it troubles me very little"—and that was thirty years ago. He had already been some time in the country.

They had good blood in their veins, but little or no money in their pockets, and they had to make their own way by the hardest of hard work—the sort of work that was done in those days, when men were men. Indeed, the history of their career is the most instructive thing that I can put into this casual chronicle, and I am glad I thought of it before too late. [259]

The three brothers took up land, wild, uncleared land, together; each had his own piece, but neighboured the other two. With their own hands they felled trees and made fences, and built their huts and yards, dug and ploughed and milked and all the rest of it—these consumptive lads!

—which seems to show that not only the right air, but strong exercise in it, is necessary for the complaint. They spent nothing in labour and next to nothing on food. They raised their own meat and vegetables, made their own candles—after awhile sold them as well—and their own soap; used wild honey for sugar, and indeed carried frugality to the finest point in every direction. As soon as they could marry they chose useful wives, who did not want servants, but would nurse the baby with one hand and scrub and wash and make butter with the other. When I paid the visit I speak of I found the children trotting about bare-footed, in linsey-woolsey (I forget how to spell that word) overalls, little sacks in shape, with two holes to put the legs through, in which they could make mud pies without spoiling anything. At dinner, after the mutton, there was a lovely apple pudding, as I thought; I remember my greedy chagrin at finding it was filled with quinces (so soon after the W—— quinces), to be eaten with wild honey instead of sugar. The jams were also made with wild honey, and the cakes and other sweets.

This was the way to get on in the world, and the fortunes of this household rose to the level of its deserts. Soon after I had made his acquaintance, the house-father took a trip home, leaving his admirable wife to keep things going in his absence. He came back with three young [260] Jackaroos, sons of the good families associated with his own, enterprising lads with money and a desire for the life he had made successful; they paid him high premiums for instruction, and he set them on his farm work—which was far better, from his point of view, than paying professional labourers to do it. One of them felt aggrieved at being kept at milking and fencing within such narrow bounds, and ran away and was never heard of more—by me; the other two, and more who followed them, bought stations and took root in the country, which they have made their own.

So this plan of the relays of paying instead of paid labourers increased the resources of our friend, and he started upon fresh enterprises. He parted with his much-improved holding, settled his family in a town where the growing children could go as day scholars to one of the best public schools, and started for "out back" in Queensland. Land speculation here was a big thing, with big money hanging to it, in those days; and he was the right man for the golden chance he saw. He took up country, no longer by acres but by miles, did something to it to give it a claim to be a civilised "property," sold it, and went back further to repeat the process.

In a short time he was a very wealthy man. I believe the Boom and its consequences gave him a bad set-back, but he could afford it. His family, in a fine town house, have lived the life of the rich for many years. The other surviving brother was of a slower temperament. He still sits, as Dik would say, upon the same land that he first squatted on—probably in the same house (with additions to it). He dairy-farms, as so many of his neighbours now do, getting up with his sons in [261] the middle of the night to milk and to drive the load of cans to the Butter Factory near by. He still works hard, and he has not made his fortune. A quiet, staunch, useful man in shire and church and all the relations of life, and "as good as they make 'em." Both are good, and their country would be the better of a few more of the same sort.

And to think that it was all due to the accident of climate! For one may be almost sure it was.

Walk some fresh spring or autumn morning up those hills, as I used to do—having always loved to kill two birds with one stone, and three birds if possible, I would at those seasons take my work there, so as to combine business with pleasure and with profit to my health—and you will feel that you are literally drinking the elixir of life. A week ago I went to call on an old friend come back from England, after some years' residence there—her husband had been one of those very Jackaroos of whom I have just been speaking—and she told me she had been for a trip up to B——, where she had once lived, while we were there. "I had forgotten," she said, "what that air was. It was a new revelation to me. There certainly can be nothing like it in the world"—and she had been travelling extensively. Yes, although I was ill there, and felt that nothing but the sea would cure me, I go back now at intervals, when the sea has temporarily failed in its effects, and I get the same surprise that she did, every time. I step out upon the little platform in the clear, cold night, at the end of my long journey from the muggy city, and that stuff that I draw into my expanding lungs makes a new creature of me in three breaths.

Well, those mornings in the hills ... let me try to describe one of them—in April, let us say. [262]

It begins with a nipping-cold bath and a roaring fire to breakfast by. But while we pile the logs on the hearth we also set wide the two door-windows to the sun. The meal and little housekeepings disposed of, I look out over the tree-fern on the rockery to the sky which I can see above the bank of new-blown chrysanthemums that line the upper fence—look at the cat basking full-length on the threshold—and fetch my big hat. Half an hour later I am in another world.

It is ten o'clock, and the sun has been shining with all its might since eight, yet the dew is thick on the steep and rugged track and on the little strips of lawn between the rocks; my stout boots, made on purpose for this rough work, and the hems of my petticoats are drenched. No delicate wild flowers in these verdant spaces now. The grass tufts are sprinkled with dead leaves and wisps of bark with the colour bleached out of them. When those brittle shavings were freshly peeled their outsides were a rich chocolate tint and the insides a tender shade of lilac. They come from a large-leaved kind of gum-tree, and I have often carried bits home and laid them on my writing-table, merely to look at the colour, as if they were flowers; but they fade like flowers too.

11 A.M.—I sit with pencil and paper on my knee. The sun has long since dried my skirts and is now burning my boots. I bask in the warmth and the matchless air, like the cat on the doorstep, and (having successfully dodged my dog) in the utmost solitude that can be imagined. Though the hidden town behind me is so near, I have only once, in scores of mornings, met a human being [263] here—a local naturalist with a butterfly-net. Not even a bridle-track threads the thousand hills of which the one I sit on is as a single wave in a heaving sea—a sea flowing to the horizon. The

distant ranges and the sky are of hues that neither language nor pigment could give an idea of. The ranges are covered with trees, the rounded, feathery tops only showing, with the effect of plush or the bloom of downy fruit; their turquoise tint has a shade of indigo in it, deepening in the folds to an intenser colour. The sky is living blue light, without an earthly stain.

Nearer—more within the limits of this world—wooded and rocky slopes, darkly green against those heavenly blues, fold over unseen valleys at my feet; nearer still, the gum saplings, with the sun shining through their leaves, the sharply-contrasting spears of Murray pine, the tossed heaps of granite rocks, mossed, lichened, fern-fringed in shady crevices, the wattle tree that makes a frame for the beautiful whole. It will be a golden frame later on; to-day its blossoms are represented by crinkled buds of the size of a pin's head. Spiders' webs shine between twigs and the green blades under them. The light flashes up and down the little threads continually; they are never still, though there is hardly a stir of air.

But never was solitude less lonely. There is only too much companionship for the purpose I have in view. The leaves talk, although there is hardly a stir of air—the little tongues glitter at the edges as they swing and turn; and another voice accompanies them, one that never ceases and cannot be ignored. It belongs to a waterfall in a hidden gorge near by. The stream, yellower than [264]
any Tiber with the washings of gold mines, tumbles several hundreds of feet over a jagged staircase of rock to the valley beneath, and makes a great commotion at that place; here it is merely a purring, crooning whisper all the time. Birds are scarce, but every now and then a handful of minute brown things, with a delicate little unobtrusive twitter, scatter themselves around me. A crow comes and sits as near as he dare, to complain of my intrusion; perhaps he does not mean to complain, but his comment upon my presence seems a perfect wail of woe. As for the ground-dwellers—lizards, spiders, ants—they are constant company, and the most distracting of all with their complicated manœuvres, which are full of cultivated intelligence when you come to look into them, There was a time when the presence and curiosity of so many little active creatures seemed a drawback to the otherwise perfect charm of the place, but now I do not mind them any more than they mind me. The trouble is that I cannot mind them less. More and more I neglect my own business to watch them at theirs, until I have to recognise that this study would have to be given up, even if winter were not near.

