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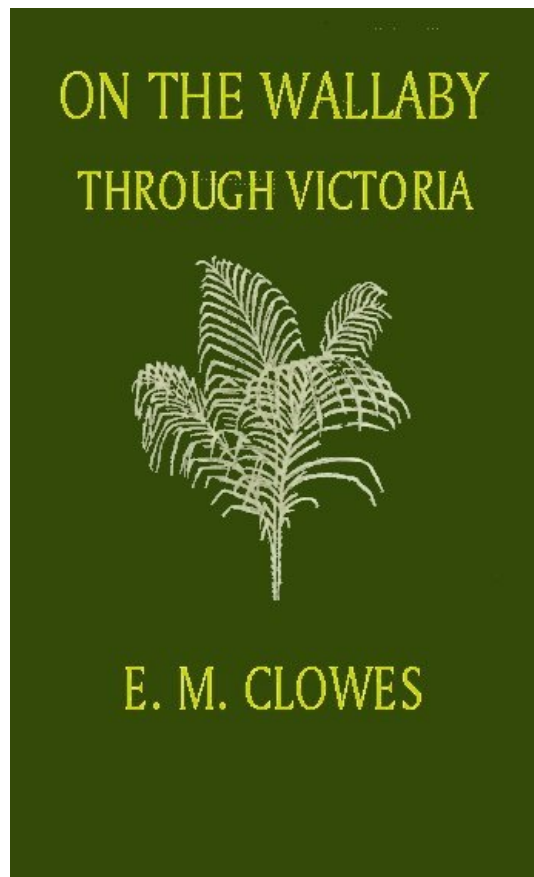
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ON THE WALLABY THROUGH VICTORIA

BY
E. M. CLOWES

ILLUSTRATED



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INTRODUCTION

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This is not supposed to be a national or political history of Victoria. When I was asked to write something about the country which has extended its hospitality to me, and given me bread and cheese—sometimes no cheese, it is true, and more often than not no butter, but still always bread, and an ever-increasing appetite—I must confess I felt frankly scared. There is a very good, if somewhat vulgar, expression in use out here, which speaks of anyone who attempts what is beyond them as “biting off more than they can chew.” And the thought frightened me. There seemed to be so many people who had lived all their life in the country, and were therefore much more capable of writing about it than I could ever possibly hope to be.

However, I found that other “fools rushed in,” who had been here for even a shorter period than myself; who had never participated in any way in the true life of the country, or depended on it for their own life, which after all teaches one more than anything else ever can about a place. I may not be an “angel,” I thought, still I know it, which is one point in my favour; and, after all, eight years can scarcely be described as a “rush.” Besides, every proverb and popular saying seems to be balanced by another which is completely contradictory—and while it may be true that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” it is also true “that lookers-on see most of the game,” and perhaps score somewhat in the freshness of their impressions and in their facilities for comparison.

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As it is I can only write about Victoria as I know it. There are many mistakes that I may have made through my inability to see all sides of a question; but they are at least honest mistakes, and not the deliberate misstatement of facts, from which Australia has so often suffered.

Of course, there are numberless phases of life out here which I have never even touched: my nose has been too close to the grindstone, while life has resolved itself for the most part into a mere struggle for existence. Still, that very struggle has brought me into touch with real people, and with the many grades of society which are to be found here as elsewhere, in spite of all the theories of democracy.

I have edited a woman’s fashion paper, of sorts, and was dismissed because—I confess it—the compositors were quite incapable of reading my writing. I have written short stories and articles; I have decorated houses, painted friezes, made blouses for tea-room girls, designed embroideries for the elect of Toorak, even for the sacred denizens of Government House. I have housekept, washed, ironed, cooked. Once I made a garden, drew out the estimates, engaged the men, bought soil and manure, shrubs and plants, laid out a croquet-lawn, delved, sowed and planted shrubs which, now threatening to become trees, perhaps represent the best result of all these years of continuous labour. Palpable results, I mean, for the other results, the enlarged outlook, the humanity, the pathos, and the friendship, with which the memory of them is crammed, form, after all, an asset which is by no means to be despised.

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Still, when I recollect that I have been here for more than eight years; and that even now less than ten times that number of years has actually passed since the natives ceded to Batman, for knives, and beads, and looking-glasses, the present site of Melbourne, and much of the surrounding country, I am filled with the most abject shame at my own achievements and

unlimited admiration for these people, so often dismissed by the ignorant at home and abroad as only "colonials," who have built up such a town as Melbourne and such a country as Victoria is to-day.

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CHAPTER I

p. 1

EARLY DAYS IN VICTORIA

THE first landing in Victoria was purely involuntary, a vessel having been wrecked in 1797 on Furneaux Island, in Bass Strait, the supercargo, a man named Clarke, and two sailors—the only people saved out of a total of seventeen—making the Victorian shores, and by some incredible means reaching Sydney. Six years later an attempt was made to colonize what was then known as Port Phillip, by means of a convict colony, and a penal expedition of nearly 400 persons, 300 of whom were convicts, were sent out under the charge of Captain Collins. But water was scarce, the weather in the bay was stormy, and the blacks distinctly hostile; the whole outlook seemed so gloomy that Collins, who must have been pretty well distracted between the blacks on shore and

the seething discontent of the convicts on his ships, applied for—and at last, after three months of unutterable misery in Port Phillip, received—permission to remove to Van Dieman’s Land, one of the very few children who accompanied this wretched party being John Pascoe Fawkner, who, thirty-two years later, assisted in the foundation of Melbourne.

Among old Victoria celebrities John Batman was one of the best known. Batman landed at Geelong in 1835—the site of the present town having been first discovered by Mr. Hamilton Hume and Captain Hovell, who, with a servant and six convicts, had, in 1824, set out overland from New South Wales with the intention of reaching Westernport. After having by some means ingratiated himself with the natives, Batman proceeded up the bay to what is now known as Williamstown, where, again conciliating the blacks, he induced them to consent to a treaty, under which he received some 600,000 acres of fine pasture-land in return for beads, knives, blankets, and looking-glasses; after which, having explored the river, he entered in his diary the Yarra Falls as being the most likely place for a village.

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Soon, however, Batman’s sovereignty was to be disputed by Fawkner, who entered Port Phillip Heads a little later during the same year, with the *Enterprise* and a handful of prospective settlers. At the Indented Head Fawkner and his party were met by some of Batman’s men, who informed them that their master was owner alike of the bay and of the rivers, Batman, it appears, taking his part well as one of the first of Australian braggadocios. Still, this high-handed attitude appeared likely for awhile to succeed, for Fawkner obediently sailed northward, touching at the places which are now known as St. Kilda, Brighton, Mordialloc, and Dromana; finally, finding no satisfactory landing-place, he anchored in Hobson’s Bay, whence the Yarra was entered in a boat, and the present site of the Customs House determined on as a settlement. Next day the *Enterprise* herself was towed up the river; the settlers, with ploughs, grain, fruit-trees, building materials, and provisions, landed, and the city of Melbourne was founded in 1835. Only seventy-six years ago, and yet there are people who, having seen Melbourne as it is now, find their chief cause of complaint against the Australians in their lack of enterprise and general slackness.

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To people such as these the present Victorian town of Wonthaggi, beside the State Coal-Mine, must have seemed to have sprung up with the astounding, challenging air of a “Jack-in-the-box.” At the time I write this infant prodigy is five months old, and boasts some 3,000 inhabitants, streets, shops, three newspapers, four churches, a skating-rink, and a theatre, though as yet no hotel. There is what is called a “Hostel,” which may procure a licence or may not—it depends on the powers of the Wowzers. Meanwhile, the only obvious way of obtaining a drink is from a beer-cart, with a two-gallon licence. Needless to say, there are other less obvious ways, many and devious, to judge by the fact that five keepers of sly “grog-shops” or “Pigs,” as they are popularly called—who were lately hauled up by the police, despatched a circular letter to all the business people in the township, asking that a fund should be organized for their defence—this being, I suppose, what the philanthropists call “an appeal to our common humanity”; though what response it met with I do not know.

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In its first beginnings Melbourne was slower certainly than Wonthaggi. Materials and tools for every sort of work were more difficult to obtain, while it was pretty well a year before any goods ordered from England could arrive—four months each way being a good average passage by the old “wind-jammers,” with a further delay for preparing and packing ready for shipment.

After a little while Batman’s party of settlers from Indented Head also moved northward, and encamped at the back of Fawkner’s settlement, where St. James’s Church and the huge rabbit-warren known as St. James’s Chambers have long stood. Two years later Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales, visited the new colony of Port Phillip, and planned out more definitely the towns of Melbourne, Geelong, and Williamstown. A resident magistrate was appointed, and in 1851 the colony was declared to have a separate and independent existence under the name of Victoria, the certainty that one can have nothing without paying for it being exemplified by the fact that, with separation, came also the birth of public debt in the new colony.

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In 1840 took place the only really organized attempt made by the blacks, round Melbourne, to rescue their country from the whites, an abortive enough attempt, beginning with a large corroboree about nine o’clock one evening, and an over-liberal allowance of rum. Two hundred black fellows were taken prisoners, and marched to Batman’s Hill, where there was a rough prison in the form of a stockade, where they were placed, with a strong patrol guard all round them; these were packed off next day in boats, and let loose in the dense scrub where St. Kilda and Prahan now stand, as it would have been no joke to support 200 prisoners in those days, when flour was selling at £80 the ton, and meat at 1s. 6d. the pound—the white population, which in 1836 consisted of 143 men and 35 women, having by that time risen to 10,291 persons, and constituting a great drain on the resources of the new colony.

Soon, however, as the stock began to increase by leaps and bounds, meat became cheaper and living less difficult. The early settlers, however, used to have to work day and night to evolve some sort of order on their holdings, to live themselves, to clear their land, and at the same time to increase their flocks. An old lady told me once of the struggles she and her husband had in the early days, before they could get any proper bush shelter up on their run, when the ewes lambed too early in the season, while the nights were yet damp and cold. Her husband or the shepherd used to go round at night and collect armfuls of what they called “green-bobs”—freshly born lambs—and, after roughly cleansing them, insist on their being taken into bed, under the blankets, with herself and her children. Not—as she declared—that she ever raised any real objection; for she had the sense to know that all their lives hung on the existence of these poor

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little weaklings, and was only too proud to find, a few months later, when the flock came to be ear-marked, that it had more than doubled—partly, no doubt, as the result of her mothering. And yet no one has ever thought of canonizing women such as this! Can you picture it—the one-roomed house, with rough log walls, mud-plastered, and roofed with bark; the log fire on the open hearth, with the kettle slung above it, ready to warm milk for the young lambs, who lay on sacking before the fire, or shared the bed—where the mother and children lay together, heads and tails? The wild Australian wind outside—and what a wind, gathering in its gallop across miles of open country, and pushing and blustering in at the door, as the farmer thrust it open with his foot, his arms full of the tiny, trembling creatures, on whom his future depended. And all around the endless stretch of the unknown land. Something of the dangers and the loneliness being possible to gather from the matter-of-fact recital, by “A Pioneer,” of the finding of the body of a dead man who had been “bushed,” and died of thirst, to which he adds this statement: “I buried him where he had been found, as I had previously buried others who had perished under similar circumstances, crossing these plains from one station to another in the middle of the dry season.”

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Gradually the old identities, people who remember days such as these, are dying out in Victoria; while so few personal histories have been written, and so few letters preserved, that the life and characteristics of the gallant early settlers seem more than likely to sink into oblivion.

Mr. Joseph Tuckwell, who died in Melbourne only a very few months ago, could tell some fine yarns when the spirit moved him. As far back as 1851 he was Inspector of Police in Hobart—a position that was by no means a sinecure in those days. Later, when the gold rush in Victoria started, he joined the police force there; then, in 1860, went to Dunedin; and a little later became Governor of Auckland Gaol—his reminiscences dating back to the times before he had sailed for Australia, when he had witnessed the burial of George IV. in St. George’s Chapel. Another link also with the early days passed away, only a month or so back, in the person of one of the last of the convict chaplains of the old Port Arthur Settlement; his wife, who is still living, being the daughter of John Price, the Inspector-General of Convicts, who was murdered in 1857, and niece of the great John Franklin.

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It is interesting to remember that in those early days Victoria was a country with no old people. Lately I was talking with some old maiden ladies, who told me that, as children, they had never seen an old man or woman; and that when they first went home with their parents, in 1876, they were terror-stricken by the aspect of their old Scotch grandmother in her white mutch, whom they could not dissociate in their bewildered little minds from the wolf in the story of “Little Red Riding Hood.” They had lived in those days just beneath the Dandenong Range, fifteen miles out of Melbourne, and speak now of the terror the escaped and liberated prisoners—of course, there were no real convicts in Victoria—used to be to them and their mother; the Botanical Gardens being then in the making, with gangs of prisoners employed upon them and upon the roads, working in small groups, watched over by officials with muskets.

It seems curious that, though Portland was settled at much the same time as Port Phillip, no one ever seemed to have thought of installing the new capital there, in spite of its truly magnificent bay. In 1836 Major Mitchell, who was the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, with a party of convicts, having followed the course of the Lachlan and Lower Murrumbidgee, crossed the Murray, climbed to the summit of Mount Hope, and saw stretched out before him a sweep of wide and promising pasture. Moving onwards to the south by south-west, he crossed this green and pleasant land, passed another range of mountains, which he named the Grampians, and thus reached the south coast of Discovery Bay, meeting at Portland with the famous Henty family, who two years earlier had established themselves there, with servants, sheep, horses, and cattle, that they had brought over with them from Tasmania. These they used to good purpose in trade with the whalers and scalers, who, indeed, were the first white inhabitants of Victoria, having run up rough temporary stores and other buildings at intervals along the coast, the principal traders, before the coming of the pastoral Hentys, being William Dutton—Dutton being now a well-known name in South Australia, though whether the family is the same I do not know—John Griffiths, and two brothers named Mills.

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Portland suffers from no natural defects, and is simply prevented from taking its place as one of the best and busiest seaports by the fact that Melbourne is the capital of Victoria, in which it is situated. Equally ridiculous sentiments or regulations, I do not know which, ordaining that all goods from South Australia—Mount Gambia, the centre of one of the richest portions of that state, being only 73 miles from Portland—shall be transferred over 300 miles to Port Adelaide for shipment. Here is something, one would imagine, where Federation might be of real use, and the Montague and Capulet sort of feeling, which makes such a state of affairs possible, be mitigated, if not completely squashed.

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I have never been to Portland, but am always hoping to go, for I am told that it is one of the most charming and old-world spots in Victoria. Moreover, it possesses one of the most beautiful and natural harbours possible—the finest in all Victoria, Westernport coming second, and Melbourne nowhere at all, for it is only by constant dredging, deepening, and general tinkering that the Melbourne Harbour is a harbour at all, and not a hill. As it is the harbour charges are necessarily so exorbitant in Melbourne that Tasmanians are already congratulating themselves on the fact that it is an ill wind which blows nobody any good; and that when ships get larger, as they seem likely to do, Hobart will be the only port where they can lie, the depth of water, right up to the quay, being some 72 or 73 feet, sufficient for any ship ever likely to be launched to float in at ease; so that Hobart may really become in time the distributing centre for the whole of the

Commonwealth. And there all the time is Portland, of which Victoria can make no use, simply because it is not her capital, and she is not far-seeing enough to cultivate a second string to her bow; while South Australia can make no use of it either, because she would rather that her produce should be hopelessly depreciated in value by miles of useless haulage, than risk parting with one iota of trade to a sister State. Truly it is like the trivial etiquette of a provincial English town, where the butcher's wife is not on calling terms with the baker's wife—or that immortal ballad of the two men on a desert island, who would die of hunger and thirst rather than speak when they had not been introduced.

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Oddly enough, it is not only in regard to its own affairs that Victoria seems incapable of realizing more than one town to each State or county; for, in spite of many protests, it still ships—with very few exceptions—its entire frozen produce to London, completely ignoring the other large and important English ports, and necessitating a most unnecessary amount of handling and extra freight charges in the distribution of its exports. Surely there is nothing so completely conservative as a democratic country can prove itself to be in some matters; a reversion to the original type, I suppose for, after all, the progenitors of the greater number of these Australians left England at a time when Toryism was at its height.

CHAPTER II

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SOME FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF MELBOURNE

FROM the moment that the ship touches this shore—no, rather from the moment that the pilot boards her—a whiff of something, at once strange and stimulating, seems to fill one's lungs and quicken one's brain. The Australian pilots are a notably fine race—the younger men, those who have been born in the country—the finest type, perhaps, that it has as yet produced, with a breezy optimism, an immense faith in the land of their birth, and true affection for the Old Country, their very love for and dependence on the connecting seas helping, perchance, to annul any petty differences or jealousies; so that it is indeed well for all that they should be the very first to greet us in the new world to which we are come.

From Colombo one sails eastwards to Australia, so far east that one almost reaches the west in more senses than one. There are Trade Winds, and there are counter Trades, as we know; and if Australia owes her climate and her fertility to the warm, teeming East, mentally, in the tastes and outlook of her people, she is still altogether Western; so markedly so, indeed, that, in Melbourne in particular, one is at times seized with the whimsical idea that it has something to do with the roll of the earth, and that we may yet be slid into the very lap of America, ending by being far more completely akin to that democratic country than to the slow-moving, monarchical methods of England.

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One must look back to one's first clear-cut, vivid impression of a new country to realize how unnumbered are the differences, even under the many apparent likenesses, to which after a little while one becomes so used. In Melbourne the stevedores and dock-hands, who throng the ship and quay the moment she is docked, are almost as incredibly different from the same class in England as they are from the swarming blacks of Colombo. They are for the most part bigger and broader-shouldered; they look far better fed. They walk with a vigour and spring—indeed, with a sort of swagger—moving more from the hip than the English dock-hand, and less with that weary lurch of the shoulders which marks him as a creature of infinite labour and privation; while, above all, they are extraordinarily clean.

I shall never forget my first impression of these men—the brilliant blue sky, the blazing sun, the great swinging cranes, and the dexterity with which they handled the enormous masses of iron-rails, etc., which we carried, apparently with so little exertion, and absolutely no bullocking; while many of them were in spotless white overalls, delightful to look upon. I had arrived out from England in a sailing-ship, long overdue, owing to a succession of adverse winds, and in consequence water had run very short, so that washing with anything but sea-water was a quite impossible luxury. Our ship was clean, for our crew had toiled nobly with paint and varnish and holystone; and the sails were washed and bleached white by the sunshine and storm of many months on the open sea, far from smoke or dust. Still, I believe that we all felt horribly grimy as the tug towed us to our place at the quay; while I, for one, was longing for a Turkish bath; and that as soon as possible, for no ordinary amount of washing as I felt would, or could, be of any use. So that perhaps, on the whole, there was a double reason for the extraordinary cleanliness of the Melbourne dock-hands striking me as it did at the time. Still, that first impression has never faded, and, to this day, I regard the Australian working man—the worker, not the waster, I mean—as the cleanest in the whole world.

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Some people, as I am well aware, are minutely clean in their persons, making it, indeed, a matter of religion, while some are clean in their raiment, but seldom both. Certainly the more completely a man is clothed, the more likely is it that he—or his clothes—are incompletely cleansed; his own mind, which I presume governs the washing of his body, and his wife's mind, which governs the washing of his garments, seeming unable to work in unison. But, though the Australian labourer is quite completely clothed, and so white as to show dirt as easily as anybody—I mention this fact for the benefit of those who persistently regard him as black and naked—he

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and his wife appear to have somehow solved this question between them. Perhaps the reason may be found in the fact that he is better paid, and his wife is better fed than most wives of working men in the Old Country. And, then, the pipes do not freeze; while in even the tiniest three-roomed house there is usually a bath and a shower—though sometimes only in the scullery or back kitchen—with water laid on. And, after all, in a hot country cleanliness is not that affair of infinite toil that it is in a cold one; there is usually a day or so each week, even in the wettest weather, when there is enough sunshine to dry the clothes out of doors, so that one is saved the necessity of slinging them in lines across the kitchen, to drip on to the children's heads, and lie in sullen grey pools on the floor. Yet there is the dust, which is beyond all words, and the flies, so that it is not all quite plain sailing, after all. Still, though the Australian workman has many little ways which at first rub every atom of your fur up in the wrong direction—he is bumptious, he is cock-sure, he is condescending; "I don't mind if I do" is his one form of accepting any proffered favour, while a shrug of the shoulders and the "My troubles" are his response to any advice or sympathy you may offer—he is also essentially clean, in other ways apart from those that I have mentioned. Besides this, he does not cadge for tips; indeed, he more often than not resents the offer of money. "What's that for?" he will ask, with a glance at the proffered coin that makes you blush to your very boots.

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I've had a hard-worked lodging-house servant refuse a well-earned tip more than once. "Lord bless you, I ain't going ter take yer money; you've enough to do with it!" has been said. Not long before I left the country I took lodgings down at the sea, to recoup from a long illness, with a carpenter and his wife and family of small bairns. When I left, the man walked to the station, carrying my bag for me, and as we shook hands on the platform, entreated me, in his wife's name as well as his own, to come down and stay with them, if I was hard up or ill, for as long as ever I liked, and not to worry about the money. "For if there's enough for us, there's enough for you, providing you don't mind our rough ways," he added; "and don't you go on working again till you're fair worn out; for as long as we've a bit or a sup, or a roof over our heads, you're welcome to a share."

On the other hand, these people will be merciless to the humbug, to anyone who is mean or idle. They know their own value; "Business is business," as they say. They will give freely enough, but they will not submit to be haggled with or underpaid; and why should they? I have worked shoulder to shoulder with them for eight years, and I never wish to work with better people. Their absolute indifference, except where they really like or respect a person, their crudity, their common sense, their shrewdness, is like a tonic. And thus, in spite of Mr. Foster Fraser's assertion that the Australians can only exist by the constant effusion of fresh and virile blood from the Old Country, I must still believe that, for any elaborate ideals and ethics of over-civilization which we take with us to this new country, we receive in return very much more, certainly individually, than we have ever given; while in respect to the question of virility, Mr. Fraser must, I feel, have very largely judged Australians from the towns, and the undergrown shop-boys and factory-girls that he has seen there. After all, if we stay a little to ponder over what he regards as the degeneracy of these people—and it can only be the town people of whom he speaks—I think we shall realize that it is all only part of the natural order of things; that the more completely a plant belongs to the outdoor world, to the wilds and open places, the more it will suffer by transplantation to the vitiated air, the smoke and dust, of the city. Some day Australia may produce two types, as England does—the city type, with, in spite of its anæmic appearance, a quite immense vitality, and the country type, heavier, slower, and more robust. In the meantime, all these narrow-chested boys and precocious, over-developed girls who at night line the pavement of Swanston Street are really the inevitable result of a period of transition. Most likely when their parents were born there were no streets at all, as we now see them; while their fathers and mothers were such people as Walt Whitman must have had in mind when he wrote, saying: "I see the makings of the best persons. It is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth."

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The parents of these weedy boys and girls—who seem, like Jonah's gourd, to spring to an untimely maturity—were, maybe, conceived and born in the open air, and toiled for their daily bread under conditions of hardship and danger such as we can scarcely realize. A people who lived in vast open spaces, the immensity and loneliness of which very few European minds can grasp, and yet who were dowered with such an abundance of air and sunshine that it is little to be wondered at that their progeny wilt as they do in the towns. And, after all, there is one persistent and saving quality about them: they hark back again to the open; their hearts are never really at one with the cities. The young boys and girls flock there, and love it for a while; but as they mature they begin to long beyond words for the country. Every little shopman, every successful artisan and his wife, cherishes, with few exceptions, the one ambition—to have a tiny place in the country, to farm a little, keep poultry, grow fruit, and live in the open. People settled for life, as one might imagine, in comfortable homes in Melbourne will give up everything—in what can but seem the most surprising fashion to those who have not got that touch of the wild, or the patriarchal, in their blood—and start afresh. Sometimes they are well over fifty years of age before they can feel free to please themselves. But even then, confident in the knowledge that all the youngsters are out in the world doing well for themselves, they will fly to the country and begin all over again in a little two-roomed iron-roofed shanty, where the bush still remains to be stubbled up, growing as it does to the veranda step, and the water has to be carried half a mile, while the only possible chance visitor is an occasional opossum on the roof, or black snake in the bed.

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Yet for all this the Bush, which somewhere deep in their hearts has been calling to them all their

lives, draws them at last irresistibly to its bosom; so that they will dare anything to be near it, to hear the laughing-kachass at their very door, and see the wild wattle-bloom in flower.

To us who have grown used, through many generations, to the life of the cities, such behaviour seems incredibly mad. We forget how very, very new the whole country still is; how it was won and watered by sheer sweat, and how the people love it all the more because of the life and youth that were lost in its making—love it because it is so near to them, so completely in their blood that the glint of stars through the weather-boards of a bush shanty is a better sight to weary eyes than any wall-paper that even the genius of Morris has evolved.

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But I have wandered far from the ship with her furled sails and my first impressions of the new country: the coming and going of Custom-House and Health Officers, the bustle, the sunshine on the quay, and, above all, the curiously homelike Cockney drawl, which is so marked a characteristic of the Australian of to-day, all of which has amalgamated together in my mind, into a vivid and clear-cut picture. It is all very well to write as if I precipitated myself bodily and instantaneously into the hearts and homes of the people, for I did not. I liked them as little as they liked me. And that was very little, for it was a long time before I could be brought to realize that any relation of England could find any possible virtue to be proud of excepting that relationship. That the whole country, indeed, was not a sort of benevolent, though ignorant, country cousin, touchingly anxious to hear all about the head of the family, and be taught the true value of life by any of its scions. As a matter of fact, I had conceived a very clear mental picture of Australia as a burly, farmer-like person, with one hand outstretched in welcome, the other filled with desirable billets of all sorts, which awaited some new-comer, with that wide outlook possible only to one who has rubbed shoulders with the oldest civilization, the completest culture. It took me, indeed, months to realize that what is old, and to our minds completely well established, may be suspected of blue mould. Also that the only relation, likely to be of any use to the impecunious newcomer, is that "Uncle" whom I have discovered to be as outwardly ubiquitous and inwardly suspicious and grudging as in England. Finding, therefore, that everything was going on much the same as though nothing very exciting was expected; and that Australia, as a nation, did not seem to be awaiting me on the quay with open arms, I hustled my few belongings through the Customs, took a cab—the most medieval institution in Melbourne, a sort of closed waggonette, and incredibly rackety—and drove up to a Coffee Palace, which had been recommended to me as cheaper than an hotel.

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These Coffee Palaces are a completely fresh experience to a new-comer, the name itself giving rise to vague dreams of dark oak beamed haunts of men such as rare Ben Jonson consorted with; but in reality they prove to be only enormous buildings, cheaper than an hotel, but otherwise much the same, saving that one pays for all one's meals as one gets them. Also there are two dining-rooms, the only difference between them as far as I could discover—excepting the price, which is higher in the upstairs, a fact that struck me as absurdly Scriptural—being that in the one you are given a table-napkin, and in the other you are not. The true inwardness of the matter was explained to me, however, on my first day there, when I hesitated in the hall, and at last inquired the way to the dining-room of a casual passer-by, with his hands stuck into the tops of his trousers and his felt hat well at the back of his head.

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"That there," he responded, jerking his thumb in the direction of a gallery, where a few of the languidly select were draping themselves over the rail—"that there's where the toffs grub, and there aren't nothing served there not under two bob; but that there"—and he moved his thumb in the direction of a door to the right, from whence was streaming an endless succession of people, still chewing or, one stage later, picking their teeth—"that there's where the blokes go: two courses fur a bob."

He was very polite, and he delayed his pressing business with his teeth to give me the fullest information possible, even to the affair of the "serviette," as he called it; but he did not take off his hat. The Australian is an inwardly chivalrous person—most wonderfully so, considering how his female belongings have elbowed him off the pavement. He never speaks of—or to—us with that sort of tolerant sneer with which the Englishman tries to pass off the humiliating fact that he was born of woman—that for him a woman's hands had performed the first, and in all probability will perform the last, offices. But he does not part easily with his head-gear.

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The first day, as I went down from my room in the lift, I remember distinctly a man getting in with a big lighted cigar in his mouth and his hat on his head. As he did not attempt to remove either, I fixed my eye on him with a stare that was meant to be significant. I was a snob in those days, though I did not realize it, till later on a working man asked me why I was so fond of talking of "common people." "It's the one thing I don't rightly like about you," he added, quite candidly and without malice. I have, I hope, been better since; anyhow, I have never forgotten what he said, or the aspect of affairs which his words opened to me. Well, all that the man with the hat and cigar did was to smile and make some remark about the weather, perfectly undaunted by my freezing glances. Then, as I still glared, his face dropped in a curiously hurt and childlike manner. At last, evidently realizing where my gaze was directed, he took off his hat, examined it thoughtfully, and, seeing nothing wrong, put it on again. Then he took out his cigar, looked at it curiously, replaced it in his mouth, and gave it a reassuring puff, as if to say it was certainly all right—so what could there be for me to stare at?

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Then suddenly I remembered the chambermaid and the pearls and all the other differences, and nodded and smiled my thanks as he stood aside to let me step first out of the lift; for they will always do that, if possible—it is one of the odd contradictions of them.

As to the chambermaid and the pearls, which, to start with, reminds me of a story I heard of a girl up at a way-back hotel, whose name was Pearl. Some rowdy young larrikin, drinking among a crowd of associates, inquired if she was "the pearl of great price"; to which effort of wit she responded, with the greatest composure, that, on the contrary, she was "the pearl that was cast before swine"; for the progenitor of the untaught Australian brought a goodly share of mother-wit with him from London, in addition to his indelible accent.

I was curled well up under the bedclothes on that first morning, with the sheet over my head, to try and keep out the glare. All the beds in Melbourne seem to be placed facing the light, and blinds are regarded apparently as a mere useless luxury. But I sat bolt upright in sheer amazement when the chambermaid first addressed me, with some palpable, but quite good-tempered jealousy in her voice:—

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"My word, but you do look comfy!"

As there were no blinds to be drawn and no tea had been ordered, she just stood there and smiled into my astonished face, with her hands on her hips, swinging easily from toe to heel and back again. She wore a neat black dress and apron, with a minute suggestion of a cap, all quite orthodox, but, in addition, she also wore a pearl necklace, formed of several rows of imposingly large and artlessly artificial pearls. As I caught sight of this, my feelings changed, for she was clean and smiling, while the necklace appeared to my eyes as a symbol and sign of all the extraordinary differences for which I must be prepared in the new world.

"You told me to call you at seven sharp," she remarked, a note of aggression creeping into her voice, "so you needn't be looking shirty at being woke. An' you didn't order no tea nor nothing."

"Indeed, you were quite right to call me. Thanks very much. And I don't want any tea, thank you; only a little hot water."

"What! ter drink?"

"No, for washing."

The girl gave a wholly surprised stare, then jerked her thumb in the direction of the door.

"Bath-room, third turn to the left, first to the right."

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For a moment I stared back stonily; then I remembered the pearls, and thanked her, adding: "It is only just seven, isn't it?"

"The very tick when I opened that door. My word, but you've got nice 'air when it's down like that. I like dark 'air, I do. The worst of light 'air"—and she strolled to the looking-glass and examined her own elaborately dressed amber locks complacently—"it's toney enough, I do allow; but you do 'ave to keep it clean, and no mistake. Now, then, if you wants a bath, you'd best look nippy, for there's a run on 'em this time o' morning. Look 'ere! I tell you what do," she went on, with sudden friendliness; "I'll pop along and turn it on for you while you get into your wrapper. My word, but that's pretty, ain't it? I like them delainey stuffs. Now, don't you be long. I've twenty rooms to see to, I 'ave. But it must be awkward like in a new country. Different from England, ain't it? A bit more go-ahead, eh?"

"How did you know?" I asked in amazement, conscious of having removed every scrap of label from my luggage.

"Know?" echoed the chambermaid scornfully. "Why, any kid 'ud know that—it's sticking out a mile!"

There are, of course, hotels in Melbourne, two moderately good and immoderately expensive, ones, and several smaller fry. But it is in the Coffee Palaces that the ordinary people congregate, and it is from the ordinary people, after all, that one can best judge of a nation; the highly educated—I will not say intellectual—and leisured classes being much the same anywhere. Therefore it is in one of the Coffee Palaces that I would advise anyone to stay who really wishes to study the life and character of the Australians. There comes the shrewd commercial traveller, who, in such a scattered country as this, is a person of wide experience, with by no means the safe and easy road before him that is trodden by his English compeers; while from him you are often able to draw some of the clearest and best-balanced judgments of the whole trend of the country and people that it is possible to obtain. Here, also, are the visitors from other States, with, perhaps, not too much money to spend, and the New Zealander and the Tasmanian, the country cousin, the cocky farmer, and the small squatter, gathering most thickly at the time of the Agricultural or Sheep Show, or during that great week when the race for the Melbourne Cup is run.

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The places are, of course, as their name implies, teetotal. If you want anything stronger than tea or coffee, or a soft drink, you give the money to the waitress, who sends out for it. But it is a lengthy progress, and one which all your neighbours seem to regard with such an intense suspicion that usually you content yourself with the truly national drink—tea. In the days of one's youth one used to be told that tea and meat combined would inevitably turn to leather in one's tummy. In Melbourne I feel that it must be the internal organs themselves which have turned to leather, so that there can be nothing more left to be feared, and one can even, after a while, drink tea and eat oysters at one fell meal with impunity. Of course, a good many children have succumbed to the united effects of boiled beef and tea, which is really the national food. But,

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then, it all conduces to the survival of the fittest, and until people will condescend to learn the art of vegetable growing, especially in drought-stricken districts, from the despised John Chinaman, it is as well to be prepared for the worst. The tea is usually drunk very strong and sweet, and most often without milk, many Australians having a deep-rooted suspicion of any fluid, even remotely appertaining to that cow which made their young lives such an intolerable burden to them. The workman, the artisan, the labourer, and dock-hands carry their tin billies, and a portion of tea twisted up in a piece of paper, out to their day's work with them; and in the towns there is always a gas-jet or a fire to be found at which someone will let them boil the water. The swaggies and the wandering army of station hands, the shearer and harvester, they, too, carry their billies in one hand, as inevitably as they carry their swag—their blanket and store of flour, and mackintosh sheet or bit of oilcloth. And for them there are dry, fragrant eucalyptus leaves and twigs—inflammable as tinder to the least spark from flint and steel—to boil their water over; the very fact of its having to be boiled, and therefore insuring some measure of safety from typhoid germs, being one of the best possible excuses for the universal popularity of tea, particularly among such wanderers, and dwellers in country districts.

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One of the first difficulties that confronts the new arrival in Melbourne is that of suitable lodgings, when he shall have tired of hotel and Coffee Palace. I know I walked innumerable streets and answered innumerable advertisements, before I began to realize that those lodgings with one or two bedrooms, a sitting-room, and privately served meals—probably presided over by an ubiquitous ex-butler and cook—which we regard so completely as a matter of course in England, are almost unknown in Australia, and so scarce and expensive as to be an impossibility, excepting for the very wealthy. Either a place was frankly a boarding-house, or one was termed a guest, and expected to have meals with the landlady, her family, and occasional friends; once I remember at an up-country lodging the "friend" being an Assyrian pedlar—certainly the most interesting person I ever met there—while someone who could play the piano or recite, and was generally of a friendly turn of mind, was greatly to be preferred.

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I shall never forget my first bewildering day in search for lodgings. As each front-door was opened I was met by the same mingled whiff of cabbage and linoleum, the same complete indifference as to whether I took the rooms or left them; the same superb air of merely letting rooms at all out of charity, or as a sort of careless hobby; also, incidentally, because, by some odd chance, the house happened to be too big for its occupants. Indeed, this reason was so inevitably offered to me that in time I found myself receiving the odd impression that all the lodging-houses had sprung up, gourdlike, to their present proportions the very night after the lease had been signed. The question of attendance, too, seemed to be always a vexed one, and, in most cases, even by extra payment, quite out of the question; while the very idea of separate meals was received with a sort of horror, as if anyone who wished to feed alone must contemplate awful orgies of an unutterable description. For the most part the beds were big, the charges bigger; the washing-basin and the slaveys who opened the door incredibly small—that is, with the professional boarding-house keeper. There seemed no possible reconciliation between the small maid and the small basin, for there the question of attendance came in—though one landlady did vouchsafe the information that her maid "slopped the room" every morning. But it seemed as if the relations between the big bed and the big rent might, and indeed were, expected to be equalized if I did not mind "sharing my room with another young lady," in one case my possible hostess's daughter.

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I shall never forget my horror when this idea was first mooted to me, nor how, in my confusion, I protested that I "had never slept with another woman in my life." On which the horror was transferred to the face of the prospective landlady, who retorted that—"if I was that sort, I might go elsewhere."