Winter ... that word reminds me of other scenes. There is an entry in my journal against June 6th, 1887:—"Five hours' heavy snow. Five inches on the ground." And another for the same month two years later:—"Woke up to find everything white with snow. Four inches officially reported. Broke trees and bushes." Our distant ranges used to wear white caps for weeks together, and white mantles on occasion, but oh, the joy of shovelling snow in one's own garden! [265]
It rarely stayed long enough to be shovelled, but once in a way it did, and the first of the occasions cited is unforgetable, because it was the first.

All the year round we sleep with windows open; here the upper sash was pulled down level with the lower, and stayed so night and day; and that window was at the foot of the bed. In wakeful hours I could watch the stars shining through the branches of the trees, and trace the shadow-patterns of the moon when it was her night out. Accustomed to rise early, I rarely fail to note the first glimmer of the dawn, and the first shaft of sunlight was levelled straight at my eyes, as by a marksman ambushed behind the looking-glass. As the sun rose I used to lie with eyes half shut to see the dazzle of rainbow colours that then filled them—as likewise to see, involuntarily, how the room was swept and dusted. There was a beautiful rosy-blossomed tree framed by that open square—I forget its right name, the "Tree of Heaven" was that given it by the vulgar tongue (I think it belongs to Queensland)—and it was my almanac the year round. Every morning a little bud grew bigger, a frond uncurled a little more; as the days passed the foliage spread and thickened, the leaves yellowed, browned, and fluttered away. And then the rain would drive in and make a mess on the dressing-table. Or a wind blew down upon the bed, causing regrets for the eider-down imprudently discarded overnight when we were full of the warmth of the drawing-room fire. Or—wonderful and soul-stirring experience—snow.

On that morning of June 6th, 1887, I felt the peculiar snow-cold, without knowing what it was, [266]
when I got out of bed to take in my early cup of tea. I had finished it, and was enjoying a few peaceful minutes before going to the bathroom, gazing upon the bare tree-twigs and their background of leaden sky, when suddenly I perceived the picture speckled with fine white particles, and understood that it was snowing. In the twinkling of an eye I was into dressing-gown and slippers, calling up the house to look at the sight. The governess was an Englishwoman, who had not seen snow since leaving her Kentish village, and never expected to see it in Australia. I went to her room first, colliding with a maid who was rushing thither on the same errand; then to the nursery, where I found three little night-gowned figures already at the window, flattening three little noses against the glass. The children were chattering and shouting with delight. The fine white particles had become substantial flakes by this time, and were dusting the roofs and bushes to an extent that promised snowballs presently; and the two small boys were wild at the prospect of fights in the street on their way to school. Australian boys of British parentage take as naturally to snowballing as to plum-pudding; you would think, to see them at it, that it was their regular winter amusement. The bath tap flowed unheeded, until the water overflowed on to the floor; the fowls invaded the sacred precincts of a beautifully-kept kitchen, and walked about there unmolested; the cat got on the table and drank the milk. It was washing-day, but no one thought of that. The snowstorm was the one absorbing interest to everybody, except the father of [267]
the family, who likes his bed and is not in the habit of exciting himself.

When the postman came it had been snowing—good solid snow—for more than an hour, and as he tramped up the twelve white steps to the front door his feet sank an inch and a half into the

soft carpet that covered them. Shrubs and trees, creepers and bushes were thick with snow. Masses of the delicate foliage of the marguerite daisy and some young pepper trees sent us into raptures with their beauty, for there was no wind to shake them. So did some old fences smothered in green creepers, the long sprays and trails of which were as neatly covered as with hoar-frost. Each arching blade of pampas-grass bore heaped-up ridges of snow, and the feathery heads looked as if they had been dipped into cake-icing, as if nothing that was not sticky could have adhered so thickly to such unsubstantial things. Every laurel leaf held a sausage-roll of snow. The corrugated iron roofs were dazzlingly white and smooth—two or three inches of snow in every groove. The back-yard and orchard were a white plain, the latter diversified with weeds and suckers that never looked so beautiful before, the naked fruit-trees being loaded with the white powder on every branch and twig. Beyond the outer fence on one side there was a mass of furze bushes, covering a piece of waste land; all this was white, too, stretching away to the grey sky.

It was amusing to see the consternation of the fowls when they were let out. They had never seen snow before, and did not know what to make of it. They tried to walk through it, and they tried to eat it; they flew from point to point and back again, craning their necks from side to side, [268] in search of the earth that had disappeared. They took refuge in the kitchen under dressers and tables, and, when driven thence, under the fowl-house walls, where they stood all day, each on a single leg, with feathers puffed up, the picture of patient misery. The cat had left her kittens in an outhouse before the snow began, and afterwards proposed to return to them. She daintily sounded the snow with her fore-paw, mewed piteously, and in the end went back to the kitchen and left the kittens to their fate. But she was, for a dumb animal, a singularly bad mother. The first time she had kittens she overlaid and suffocated them, and the second batch she carried from a warm bed in the middle of the night, and in a tempest of rain, while they were yet blind and helpless, and deposited them beside an overflowing water-tank, so that when they were found they were so drowned and chilled that it took a whole day's nursing to bring them round.

This was the state of things at half-past eight. It snowed, without stopping for a minute, until twelve, when the drift was six inches in some places, and in others a foot. All the heads of pampas-grass were broken off, borne down with the weight; and stout myrtle and box bushes, which had taken the snow solidly, were trailing to the ground with their stems splitting. We had one tree-fern that rose from the centre of a rockery, and spread itself over it like a handsome umbrella. It stood in front of the dining-room windows, and was an object of constant interest to the family, which always knew when it started a new frond and how it was getting on generally. At twelve o'clock ferntree and rockery were one smooth white mound—the snow covered the [269] whole thing completely; not so much as a green tip the size of a pin's head stuck out anywhere. Even the native gums had managed to catch and accumulate the soft flakes, so that they looked as if full of white blossoms; wattles were bent and loaded like the pepper-trees, while the great pines would not have disgraced a Canadian winter forest. Such a sight had not been seen in that town since it was planted in the mountains in the old gold days. We neglected all our work to gaze upon it. And then a little wind began to blow through the white stillness, and there were signs that the snow was going to turn to rain. Huge masses fell from roof eaves and boughs, falling with a soft but heavy thud upon the garden beds and paths, which had been so smooth and spotless. "Pure as untrodden snow"—that is a good phrase. How dazzlingly pure it is! I know it is silly to say these things to an English reader, but let him be an exile for seventeen years, as I had been, and see how a snow-storm will strike him then. It brought to my home-sick heart memories of the old days of youth, before one realised that there was such a place as Australia in the world; visions of flat fen marshes, all black, white, and grey, like a photograph—of frozen meres fringed with pollard willows, and dry reed-beds rattling in the wind—of old snowballings, old skatings, old walks with old sweethearts on the ringing roads, old talks by the winter firesides ... things unspeakable.