These are the people who flood the daily papers with glowing advertisements—perhaps that landlady would say: "And these are the people who answer them." But still I would have you beware, for they are false as their fringes—luckily, almost as palpably so. Once, I suppose, they held any temporary dweller in Melbourne irrevocably in their clutches, but since the Land Boom—"the Boom," as it is always called—which, in spite of all its horrors, had a most potentially humanizing effect on the people, a few capable gentlewomen have taken the work of the landladies into their own hands, and comfortable, well-ordered, truly home-like boarding-houses are springing up, which threaten to oust these pre-historic harpies from their lairs.

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The streets of Melbourne are, to my mind, the most tiring I have ever known. They are so straight, so uncompromising; Collins Street alone presents such an endless vista as one gazes up it that I remember, in those first days, feeling as if I would like to take it up in my hands and twist it into some unrecognizable form—warp it and bend it. Straight from west to east, side by side, run several such streets, the principal ones of the city, crossed again at right angles by others every bit as straight—all without a single saving grace of curve, of sheltering crescent, or tree-shaded square, so that when a hot north wind blows it rushes across the interstices of these streets like a hot blast from a furnace, eddying thick clouds of yellow dust—filled with the unutterable debris of the streets—furiously round each corner. There are some really most remarkably fine buildings, but the city is not yet sufficiently complete to show them to advantage or in any harmonious whole, and they look, on the whole, rather ungainly among their humble neighbours—squashed in, in an apologetic manner, between them. During those early days of my life in Melbourne, when the first fascination of newness had faded and I had not yet begun to know the true meaning of the city, the place impressed itself on my jaded mind, with photographic clearness, as an individual without eyelashes, staring unblinkingly, showing a face

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with no half-tints, no delicacy; and, though possessing a sort of humanity, as all big towns do, yet quite without a soul. Indeed, I believe that this is really the truth, and that the soul of the town is wanting because the hearts of the people, in spite of the manner in which they flock to the big cities, are really all the time in the open country, the strongest proof of this being perhaps found in the growth of the suburbs, which push their way ever further and further afield, and in the fact that very few people indeed—having no inborn love for the life of the town as so many of us have—live in the city itself if they can afford to do otherwise.

During the day, indeed, this absence of soul is but little realized, save when the hot winds and dust carve a heavy furrow down the centre of every brow and call into being a thousand criss-cross wrinkles. But at night, or on Sabbaths or holidays, the town is strangely empty, even more so spiritually than actually. On such days in old-world cities, it always seems to me as if the quiet dead were abroad, wandering lovingly round the shady squares—with their sober-faced houses—and the flagged paths of churchyards, the secluded seats, the ancient archways and narrow silent streets; articulate in the twittering of sparrows or the coo of pigeons, lost at other times in the

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roar of traffic. But here it is different; the souls of the dead are all away in the primal forests or Bush that they loved, while the living are off to the mountains or sea—train-load upon train-load, many of them away at the first streak of dawn, leaving the parsons lamenting from their pulpits over an array of empty pews. I once went to Sunday morning service in St. James's Church, which is known as the "Old Cathedral," and found eleven fellow-worshippers there. And yet I believe the instincts of the people are true; that the sea, with its white sands, its cliffs, its rocks, and wonder of virgin Ti-tree, teach them more than any number of sermons could do. What thoughts the Ti-tree alone gives rise to! Pagan perhaps, yet all sublime. With the wild forest-myrtle it is the most human tree that could well be imagined. Such twisted trunks, such curious entwined limbs, such delicate flowing foliage! It is as if Pan, the great god Pan, still real and vital in this wide world, had chanced on a flock of nymphs at play along the shore, and embodied them thus as they turned to fly with outstretched arms and flowing tresses; or Neptune himself translated them to trees as they slipped from his embrace.



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF MELBOURNE.



ON THE YARRA.

When the sea is so near and the wonder of the Ti-tree and the mountains, and the forests, with their giant gum-trees, and the deep gullies of ferns, cool and fragrant on the hottest days, perhaps, after all, one may consider that God has built temples to His own liking, and that the dreary little brick churches and tin tabernacles of the country districts are as little wanted as the more imposing structures of the town; while the crowds who flock each Sunday and holiday away from the dusty city into the open country have indeed chosen the better part.

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That the young people make love openly and shamelessly in the railway-carriages or on the beach; that they are loud and larky and irreverent, does not matter at all; there is really less room for shame where there is shamelessness: and then as a living proof of what these rowdy boys and girls develop into there are the uncounted young families, father, mother and children, clean and smiling and prosperous, scattered in intimate little groups over every holiday resort

within an hour's reach of town. After all, in spite of "certain writers of our own day," there is nothing very wrong with a country where the artisan—who, after all, is its backbone—can afford so much fresh air and freedom, so many health-giving holidays; and, in addition, can show such a cheerful helpmate, such a well-nourished, well-dressed little brood, as can the Australian artisan. There is rather an apt old saying, which it might not be amiss for some of us older people to lay to heart in discussing a State that is mainly the work of three generations, such as Victoria, and that is:—"They that can *do*, and they that can't criticize."

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Every principal street in Melbourne seems to be possessed of a poor relation—meagre, dreary, and more or less unpresentable. There is Collins Street, for instance, wide and majestic, and—may I say?—awful in its unbroken length, leading straight up to the Houses of Parliament, and yet not emblematical, I hope, of that other wide and straight path that leadeth to destruction. Keeping step with it all the way, dim and narrow, noisy and bustling, in the shadow of its skirts runs Little Collins Street. Then there is to the right, still looking upwards towards the seats of the mighty, Flinders Street and Little Flinders Street; to the left, Burke Street and Little Burke Street—the haunt of John Chinaman—Lonsdale Street and Little Lonsdale Street, and so on; the transverse streets that cross them alone being free of these poor relations. "The most irrelevant things in Nature," as Charles Lamb calls them. Indeed, I wish that more of the streets were without them, or that, at least, they did not run in such unbroken continuity—that one might tear the middle out of them in places, as one does out of a French roll, and form a hollow, instead of a block. Even in the place of a single warehouse, here and there, to have a little open space, a few trees—the city-loving plane or large-leaved maple—and a seat or two, so that the unnumbered city clerks and warehousemen might have some little open place and some greenery in sight of which to eat their lunch.

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Melbourne is rich in public gardens of rare beauty, while in the Botanical and Fitzroy Gardens there are kiosks where one may get a meal served in the open. But they are all too far from the centre of the city to be of much use during the short hour or half-hour allowed for lunch; while for all the tiny people whose fathers are caretakers, or whose mothers are charwomen, in the very heart of the town, they are indeed a far journey, fraught with untold dangers.

For many years I lived and worked in a great mass of buildings, offices, single rooms, and chambers, rather to the west of the town, starving for the breath of a tree, the sight of a little greenery within easy reach; even the Flag-Staff Gardens, the nearest in that direction, being a good twenty minutes' walk away. Then, to my joy, I discovered the little Old Cathedral, packed away among warehouses and offices, with its tiny garden, its patch of green sward, its few shady trees, and its herbaceous borders, where there grew a blue flower, whose name I do not know but which I imagine belonged to the borage tribe, of the intensest blue I have ever seen. There were other flowers, of course—geraniums and nasturtiums and dahlias, I believe—but it is the blue alone that lives in my memory, for, like Thoreau, I feel that there is something intensely exhilarating "even in the very memory of blue flowers growing in patches."

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After a while this little garden came to make a real difference in my workaday world—to represent such a true oasis in a desert, which was sometimes all despair, that I can but wish there were more such breathing-places in the midst of the bustling city world. St. James, of course, added very considerably to the glamour of the garden in this case; impressing me, as it always did, with a curious air of antiquity, breathing out more of the atmosphere of the old world than any other building in Melbourne. I use the word "curious" because, after all, it is only some seventy-four years old, though it has taken upon itself an air of reverent age, enwrapping itself about with an atmosphere of brooding peace, quite unviolated by all the fury of getting and spending which goes on around it. Perhaps it is the fact of its being surrounded, as it is, by such a medley of youth and vigour that gives it this precocious air of venerable age; like the eldest of a large growing family it has reached a sedate maturity very early in life, as one counts the lives of churches. Indeed, it is more than mature, and English nostrils sniff up greedily from within its portals the only possible odour of mould and mustiness to be found in Melbourne. Dear old church! The services are orderly and reverent, but in the high tide of work days, when it is empty, but—all praise to its Rector!—never shut during business hours, it and its little garden preach to us the best possible sermon on that one text which, English and Australian alike, we all want reminding of in these busy days, bidding us "study to be quiet."

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CHAPTER III

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MOSTLY CONCERNING "SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE AND SAUCE FOR THE GANDER"

WHEN I was a girl I remember many times hearing my father say that he would rather mount a lady on a young, well-broken horse than on an old hunter; that they knew too much, that they had mastered the art of falling soft, and preferred their own way to that of their rider. As a housekeeper, I know I would rather have an absolutely untaught young girl as a domestic than one who held her own views as to how everything was to be done; equally fearing and disliking any new innovation which might possibly mean extra work. For the same reason, if I was a politician, I would rather have my lines cast in a new country, not yet pot-bound by traditions. England seems at times to hover, literally paralyzed, between the devil of:—"They say" and the deep sea of:—"Has been." I recollect that in the old days at home a ploughman was ordered to

run his furrow along a special field from east to west. I can see now the odd, clouded look of bewilderment which came into his face as the order was given to him; then the drawing down of the long upper lip, the set of the obstinate chin, when his protestation that it "wur allus ploughed t'other way" were received merely by a smiling repetition of the command. Finally, his utter bewilderment when the—to his mind—unanswerable argument that it had "allus been ploughed that way, when ferther wur a lad, an' gran'ferther wur a lad, an' the owd meyster wur alive," was met in the same manner.

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The merest yokel in Australia could see no reason at all in an argument such as this. Here the people revel in change. They are ready to try anything, and, if one plan fails, another is at once experimented with. Sometimes it may be rather like the progress of a bull in a china-shop, but still it is progress, and the people here find it very difficult to realize the mind of a country which takes up the attitude of a man refusing to change his shirt for fear that he should suffer some chill or discomfort in the process. In the article on the Sydney Congress in the *Times* of May 24, 1910, the difference between the two countries in many political matters is very plainly stated:—"There is nothing more extraordinary in Free Trade propoganda than the lame contention that we must continue upon a ruinous course because a new policy will involve initial difficulties. That argument is laughed to scorn in Australia. The Australian fears no difficulties. The spirit which leads men to face and overcome obstacles is in his blood. His history and condition are one long record of triumphing over difficulties, and he cannot understand why the complexity of framing a tariff should be urged for a moment in England. He thinks, like many Englishmen, that the historian of the future will contemplate with amazement the spectacle of the Dominions seeking closer unity, while the Mother Country remains coldly repelling their advances."

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A question one very often hears asked in Australia, usually as a joke or sort of catch-phrase, is:—"Where do I come in?" But there is no joke at all about the state of mind which such a question implies. I have often heard new chums say very nasty things about what they call the "self-seeking nature of the people"; and they will point out—when the distinction between the old and new country are being discussed—all that Australia owes to England, how she depends on her for naval protection and for her very life as a nation. But, still, something more is expected from the modern mother than merely boxing the ears of all the other children who interfere with her progeny, and, after all, the obligation is not entirely one-sided. Even if we forget the ready help which was given in the time of the Boer War, we ought not to forget that in Australia many thousands of people, that England confessedly could do nothing with, have been remade into men and women, who—with their children—have gone to the making of a very fine people.

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In many ways Australia is more loyal to England than she is to herself. Among private people there always seems very little preference given to Australian-made goods alone, but a very great deal to all goods made by English-speaking people, though naturally those in authority intend to protect their own manufacturers first. Out here Imperial Preference is not a party matter, and in these days to come across even one important question in politics, where the good of the entire country alone is considered, seems like opening a window and letting into a stuffy, gas-heated atmosphere a stream of pure air; while it is for this reason that the defeat of Mr. Deakin—during the last election—has not upset the whole apple-cart, as such a Labour victory would inevitably have done in England.

There is no doubt, I believe, that Australia, as a whole, is in favour of Imperial Preference. At the Sydney Congress, Brisbane, Perth, and Hobart were frankly for it, and though the three great Chambers of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide remained neutral, none of the State capitals voted against it, while most of the smaller Chambers were most openly in its favour.

That some of the Chambers were neutral is not to be wondered at. Already Preference rates are extended to 294 items of British goods, coming under the Preferential tariff and paying on an average 24 per cent. less duty than foreign goods of the same kind; the total rebate on British goods in Australia in 1908 reaching the sum of £828,000. Foreign exporters are not blind to what the Australians are doing for their fellows, and in one instance a special discount was offered, equivalent to the amount of Preference given to British-made goods, while every sort of effort has been made to undervalue or dump foreign goods at less than their market value. And yet it is the British manufacturers who have most persistently tried to hoodwink the Australians, English cotton materials having been actually sent to the Continent to be printed and dyed, then back to England to be packed and shipped off as Preferential goods.

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Now the stipulation has been made that goods commanding Preference must have not less than 25 per cent. of their value represented by English labour, the tolerance and moderation of the rule speaking well for the patience of Australia, though it certainly does not speak well for English manufacturers that there should need to be any such regulation. It is like having to compel a man, to whom you are paying ten pounds a week, to contribute ten shillings for the support of the wife, who keeps his house in order, cooks his food, and rears his children.

But this is not the only grievance that Australia has against English manufacturers; an even more fatal one is that they simply cannot get what they want. For some years I was working in Melbourne at house-decorating and fitting. My business took me among wholesale and retail tradesmen and importers of furniture, hardware, draperies, carpets, tiles, and the hundred and one items that are needed for the fitting up of a modern dwelling, and from one and all came the same complaint. They could not get what they wanted from the English manufacturers. Goods were not true to sample; there were not a sufficiency of one sort, and, when more was applied for, the buyers were either frankly told that they could not have it, or a different class of goods

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was sent in its place. Mr. Hamilton Wicks, the British Trade Commissioner, has spoken pretty plainly about the difficulties which Australian houses find in getting their orders properly attended to in England, however much they may wish to be loyal to the Empire. Often it is a case of:—"Oh, anything is good enough for the Colonies; they are used to roughing it out there!" or, perhaps, less flagrant, but none the less irritating, there is an absolute lack of knowledge as to the requirements in Australia; a pig-headed refusal to see that many articles needed here—particularly agricultural implements—are of a necessity quite different from those in use in England. "Give Grandam kingdom, and thy Grandam will give you a pear or apple or a plum," says England, "and do not be impertinent enough to quibble about its being a trifle overripe or blighted."

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To the people at home who assert—as I have often heard them do—that Australia is a completely self-seeking country, I would recommend a short study of Australian commerce—even of Victorian commerce alone—and of the statistics showing the imports of the last few years, a very brief perusal of which will be sufficient to prove that an infinitely larger amount of Australian money is spent in England, and other parts of the Empire, than in any foreign country. In 1908 Australia spent in imports from British Possessions, including India, £36,319,781, as against £13,479,492 in those from all other countries, including the United States.

In 1904-1908 the proportion of goods imported from England and other British Possessions averaged 72.93 per cent., and from all other countries, including America, 27.7 per cent.—could England itself show as fair a record?

Again, though in 1908, £1,305,602 were spent on German imports by Victoria alone, the value of Victorian goods exported to Germany reached £2,015,536, so that the obligation was by no manner of means all on one side.



Mr. Foster Fraser has two great faults to find with Australians—they are slack, and they are few. Oddly enough, while continually reverting to the thinness of the population in the country districts, he finds fault—to take only one of the many instances—with the fact that the output of butter is nowhere near as great in Australia as it is in Denmark. Denmark, a made country! A country that has been perfecting its dairying industry for years! Why, I remember when I was quite a small child—and that was a long while ago—that the cooking butter used to be brought in little kegs from Denmark—to a pastoral country like England, too! Little Denmark, which, including Iceland, has a population of 2,708,470, with a density of 49.94, as against the immense continent of Australia, with its population, according to the last census, of 4,275,306. Why, Denmark, including Iceland, covers an area of but 55,306 square miles, and Victoria, the smallest state in Australia, 87,884. Put 2,708,470 people—the population of Denmark—into it to start dairy-farming, and then comparisons may become merely odious, and not, in addition, ludicrous. As it is, Victoria alone exported to the United Kingdom, in 1908, butter to the value of £868,068, and that's "none so dusty," as her own people would say; while the amount of butter actually consumed there was valued at £1,250,000, and cheese, both consumed and exported, at £100,000.

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It seems as if I was "barracking" for Australia as against England, but very far from that. Though I have lived in Australia for years, and though it has helped me to a wider, fuller life than I ever knew before, England is my own country, and still holds my heart. And yet, when one hears, as one so often does, sweeping and wholesale condemnations and criticism—or, perhaps worse, faint praise—given without any realization of what a country really is, and how it has reached the position it now holds, it seems only honest that those who have gained their living through that country, to whom it has afforded friendship, shelter, and consideration, should speak of it as they have found it. A sort of friction seems inevitable between parents and their grown-up children, but the fault is not always and altogether on the children's side—and, in any case, the friction is only intensified either by interference or well-meant attempts at rearrangement. Australians hate alike interference and pity. If you sympathize with a man or woman out here, it is ten to one that they will inform you that they can do their "own lying awake at night." Once when a miner

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died up West his mates put up above his grave these words as a text—and, in truth, there are many worse:—“He did his damndest; angels could do no more.” But, then, the world in general is much like the ultra-tidy housewife of whom Oliver Wendell Holmes writes “that if the Angel Gabriel did come down from heaven, she would be complaining of him, that he dropped his feathers about the house.”

Australia is so much overgoverned that it is really a wonder the broth is not spoilt between the multitude of cooks. It seemed bad enough before Federation, but it was nothing to what it is now, and one wonders that there is anyone left to govern. How long the state of affairs will go on which permits the expense of two Government Houses, and a superfluity of officials, I do not know. It seems, indeed, as if everybody must have been too busy to bother about it, and that the State Governorship remains, like many another archaic institution, simply because so many more intricate complications engage the attention of the people.

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Luckily for Australia, the separate functions of her two Houses of Parliament—the Legislative Assembly, or Lower House, and the Legislative Council, or Upper House—are more definitely defined than those of the House of Commons and the House of Lords are at home—or have been till just lately. Still, Australian politics represent a tangled web to the new chum, and one which I have had very little time or opportunity of studying. I scarcely know, indeed, how I ever got started on the subject of Preference, but as the chapter somehow began itself in that way, and as this book is most likely to be read by people at home, who, by some chance, may happily know even less about the matter than I do, a few of the leading points of the game may not come amiss.

Frankly, I confess that the first day I was present at a debate in the Legislative Assembly I was reminded of nothing in the world so much as the trial scene in “Alice in Wonderland”:

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“‘No, no,’ said the Queen; ‘sentence first—verdict afterwards.’

“‘Stuff and nonsense!’ said Alice loudly. ‘The idea of having the sentence first!’

“‘Hold your tongue!’ said the Queen, turning purple.

“‘I won’t!’ said Alice.

“‘Off with her head!’ said the Queen; but nobody moved.

“‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice. ‘You are nothing but a pack of cards.’

“At this all the cards rose up into the air and came flying down upon her.”

The question in the House at that time was, if I remember rightly, something to do with the duty on cloth caps made in Tasmania, and it really seemed astounding that so much excitement could be got out of such a little thing. Everything anyone said was frankly contradicted even in plainer words than “stuff and nonsense!” Everybody seemed to speak at once—or, rather, shout in a vain hope that they might be heard above the babel—and personalities of all sorts were freely indulged in, either to be completely disregarded or replied to by more abuse; often, I must confess, rather wittily put; while, should any orator succeed in shouting down his fellow, even then his troubles were far from ended, his every peculiarity being ruthlessly registered by the Press. The other day I came across an amusing and most characteristic notice of the New South Wales Premier in the *Bulletin*, from which I cannot resist quoting, affording as it does a very good example of this freedom of speech:

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“McGowan will no longer be able to complain of getting too little newspaper space. He will get enough; but the Lord help those who have to ‘take’ him, and preserve them from charges of misreporting. For McGowan is the most slovenly speaker in the world. If he’s not, I’d like to shoot the other. Half his sentences are never finished, and his remarks trail round and round his subject like a snake in a hen-coop looking for the exit. His constantly repeated gag is—‘The point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is this.’ Then he suddenly discovers that he has mislaid the point, or left it at home, or in the tram, or somewhere, and while he is trying to recollect what he did with it, he fills in time by rounding off a flock of sentences which he left unfinished earlier in the evening.”

And again:

“The haste of the Fisher Government to do things lately moved Alfred Deakin to describe its proceeding as ‘quick-lunch legislation.’ Poor old Alfred’s variety was ‘fasting man’ or ‘dry-crust legislation.’ You sat down at the table and looked at Alfred’s political bill-of-fare. In about three years a dead waiter came, and you ordered chops. The waiter departed slowly in a state of decay, and fell into dust before he reached the door. Then you stayed around, through geological periods, till Judgment Day, and, looking down from the battlements of heaven, you saw Alfred’s cook still chasing the sheep through perdition. Truly there was no quick lunch about the Deakin methods! In his restaurant the dropped soup took six months to reach the floor, and, as likely as not, you saw Alexander the Great at the next table, for time didn’t matter there.”

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One politician who reached the limit in the matter of political amenities, and who has died very recently, was Mr. J. H. Graves. The abuse, the satire, and the damning with faint praise, the awful disclosures, and the still more awful insinuations, that Mr. Graves indulged in, were a perfect nightmare to the House of his day, all the more to be dreaded from the fact that he never spoke at random, that all his shafts were at once winged and barbed by truth, and their course directed by a sure and certain knowledge of the tenderest portion of his writhing victim’s

conscience. People said, and, I believe, with truth, that J. H. Graves kept a carefully compiled Doomsday Book, containing the history of every member of the House, with every possible detail of his every mistake and misdemeanour, and all the mistakes and misdemeanours, the scandals and family skeletons, of his progenitors. A speaker in the House cannot be summoned for libel; all that can happen is that he should be called upon to apologize for anything particularly insulting—and Mr. Graves was ready to apologize with cheerful alacrity. There was always plenty more in that fatal book. It is said that Mr. J. L. Purves, by whose death the Australian Bar has lately lost one of its most brilliant members, once got hold of the original book and burnt it; and that, though another was begun, it was so much less voluminous and comprehensive, members ceased, from that time onwards to feel cold shivers running down their backs when Graves's glance fell upon them; and so much of his power was lost, though in a dispute with another man, who came from the same county as himself, this second book was actually produced in proof of its existence.

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"I have never been guilty," thundered a member recently, in a fine fury of indignation, "of going to the telephone and impersonating another man, and using the information obtained against him in Parliament under the cloak of privilege. But I must say the honourable member for — stands here self-convicted of that action." I have not the faintest recollection of what it was all about, but it is characteristic; while the title "honourable," as it is here used, strikes me as rather a meaningless survival in a democratic country. "Hi don't call 'im the 'onourable," I once heard an emphatic political opponent declare. "Hi calls 'im the 'orrible."

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"Cabbage-grower!" someone shouted at some public meeting where Mr. Bent was making a speech. "Well, there's no question about that," retorted the late Premier beamingly; "the question is, did I, or did I not, grow good cabbages?"

The odd thing is that out of all the schoolboy chaff, and the apparently hopeless babel of mere words, such good measures can be evoked. It is somehow like flinging a medley of unappetizing-looking scraps into a casserole, and, rather to one's own surprise, evoking a good soup—when all the scum has been removed.

The State Governor, as the Victoria Year Book remarks bluntly, is only expected to exercise his judgment in assenting to, or dissenting from, or reserving of, any Bills passed by Parliament, and the granting or withholding of a dissolution—either of which measures will, for the time being, render him equally unpopular—or the appointment of a new Ministry. Apart from this, his whole duty consists in looking nice and behaving prettily, while by far the most arduous part of the position rests upon the shoulders of his wife. If I was going to choose a new Governor for Victoria—which somehow no one has even thought of asking me to do—I should not even want to see him, though my interview with his wife would be long and arduous. She must dress beautifully, for she is of little use unless she wears things that other women can copy; but she must give herself no airs, while the complete frankness of the criticism which she will meet with may be gathered, with some amusement, from the following description of a garden fête at Storrington, the State Government House:

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"The visitors were so eager for the frivol that they arrived before schedule time (3.30). Motors and carriages were politely dissuaded from entering the gates, while Aides peeped unhappily round the pillars of the veranda, and sent agonized messages upstairs. But the Carmichaels were getting into party duds as fast as they could. They had been opening the motor-drive out to Toorak at 2.30, and the lady's return home and quick change into a dream of a lilac gown had all to be compressed into the one brief hour. When at last the pair came out, the dress—a trailing circumstance of nonchalant coolness—was received with murmurs of admiration. Someone has been redrawing the lines of the Carmichael lady's figure; it has the new slenderness necessary for the new dressing."

The ideal Governor's wife must be of the bluest possible blood—nothing insults a democratic country like playing down to it in the matter of nobodies—and yet she must forget all the class distinctions she has ever known. She must remember everybody, entertain royally, and spend lavishly. There was once a superlatively mean Governor, with a superlatively mean wife, in Victoria, and they will never be forgotten; it is a fault that the people here are not prone to themselves, and which they simply will not tolerate in those whom they consider handsomely paid to cut a dash. I never saw but one public-house called after that particular Governor, and this, in itself, is significant—besides, even it is in a mean back street.

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When the Ministry finds it is unable to disentangle itself, when it has not a proper working majority, or is defeated on any matter which it considers vital, then the Premier, instead of tendering his resignation and asking the Governor to "send for" a leading member of the Opposition—as would be the case were he defeated in Parliament or at the polls—asks the Governor for a dissolution, the terms of which are very carefully dictated to him, though at other times he acts mainly on the advice of the Executive Council.

In the Executive Council there are eight salaried Ministers. Four at least of these must always be members of the Council or Assembly, but not more than two of the Council or six of the Assembly; while upon accepting office a Minister vacates his seat in Parliament, though he may return to it without being re-elected. The Council—or Upper House—consists of thirty-four members, being divided into seventeen electoral provinces, each of which returns two members. The member of each electorate who receives the largest number of votes retains his seat for six years, if there is no General Election, the other members retiring after three years.

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In the Lower House there are sixty-five members, single electorates being provided for each seat. Universal suffrage is in force; all persons natural-born or naturalized, and untainted by crime, are on the general roll, and plural voting is not allowed. A member of the Assembly receives certain allowances for his expenses, at the rate of £300 a year. This is, I suppose, given that professional or working men may feel free to devote themselves exclusively to a political life, and be relieved from all other business anxieties. In England it may seem quite a lot, but it appears to me—considering the really large incomes to be made in Australia by a thoroughly able man in nearly any business or profession—that it is not enough. It pays the working man, hand over hand, to go into Parliament, for it is not likely that he would make as much at his own job, however good he was at it. But a capable lawyer, say, or doctor, upon whose mental training large sums have been spent, will earn far more than that if he is any good; and certainly, if he cannot manage his own affairs, he will not be able to manage those of his country. So that a successful man, particularly if he is married and has a family to bring up in the same way in which he himself has been brought up, would have to be peculiarly unselfish—almost culpably so—to relinquish his profession for a Parliamentary career. I suppose it would be impossible that members should be paid in proportion to their former earnings and their status in life, but, after all, that would be the fairest thing, and insure the best type of man.

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Apart from personal expense, the election expenses of a candidate for the Upper House are fixed at £400, and those of a candidate for the Lower House at £150, while there are strict regulations regarding the manner in which this sum should be spent—viz., in printing, advertising, publishing, issuing, distributing addresses and notices; and on rolls, stationery, messages, postage, and telegrams; on hiring halls and holding public meetings; on the expenses of committee-rooms; on a scrutineer, one only at each booth; and on one agent for any electoral province or district.

Although the power of the Victoria Parliament has necessarily been considerably curtailed since Federation, all matters to do with the internal development of the State are still in its hands; while, apart from Customs and Excise, it retains the power of taxation for State needs and the Public Debt, the State railways, Crown lands, mining and factory legislation; while to the municipalities have now been accorded the Water Supply Trust, the Tramway Trust, and Mining and Land Boards; while the Postal System, all Custom and Excise Duties, and all affairs of Foreign Policy, are under the control of the Upper House.

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Any income over £200 a year is subject to income tax in Victoria, with an exemption of £100 up to £15,000. Incomes derived from personal exertions are taxed 3d. for every pound of the taxable amount up to £300; up to £800, 4d.; up to £1,300, 5d.; and up to £1,800, 6d.; over that, 7d.; the incomes derived from property being taxed at double that amount—the tax-collectors seeming to be possessed of a considerable amount of insight. Certainly no one has ever so much as suggested to me that I should pay an income tax, though I am doubtful as to whether this should be taken as a compliment either to myself or my publishers; while I must confess that I have felt at times rather hurt that no one in authority has credited me with possible brains to the extent of over £200 a year.

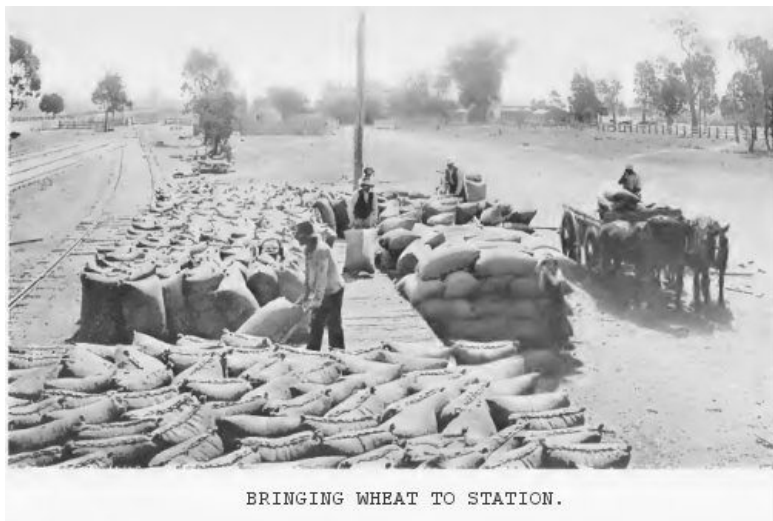
A short study of the Victorian Land Tax seems to give one a singularly vivid picture of the country, being arranged, as it is, on a basis that would be out of the question at home, for the tax is levied, not on the mere size of the property, but on the amount of sheep that it will carry. Land that will carry four sheep or more to the acre is valued at £4 per acre; land carrying one and a half sheep—which half not being specified—£3; one sheep per acre, £2; under one sheep per acre, £1. All estates above 640 acres, and valued, by this means, at over £2,500, are taxed at the rate of 1¼ per cent. upon their capital value, after deducting an exemption for £2,500—exemption only being allowed on one estate for each owner.

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The railways are the property of the State, the first railway-line in Victoria having been opened in 1854. Apart from a few suburban lines, for many years every thought was concentrated on directing the railways towards the mining centres, and very little attention was given to any but the gold producing areas. But gradually, as people began to return to their farms and sheep-runs, and the agricultural possibilities of the State again seemed worth considering, the numbers of railway-lines began to increase, and during the twenty years which followed 1874 no fewer than 2,498 miles of railway were constructed and opened for traffic, since which only 348 miles of line have been added, chiefly in the wheat-growing districts of the North-West.

The whole system of Victorian railways, with its staff of some 13,000 men, is managed under Parliament by three commissioners only—an odd exception to the general overgoverning that occurs in most public affairs.

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BRINGING WHEAT TO STATION.

People are always travelling in Victoria, seldom staying at home for even a single day's holiday, while they think no more of going to Sydney for the inside of a week than the average Londoner would of going to Brighton; and it is amusing to remark that the number of passengers carried over the lines in the year 1908 represented sixty journeys a year for each man, woman, and child in the State—though, of course, there are many people who will take three or four different journeys to separate suburbs in one day, to balance the lonely dwellers in the back blocks who have never been in a train in their lives. Still, the average of 150,000 passengers coming and going at Flinders Street Station alone, in one single day, seems to me a very large one.

For the purpose of administering the Land Act, Victoria—and it must be remembered here that I am speaking of State, and not of Federal, affairs—is divided into seventeen districts, in each of which is a land office and officer. These districts include 3,316,727 acres of pastoral Crown land, exclusive of 6,412,500 acres of Mallee land—the entire Mallee covering 11,000,999 acres. This spare land is graded into first, second, and third class land, auriferous and pastoral land; the greater part of the first-class land, with sheltered valleys, suitable for vineyards and orchards, being in the Buln-Buln area, the soil of which is mostly volcanic, and of a warm chocolate brown.

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A great many of the large estates in Victoria are being subdivided into farms, the squatters being under compulsion to sell a certain proportion of their property. The Land Branch has now acquired forty-nine properties, which it has subdivided into 1,203 farms, and 589 allotments for workmen's houses—the question as to who the workmen are to work for apparently not having been very seriously considered—while shortly the Werribee Park Estate of 23,214 acres will also be available.

One knows, of course, that Victoria must be more thickly populated. But one cannot wonder that squatters whose fathers have acquired vast areas of land, who have built dwelling-houses, fenced and planted, invested money in stock, and, in fact, devoted the whole of their life to the care and the improvement of their properties, should feel aggrieved at seeing them taken away from them, chopped up into small holdings, and allotted to men who have never done anything towards the furtherance of the export and import trade, or the gain and credit of their country. Still far above this, it must be most galling of all to have shipload after shipload of emigrants brought out to occupy land which the squatters feel belongs to them—morally, as well as actually, if land ever did belong to anybody, wrested from the wilds as it has so often been by incredible labour and risk of life.

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Progress seems always to involve a trampling underfoot. It is a Moloch whose chariot-wheels spurt blood at every turn. Many of the Victorian landowners are not only indignant, they are genuinely aghast; heart-sick at the deprivations of the Land Board, their grievance being aggravated by the undoubted fact that there is still a great quantity of land which is literally no man's ground, as far as settlers are concerned. I heard one story of a very well-known family in the Western district, the founders of whom, a Scotchman and his wife and two children, journeyed up from Melbourne by waggon, in the days when the whole country was infested with dangerous blacks, and, finding a pleasant, fertile pastureland in the Western country, with rich volcanic soil, well watered, determined to settle there.

It was necessary, however, for the man to go back to Melbourne for implements, provisions, and stock, and all the other necessities of life. If they all went someone might come and snap up the land; in any case, it would be a long and weary journey with the bullocks, and he could get there more quickly and easily alone on horseback. So the waggon was made into a temporary house, and, with ammunition and food enough to last till her husband's return—which at the quickest would not be before a month were well passed—the woman, an English gentlewoman, with her two tiny children, settled down to hold the land against the possible encroachments of other white settlers; above all, to hold her own life and that of her children against the more than probable onslaught of the blacks, and all the horrors of which they were capable. Some day, for the good of Australia and the Australians, the history of such people ought to be written. Yet it is to land so won and so held that every casual "rouse-about" or street loafer feels that he has a perfect right.

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One can in some ways understand the feeling against large landowners better in England, where space is so limited; where people literally heat into anarchy with being packed so closely together; where land was acquired, for the most part, centuries ago, and the proprietors are nice and clean, alike of blood or sweat. But out here it is different. Old men remember the hand-to-hand fight with the desert; the danger, the almost incredible difficulties of transport; and, above all, the self-sacrifice and privation of the women whose sons now hold the land.



MILKING TIME ON A DAIRY FARM.

It is not the Land Board that one condemns; they are doing what they feel is best for the country, and perhaps will be best for the new settlers, when they have shaken down into their places, though one can but believe that, in the end, the man who is industrious and far-seeing will inevitably acquire more and yet more of the land which the thriftless muddler finds himself unable to manage, when large estates will gather again like snowballs. But it is the average man in the street who talks as if the squatters had done nothing but wallow in luxury for centuries that makes one so mad.

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In many of the dairying districts owners of large estates have voluntarily sub-let a great part of their land, and set up butter factories, to which their tenants bring their milk. In the old days all the butter not required by a farmer's own household would be bartered at the local store for groceries and clothing, the farmers' wives getting a poor return indeed for it during the spring, when it was a drug in the market; and to such as these the central butter factories have proved a veritable boon, adding enormously to their comfort, and minimizing their labour. In some instances the farms are leased, and the tenant pays rent, but in others the landlord stocks the farm and provides all the implements, while the tenant supplies the labour, and proceeds are divided; one great advantage accruing to the small farm being that the factories pay for the milk either weekly or monthly, while the market is absolutely sure. Every day the tenant-farmer drives up with his milk-cart to the factory door; the milk is taken in and weighed; it is then analyzed, and the value, according to the percentage of cream, is credited to his account; while he drives off with the separated milk—due to from the day before for his poddy-calves—all his responsibility as regards the milk being at an end. Do they use the term "poddy-calves" in England? For the life of me, I cannot remember. Anyhow, it means a calf fed on the same system as a modern baby, this bottle-feeding of young calves being a serious item in the manifold work of a dairy farm.