By half-past twelve the rain had come, the snow was going. It was already slushy about the doors, semi-transparent under eaves and branches. More and bigger lumps of it slid and fell, revealing the broken limbs of the trees that had seemed so strong, but were not strong enough [270] for the weight they had had to bear. The boys had come home with rosy faces and exulting mien, their collars limp as rags, their boots and stockings saturated, their coats plastered with melting snow. They had had as good a snowballing as England could have given them—one they will not forget as long as they live.

But the common winter day up there was, in fine weather, a thing beyond words. The nipping and eager temperature, the iced pools and frosted grass in the shadows, the dazzling sun in the open, the diamond glitter and transparency of the air through which one viewed the sapphire-blue ranges miles away, the ringing granite roads, that knew neither mud nor dust, the exhilaration, the invigoration, the pure joy of life....

And I left this sweet place hard-heartedly, without a pang. So did G. His dignity of Rural Dean was laid aside with no more regret than I felt for the old frocks that I gave away because they were not worth packing. We were Bush folks no more. He was going to be "town clergy," and no unimportant member of that much-envied band; and I was going to live with books and other stirring things—the "larger life," which somehow never proves quite deserving of its name. And we were going nearer to England than we had yet been. The day after I knew "all satisfactorily settled," I began sorting, clearing up, dismantling—a job I love only a few degrees less than the rebuilding of a new home out of chaos. "The nuisance of moving!" is a lamentation one hears often from those who have to do it; nobody ever heard it from me. It puzzles me how any housewife, interested in having her things nice, can fail to enjoy such an opportunity for putting [271]

new ideas in practice. I have thoroughly enjoyed it eight times, and should like nothing better than to move again to-morrow, provided it were to the right place—the place that I am so long getting to that I almost despair of seeing it again.

We were moving now too far to take all the furniture with us; in bulk it was not valuable enough to be worth the heavy railway charges. So I packed the special treasures and all else that I could, and, leaving G. to struggle with the sale and the final farewells, preceded him to Melbourne, that I might lay the foundations of the new home before he came to it.

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[272]

CHAPTER XIX

ToC

THE EIGHTH HOME

The eighth home was quite an imposing house—for us—too much so for my taste and the resources of the moment, insomuch that I had to leave the furnishing of the drawing-room to a future day; but what an interesting time I had, with my paper-hangers and people! In a few days I had the walls—raw plaster and grubby at that—decorated and dry, and the floor-staining done, and the elementary necessaries of family life collected; so that when I, and the little daughter who had been with me, met our male belongings at Spencer Street Station on the 30th of October, we went home together for good and all. G. took over his parish on the 1st of November, and we were then settled down, although the delights of "fixing up" went on for weeks—I may say for years—if it has not continued even to this day. A week or two after the induction ceremonies the parish made a splendid evening party for us in the largest public room of the town. A great horse-shoe of flowers with "WELCOME" on it—the iron frame is still preserved in the gas cupboard—was presented with charming compliments: members of Parliament and mayors and other distinguished persons flattered us in cordial speeches from the platform; professional singers—Ada Crossley amongst them—rendered a choice programme. It was a proud occasion, a [273] happy beginning of the new life—the first rush of the champagne out of the freshly-opened bottle—sweet to remember, but sad also, because, like all such sanguine moments, it both gave and asked too much.

And now here I was living by the sea at last—the desire of my heart from childhood. There is a family tradition that when, as a mere infant on its mother's lap, I saw the sea for the first time—at Hunstanton it was—I was so overcome with sentimental emotion that I burst into tears. I can quite believe it. I do not remember ever to have seen it, after absence, without feeling more or less that way, whether I expressed the feeling or not. "Hunst'on" in those times was only the old village of the L'Estranges; where the watering-place proper was afterwards established there stood but a lonely inn on the cliff—the New Inn, it was called, though it looked far from new—where brides and bridegrooms went to get out of the world. We used to have lodgings at the Coastguards' (parents and children, nurse and governess, distributed amongst them at sleeping-time, with a common rendezvous for meals), or at "Willoughby's," within a cobbled courtyard with gates that shut at night, or at the Post Office, which sold the wooden spades and pails that were always our first purchase, or—when we could get it—a whole house of our own, bespoken for the season from the year before. The same families, more or less, occupied the limited accommodation of the place summer after summer, and it was necessary to be beforehand to secure a footing. There was one year when we were absolutely crowded out—a black year indeed! I see myself now, face downwards in the orchard grass, broken-hearted by the calamity. [274] In those days we made the journey from Lynn on a stage coach—the last one left in England, I should imagine—and the red mass of Rising Castle was the memorably romantic feature of that drive, next to the first opening to view at the end of it of the ever-wonderful and mystic sea. We used to arrive late in the afternoon and first open one of the enormous hampers and feed like a pack of cormorants: then we little girls were fitted out in our sea-clothes—all made on purpose, from the cotton hoods to the raw-leather shoes—and the boys put on their fishermen's guernseys, and down we went to revel in sand and rocks and sea-water until the latest possible bed-time. Old Sam Dunn, the only waterman and one of my dearest early friends, would already have been up to our lodgings to welcome us, to take over the boys as partners for the summer in his boat and enterprises, and to bring his votive offering of cornelian stones and bits of jet and things to his "little missy." What days! What days! When my own children were small I went to no end of trouble and expense to give them the bliss that had made life so heavenly to me at their age. I took them to the seaside; I bought them wooden spades and pails; I would have got them a donkey (like Callaby's) if there had been such a thing procurable. In vain. It was like trying to teach them to understand Christmas. The sea is not in the blood of Australian children as it was in ours.

During all my inland life at home and twenty-three years in the Australian bush, however happy I may have been, there was always that one thing wanting—the near neighbourhood, the salt

breath of the sea. I used, when in the Western District, to spend hours sitting amongst she-oak trees in a wind, because, with the eyes shut, one could believe that there one listened to its very voice. Twice, when ill in bed, I found the craving overmastering. "I know that, if I could get to the sea, I should get well," I cried at a time when I was unable to take myself thither and G. said he was too busy to take me. "Not for one day?" I implored. "What's the use of wearing yourself out with those two long journeys, and spending five or six pounds, for one day?" he asked. It did seem unreasonable, but I begged and bribed him to give me my wish. We left B—— one afternoon, reaching Melbourne late at night; next morning took boat for Sorrento and the open Pacific; saturated ourselves with sea-essences until night again, and returned home next day. The result was so miraculous that, under the same circumstances, we repeated the experiment three months later: only then we took four days instead of one. I do now go back to the hills for strength, as I said in the last chapter, but quite as often exchange the sea for more sea. [275]