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A Victorian butter factory is a delightful sight. The scrupulous cleanliness, the huge tanks of cream, the vast churns at work, and, above all, the great swiftly-revolving disc of wood upon which the butter is worked. Delicious stuff it is, too, a rich, deep, natural yellow colour, and fresh flavour; infinitely superior to the ordinary home-made product, where the cream is often kept too long, in the effort to collect enough to be worth the churning. Already Victorian butter has reached Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Corea, Arabia, Cape Colony, Natal, Portuguese East Africa, German East Africa, Dutch East Indies, Malay States, Philippines, Reunion, Hawaii, Fiji, and Mauritius—and when I think of the butter we used to have, some ten years ago, when I was in the last-named island, I feel that it and many hundred similar places, have something to thank Australia for. I will not venture to name the country that the tinned abomination, which was sold there under the name of butter, came from, but it was like nothing so much as what the old Oxfordshire ploughmen used to call "dodments," to "sloime with dodments" being, in their vernacular, the equivalent to "greasing a cart-wheel."

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Oddly enough, Victorian farmers do not take kindly to breeding pigs. I believe, if I ever became an agriculturalist, that would be the one line I should take up, though, as far as I know, I never heard of a woman pig-farmer. However, the assertion that Gilbert White makes in his "Natural History of Selborne" that the progeny of one sow amounted to 300 has always fascinated me, and it seems strange that, with the large increase of all other industries in Victoria—particularly of dairy and fruit farms—the number of pigs has actually fallen, though the prices they fetch are higher than they ever were before. Here, at least, should be a chance for the Irish emigrant further than that of "sitting on the gate."

A friend of mine once told me that he was driving through a country district with the parish

priest, when they passed an old Irishman engaged in this historical occupation. The priest, drawing rein, mentioned some wedding, at which he had lately officiated, expressing his regrets that he had been obliged to leave directly the ceremony was over, and inquired of the old man whether they had a good supper, and plenty of fun after it.

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"Sure, yer Reverence," answered Paddy, his face wreathed in smiles—"we did that. And lashins and lavins ther wur. Buther on bacon!" Lashins and lavins! And so there ought to be for the pigs in the dairy districts, judging from the statistics, which assert that the output of separated milk in the State is 1,385,000,000 pounds, leaving sufficient after every calf in Victoria has been fed to produce 40,000,000 pounds of pork. There's "buther on bacon fur yez!"

In the early days, apart from gold, wool was one of the chief productions in Victoria, as in New South Wales. During later years, however, it has been surpassed by the combined industries of dairy produce and grain. Still, there are 14,000,000 sheep in the State, mostly merinoes, producing some of the finest wool in the world, particularly the sheep from the bounteous Western district, where the family of Macarthurs—Captain John Macarthur, nearly a hundred years ago, having introduced the first merino sheep from Spain and Great Britain—still flourish, or did flourish when I was last in that part of the world, before the craze for chopping up estates became the vogue. I remember being shown little samples of wool by an old squatter and told the different sort of sheep from which they were cut, then made to shut my eyes, and learn to name the varieties from the feel alone. I would have made a good wool-sorter, he said; and, honestly, I believe it would be a fine trade for women, with their delicate sense of touch.

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That special station had been magnificently fenced and guarded from the wind by acre upon acre of gum-tree plantations. There had been a great bush fire just before I was last there, which swept for miles across the open country, destroying or injuring many of the old man's treasured plantations, and even scorching the creepers off the solid, square-built stone homestead. Every man, woman, and child on the place had worked like fury to stamp it out, and just saved the home; but, beside the fencing and younger plantations, any number of sheep were destroyed, and, I believe, the wool-shed also. Then, a year or so later, just as the shearing was finished, there came a sudden late spell of hard frost and killed 10,000 of the sheep. So a station-owner's life, even in these days, is not all beer and skittles, as the man at the street corner thinks; and who will make fences and plant trees when the country districts are all a patchwork of small holdings, each owner trying to get a fortune out of his own special little lot? It's a vexed question all round, but somehow it seems there ought to be enough to pay Paul without robbing Peter.

What a dry chapter! The *Bulletin* would say it was written by a "Wowser"—a Wowser being an advocate of everything dry, of temperance and all the virtues, who expresses his opinions in such a manner that the good he advocates appears as offensive as he is himself. The Wowser is quite a common species in Victoria, and has even been known to crop up among the highest dignitaries of the Anglican Church.

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CHAPTER IV

THE WORKING-MAN AND THE WORK-A-DAY WORLD

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THE working-man in Australia is being made a demigod of, with all sorts of frills added, so that the fact of his possessing feet of clay, like the rest of us, may be hidden, even from himself. He does not really care about it all. He wants—if he is a real working-man—to do his job, and smoke his pipe in peace, while all he asks for is fair play, or all he has asked for in the past; because now, like all spoilt children, he has come to a state of mind when he really does not know what he wants. He is like a boy, naturally brim full of the spirit of adventure, of pluck and endurance, who has been kept at home and pampered by an over-fond mother. It is not his fault that he has missed the bracing atmosphere of that greatest of all schools—the adverse world.

The wonder really is that the Australian working-man has kept his head as he has done and gone on with his job at all; that trees are being felled, bricks laid, roads made, and mines worked by these men, who—from the way their supporters talk—ought to be living on the unearned increment of the landowners; ought to be seething in revolt at the inequalities of life, "protesting and demanding," and doing little else, instead of going plodding off to work each morning; with their lunch done up in a red pocket-handkerchief, that might be so much more effectively contrived into a cap of freedom. Luckily, the working-man, for the most part, regards his political supporters as any normal John Bull regards his womenkind. They are all very well in their way, but they are not, for a single moment, to be taken seriously—and so he refuses to be made a fool of. After all, what is there for him to fuss about? Usually he has grandparents, or ancient relatives or friends, who remember what the life of the working-man in England was like in their young days; at the present time he has newspapers, and probably knows as well as you or I do of the number of out-of-works and paupers, and deaths from starvation in England—125 dying from sheer want of food alone in 1909. Of course, he is sometimes out of work himself, and masters are mean, or wages low. I remember one case brought against a manufacturer of food-stuffs—porridge, oats, flour, pickles, etc.—where the awful fact came to light that the wives of some of the employés could not afford to spend more than 5s. a week on meat, this—with the best chops at 5d. per pound, and good joints at 3d. or 4d., and commoner sorts at 2d.—being equal to at

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least 10s. in England, where, in the country districts, meat more than once a week is very rarely seen on a workman's table. Melbourne was terribly shaken over the disclosure; but still the workmen went on working for that particular manufacturer just as they did for any other. There was no bloodshed, no real boycott, no particular agitation—there seldom is among the *bona fide* workpeople; they know when they are well off. It is the agitators who agitate for them, who insist on treating them like *enfants gâtés*.

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After all, even the good things the reformers have procured for the working-men are not good for all. Take as an instance the minimum wage. It is good for the middling worker, for the man who is neither weaker nor stronger, better nor worse, than his fellows. It is not good for the man who is above them, because the universal high rate of pay prevents the employer from being able to raise it in any particularly promising case; already they pay so much that they can do no more. Neither is it good for the old or the feeble, for the pottering odd-jobman who is not up to a regular hard day's work, and yet who could keep himself—at a time when his family are probably out in the world and doing well—by his own small exertions; living on far less than the minimum wage allows, and still feeling he is taking his part independently in the battle of life.

As another instance of the two-sided way things work, take the Trade Boards. There are now fifty-nine special Boards in Melbourne, by which the rates of wages and prices for piece-work are fixed, the average wages since the establishment of these Boards having risen very materially—in the bakers' from £1 12s. 6d. a week to £2 4s. 7d.; in the furniture trade from £1 9s. 1d. to £1 16s. 8d.; in the bootmaking trade from £1 3s. 2d. to £1 16s. 8d., to cite only a few examples. In the face of this it is evident that the workman need not feel disturbed by any fear of being underpaid; the Board connected with his special trade will see to that for him. But, on the other hand, the high rate of wages—which sends out of the country a great quantity of work which might just as well be done in it—makes it possible that, as the population increases, the Australian workmen may be faced by a serious lack of employment, besides raising the cost of some articles very considerably. To take one instance. In 1908 Victoria exported 1,680,294 pounds of frozen beef. I presume all the cattle so used possessed skins—indeed, it was proved by the export of raw hides—and yet the leather imported into the State that same year was valued at £275,291, and the Australian workman pays more for his boots—if they are of leather—than does the English workman.

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Yet, after all, clothing, boots, and house rent are the only things for which the Australian workman has to pay dearly out of his ample wages. Food is quite wonderfully cheap. I remember a restaurant—it was not The Paris nor The Vienna, nor was it situated anywhere in the vicinity of Collins Street—that I used to go to in my drab days. There one could get soup, hot meat with two vegetables—I particularly recollect quite delicious little beefsteak puddings, one served to each customer—a sweet, often apple-tart, or milk-pudding made with egg, a cup of tea, and as much bread as you wanted—all for 6d.! More than that, they would send round to any office or workshop a tray with meat and vegetables—an ample allowance, too—a pot of tea, and a plate of tart or pudding, milk, sugar, and bread, for the same price. Once I breakfasted there on tea and toast—plenty of it, thick and hot, and lots of butter, too—for 3d., a more ample breakfast, with the addition of a plate of porridge and a chop, or bacon and egg, mounting to 6d.

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I remember that breakfast well. It was the day before Christmas Day, and I had gone into town from a suburb, three miles distant, by the first train, at five o'clock, thinking that I might do an article for a local paper on the Christmas show at the Victorian Market. Not that I did any regular journalistic work at that time, but I was like a sparrow; pecking round in the dust for anything I could get hold of. And it was dusty that day, too, even so early in the morning, dense and yellow with dust, and with a scorching north wind blowing. However, I got to town, and then, to save another tram-fare, toiled up the long hill to the market, in the very face of the wind and dust, with clenched teeth and tortured eyes, arriving there only to meet one of the regular staff of the paper for which I intended my article actually coming away! She had stayed with a friend in town, gone to the theatre, sat up all night, talking and tea-drinking, and reached the market soon after three!

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The Melbourne Market is a wonder and a delight at any time, but at Christmas it is glorious. It must be remembered that it is the time of fruit and flowers. There are piles of cherries, early apricots and peaches, bananas, and pineapples and tomatoes, glowing masses of colours; and carnations, and roses, and irises, and the clear blue of cornflowers. There are confectionery stalls heaped high with every sort of cake and pastry. The keeper of one stall, where most delicious gingerbread was sold, told me that she made everything herself and had been at the market three days a week for thirty years. There are stalls of china, hats, dress materials; poultry and fish, dairy produce, pork, bacon, books. There are Chinese gardeners smiling urbanely over their stacks of vegetables; big sun-browned fruit farmers; busy wives with butter and eggs (in large white aprons); and butchers, with their blue coats, selling meat—the best at only 2d. and 2½d. a pound, here in the market—and making a most prodigious noise over it, too. I remember once fancying some brains for breakfast, fried in an outer wrapping of bacon—I knew exactly what they would look and taste like—and the laughter that greeted me when I inquired of the butchers if they had "any brains," and how I laughed, too. When once one is up and out in the fresh air it does not take much to make one laugh at five on a summer's morning.

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There is one dairy-stall at the market that is presided over by five sisters. It is all exquisitely clean, and the butter and eggs, and bacon and sausages, and jars of yellow honey are the very best procurable; while the sisters—as fresh as paint—look delightfully pretty in their large white aprons and over-sleeves. If I was a Victorian up-country farmer, it is to that stall I should go if I

wanted a wife; not to "Holt's," which is quite close by.

"Holt's" is an institution in Melbourne—a matrimonial agency, with a minister of some sect or other always at hand; witnesses, ring, and all, ready for any venturesome couple. In England one is occasionally amused by seeing a matrimonial advertisement in some daily paper, but there are nearly always from six to a dozen a day in the Melbourne papers, and intensely amusing they are. Often, in their way, intensely pathetic too, evidently written, as they are, by up-country settlers, men who need a mate and comrade, and have no possible chance of meeting any unmarried woman in their far-away shanties; and by women who see a hopeless desert of celibacy stretching out in front of them, with no possible prospect of meeting any men outside their own family circle. The odd thing is that it is so often people with money and settled incomes who advertise, apparently as far from meeting, in a natural manner, with anyone on whom to lavish their affections as are the little servant-girls, milliners, and clerks who otherwise patronize "Holt's." I never, as far as I can tell, knew anyone who was married at this popular marriage-shop, but I must have *met* people so united again and again, if the very large percentage of marriages I once heard cited as taking place there is correct.

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The whole matrimonial business is run by Mrs. Holt, though perhaps her husband assists in the part of witness, best man, etc. At one time, however, Holt was a very well-known repoussé metalworker and engraver, and made presentation shields, and cups, and all sorts of imposing things. Once, being most keenly interested in metal-work, which I adopted as a sort of side-issue to my other trades, I ventured into the smug and secretive-looking place—with the very clean and inviting steps, and the magic name over the door—to interview Mr. Holt, and ask if he would give me some lessons. He replied that he had no leisure for teaching; and apparently he was right, for all the time I was talking he kept being repeatedly called out of the room. The door would open a crack, a voice would breathe his name, and with a murmured apology he would rise and slip out. There would be more whispering in the hall; then the sound of a closing door and silence for about ten minutes, during which time I pictured some awful and all too binding rite being practised in another apartment. Then there would be more whispering in the hall; the sound of the front-door furtively closing; and mine host would slip back to me and our dropped conversation, which was engrossing, save for these interruptions, for I found him an enthusiast over his art, and quite willing to give me such information as was possible. All the same, it was somehow uncanny, and I was not sorry to get away, still free and unfettered by any "dark gentleman with means" or "fair young man, of a loving disposition"—a description that many of the would-be bridegrooms indulge in. One breach-of-promise case I remember well—though whether it was the outcome of one of "Holt's" advertisements I do not know—where the romantically minded, would-be suitor described himself as "a young man of military appearance in the millinery business."

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There was once a Melbourne man who—for fear, I suppose, of the torment of jealousy—advertised for the "ugliest woman in Australia" as his wife—got her, too, and has her still, for the gods love beauty.

I seem to have wandered far away from the Victorian Market, but, in truth, it is but a few steps. From two o'clock in the morning of each market-day the carts roll past the very door of the marriage bureau, with sleepy men lolling on the top of their piles of produce, bringing, along with the loud rumblings of heavy wheels, a waft of country scents through the city streets. Till five o'clock the carts arrive in a long procession, the flowers and more fragile sort of fruits last of all, while by then there are others ready to leave, and the retreating tide begins.

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Hundreds of carts and tented waggons wait in the road which divides the two sides of the great roofed-in market-place, many of them with a child or two, or a half-grown lad, placidly asleep on the pile of sacking inside. The noise is indescribable, the crowd is immense. Everyone seems to be eating bananas or sucking oranges; all save the mothers of families, who push their perambulators—laden high with fruit and meat, babies, and vegetables—up and down the narrow alley-ways between the stalls, driving them ruthlessly in upon the legs of the crowd, with a decision which suggests that an army of women with "prams" should be added to the Australian Defence Forces. The large buyers from the shops have usually all finished by six; then come the housewives, and a sprinkling of dainty, delicate-looking maidens, who at first puzzled me, but who, I found later, were mostly tea-room girls, out to buy fruit and flowers to decorate their tables. What fruit, too! Peaches, 2d. a pound; pineapples, 2d. each; oranges, 2d. a dozen; grapes, 1d., 2d., and 3d. a pound; bananas, 2d. a dozen; huge water-melons, with slices cut out of them to show their beautiful pulp, like "the King's daughter, all glorious within."

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In the summer—if one goes early enough—the market is a sheer joy. In the winter it is almost more fascinating as a sight, lit with its flaring petrol torches, but it is not so nice getting there. I remember one cold winter's morning, at five o'clock, half running, shivering, up the long hill in Queen Street, meeting only one policeman, who flashed his lantern at me suspiciously. I even remember what I bought—chops and a bunch of rhubarb, and six eggs, and six pounds of potatoes, and some gingerbread—two large hunks for a penny. I was going to buy butter, but I bought a bunch of early narcissi instead, and ate my bread dry for a week.

Later on the metal-work, which I had discussed with Mr. Holt, came to be the most paying of my many endeavours, and brought me some amusing adventures in my search for a work-shop—after having been politely requested to leave several buildings—where there was nobody to be disturbed by my incessant hammering, the tang, tang, tang being little short of maddening to anyone who was not actually doing it themselves; while, in addition to myself, and the girls whom

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I had taught to help with the more mechanical work, as often as not I had two or three pupils, all plying their iron tools and hammers at once.

After a long search I found a young motor engineer, who was willing to sub-let me a corner of a large upper workshop for the merest trifle; and here I established myself for some six months, till the craze for metal-work slackened. Here also came my pupils with praiseworthy zeal, picking their way daintily over the gritty and littered floor and up the most awful stairs I have ever encountered.

It was a grand place to work in, for we were allowed to use the bellows and blow-pipes for heating our metal and vices for shaping it, all far bigger than I could afford to obtain for myself; besides which we could get any broken tool replaced on the spot. At first the men at the far side of the room could hardly get on with their jobs for watching us. The hammering out of the pattern they could understand—that struck them as a sort of fancy job—but the shaping of the larger pieces of metal, and riveting and brazing seemed, I suppose, quite an extraordinary phase of women's work; however, they soon got quite used to us—though never to the hats and costumes of my pupils—and what a good-tempered crew they were! The place was, at times, frightfully hot, with the sun blazing down through the skylight and the blow-pipes going; but they always seemed to be contented, laughing and joking, and I never heard a word of bad language—not real bad language—all the time I was there.

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These engineers and metal-workers seemed, on the whole, a much more cheerful set than the painters and cabinet-makers. Several times I did jobs for a large drapery and furniture-making establishment, mostly painting white furniture with little garlands and wreaths in Louis Seize style, or cupboards and boxes with pictures from nursery rhymes. I found the cabinet-makers—apart from the carpenters who work in larger and more airy premises—and the French polishers on the whole a rather anæmic and melancholy class of men; though among them, as among all other Australian workmen, I, an alien, and—in their sense of the word—a mere amateur, met with the greatest possible courtesy and kindness, finding them always ready to give me a helping hand, lend me materials, or pass on any small trade secrets that might benefit me; while, somehow or other, someone inevitably conjured up a cup of tea to help me through the long afternoon hours. They did seem long, too, for, though I worked far longer than eight hours a day in my own rooms, at most times twelve, and for one awful week, I remember, fifteen, I went from one thing to another, and moved about directing or teaching, or doing little homely odd jobs in between. Still, I liked the working in the shops or factories best, and certainly all my happiest days in Australia have been spent among other workpeople; while to this special firm—Messrs. Buckley and Nunn—I owe a special tribute of thanks for unflinching fairness and consideration.