For where I live I am still forty or fifty miles from the shore whereon the ocean rollers break. To be sure I can hear the sound of waves on our Back Beach—one may occasionally be knocked over by them in the Baths—but, looking across the water that runs sheer to the sky, I am conscious of the engirdling land that I cannot see; it is not the great deep that the great storms play with. Even upon this the house turns its back; my windows command only Hobson's Bay—just a pond with city round it—the mouth of the river piercing the ring to my left, the mouth of escape to the sea and the world on my right, round the breakwater pier and sea-wall that the convicts built. Well, I am satisfied with that. I have a moving panorama before my eyes that they never tire of dwelling on. I had amongst my wedding presents a pair of good field-glasses that lay stowed away and forgotten in drawer or cupboard until I came here; now they hang by my writing window, and the case is worn out with the daily handling they get. Every ship that comes in view passes me by, the multifarious craft going to or from the river wharves, the great liners that tie up at Port Melbourne opposite—these last the objects that fascinate me most. A kind superintendent of the P. and O. Melbourne office sent me, when I first arrived, a packet containing a separate letter of introduction to every purser of every ship of theirs visiting the port, instructing each gentleman to give me "all possible facilities" to "fully inspect" his vessel. It was my favourite recreation for a long time to rummage through these floating hotels, and pretend to myself that I was a potential traveller in them; and then I came home to watch them steam away without me, as I have watched them week by week ever since. It is a melancholy pleasure that never palls. But I have four of those letters to P. and O. pursers unexpended still. [276]

Close about me lie piers, ships, boat-slips, collections of anchors, buoys, boilers, the old bones of dead vessels once so bravely alive—more alive, as I think, than anything else that hand of man has made; everything that meets the eye suggests the sea in some form. "The fishing village" is a newspaper term for the place, and when I was coming to live in it every other letter that I received condoled with me on my being obliged to do so. It is not a village; it is not more fishy than other towns along the shore; and I have never pitied myself for belonging to it. The fact that it is not a watering-place, with an esplanade and summer boarders, pleases me. It could easily have rivalled the "residential suburbs" across the way, which are cooled by the sea-breezes on one side only and not on three; but far be it from me to put such an idea into its head. Let it jog along in its unfashionable, unenterprising, unbusiness-like way while I am of it, and begin its hustling—as it will do sooner or later, if the powers that be allow our limbs to move again—when I am gone. It is a treat to find something that does not know how to advertise itself, nor want to know. [277]

In this humdrum place, that is so cool and quiet, and to me so congenial, there is but one interesting walk. That is to say, but one that I consider worth giving an afternoon to. G. says he gets tired of it; I do not; and I am sure that Bob, the fox terrier, spends the week looking forward to it. The three of us ramble off together on Saturdays after lunch, weather and other circumstances permitting, and our faces turn the one way automatically.

We go "along the front"—*i.e.*, the one-sided street that fronts Hobson's Bay—until the little marine stores and cook-shops and sailors' pubs lose themselves in a wilderness of docks and railway yards and buildings, lonely and grass-grown since the river and the port opposite took so much of our shipping from us, though there was a partial return to some of the activities of former days while the war was going on. Seldom a Saturday then that we did not find ourselves blocked by rows of trucks shunting back and forth across our short cuts, carrying hay or horses to the steamers whose clacking windlasses we heard from the neighbouring piers.

First we come to the yard within which lies the Graving Dock—once so wonderful, now so inadequate, but seldom empty and always interesting, no matter how insignificant the vessel on the chocks. Those weather-worn tramps that fight the unseen Powers at a disadvantage in everything, except courage and seamanship, are the ones I like to look at best. Sometimes we are asked on board, and a rough old salt, hero of untold brave deeds, shows us round and gives us tea, and feels himself honoured by the visit of persons not worthy to brush his shoes. These casual entertainments are my delight. Sometimes the captain's wife is *cicerone* and hostess. There was a whole family in one case, including a melancholy and discontented girl, who had a piano to practise on, and whose sad lot I was not too sea-crazy to understand. I sent her a bundle of old novels to vary the monotony, which was perhaps a cruel kindness. [278]

Now and then tragedy comes upon the scene. A wreck is dragged in to be operated on. Some poor ship that has had a fire at sea, or her nose smashed or her side ripped open in a collision, or who has drifted for weeks with her propeller gone, lies naked before us with her wounds exposed; and then I stand and gaze and imagine things until G. gets cross because I cannot drag myself away. When the *Ormuz* had that accident in the Rip she so tightly filled the dock that her

skeleton bow was almost within my touch. No more do I wonder at what ships can go through, having seen how that giant frame was put together. I went down to the bottom of the dock and held up the great hull in the palms of my hands. It was a strange sensation.

From the dock we pass by devious ways from yard to yard and pier to pier, descending and [279] climbing, turning narrow corners, poking walking-stick or umbrella into the tufts of coarse grass and scrap-heaps of rusted iron or sea-rotted timber where Bob has his exciting hunts for the rats he smells but never catches. "No admittance except on business" is a legend with no meaning for us. If it rains, or the sun is over-hot, we retire to a dark and spacious shed where rows of gas buoys await their turn to shine beneficent in the stormy nights. Impressive creatures they are when viewed so near. Now and again we are shown torpedoes and compressed-air engines and such things, but as a rule we are not sight-seeing in a business way and do not desire company.

So we drift to the outermost pier of all—the Breakwater, half of which is stone rampart between Hobson's Bay and Port Phillip Bay, which stands to us for open sea. We sit as long as Bob's patience holds out on the bulkhead at the extreme end, and watch the ships go past us—so near sometimes that we could toss a biscuit on to a deck. They are intercolonial steamers that have started from a Melbourne wharf or are bound thither; the great liners, of which few are visible at this end of the week, take a more distant track. In the yachting season the blue water is sprinkled with white sails; we follow the manœuvres of the boats we know, and wait to see the winner come home, if she is not too long about it. Several times I have been aboard one of those racing cutters in a "sailing wind," and—I refrain from rhapsodising on the subject.

If the afternoon is still young we stroll on around the point, along that sea-wall which was built by convict labour—significant words, recalling days we do not care to think of. The wall is broken [280] down in places, and stays so; this is the "old part" as the old times left it—some day to be repaired and used, but gently going to pieces in the meantime. All around us here we feel the spirit of those old times, so stern and sad. Close by is the spot where Commandant Price was murdered. It was before my time, but I have heard the tale of his life and death from friends and relatives, co-officials and eye-witnesses, authorities whom the author of *His Natural Life* never had opportunity to consult. They say—of course I can only take their word—that he was a brave and just, if undoubtedly hard, man, and that Frere in *His Natural Life*, supposed to be a portrait of him, is a cruel caricature. One of his official colleagues, who was also one of the kindest and most high-minded of men, solemnly assured me that what he did was "what he had to do" and represented to him his duty.

And just here, until a short time ago, lay the strangest little graveyard that I ever knew. Its enclosing walls had fallen into rubbish-heaps amongst the grass, which looked too thick and rank to safely walk in except when summer heats had dried it up; then we would prowl gingerly amid the forgotten graves—forty years old and upwards—and read the touching legends on the dilapidated headstones, which showed, amongst other things, that John Price was not the only one done to death "in the execution of his duty." Here lay a whole little world of people as utterly of the past as if they had lived centuries ago. Periodically someone protested in the local papers against the disgraceful condition of this lone bit of land, and at last the town decided to transfer its contents to the present cemetery. In a corner of that pretty garden they dug one big grave to [281] accommodate the remains of what they calculated would be between two and three hundred bodies. The number found was nearly a thousand. I saw them stacked in little boxes, like a grocer's stock of tea or candles, half in the new grave, half piled on the brink. Several pathetic secrets that Mother Earth might well have kept to herself were dragged to light, and I am sure it must have been impossible to avoid mixing the fragments up. The new grave now looks very neat, slabbed all over; and the old burial-ground is ready to build on whenever good times arrive. But when we walk past the spot we miss something. We feel that we liked it best as it was.

Usually we do not go beyond this point. We scramble out to the furthest tenable boulder, and sit with our faces to the water, and watch the practice of the big gun of the fort close by, firing at a buoyed flag; and tease crabs, and lay plans for going Home some day, until it is time to return. But we can go on along the shore until we all but complete the circuit of the town, which is really a good walk for cold weather.

The sea makes in a sense the foreground of any picture I can draw of my eight to nine years of Melbourne life, but there was more than the sea to render the change to Melbourne instantly beneficial to us. That was a luxury, an adornment, of our new life; a solid advantage to me personally, since its air and influence improved my health, but not otherwise to be so designated. The first substantial profit that we reaped was in our nearness to the best schools.

It is for his children that the poor Bush parson feels his isolation, more than for himself. In Victoria he is never placed where he cannot give them an education of a kind—at the private [282] schools of his township or the State School in the last resort—but the cost of the better one that he must desire for them, to fit them for professions and a good place in the world, is mostly beyond his means. The custom of the great schools is to charge half fees to clergymen—I do not know why, any more than I can see the justice of the doctors charging them no fees at all, as the majority of them will not, unless you force them to it—but even upon those easy terms I know from experience that you cannot keep a son at a public school, giving him all the advantages of it, for much under £100 a year. Lay mothers have told me that in their case £150 was not too much to set aside for the purpose to cover all expenses. The Public School means possible scholarships, not only for the school years but for the University afterwards; and it is hard to have a bright boy and see him blocked at the outset from this shining path along which alone he can directly attain distinction. I know one poor country clergyman who, with his wife and daughters, lived servantless and on next to nothing to give the only son his chance. Half their little income must

have gone to pay for it, and the boy was still a poor boy at school, in dress, pursuits, pocket-money, friends, at a disadvantage amongst his fellows. It is pleasant to record that he proved superior to these petty circumstances and worthy of the sacrifices that were made for him. But he is only a bank clerk now, because, not having a home near the University, it was impossible for him to go there. Another clergyman's son of my acquaintance, who had this convenient base, did his course as an "out-patient," while earning his fees at other work. He is now a "don" himself.

[283] So, with sons of our own, we soon had occasion to congratulate ourselves—in the case of one, at anyrate. The boy who had been pursuing a costly education more than two hundred miles from home was now within easy reach of it; I could visit him by water for half-a-crown. And of course I did so the very first thing, fetching him back with me to make the house-warming complete. It was then represented to him that the greater part of the expenses incurred on his behalf might be saved by the simple expedient of transferring himself from the "Geelong Grammar" to the sister, if rival, "Melbourne Grammar," which he could attend as a day boy. His answer was—for he had been over four years at Geelong, and his boat had been Head of the River most of the time, and it was his school—"I would sooner kill myself." We quite understood. It was perceived that in his case economy might be practised at too great a cost, and we refrained from further argument. The younger brother jumped at the privilege thus scorned, and turned it to such account that in the following month we were relieved of all pecuniary liability in respect of his education for three years to come. In the result there were certain little embarrassments which took time to wear off. States of tension occurred in the vacations, and an occasional approach to civil war, all on account of the merits and demerits of the respective corporations to which they belonged, and I narrowly escaped witnessing a Public School's Boat Race in which I must inevitably have seen a son defeated. I used to wear at these functions, at one time, a breast-knot of light-blue and dark-blue ribbons, mixed in exactly equal proportions.

[284] I think the Boat Races and Speech Days have furnished the keenest joys of my Melbourne life. At B—— there was racking suspense before the postmaster's son came tumbling down the garden steps to the dining-room window, waving the telegram and shouting—in defiance of the regulations—"He's won!" And now, without the wicked waste of money that I had once been guilty of to obtain the privilege, I could follow the race on the umpire's boat, and drop proud hints to other mothers that it was my son who—etc. As for the Speech Days, modesty forbids me to say more than that I would not have missed them for the world. But apart from these strictly personal enjoyments, many and many, long unknown, now came to me.

"Mullens," to start with—everyone who knows Melbourne at all knows that delightful haunt of the book-lover—and all the new books I could want, and more; and never the lack of a new magazine to entice me to bed early. Any night of the week—the day's work done, even to the last toilet, and a reading-lamp shining softly down upon the page before me—I can realise my idea of luxury. Old books too—the Literatures of the Past and of the World (of which I had scarcely heard in youth before I was cut off from access to them)—these I could batten on, and at no cost at all. The great Free Library—the greatest, to my mind, of all Melbourne's civic institutions—was but an hour's distance from me. It is rather the resort of the street loafer, looking for a place to rest and doze in, than of the student—other than press hacks and such like, who go there with the business note-book and pencil; one never sees—at least, I have never seen—any of those gentlefolk who throng Mullens's daily; it seems to lie off the track somehow. I, like the rest, [285] forget to go often when I might go, but when I do think of it I am amazed at my neglect. A lending library is included in the many privileges conferred upon those who pay nothing, and there come from it into the family circle weighty as well as up-to-date works not otherwise in library circulation, and beyond the resources of the family purse and the family bookshelves. For one reason why we do not buy books much more largely than we do, is the want of settled homes for them. To a people so wandering and restless, books in quantities become physically burdensome; they take up too much room in a temporary house, and are too costly as travelling furniture. By the way, I have not found that rich people, with whom these considerations need not count, care to accumulate them.

Gathered under the same roof as this treasure of books are fine, although relatively less fine, collections of objects representing the arts of the world; and the picture galleries, with their medley of good and bad, can charm a loafing hour at any time. Pictures, however, unlike books, are amongst the things that are still too scarce. In girlhood I used to haunt their homes in London, when periodically visiting a spinster aunt who allowed me no more frivolous entertainment; and it is the memory of those old feasts that keeps me dissatisfied with the crumbs that have been cast up here. But the crumbs are adequate to the general demand for them. Art, like Letters, is still an exotic in the land. In the furnishing of ninety-nine out of every hundred of the fine mansions that surround the capital, pictures—real pictures—have, I have been told by those who know, been the last thing thought of. Yet I have seen two private collections—one loaned to an exhibition and one in the house it belonged to—which would be [286] hard to match for beauty and choiceness. And there may be more.

But I believe there are already guide-books to the city of Melbourne, with all its British institutions common to every British city of any consequence precisely catalogued. And I have lived too retired a life as a Melbourne citizen to be qualified to enter into competition with them. I do not know the faces of the City fathers when I see them, and am unacquainted with much else that is common knowledge to any man in the street. On the other hand I have strayed into some of the by-ways, the underground tunnels, of our local civilisation, where the local historian would feel off his beat.

For some years, while in town on business or holiday from the country (and parish), I was much with a dear friend who, while living far above it in what we call the best society, shared my passion for unconventional excursions into what answers here to Gissing's Nether-World. We did not go "slumming" or anything of that sort—we would have been the last to commit such impertinences—but we wanted to see deeper into the workings of the mysterious problems of social life which so much and equally concerned us. In memory of her and those days of lofty thought and helpful companionship I keep on a shelf apart the books she gave me—Mill, Morley, Thoreau, and the like—that we read together under the trees of her beautiful garden or by a secluded fireside, and which inspired us to the search for that ideal truth which we could not admit was inaccessible. Our husbands were both indulgent to our aberrations from the beaten path. In G.'s case, I must confess, I traded a little upon the fact that what the eye does not see the [287] heart does not grieve for; I thought it just as well that a parson—and one so far away—should not know everything; I took the view that I was at large for the time being, and to that he never made objection. Of course, I respected the altered circumstances when we came to live in town together, and have known nothing of alien "persuasions" and their goings on of a Sunday since.