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Before the great Women's Exhibition I worked for some time with another firm, who gave me an equally free hand, paying me at the same rate, £1 a day, better than many a really skilful artist in London gets, and enabling me to live in clover while it lasted. Indeed, from only one firm in Melbourne did I meet with anything like unfairness. This was for one of the biggest pieces of decorative work I ever did—a frieze—for which the architect of the building for which it was intended arranged to pay £37, out of which, of course quite unknown to him, I got only £5 for my work, and £1 for the paint.

In the cabinet-making trade, wood carvers and turners get on an average 54s. to 56s. a week, as do all other skilled cabinet-makers. Bricklayers average 10s. a day, and carpenters the same. Unskilled labourers are paid 6s. a day; quarrymen, 45s. to 54s. a week; electric-light fitters, 54s. a week; farriers, 48s.; composers, 56s.; blacksmiths, 54s. to 72s.; smiths, 45s. to 52s.; fitters and turners in engineering works, 60s. to 66s.; nail-makers, 50s. to 70s.—rather different to the 2d. an hour the Lancashire women have been agitating for; but women do not make nails in Melbourne, nor do they make chains—or wear them either.

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It is little wonder that, with wages like these, in a country where food is so cheap as in Victoria—Mr. Coghlan estimates that only 37.5 per cent. of the earnings of the people is spent in food and drink as against 42.2 in Great Britain and 49.1 in Germany—with a climate in which fires are seldom a real necessity, certainly not for more than three months in the year, where the means of transit, of change and amusement are cheap and inexpensive, that the Australian workman, when it is impressed on him that he must show a proper twentieth-century spirit of revolt, is—being by nature a peaceful and good-tempered person—rather puzzled to know where to begin; and this is in spite of the fact that more than twice as much meat is consumed annually per inhabitant in Australia than in England, and more than four times as much as in Germany, and that a meat diet is supposed to give rise to a passion for revolt, crime, murder, and rapine in the heart of any man.

There is, I believe, only one vegetarian restaurant in Melbourne, and that is in the basement of a building in Collins Street, originally intended for a cellar. I would not like to say anything unkind about it or its habitués, but certainly they *do* not look as if they had been grown there; while I certainly prefer the appearance and colouring of the people who—cheerfully and persistently in the face of all food faddists—still consume their three meat meals a day, though there is, of course, moderation in everything.

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There are no workhouses in Australia, and there is no Poor Law; on one side there is the State, and on the other benevolent asylums—the former instituting more or less spasmodic relief works in the time of any great depression; the latter helping lame dogs over stiles when needs be. But, except for the physically and mentally unfit, the Victorian does not need charity; there is nearly always work of some sort for the man who really desires it; while up-country the sun-downer, or

bona fide worker in search for a job, will find "tucker" for the asking at any farm or station. For the people who habitually refuse to work there are the prisons, to which a man or woman may be sent for "possessing no visible means of employment," which is considered paramount to battenning on their fellow-creatures in some fashion or other. Farm colonies for incompetents have long been thought of, and certainly they are a very necessary movement in the face of the large class of men who are willing and able to do a set task, but quite incapable of tackling any job on their own initiative.

There is, of course, the Labour Colony of Leongatha, which, since it was established first, in 1893, has cost the State the large sum of £36,812 15s. 6d. The last four years, however, it has been more nearly self-supporting, under a new system of management, than it ever was before, and hopes are entertained that it may in time become entirely self-supporting. The colonists are instructed in all branches of farm-work, and mostly stay in the colony for some two or three months, after which employment of some sort is found for them. Up to 1907, 7,232 destitute men had been afforded relief—and £36,812 15s. spent on it! No one can say that Victoria shows a mean spirit towards her derelicts, though perhaps she is scarcely so generous toward her ratepayers; but, after all, one colony can scarcely grapple adequately with all the different types for which such places—even if regarded as mere sorting and grading centres—are needed, and Leongatha has suffered—and still suffers—from the indiscriminate types with which it is expected to deal.

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However, the *bona fide* working-man who is out of a job, for any length of time, in Melbourne is very rare; and the other sorts one must class together as more or less invalids, even if only afflicted with the microbe of idleness or incapacity. It is not, then, charity or more work that the artisan or the town labourer wants. Indeed, he wants nothing. Really and truly that is why the strikes here, which are mostly for the bettering of what is already good, lack the passion and sincerity of strikes in England, agitating, as they usually do, for the remedying of what is intolerably bad. In this may be found the reason why Australian strikes are, for the most part, a failure, as were—among others—the railway strike of 1903, the New South Wales Tramways employés' strike, and the great trade strike of 1890.

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In country districts, however, though the wages may be good and the cost of living low, men often exist under conditions compared with which a prison life might be considered gay, and it is to these conditions that the Victorian Government will have to turn its attention more fully if they wish to count on all the emigrants, whom Messrs. M'Kenzie and Mead have been drawing into their net, not only settling upon the land, but writing home such accounts of their life there as may lead more of their fellows, in the Old Country, to follow their example. More irrigation centres, more railways, cheaper freight and railway accommodation for passengers in the far country districts are all needed, and, I believe, for the thinking man or woman, a better sort of encouragement for putting money and labour into the land than that afforded by the mere fact of taking it away from the old settlers and their descendants, who, on the whole, have worked as consistently for it and paid as honestly as any new emigrants are ever likely to do. "They have robbed others that we may have the land," the new-comers might well say. "Let us make haste and get all we possibly can out of it, for what has happened once may happen again."



BUCK-SCRAPING.

Poverty at home is truly terrible, but I doubt if any poverty has ever been as unbearable as the utter loneliness and strangeness of this country and its ways will seem to many a new immigrant—used, as he has been, to the close community of village life—on finding himself twenty or thirty, or even fifty, miles from a doctor, beyond all reach of church or school, facing droughts which descend upon him like the incomprehensible, awful vengeance of some unknown God; day after day of blazing sun, of incredible toil, no leaf or blade of grass even reminding him of home. The best—the very best—the ablest, the strongest, above all, the least imaginative, will fight through; they will grow to love the gum-trees, the sunshine, and the silence of the Bush, but the first few years will prove a hard fight against home-sickness and hopelessness. It is a fight worth waging, a country worth living in. All the same, I only hope that the hundreds of people, the families of 2,206 persons—including 1,591 women and children—concerning whom M'Kenzie and Mead are so jubilant, and over whom the *Argus* has almost shed inky tears of sheer joy—do realize that, if they are to take their intended place on the land, it is to a real fight, and not to beer and skittles

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that they are coming.

Lately one of the members of the Victorian House of Representatives declared that he could, within twenty-four hours, bring to Parliament House a hundred young men—with plant, capital, health, and industry—who for months had been vainly seeking for land on which to establish themselves. In answer to this, two squatters near Camperdown, where the pick of the Western District country is to be seen, have each offered to find good land at a reasonable rental, and under a liberal lease for ten out of these hundred men. They would get entry for fallowing from July to December, 1912, and not be asked to pay any rent till March 1, 1913, when they would have been able to gather in their first crops. Such terms, it has been declared, have been offered for years, and the twenty men are not yet forthcoming, let alone a hundred. It still remains to be seen whether the English and Scotch farmers among the prospective emigrants will take a better advantage of the offer.

I was once talking to an Irishman, who was working on the railway-line out here, about his own country, for which he professed the most passionate affection, bringing tears to my eyes by the description of all the horrors that had attended the eviction of himself, his young wife, and children—the barbarous disregard of sentiment and feeling. “But why?” I exclaimed at last, when I did manage to get in a word—“why? Were you very much behind with your rent?” p. 91

“I was that—sure I’d niver paid it at all, at all, nor me feyther before me.”

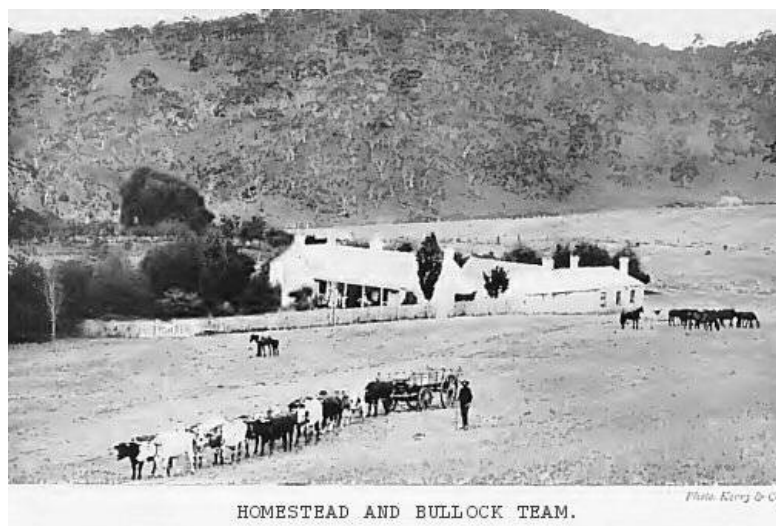
“But if they knew you could not pay?”

“Ach, I could pay fine; but what should I be afther wasting good money paying rint fur? Now, tell me that.”

It sometimes seems to me that many of the would-be farmers, who in Melbourne clamour for land, hold much the same opinions as did that Irishman. Why should they waste good money buying land, or paying “rint” either? though the plea which is put forward is that the settlers want to buy the land, and the squatters—the two Camperdown men among others—wish to merely lease out and not to sell their properties. Perhaps it would be as well in either case to follow the precedent of the pie-man, and insist, as he did—“Show me first your penny”—or, anyhow, show the young men, if not their pennies, before subdividing any more of the large estates; for it may yet happen that Government finds more on its hands than it clearly knows what to do with.

The latest concession which the Government is agitating for on behalf of the working-man is a Compensation Bill, compelling an employer not only to compensate any man injured while at work, but also to provide for him in any disease which he may contract while in his employment. This, like the minimum wage, is a measure which, if carried out, will press heavily on the weak—the very people who, I believe, it honestly hopes to benefit. For the man with a cough, who might develop consumption; for the man who looks as if he might have a weak heart or a weak back, who even appears in any way delicate, it is ruinous; for who would dare take the risk of a responsibility which might run them in hundreds of pounds? The small settler who has heretofore eked out his living by casual work, at a busy season, on some neighbouring station, dairy, or fruit-farm, will suffer too; for who will venture to employ for a few days a man whom in the end they might have to support for life? It is all very well to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, but why skin it first? By the time this appears in print it is more than likely that the proposed Bill will have become law, for many members will vote for it, not because of their convictions, but because, if they stand firm, Federation may intervene with some measure even more stringent. p. 92

The worst part of Federation is that nobody quite realizes its power; it may be merely a semblance of reality, or it may be an ogre. It is like those shadows which lurk in the dark corners of a room, frightening wakeful children; or the genii that Sinbad at first hoisted, with such genial good-will, upon his back.



When I landed for the first time in Australia the relations between the landowners and the

working-people were certainly far happier than they are now. People were proud of the vast estates, as indicative of the size of the country; of the immense flocks of sheep, and the merino wool that nowhere else could be matched for quality and quantity. Certain especially silky wools are procured from sheep in certain parts of the Western District of Victoria, and nowhere else, lambs' wool actually reaching the price of 2s. a pound in Geelong market this last season. It was famous wool such as this, grown largely by the Macarthur and Russell families, which built up the reputation of Victoria far more surely than gold ever did, or pigs or onions ever will. Sheep do not reach to such a pitch of perfection by chance, and the Western District merinoes would scarcely be recognized by their original progenitors, popularly supposed to have emerged from the Ark. Immense sums of money have been spent on importing animals and bringing them to the highest pitch of perfection, and a question that has got to be faced is: Who—when the land is cut up into small holdings—will have either the money or enterprise necessary for importing fresh blood; and how will all the evils of inter-breeding, always such a danger on small farms, be avoided? Even now stud sheep are being sent out of the country, one owner a few months back having shipped off close on a dozen to Natal, feeling, I suppose, that there was nothing more to be made out of valuable sheep in a country which was, bit by bit, being cut away from under his feet.

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“Men are more valuable than sheep,” is the parrot-like cry of politicians—*some* men I would say. In any case, men can live on sheep, and they cannot—unless they are cannibals—live on each other. If the large estates are not put to a proper use, if the sheep and wool they produce are a menace to the credit of the country, or when all the unsettled land is gone, then a reconstruction will become imperative. Meanwhile it is well to remember what has been done with the sheep, and what the sheep have done, and are still doing, for the country.

The original flock of sheep which formed the chief part of the stock owned by the Henty family was formed in Sussex at the end of the eighteenth century, taken out to Jamaica, then, later on, transferred to Portland by Edward Henty. To this flock many of the best of the Victorian sheep owe their origin, merinoes, also originally imported from England, being brought down from New South Wales by Captain Macarthur. In 1836 there were, officially, 41,332 sheep in Victoria—or Port Phillip. By 1842 the number had risen to 1,404,333, from which the number went on increasing by leaps and bounds till, in 1891, it reached 12,692,843, when the run of dry seasons, which lasted till 1901, decreased the flock to 10,841,790. The enormous rate at which the value of the export of wool increased may be gathered from the fact that between the years 1837—the year following the settlement of the Henty family in Portland—and 1840, five years after Faulkner's settlement on the bank of the Yarra, and six years before the recognition of Victoria as a separate colony—this value rose from £11,639 to £67,902. In but one more year it leapt up to £85,735; while in 1908-09 the total value of the wool-clip in Victoria, with wool stripped from Victorian skins and exported on skins, has been estimated at £3,556,168, the weight of wool from the Western District sheep alone weighing 27,708,920 pounds.

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The first live stock landed by Captain Phillips in Australia, in 1788, comprised 7 horses, 6 cattle, 29 sheep, 12 pigs, and a few goats.

Four months later the live stock in the colony were estimated, in a letter from Captain Phillips to Lord Sydney, Secretary of State for the Colonies, as follows:—“7 horses, 7 cattle, 29 sheep, 74 pigs, 18 turkeys, 29 geese, 35 ducks, 205 fowls, and 5 *rabbits*”—so that Mr. Austin was not the first, or the only, culprit in respect to Master Bunny.

In 1908 there were, roughly speaking, 87,043,266 sheep in this colony, the result of breeding and importation from the old country, from India, and the Cape, the sheep in the six years from 1902 to 1908 having increased by 33,374,919; while the value of the wool exported from the entire colony in 1908 was £22,914,236. In the face of these figures and the well-known fact that the number of sheep in all other countries is diminishing, it does seem rather like killing the goose with the golden egg to prohibit big estates, which, after all, are the only estates possible for pastoral success. As long as there is plenty of land still vacant and the output of wool is not only a great source of wealth, but also a credit to the country, it seems a mistake to financially cripple, beyond all hope, the people who produce it; while the fact that many of the large estates have been on the market more than once and found no purchaser, seems to have escaped the notice of Mr. Fisher when he so light-heartedly sent the maximum rate careering upwards. It seems, indeed, like trying to hang a man who has already been beheaded to take away all the land that is worth anything and impose the heaviest possible tax on that which is worthless.

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As yet no one seems to know whether the Federal Parliament is or is not within its rights in levying any such tax at all. However, if their action is proved unconstitutional, the landowners will not be very much better off, as the State Parliament will be only too ready to impose a progressive tax on their own account. Still, they should certainly be able to show a trifle more discrimination than is possible for the Federal Government, while there is some hope that they may differentiate between the man who owns a vast stretch of land, far from any railway or town, and only possible for pastoral purposes, and the man with a small, compact estate, with rich soil, well watered, and capable of the closest cultivation; while something might be done to compensate individuals and companies “away out back” for the disadvantages under which they will labour in competing with the lease-holders of Crown lands, who will have no tax whatever to meet.

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There is an idea in England, among the people who do not know much—and these are always the readiest to express their opinion—that the squatter simply sat down on a piece of land and raked

in just as much as he could get from the surrounding country, mile upon mile upon mile of it; riding round, killing off horse after horse in the process, sticking up a post here and a post there, and asserting:—"All this is mine"; straddling over the land, with his long legs, and his top-boots, and his picturesque slouch hat, striking his breast, just like a man in a play, and reiterating, "Mine, mine!"

But it was not like that at all. It was blood, and sweat, and sheer endeavour, and hard cash. For one must remember that the men who hold the large estates are not the same men who ran up a fortune in a year on the gold-fields.

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The land was paid for—and to the Crown, too—up to as much as 20s. and 25s. an acre. Yet, as Sir Henry Wrixon says during his report on the Federal Land Tax in the *Argus* of August 20, 1910, the present Government, in its desire to still have the cake its predecessors have eaten, would say to the landowners: "True, we have sold you this land and have got your money; indeed, in some cases we urged you to buy at more than its real value, in order to facilitate your plans for land settlement. But now we have altered our views; we want no large purchasers or holders of land. Clear out, you miscreants. Tremble before the vengeance of a triumphant democracy."

It may be political, but is it—to put it in a characteristically Australian term—"is it cricket?" and is it sense? And is it the sort of behaviour that is likely to tempt new settlers with means to invest their money in Australian land?

At a public meeting lately Mr. Fisher assured a delegation of mercantile men that they might always rely on him in commercial matters. But Mr. Fisher, in as far as he counts—that is, politically—is not immortal, and his successor may in his turn "barrack," to use another popular expression, altogether for the landowners; while the mercantile class may in their turn go to the wall with one single twist of the kaleidoscope.

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If such a tax as is now determined on was not retrospective there would not be much to complain of. If it was even decreed that it would be regarded as a capital crime in the future to acquire any land over 5,000 acres in extent, that might be fair. But to sell a man anything, then count it a crime that he should possess it—well, it seems, to say the least of it, a peculiarly feminine way of looking at things. And I cannot help wondering if Mr. Fisher was going to try on a new suit, or buy a new hat, or anything else really important, when he lately dismissed the deputation of prominent pastoralists—headed by Mr. J. A. Campbell, President of the Pastoral Union of Southern Riverina—who sought to lay their side of the question before him, after twenty-five minutes, with the airy remark that:—"Doubtless we are all of us desirous of going somewhere else this morning." And this to men whose homes and families, whose whole means of life, and pride of life, depended on such a twenty-five minutes!

It is true that Mr. Fisher promised to consider the new facts brought before his notice by the deputation. Still, it is not generally considered quite the best thing to mix a cake after it is baked. In our old nursery days we were inoculated with the saying that "It is better to be sure than sorry"; and it is an odd feature of the political affairs of this country that, while all discussion is perfectly free, and praise, criticism, and condemnation equally open to all, great questions are still settled and great measures passed with hardly any discussion at all, or even thought.