But it was just these irregular operations in the moral world that we desired to investigate, my friend and I: our outlook over it was not bounded by the walls of the Church of England or of our class. Drawn as we felt ourselves to be towards our fellow-strugglers after light and knowledge, we wanted to know what they were doing in furtherance of the common aim. The phenomena of spiritual life, in whatever form, attracted us; the more curious and unconvincing to us personally, the more earnestly to be searched into and understood, if possible. The Salvation Army was a case in point. Why was it such a power in the land? Eclectic as we were, we could find but one theory to account for it—which I still think a good one, *i.e.*, that men and women share equally and intimately in the whole work from top to bottom—but this did not cover all the ground. It did not adequately explain the number and fervour of its non-official adherents, and their long continuance in faith. According to appearances, it is all force and artificial emotionalism, the "unhealthy excitement" against which I have heard so many good clergymen earnestly warn their flocks; yet time falsifies the prediction I remember they made from the pulpit at least eighteen years ago, that it was a passing craze, a grotesque epidemic, that would quickly die.

My friend and I—our minds burdened with, our thoughts and conversation full of, the (to us) [288] injustices of human arrangements, and our responsibilities towards the (to us) enslaved and wronged—wondered how much real amelioration of the lot of the more miserable was wrought by this particular agency. We knew that, as we sat, like Buddha in his palace, within our social shelters, we could know little about it; we resolved to go outside and see. It was Sunday morning, and we said we would go to a Salvation Army meeting, at the Head-Quarter Barracks, that night. My friend's husband, who would have liked to keep her (she was so precious) in a glass case, yet could not bear to balk her wish if it was anywhere within the bounds of reason, asked leave to take us into the city and to the door of the tabernacle, and to wait for us until we came out; but we agreed that that would spoil it all. For what we wanted to feel was that we were one with our poorer fellow-wayfarers on this pilgrimage of life, afoot and equal, not carrying any of our unfair privileges into their rougher line of march. Her correct English maid, who must have had her thoughts, though she did not express them, produced a plain waterproof and a gossamer veil, in which my companion could hide her native elegance from a curiosity that we did not wish to court—I easily made myself inconspicuous—and we set forth, escorted only as far as the railway station of our exclusive suburb.

When we got into the Sunday-night city streets we were a happy pair. Manners in Australia do not deteriorate as the social scale descends; we were jostled on the crowded pavements, but not rudely; in fact, the sensation was grateful to us. We were literally in touch with our kind, free of [289] artificial restrictions, and "seeing life" as we had desired to see it. The crowds were later, however; going in we were before them, thinking it wise to be early since we had to find our way. The large building was filling fast when we arrived, but we secured what we thought safe seats—near the door, and with a pillar or something buttressing our backs—and from this point studied the scene and the proceedings with rapt attention. I should think no Salvation Army meeting ever included two persons at once so devout and so hopelessly impervious. But, though impervious, we were deeply impressed. The only thing that offended us—unless I except a hectic and hysterical preaching girl, whose health we saw being destroyed before our eyes—was the conduct of a group of lads who had evidently come for the fun of the thing. They sat just within the door, and ought to have been put outside it; yet their ill manners were compensated for by the patient courtesy of the officer who from time to time came to expostulate with them. For myself, I could willingly have boxed their ears. I remembered this incident when afterwards I had a Salvation Army servant and it was reported to me that my own mischievous boys had gone to the little conventicle of her sect to hear her preach. She was a quiet-mannered, sedate sort of person, and never gave us Salvation Army in the house, except in the form of a modest brooch; but on Saturday evenings—the Australian servants' free time—she stole off in her hallelujah bonnet, and, I was told, carried a torch or a banner in the procession that patrolled the town, and sang and prayed with the best of them. We never minded these little things, holding the view that [290] a good servant was a good servant, and that her religion was her own business. One of the best we ever had was a Roman Catholic of the strictest type. I believe that girl never omitted an observance required of such an one; yet she never allowed us to be inconvenienced on that account. She would do her washing, or whatever it was, in the middle of the night to go to a morning service; on Sundays she would come out from her devotions at her church, which was not a stone's throw from ours, to put on the potatoes, and trot back again. Between our kitchen and that of the Presbytery the most neighbourly relations existed during her reign. They

borrowed of each other without any false pride, and many a time, at my secret instigation, B. went over to assist when the priest was having company, sometimes carrying extra silver and such like from my store. I was always desperately afraid of his hearing of these liberties that a black heretic was taking with him—and he a dean, if you please; mentally putting myself in his place, I knew how I should feel, and I was always exhorting B., who was garrulous, to guard against this risk.—One Christmas I heard that he was to have a party of priests to dinner, and that his cook was quite incapable of rising to such an occasion. "I'd like to send over one of our puddings," said I, "only that I'd be so afraid he might ask who made it"—for our puddings, I may modestly state, were good. B. jumped at the tentative offer, and the pudding, with a few etceteras from the same source, duly graced the dean's table. Our Christmas feast took place in the middle of the day, his in the evening, so she could attend to both. When she returned at night from the second function she was radiant. The table, she said, was something beautiful, and they ate up all [291] the pudding, and praised it to the skies. "I do hope to goodness you never breathed a word," said I, "and that that cook will keep the secret." Alas! it transpired that B. herself had been unable to keep it. "But," said she, "you needn't worry yourself at all, for he was quite pleased about it, and says he is coming himself to thank you for your kindness."

That was a good old man, and the most liberal-minded ecclesiastic of his faith that I ever came across. B. being so strict a daughter of her Church, and living in a place where its influence was strong—for the matter of that, it is strong everywhere in Australia—she used to have qualms of conscience now and again, after the nuns had been talking to her, as to the lawfulness of dwelling under a Protestant roof. She went to the dean for advice, and he gave it promptly. "Don't you be a little fool"—his very words, she told me. "You get more Catholic privileges where you are than you'd get in many a Catholic house. You stay where you are well off." Under these circumstances she was delighted to stay. But some time afterwards, when under more rigid discipline, she was inveigled from us—the only one of our good servants who went, even to that extent from choice, except to be married. But she still maintains intimate relations with the family, and brings each little Pat and Biddy to show us as soon as it is old enough to take the air.

But to return to the Salvation Army. Personally, as I have said, we were cold to its appeals, but seldom had our hearts been so warmed by the reflected feeling around us. It was perfectly apparent to us that we were in contact with things as sincere and real as they could be. Even the [292] hectic girl preacher, who almost frothed at the mouth, was in earnest, whatever the old hands amongst her colleagues, who sat about her and watched her, might have been. The music—their best—with its swing and precision, was splendid, incalculably effective as a stimulant; I could have thrilled to that if I had not heard so much of the excruciating performances of the humbler rank and file. But it was the congregation which so impressed us. Going to church all my life—much against the grain sometimes, I must confess—I had never seen anything like it; so many men in proportion to women, such intensity of religious feeling as distinct from superficial ardour and rant. The service was very long, and we grew anxious as the hours passed, knowing how our husband and host would worry about us if we missed the train he had fixed on for our return, and we had carefully left our watches at home. So I leaned towards my next neighbour on the left, a respectable and very quiet and silent young working-man—just as I would have done in any other church—and whispered to him, "Would you kindly tell me the time?" As soon as the words were out of my mouth I was smitten with compunction, and felt more ashamed of myself than I had ever done in my life. Wild prayers were going on, and the young man was on his knees, and his uplifted face wore a stern solemnity that showed him miles and miles above all such considerations as the time of day. At first he took no notice, as if he had not heard me; then he slowly climbed down and down from his heights and looked at me with a blank, dazed stare; and his eyes were full of tears. I shall never forget him, and all that he taught me in that moment. We went home thoughtful, humbled in our intellectual conceit, deeply touched and moved; certainly [293] all the better for our excursion into this by-path of national life, although we never felt drawn to go into it again.

On another Sunday evening we attended some sort of Free Thought service in one of the theatres. Here the "minister," if not a charlatan, was something of a fraud—to us, at anyrate, who had made a deeper study of the questions dealt with than he had. But in this case again the congregation, which filled the building, was the instructive and surprising feature. Not only perfectly respectable and orderly, but grave and attentive, and the majority well-dressed middle-class people, husbands and wives together, dropping into their seats with the air of habitual attendants. The proverbial pin might have been heard while the pseudo-teacher poured forth words and phrases that had no intelligible meaning in them; every eye was fixed on him, every ear listening. We were much exercised in mind over the results of this experiment. The size, seriousness, and social quality of the congregation were our chief concern. Evidently seekers after light and knowledge, like the rest of us—no mere heathen idlers wilfully or carelessly breaking the Sabbath day. "And," sighed we, "getting only this rubbish for their pains!"

Then there was a place called, I think, the Progressive Lyceum—a small body this, but, once in it, you found it a little world to itself. I went there one Sunday, and again felt how little the classified majority of us knew what the mixed minority was about. I was with two other inquiring friends this time, and we were invited to stay to a sort of little conference that was to conclude [294] the morning exercises. Well, before we knew it, we were joining in the discussion—carried on without a trace of theological rancour—with half-a-dozen or so of the leading members sitting in a group in a corner of the otherwise emptied room, all as friendly as could be. Other little worlds within worlds, colonies within the colony, I have wandered into from time to time, never without gaining fresh conviction of the interestingness of my fellow-creatures and of their inherent goodness—more trust in and respect for that poor human nature which, fumbling along its

confused and crooked paths, yet ever seems to be aiming at the true goal. More than that—as one can see by taking the general bearings at intervals—it is getting there by degrees.

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CHAPTER XX

ToC

CONCLUSION

The thirty years covered by this chronicle came to an end with the nineteenth century and the history of these colonies as such.

On the last day of 1900 I sat at my writing window to watch the drop of the time-ball that regulates all the Government clocks—the clocks which the morning papers had warned us to set our time-pieces by at 1 P.M., so as not to be a second out, if we could help it, when the midnight hour should strike. I cannot describe the state of tension we were in, the sense of fateful happenings that possessed us that day. The New Year and the New Century were coming to all peoples, but we could not think of them save as satellites of our New Commonwealth, arranged for the purpose of fitly inaugurating the New Nation. Australia believed herself on the threshold of the Golden Age. I myself openly boasted of my happiness—reviewing my peaceful family life, my little home circle, unbroken since 1876—when we began wishing happy new years to one another.

The same scene lies before me now. Hobson's Bay in the foreground—never professing to be picturesque, but to me as full of variety and charm as a good, homely human face—and the long line of city dividing it from the sky. In the sunset of a fine day—sunset taking place behind me— [296] that thread of crowded life is glowing beautifully, isolated buildings, as they catch the direct gleam, standing out as distinctly as if they were not leagues away. And after dark it will shine a thick-set band of lights many miles in length. And then, later, a clear moon will flood the whole. All as it was twenty months and more ago, when our hearts were so confident and our hopes so high.

But Fate has dealt with our hearts and hopes in the usual way. The closing of this book synchronises with the ending of one of those lives integrally a part of mine—that of my eldest son, in the prime of his fine young manhood—which for me has altered the whole face of the world and of the future, but yesterday so smiling for us both. I took no account of the Ambushed Enemy when I said on that New Year's night that I was happy.

And as for the country that went mad with joy on the same occasion, how does it feel now? Where is the enthusiasm for Federation which then turned every head?

Federation, so far as we can see, has put back the Golden Age. The triumphant shout, "Advance, Australia!" has become a mockery in our ears. "Australia for the Australians!"—that ignoble aspiration, which even then meant "Australia for the Australians now in it"—less than two to the square mile—now means that Australia is not even for them. No, for the census returns of this state for 1891 gave us 446,195 young persons of what census people call the marrying age (15 to 35), of whom the excess of young men over young women was 17,047; and the census for 1901 shows 419,910, and the excess on the other side—16,742 more young women than young [297] men. Where are those lost young men? And why have they gone from one of the gardens of the world, as Victoria should be, with its temperate climate and its consequent potential fertility? Most of them have gone since the new century came in, and the other states have to mourn similar losses within the same short space of time. There have been no gains. Immigration, even of the most desirable "White Australia" brand, is discouraged in all possible ways, in the supposed interests of the beneficiaries in possession—reapers of the sowings of far different men —with their "work" and "wages" which no longer correspond to the old meanings of those words. While as for our coloured brothers—including Britain's ally, Japan—they are not recognised as men at all. They are vermin, to be stamped out like rabbits.

One third of Australia lies within the tropic belt, where manual labour is incompatible with the white man's physique, and where no industry could afford him, at the price he puts upon himself. What matter? Let the Queensland sugar fields, and the seven millions sunk in them, revert to the desert waste they were before. Let the pearling industry go to foreigners, as it must go. Let the Northern Territory, an area equal to that of France, Germany, and Austria combined, with all its known potential wealth, lie waste and empty, while millions upon millions of our co-inheritors of the earth swarm upon little bits of land that do not give them room to turn round. What does it care, this dog in the manger? It will starve itself—it is starving itself—to keep the world out, to shut off competition with existing interests, to nip back growth at every point. Oh, that we had a [298] Washington to lead our young nation in more righteous paths, to nobler ends! Had "Australia for the World" been the watchword of the Commonwealth, we might now be making a second great United States such as only the glorious First could rival. Instead of that a stationary population of

less than four millions, from which the best elements are being rapidly drained away.

For these four millions we have fourteen Houses of Parliament, with over fifty ministers and little under a thousand members. They are housed magnificently—in this State, at anyrate—regardless of expense; they have billiard-rooms, and bowling and tennis grounds, and every club luxury, the "keep" of the Victorian establishment alone (the parliamentary bill for the year) running to £141,549. Each pair of State Houses can pledge the credit of its section of the country as it likes (what our public debt amounts to everybody knows); the Federal Houses can pledge the credit of the whole. And what is there to control them? "The State servants," says the *Argus*, "already constitute almost a clear majority of the names on the electors' rolls." Government "promises soon to become the sole employer of labour in the community." The octopus of political rule holds the private citizen—"pursued with regulations and prohibitions in his uprising and his down-sitting," so that "there will soon be absolutely no room left" for him—helpless in its grasp.