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From the beginning that part of the new land tax which has been most carefully impressed upon the people is that, while they will all benefit from it, only some 6 or 10 per cent. will be called upon to pay it. This all the electors completely understand, as they naturally would anything that has been so carefully explained.

What has not been so clearly put before the people is the question as to whether the small farmers—who are to occupy the improved holdings on the alienated land, 200 acres or so—and who will be straining every nerve to meet the half-yearly payments, all the immigrants and townspeople will, in the future, be as beneficial to the working-man—whom the tax is supposed to benefit, who in any case has the pleasure of seeing others squirm beneath its weight—as the large landowners have been in the past. After all, these landowners have not stood alone. They have employed an enormous number of men, in an enormous number of ways, from the shearers who clip their sheep to the stevedores who ship their wool, the people who transfer it by railway or bullock waggon, the people who buy it—English, French, and Flemish wool-buyers, who live in Melbourne for two or three months each year, and spend money there; the tradespeople, servants, and artisans.

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A big station is like a camp of soldiers; the store-room alone would amaze any English housekeeper, resembling, as it does, a shop, stocked with all the necessities of life in immense quantities. There have been an enormous number of people employed in Australia in growing, making, and packing most of these supplies; and the revenue has been swelled by the importation of the rest. In the shearing season the place is like a hive, and the whole country is alive with men flocking from one station to another, and carts and waggons with supplies—relatively alive, of course, for in these vast distances an army would have as little effect as a swarm of ants. Still, the big stations are the arteries of the back blocks, keeping vital tracts of country which, except for them and except for the sheep which find a living there, would lie uncared for and untouched.

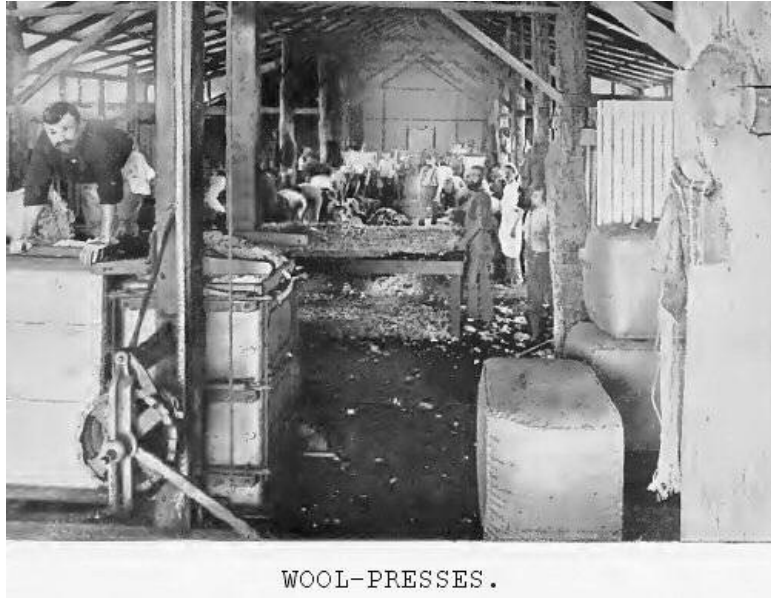
The small cockies do most of their shearing themselves, all the family being called upon to help: the girls in carrying away the fleeces, and even clipping the belly-wool for their brothers; while

sundry neighbours will drop in to give a hand, the wool-shed usually consisting of an extempore tent or canopy of hessian.

In other places the cockies shear in a neighbouring squatter's wool-shed, after his flocks are finished with, keeping on some of the regular shearers if the wool-clip seems large enough to warrant it; while from many small selections all the men go off at shearing-time to make a bit of extra money on the neighbouring stations. It is upon co-operation such as this, both in the matter of wool-sheds, shearers, and stud rams, that—if all the large estates are to be cut up—the small selectors will have to depend in the future; unless the sheep is completely "taboo," though the enormous tracts of country which are necessary to support the flocks will prevent this pastoral co-operation ever being so successful as in the matter of central butter, cheese, and bacon factories.

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Hand-shears have been so completely replaced with machinery nowadays that only a minority of the younger men can clip by hand at all, and are often completely at a loss in the smaller flocks, where there are no machines in use.



A big shearing-shed is a tremendously inspiring sight, as every place is—even a match factory—where work is being done quickly and well. But, apart from this, there are the various marked characteristics of the men, the play of muscle in the sunburnt arms and necks, and the colour of the weather-worn clothes, the shimmer of heat and dust, and the silky gleam of the wool as it falls upon the boards, swathe upon swathe of it, exquisitely creamy-tinted and fine, the product of intensest care and cultivation, the result of breeding being shown in the fact that fifty years ago a fleece from a full-grown sheep averaged 3 to 4 pounds, whereas now it averages 8 or 9, from some flocks even 15, pounds.

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The shearers live—that is, sleep and eat—in what is known as "the hut," a long narrow structure with bunks at either side, in two tiers, each bunk just long enough to hold a man. The table, which runs pretty well the whole length of the hut, is made of sheet-iron tacked on to a rough frame, with benches at either side, and there is little else, save the atmosphere, which is thick and portentous, an intermingling of tobacco, wool, beer, spirits, clothes, boots, blankets, and men.

The better sort of shearers declare that the noise and the stench, the constant fidgeting and stirring all night, the snoring, coughing, spitting, and swearing, make it impossible for anyone to get a decent night's sleep in these huts, and many pitch a tent for themselves and a pal, or build a mia-mia of boughs as far from the rest of their companions as possible.

The shearers have one chronic grievance, and that is the food and the cook. They have another constantly recurring grievance, and that is wet sheep, over which they are in a perpetual state of insurrection; and little wonder, considering that the labour and the menace to health incurred in shearing wet sheep is hardly to be overestimated. No squatter can make his men shear wet sheep since the formation of the "Shearers' Union," and rightly enough too, though he is bound to pay them all the time that they are in the sheds waiting for the sheep to dry. A really wet sheep can be picked out in a moment by the lank, dark look of the wool; but when the wetness is not so distinctly shown, the question between the shearers and the squatter—who naturally wants to get his sheep finished—becomes a vexed one. Often, too, the back is quite dry, while the neck and belly of the sheep is wringing wet; while the argument so often used in courts of law that no rain has fallen for weeks is absolutely futile. Anyone who is used to shearing in Australia is not likely to doubt the Scriptural story of the wet fleece, whether it was on the sheep's back or off it, for the yoke of the wool will absorb moisture to any extent from fog, dew, or even from an atmosphere that is not palpably the least damp.

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Harry Lawson has drawn us some grim pictures of life in the back blocks. It is often bad enough for the large landowner and his womenkind. But they have books, and papers, and motors—which have revolutionized country life in Australia more than anything else. They can take

occasional runs up to town, and have friends to stay with them, so that existence becomes endurable in a way that it never could become to the small settlers, and it seems to me that before such people are uprooted it would be well to face clearly the question as to whether those who replace them will ever be able, or willing, to endure the life which they must face—conditions which will appear far more appalling to strangers than to people who have been bred and born in the country, and who possess, as all Australians seem to do, the most amazing powers of rebound. “John Barleycorn got up again and sore surprised them all” might be said of many a man and many a district in Australia. One of the most extraordinary things about the people being that they will live in absolute loneliness, facing drought, heat, and loss, toiling incredibly to get their stock fed and watered, watching them die day after day during a bad season; and then, when good times come, start again at the very beginning, with as gay a spirit as ever, absolutely unembittered by all the hardships through which they have passed.

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Usually the spring might be expected, in its rebound, to fly too far in the opposite direction; but, oddly enough, men who have hardly seen a woman, or sat down to a decent meal for months; or known what it was to have a moment's relaxation, or pleasure, or sport, will come up to Melbourne and enjoy themselves in as well-ordered a fashion as though they had been living in the very lap of civilization and luxury. In most countries where men had lived as these men had lived, there would be the wildest orgies and excesses, and all sorts of tragedies to follow; but the Australian possesses more than his share of “horse sense”—he also possesses a sense of humour which is mainly, I believe, the greatest reason for his not making a fool of himself.

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Of course, men still go “on the bust,” cheques are planked down, and “shouting”—the Australian equivalent for “treating”—indulged in till all the money is finished. But, even so, the men are good-tempered, and it is not a case of shooting everyone who does not happen to be as thirsty as they are; while on the Australian gold-fields, from the very beginning, the record of crime and lawlessness has been far less than in other countries. I remember one story which shows the inspiring joy—even in anticipation—of planking down a cheque that strikes me as delightfully characteristic. A new-chum arrived at a shearing-shed and asked his way to a township some thirty miles distant. None of the men were able themselves to direct him, as they, too, were new to that district, but referred him to the cook, who, they declared, had been there. “Why, yes,” acknowledged that worthy when appealed to; “I've been there right enough; but I'm blessed if I remember the road. Ye see, mister, it was like this: I wur only along that way once, an' I wur goin' ter cash a cheque.”

An old book by an early Australian settler tells another characteristic story. A clergyman arrived at a far-away station at shearing-time, and was put up there for a few days, which happened to include a Sunday, when he expressed himself very desirous of holding a service for the shearers. As one may imagine, his host was rather torn in two between his desire to please his guest and not set all his men's backs up. Anyhow, on Sunday morning he proposed riding on to the woolshed—three miles' distance—in advance, and preparing the congregation. As he expected, none of the men had a moment of time to spare; there were shears to sharpen, clothes to wash and mend; one man declared he was a Catholic, and had never been inside a church in his life; and the cook and his boy had dinner to prepare for thirty men.

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Then the boss changed his tone, and declared: “Every man who attends the service in the woolshed in half an hour's time, and behaves himself in an orderly and respectful manner, shall have a glass of rum served out to him after the service.”

It was the greatest success. The men—as such men will—played fair; and years after that very clergyman, then become a high dignitary of the Church, described in a book on the Colonies the picturesque incident: the service in the woolshed, with the wool-press as a pulpit, and the absorbed congregation of shearers and washers.

On another occasion it struck a visiting clergyman, who was merely travelling through the country, that there must be an enormous number of children who had never been baptized. As it was a slack season, he somehow inveigled the squatter at whose homestead he was staying to start out with him on a sort of camping expedition, during which they rode close on a hundred miles, meeting with several families of shepherds, whose children they baptized, often to the great indignation of the parents, who imagined some slur was thereby cast on the management of their progeny. One matron, however, declared that she was quite willing that her brood should be christened if only they could be caught. They were as wild as kangaroos, and as they had bolted into the scrub at the first sight of strange faces, the only thing possible was to ride them down and literally drag them by force into the Church's fold. The highly amused squatter officiated at this ceremony both as godfather and godmother, and, I presume, whipper-in, though he declared himself as thankful never to have met any of his god-children in after-years.

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The Australians, up to this day—though they are as good as most, and better than many—do not trouble themselves overmuch about the forms of religion, while just the same strenuous efforts are still made to gather wandering sheep more securely into the fold. Some years ago Parliament actually dared to attempt to interfere with the people's Sunday, and an Act was passed which stopped all local and excursion trains running on Sunday mornings. Needless to say this law was short-lived, and endured, I forget exactly for how long, but certainly only a month or two. At the present time there is no Sunday post, and no second delivery of milk; but these regulations stand more for the benefit of the workpeople than the Church, I believe; while now the Postmaster-General is absolving all men in his department from Sunday labour who can plead “conscientious objections.” I believe that inquiries as to how these objectors spend their Sundays have been set

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on foot, with the result that fishing, cricket, and billiards have been found to rank highest in their esteem. Apparently it has not occurred to the Postmaster to try rum, as the more man-wise squatter did.

Oddly enough, even the Boer War has not diffused an idea, which is very general, that the Australian working-man is divided into two types—the luxurious, lazy, arrogant holiday-maker and the rollicking cow-boy sort of person. For myself, I should say that the town man, artisan or labourer, is much the same as in any other country, with the added—but quite unimportant—defects and virtues of his time and place. He is more cocksure, but he is also more self-respecting, than the labourer at home. He works less uninterruptedly, but he works harder while he is at it, though with less appearance of sweat and fever, merely because he is better fed, and all the conditions of his life are more wholesome, while his hours are shorter; but otherwise he is much the same as elsewhere.

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In the country districts the difference is far more pronounced. “Away back” the shepherd and cattle-man is more ignorant than most of his fellows at home, but he is more resourceful; he has more spirit and more pluck. If the country is not new to him, it was new to his father or grandfather, and it needed all their power of resource and adaptability to get on in it.

I have said that the schoolmaster and schoolmarm in the back blocks face difficulties and meet with conditions almost incredible to their fellow men and women at home. The distance makes the outlook larger. An afternoon visit becomes a long day’s journey, an adventure, an undertaking. The Bush parson and the Bush doctor live a life completely different from the life of a country parish. The very fact of being so constantly on horseback, as they are, makes a difference. The many hours of open air, of sunshine and storm that are involved when they go to visit a patient or christen a baby—it all makes a difference, and a wholesome one too.

Then the postman; think of the country postman at home! His leisurely ways, his thick boots, his slow, steady progress, his many pauses for gossip and refreshment, all dignified by a sort of consideration which the other yokels show him as a servant of the King. Then think of the mailmen in Australia, of their dependence on their maps, and their knowledge of the country, the danger they are in from thirst, from privation, from the chance of being bushed, and from blacks—not, perhaps, in Victoria so much now, but certainly up North, which very fairly represents many other places as they were fifty or sixty years ago.

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Only last year a mailman missed his way up by the Archer River, and turned up, nearly a week later, 120 miles farther south than he should have been, having gone right round Coen, for which he was bound, without striking his track. Again, quite lately another mailman in the same district was lost for fourteen days, having travelled round and round in a circle. When the police found him he was delirious, and fought them wildly, thinking they meant to murder him and steal the mailbag, which he had stuck to through all his suffering.

Coen, which is in Queensland, on the Cape York Peninsula, is indeed a place of tragedies. Another young mailman on the same track disappeared, and when his forsaken camp was discovered at the foot of Marsley’s Spur, a note was found pinned to the bag. “Please do not touch the mails; am away horse-hunting.” But though this man’s tracks were followed for miles, no trace of his body was ever found. One mailman, worn out by despair and long, dry stages, shot himself when within actual sight of Coen Post Office; while another was drowned while attempting to cross the Archer. In a district such as this even the arrival of a bill by post would cease to be a commonplace and inevitable event, the wonder being that it should arrive at all.

p. 112

One often sees little boxes in the country places nailed to some tree on the road. It is there that the letters for the settlers, squatters, and cockies are left by the mailmen; while it is generally one of the duties of the daughter of the house to ride for the mail once, or perhaps twice, a week, twenty miles or so to where the precious documents have been dropped into the private box.

Another thing besides pluck and resource that the way-back districts breed is the true spirit of friendship. The first time I went up-country in Australia I travelled by night, arriving at my destination soon after four in the morning, and such a morning as I believe only an Australian spring can show: cool and fragrant, though it was at the height of a great drought, and enveloped in a haze of wonderful blue.

In spite of the beauty of the morning I must say I was feeling rather miserable and forsaken, and in doubt as to what was going to happen next, when I climbed wearily out of the train and saw no one I knew on the platform; and little wonder, I thought, considering the hour. However, my anxiety did not last long, for two young girls in fresh white dresses claimed me, explaining that they had promised my friends to come and meet me, and take me to their house, where I could have breakfast, and rest till later in the day, when I should be fetched.

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That was my first introduction to a sulky, I remember. I and one of the girls packed into the odd little vehicle, and the other girl ran behind through the still sleeping township. There were a lot of streets, all with very imposing names at the corners on large name-boards, but we did not take much notice of them—indeed, there was nothing beyond the names to distinguish them from the open spaces of spare ground, between the little tin-roofed houses, across which we and the sulky and the running girl cut at a hard gallop.

When I arrived there was a room ready for me and a hot bath, the girls themselves having started the bath-heater before they came to the station; and a fire of logs—a welcome sight, for there was a nip of frost in the air—and tea and thin bread-and-butter, and a nightdress ready aired, so

that I need not trouble to unpack. Of all the warm-hearted kindnesses I have ever met with in this country, this preparation for the coming of a woman who was an absolute stranger—simply the friend of another friend, herself a new-chum—lingers in my mind as one of the kindest. To this moment I remember vividly the feeling of exquisite comfort with which I snuggled my tired limbs in among the bedclothes, after my bath, and lay there, with the blinds down, sipping tea in the dancing firelight.

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It is odd how often one can do with, and delight in, a fire in one's bedroom out here; but days which have been blazing hot are apt to end with a cold night, and then the wood fires are so tempting, so cheerful and companionable. I recollect once staying a night with some friends on Mount Macedon, where the sitting-room boasted a really huge open fireplace, in which burnt an immense log, part of the trunk of a tree, banked up with smaller pieces. This monster burnt steadily all day till about eleven o'clock at night, by which time the middle of it had become a glowing mass of crimson, that finally broke, with a soft crash, a flare of sparks, and thick fall of silver-grey ash. It is a sound one grows after a time to listen for and love, this breaking of the burnt-through logs. Once up-country I was lodging in a little wooden shanty, through the cracks of which I could see the stars as I lay in bed. The nights were very cold, and I used to make up a good fire the last thing—the fireplace and chimney being the only part of the house built of bricks—to be regularly awakened after some hours by the soft crash of falling logs. Yet, though the nights were cold, the days were such a blaze of golden sunshine that my sheets—there were only one pair for each bed—used to be taken off, washed and dried, and aired in the sun, and put back again the same morning.

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But it is not only among the well-to-do people that the spirit of comradeship shows itself, as it did to me that first morning up in the back blocks—it is everywhere among all classes. People have done surprising things for me—people to whom I was a complete stranger—while among themselves, from squatters to swaggies, though they do not write essays on friendship, they will hold by a mate through good and ill—and most of all through ill.

One instance, which, though it belongs to New South Wales, is so typical of this that I cannot resist quoting it, was lately cited in the *Sydney Bulletin*, which says:

“The Outback can still breed some true mates. One of them was heard of at Parkes (N.S.W.) the other day. With another man—a good deal older than himself—he had tramped into Forbes looking for work. On the way the older man's boots gave out, so the mate bought him a pair, and then had only a few shillings left. They didn't get the work they were after, so they decided to give their feet a rest and take the rail to Parkes. The older man's fare was fixed up all right, but the young one quietly took a ticket as far as his money would stretch, and then, with a breezy: ‘So long!’ he got out and walked. The older man rode on; but bad luck had got him down, and when his mate turned up at Parkes he was a corpse. The coroner's court said it was suicide on the part of one, and mighty fine and generous behaviour on the part of the other; and witnesses and others insisted on dropping their fees and some odd coins into the white man's empty hat.”