And who are they that work this Juggernaut of an engine, that run this overgrown business of state? To quote again the authority above-mentioned, not seldom "men who, in private life, would [299] hardly be trusted to run an apple stall."

There was a *Times* correspondent with the royal party that recently visited us, and he published his impression that "political corruption" was amongst our little failings that he had noticed. That was an observant man, worthy of his post. Here nobody had an idea of such a thing, and the outcry that ensued upon the cabled report of his report, the indignant protest of injured innocence, was almost unanimous throughout the land. Every newspaper repudiated the foul aspersion, and in good faith—because, as a fact, the parliamentary candidate does not bribe and corrupt within the meaning of the act as traditionally understood; he does not buy the individual's vote with coin from his pocket or a pot of beer. But what he does—which probably never strikes him as political corruption, although recognised as that by the *Times* correspondent—is to buy *en bloc* the party which gives him his comfortable place and perquisites—his trade and living, in fact; and that party will be paid in full or know the reason why. They support each other—both at the expense of the general community. There is a printed rule of a Political Labour League which says that "before any person can be accepted as a candidate for the Federal or State Parliament" he shall "place in the hands of the executive of the league an agreement that in the event of his acting contrary to the policy of the combined Labour Organisation," and of their consequently "passing a vote of no-confidence in him, he will resign his seat." Furthermore, he is to "place his resignation (undated) in the hands of the executive, together with a document authorising the executive to fill in the date subsequent to the day on which the vote is taken." Parliament would [300] not be what it is if there were not plenty of men willing to subscribe to such contracts as these—to sell their votes in the House beforehand, in order to get there. We all know that they do so sell them. We see the price paid when such legislation as the Minimum Wage Act is concocted, that pitiable outrage upon the natural, the moral, and the economic law which is visibly recoiling upon the heads of those it was framed to benefit, killing their goose of the golden eggs as well as ours.

It was to the Commonwealth Government that we looked for relief and redress—that was the meaning of our wild jubilation when the union of the states was consummated. Alas! Could we have foreknown the history of its first couple of years, there would have been no federation in our time. Could we be unfederated to-morrow, the *status quo ante* would be restored the day after, beyond the shadow of a doubt. For the Federal politician is but the State politician writ large. His wider sphere of action means but greater opportunities for the exercise of those political vices which are so ingrained in him as to have become his second nature. The first act of the Federal Ministry was one of sordid personal greed; every following act seems to have been worse. Federation, so far, has but riveted our chains at home and darkened our character abroad—and I do not know which we feel most keenly, the latter, I think. For when six voices spoke for us there was a chance that some of them would do us justice; when the one voice that speaks for all betrays and disgraces us, we have to take the loss and odium silently and seem to acquiesce.

However, the country itself is still, potentially, as fine a country as the world contains—a huge [301] manger, with provision for the sustenance of myriads of happy homes—and it cannot always remain the personal possession of a ring of unpatriotic self-seekers which may more appropriately be likened to a vampire than to a dog. It was meant to be a great country, and some day the hands that know how to make it so will get hold of it, perhaps sooner than we think—possibly before these pages see the light. I close my chronicle on the 18th of September, 1902, at a moment when the political sky in this State is brightened by a ray of hope such as it has not known for many a day, and which may signify the approach of a new era, not for us only but for the Commonwealth at large.

Some months ago a movement of revolt against the state of things was started by a few farmers, humble representatives of the uncorrupted manhood of the community; they met in their little country town and formed themselves into a league, which in a few months had branches in all the rural districts. The moral force generated was enough to put in a Government pledged (although no one believed its word) to the league's programme of Economy and Reform. Only the typical, the professional, politician jibed and jeered at the country bumpkins who thought to touch his long-established power and his State-filled pocket. "Is not this mine ass?" said he in effect, and, as soon as the Reform Government submitted its Reform proposals, voted against them with a light and fearless heart. But then an unexpected thing happened. That Government chanced to be in earnest. On that vote it not only resigned, but applied to the Governor for a dissolution—and got it. "People's Turn Now" says (in big capitals) a city daily, repeating the [302] phrase with the same emphasis in every issue; and the fact does seem to have come home to them at last. On the first of October we shall see what we shall see. The Labour Party and the

Civil Service are combining in defence of the old *régime*, and their numbers may be overwhelming; on the other side are the patriots, one and all, and at their backs the Press, never before united at such a time.

I ought to have mentioned sooner—what everyone who knows this country knows—how high and dignified is the moral and intellectual as well as (comparatively speaking) the literary standard of our representative journalism. It is beyond a doubt, and was never more so than at this moment, that the Press of Australia has a consistent respect for itself that is not found in some far greater nations. If there is a "gutter" belonging to it, it is so small and inoffensive that no whiff has reached my nose. With few exceptions (for which more or less can be said on the score of other good qualities), there is nothing in general circulation that is not almost austerely respectable. I have been told of an editor of high position who, if "darling" appears in a contributor's MS., crosses it out as an improper word, unfit for the family circle. We are so respectable as that. The *Society Journal*, vulgar spy and tale-bearer, cannot make a living here. In all the papers, more or less, "social columns" are available for those who wish to make public display of their frocks and entertainments, but the old-fashioned lover of domestic privacy may count on being left alone. As with some other of our national institutions, the founders of our Press system were gentlemen. A standard of good taste and high-mindedness was set in the [303] beginning, and the tradition of it remains a living force. When Edward Wilson of the *Argus* bequeathed the charge of his interests in that paper to the friend who for thirty years conserved them so well—who for two-thirds of that time, until his death, was my friend also and told me the story—the last instructions of the dying man were: "Keep it gentlemanly, and never let them be mean." The rival "great daily," the *Age*, is a power in the State such as, I should think, no individual newspaper ever was in any land, and the literary beauty and philosophical significance of some of its Saturday leaders have reached a level that would have made them notable amongst men of letters anywhere. And his daily newspaper is as necessary as his meals to the average citizen, while the weekly that belongs to it, a wonderful compendium of miscellaneous matter, is drained to its last drop by the Sunday-resting Paterfamilias of the rural districts, whose only book it is, and whom I have seen poring over it luxuriously the live-long day.

The Press of a country leads it, but it follows also, if only for the reason that it has its living to earn. And our newspapers being what they are—capable of the almost incredible nobleness of sinking their life-long quarrels and party policies to stand shoulder to shoulder when the true welfare of their State demands it—is the best proof of its inherent soundness that any country could show. For the example of Victoria will be an inspiration to her sister colonies, which are all one people with her, and all in like case.

It is indeed a good country, even as it stands. I can say with truth and gratitude, homesickness notwithstanding, that nowhere could I have been better off. And I am as sure as I am of anything [304] that sooner or later—this year or next year, or after my time—the day of emancipation and enlightenment will come, to inevitably make it as great as it is good.

THE END

Colston & Coy., Limited, Printers. Edinburgh

Typographical errors corrected in text:

Page 26: Melbourue replaced with Melbourne
Page 46: "in any of then" replaced with "in any of them"
Page 291: "so warmed by he reflected" replaced with "so warmed by the reflected"

Note that the spelling of 'canons' on page 62 is retained as is since the writer of the quote does not have a good grasp of the English language.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THIRTY YEARS IN AUSTRALIA ***

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