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CHAPTER V

THE WORKING-WOMEN OF MELBOURNE, AND IN PARTICULAR THE CHAR-LADY

p. 117

VERY few people of any social standing beyond a few college professors and doctors actually live in Melbourne. But, still, it is thickly inhabited, and has a curious sublife of its own, quite distinct from that of the people who flock to it during business hours; returning again to their suburbs between five and six, only to reappear later, like flashing meteors, on their way to the theatre and supper at The Vienna or Paris Café. The professors congregate for the most part round the University, and the doctors up at the east end of Collins Street, where one would imagine there must be at least one doctor to every five people in the town. But beyond these there are the upper parts of shops, where the tradesmen who cannot yet afford a villa in suburbia live; and dingy, narrow streets, with little huddled homes where the workpeople dwell, and out of which issue on Sundays and high days the most resplendently attired young women that you could possibly imagine; while, besides these, there are huge blocks of buildings known as “Chambers,” the inhabitants of which are less easy to place—and what a hotch-potch they do present in all faith, kept ever a-simmer by a flame of gossip.

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Rooms in these places are all prices, all sizes, all degrees of comfort or dinginess. Melbourne Mansions head the list; but these are really flats, beautifully appointed and proportionally dear. The drop from them is sudden indeed, chiefly marked by the washing accommodation. In Melbourne Mansions each suite, even if it consists of but two rooms, has its own bathroom attached. But the next step down in price gives two bathrooms, with hot water laid on, between the inhabitants of each floor, one floor for men, the next for women, and so on. Thus, if you live on the landing where the men's bathroom is, and you happen to be a woman, you must walk the length of a long passage, and upstairs in your dressing-gown before you can reach your morning tub. It is all very well if you are early, before anyone else is about, but if you are late, you meet all the men coming out of their rooms on their way to work. Another drawback being that you more than occasionally forget to take your latchkey with you, and do not realize your fatal error

till you return from your ablutions, when you alternately cower against your lintel and make wild dashes to the lift: entreating the lift-man to send the caretaker with his duplicate key, so that you may gain the shelter of your own apartment.

There is a rule that no one shall wash clothes in these baths, but everybody does; and when I used to hear the tap running furiously, and someone singing loudly behind the locked door, it needed no particular penetration to guess that it was all done with the idea of muffling the sound of scrubbing and rinsing. Considering the incomes of the people who lived in these chambers, and the exorbitant prices charged by laundresses; also the fact that many of the tenants have only one room, and have to carry both clean and dirty water up and down stairs, this washing habit cannot be wondered at; and only when people, quite beyond the pale, wash their saucepans and frying-pans in the same manner do any but the most inveterate grumblers register a serious complaint. Though I must say a great deal of sound and fury always rages round the bathrooms; one great scandal I remember being started by a lady whose husband had seen another lady going to the bath in her *robe de nuit* alone.

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These particular chambers, or rather the entrance passages and stairs, are kept beautifully clean by a small army of men and char-ladies; as for the rooms—well, they vary; though it seems that the smarter the ladies are who come out of them the less savoury is any glance or whiff that one catches through the open door. But these are mostly comparative idlers: those people who never do have time for anything. No praise that I can give would be too high for the *bona-fide* working or business girls, who form a large percentage of the inhabitants of these places, the way they toil to keep themselves and their belongings dainty and fresh, and their unbounded goodness to any fellow in distress; their cheeriness and gallant efforts to keep up appearances, being beyond words.

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There are telephone-girls, typewriting-girls, shop-girls, tea-room girls, University students, art students, dressmakers, and milliners. For the most part they live in one room, that presents on the whole a very cheerful appearance, with disguised packing-cases masquerading as cupboards—in which all the toilet paraphernalia is poked away—pegs with a curtain over them for a wardrobe, a basket and deck-chair or so, and a trestle-bed, which during the day does duty for a couch. These rooms are often no bigger than a medium-sized bathroom, but the girls entertain there; their men friends come to supper, and they make coffee over the little gas-ring, or primus, and cut anchovy sandwiches, and have a very cheerful time—washing up the cups in the bathroom at dead of night when it is all over. There is much gaiety and good-comradeship, and a little too much noise, perhaps. But if you are young, and have been tapping a typewriter all the day and answering your snappy employer in respectful monosyllables only, it is good, no doubt, to feel you are still a woman; and there *are* men in the world who like to talk to you, and *would* like to make love to you; cannot bear your soiling your hands over the kerosene stove; and are really disturbed because you look tired. After a long day's grind to have a hot bath, which makes you feel as good as anyone; and brush your hair till it shines, Melbourne girls are veritable artists in hairdressing, marvellous when one thinks of the size of the looking-glasses; then to put on your best Jap silk blouse—at one and four-three a yard—made by yourself, aye, and washed and ironed again and again by yourself, and arrange your threepenny bunch of flowers in the vases, and turn the cushions to the clean side. Then "play at ladies," waiting for your guests to arrive, life is really very pleasant, and the next day's work seems far away; besides, anything may happen before that, for the life even of the most ordinary girl is full of infinite possibilities. Though if the expected visitors do not turn up, and send a wire or a note at the last moment, it is little short of killing; while the sight of the anchovy sandwiches—all curled up—which you try to eat for breakfast, in the cold dawn of the next day, because you simply cannot afford to waste them, seems the last straw.

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These girls work incredibly hard, and live the straightest, simplest of lives, every day of which is a series of petty privations and self-denial, in spite of small pleasures. That some gayer damsels do have rooms in these buildings merely for the sake of the liberty it allows them, and use it, too, to its full extent, has, on the whole, given them rather a bad name. But this is grossly unjust to the greater number of the residents, who live there for the very good reason that they would rather have the tiniest room of their own, and "leave off work to carry bricks," than herd with a lot of others in a boarding-house, at the mercy of a landlady. They rise very early—one kind-hearted music-teacher used to bring me a cup of tea in bed nearly every morning at six—and though I always turned out myself at half-past, I was never by any means first. The girls get their own breakfast—and along every corridor one hears the whirr of primus stoves; and smells, and breathes in, an atmosphere of kerosene, sausages and bacon; coffee is generally kept for evening parties, tea being both cheaper and more easily made. For the most part business girls have their lunch out, or take it with them—generally the all-ubiquitous scones and tea; but when they come back from work they get their own evening meal, and then the roaring of the primus starts afresh.

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At midday on Saturday they flock home and start to turn out their rooms, and wash, and dust, and sweep, while whole stories may be read in the little odds and ends of furniture which take an airing in the passage while the cleaning goes on. Then, as often as not, they do their week's washing, no inconsiderable task in the hot weather, when print dresses and blouses are worn. Still, they get through their work quickly enough—for the Melbourne girls are fine workers, sharp and decisive in all they do—hang their clothes on lines across their room, then dress and go out for the rest of the afternoon, with some friend, often ending with an evening at the theatre; for, though they work hard enough, goodness knows, yet they enjoy life on the whole.

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There are sweethearts, or "boys," as they are always called, in plenty; and cottons and muslins are cheap; and the beach, with all the gaiety of bands and sideshows and bathing, to be reached for the small sum of threepence.

Then on Sunday mornings there is profound peace hanging over the building till well over nine o'clock, when the primus smell begins to be replaced by a distinct odour of ironing proceeding from every girl's room for about an hour before she starts off—with flying white veil, crisp muslin skirts and blouse, long white washing gloves and beflowered hat—for a day by the sea or in the country with her "boy," and another girl and her "boy"—the usual quartette. No wonder that these girls are more fearless-looking, healthier, brighter, and less neurotic than their fellows at home; for, apart from the greater facilities for fresh air and cheap, healthy amusements which they enjoy, they are better paid, a typist with a machine of her own getting half a crown a thousand words; while, if she is any good, she can always demand £2 a week in an office, with extra pay for overtime. The same thing holds good in every branch of women's work, the domestic servants demanding, and getting, higher and higher wages every year.

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In Melbourne it is no good trying to get a servant by merely stating your requirements at a registry-office, and asking that a likely girl should be sent out to see you. On the contrary, it is the mistresses who line the waiting-rooms at the offices. They come early and stay late, often bringing books with them, and only slipping out for a hurried meal when they are quite certain that every possible domestic is comfortably enjoying her dinner at home, or in some restaurant. If it is very hot or wet, no maids turn up at all, though the ladies still flock to town by each early tram and train; a wistful-eyed and weary host, so evidently bent on that all-absorbing quest that one gets after a time to recognize them at first glance as servant-hunters. When a smiling and self-satisfied young woman is brought into the room by the harassed person who runs the office, and introduced to some eager mistress, all the other ladies glare at the possibly successful candidate for the girl's favour, and meanwhile smile at her in the most beckoning and easy-going way; though even when she has thrown the glove, so to speak, they all know that she will not have the faintest compunction in breaking her agreement. These are a few of the questions a mistress may have put to her:—Does she keep a piano for the maids? If not, are they allowed to practise in the drawing-room? Are there any children?—an unforgivable sin in the eyes of a Melbourne domestic; as one hopeless lady said to me, after many days of weary waiting:—"They expect us to put out the work and kill our children." Is she allowed every evening out, and half a day a week, and a whole day a month, and every Sunday? And is she expected to wear a cap?

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For the most part even the best of them refuse to call you "ma'am." It is, "Hey, you there," if they wish to attract your attention, and "All right" in response to any order. A little less in the rough, and they repeat your name every moment, till you are sick of the very sound of it. One woman I know, who remonstrated with her maid on the constant reiteration of "Mrs. —" was met with the response that if she was Mrs. — she ought not to mind being called so, and if she was not, she ought to be ashamed of herself!

But I have strayed far from the subject of the chambers and their inhabitants, of which, indeed, a whole book might be written. One sees the cheery, independent-looking girls walking, with that characteristic swing of the hips, along the passages, or hurrying to their work through the sunny streets; but this is all the brightest side of the picture, to which there is, as in all pictures true to life, a reverse side. Even here there are not always billets to go round; a girl may lose her situation, and not get another at once, and then the primus roars less frequently, and there is no odour of bacon or sausages mingled with the kerosene. The door is kept jealously closed. Sometimes the men from the shops which let out furniture on the hire system come and fetch it away. The inhabitant of the room tells you jauntily that she is moving, and that it is not worth while carting furniture about; but she stays on, with lips that every day grow whiter and more persistently smiling, while you meet her in the street during business hours, trying to look very busy and full of affairs.

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Some girls will talk of their position; they are "out of a billet"; they are "awfully hard up," and one need not fear greatly for those who can do this. We have all been in the same box, and are only too ready to give her a meal here and a meal there; to lend her a lounge-chair by way of a bed, till something turns up, and help out her scanty wardrobe, if she wants to appear particularly smart and prosperous when interviewing some possible employer. But it is those who do not and will not complain who are the difficult ones to deal with. One such girl, I remember, was found by the caretaker—when the busy people about her at last began to realize that they had not seen her go in and out of her room for some time—lying on the floor behind the locked door, as nearly dead as any woman could be, from sheer want—starvation, to put it bluntly—though there was not a single woman in the building who would not have helped her, if only the real state of things had ever been guessed at; for the uncharitableness of the Australian woman is, for the most part, verbal; they will abuse you like a pickpocket, but, while they will not leave you a shred of character, they will literally strip themselves in other ways that you may be clothed.

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But girls such as I have been writing of do not comprise the whole inhabitants of these chambers. There are married couples, for the greater part, living as much on the edge of things as the girls. I remember one quite cheerful matron confessing to me that she and her husband at that moment had only twopence between them. He was an engineer, of sorts, and when he was out of a billet she used to take in dressmaking by the day, and get a small part at one of the theatres in the chorus, or as part of a crowd; or—being possessed of an extremely fine figure—pose for a photograph or sketch of some newly imported model gown for one of the larger

drapery firms, or as an example of the newest styles of hairdressing for a ladies' paper. Then there are more prosperous couples, sometimes with children—or more likely with one child—and various men who “batch” in places such as these, getting their meals out at some handy tea-room or restaurant.

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Cheaper than these rooms are others, to be found for the most part in the narrow back-streets—buildings with long, echoing, uncarpeted passages, kept very moderately clean by occasional charwomen, with no hot-water supply whatever, and for the most part no bathroom. They are badly lighted, shivery places even on the hottest days, and though some of the rooms are bright and cheery enough, the doors, with the dirty, cracked, chipped paint, bear an ominous look, as though the wolf were for ever pawing at them. They are failures as buildings. Mostly they have not been designed for residential purposes at all, but as huge blocks of offices, in those days of swollen pride “before the boom.”—In England things have happened before the Conquest and after, but even B.C. and A.D. are letters which here have no significance—except to the geologist—and it is as “before the boom” or “after the boom” that all affairs of any importance are said to have occurred, unless the date is further particularized as “the year So-and-so won the Cup.” Among many other mementoes of the great bubble these buildings stand confessed failures: as unadapted for the purposes they are put to as are the many human failures, who drift into them, aimlessly as a stray leaf is drifted through an open door by some passing breeze.

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From places such as these people are always moving, whether from an inborn restlessness or a desire to escape their creditors, I cannot say; but one day you see them toiling up and down stairs with the oddest, and most intimate, household and personal belongings clasped in their arms. There is an eddying whirl of dust and straw outside some room door, while from within it comes a persistent sound of hammering. Then only a week or two later you run across the very same people staggering downstairs under the same burdens, or dropping soft bundles over the banisters to the hall below; and pass a widely open door, which shows you an empty room, with fresh stains on the walls, and a fresh irruption of tin-tack holes everywhere; while a perspiring “char-lady” tussles valiantly with the dirt-begrimed floor, for these “flitters” take little or no pride in their surroundings.

The army of “char-ladies” in Melbourne is a large one. It is a “legion that never was ‘listed’”; it has no commander and no regulations; it is managed by no Acts of Parliament; is included in the affairs of no Board; has no fixed minimum wage; in fact, has no protection of any sort, beyond what lies in the tongue of each individual member; though that is, indeed, most often a two-edged sword. But, for all that, these women have one weakness, and that is their strength. If they were not strong enough to work their husbands would be supporting them. If they had not willingly and bravely put their shoulders to the wheel at the time of some crisis, scarcity of employment, or illness, their husbands would never have found out how much more capable they were than they themselves; for, with very few exceptions, the women that one sees scrubbing miles of passages and mountains of stairs, in warehouses and offices and chambers, long before it is light on a winter's morning, are married women.

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There was one charwoman attached to a big block of buildings I once lived in, a little upright, dark, bright-eyed incarnation of energy—very different from most of the bent and wearied regiment—to whom I often gave a cup of tea and some work to do in my rooms just for the sake of hearing her opinions. Remarking to her one day that I supposed a great many daily workers, such as herself, had husbands, as many as half—the rest being widows, with the exception of a very small percentage of spinsters—she replied that well over two-thirds of them were either deserted wives or supporting their husbands in idleness. Her own husband had been a hard-working fellow and very good to her and her two children, till one time when he was out of work she had turned to and gone out charing. From that time onward she had never had a penny from him, for herself or the children. For a time he had lived at home in idleness on her earnings; then—what an irony of fate!—got a good job and gone to live with another woman, who spent every penny of his wages on dress and luxuries, not even doling out to him sufficient for his weekly allowance of tobacco, as even the most niggardly wife would have done. But for the most part these defaulting husbands have “gone West”; and when a husband does that—leaving his wife behind to follow him later on, when he has got a job—she might as well ring down the curtain and realize at once that her married life, anyhow, as far as he is concerned, is at an end.

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In the heart of each individual wife hope lingers for a little while: “her Bill,” or “her Jim,” is not like the others, and at first letters and an occasional remittance may come pretty regularly. But in the ears of those who merely look on at the game the words “going West” ring like a knell, and God only knows what history of struggling hope, of poverty, of disillusion, and toil might be gathered round that one little phrase. As I write these women seem to visualize before my eyes; the work-bowed figures, the roughened hands, the tired faces, with their bright, eager eyes, all victims of the golden lure of the West, where the Victorian husbands seem to cast their conscience as easily as a snake casts its skin.

Luckily for the Melbourne “char-lady”—I once heard a child severely rebuked by its middle-class mother for speaking of a washer-woman, and the female side of the Melbourne prison, referred to as “the place where the lady convicts are kept”—she is far better paid than her English sister, the minimum daily wage being four shillings, with dinner and sundry cups of tea, while she receives at least half a crown a week for attending to an ordinary small office or room, lighting the fire during the winter months, and sweeping and dusting it daily. It is wonderful how much of this sort of work a really smart woman can get through, and the one of whom I have spoken seldom did less than twenty rooms regularly each day—the offices the very first thing in the morning, or

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the last thing at night, and the living-rooms of the bachelors and more prosperous business girls between nine and twelve. After this she would race home, see to her own house, cook her children's dinner and return about six to get a certain proportion of the offices ready for the next morning; doing her own washing, as she told me, on Sundays—a practice not greatly to be condemned, seeing how near a place cleanliness occupies to godliness. Her four children were always very models of neatness and cleanliness—as was their mother—indeed, the appearance of all working-women in Melbourne, of whatever class, strikes me as very far superior to what I remember it in England.

One summer when I lived out of town and went to work every morning by the eight o'clock train, I used to marvel at the way the girls going to business in shops and offices managed to turn themselves out at such an early hour; and the amount of real work that it must have occasioned them to wash and get up their fresh stiffly starched print or linen dresses—which certainly could not be worn for more than two days—their dainty white cuffs and collars and other etceteras of the toilet. One particularly trim girl, I remember, confessed to me that she only possessed one set of muslin cuffs and collar, and washed and starched them regularly every evening when she got home, ironing them out before she left each morning. On the whole these girls are a far fresher, healthier set than those who live right in the town, as much, I suspect, from the better food they have when they are living with their people as from the better air. Indeed, without any exaggeration, it is worth while going to Flinders Street Station, or Princes Bridge, any day between eight and nine, for the mere delight of seeing the dozens of fresh, happy-looking girls that the early trains disgorge; then to watch them branch off in every direction—up Flinders Street, and down Flinders Street, and along Swanston Street—to their places of business. It is as if the puffing suburban trains were each a veritable part of the heart of the town, pumping bright new blood through every artery, in the shape of the grey and dust-grimed street. The human freight brought in by the later trains is more exotic, and on the whole less robust; though whether the work, in which the girls who arrive between nine and ten are employed, is more sedentary, or the girls themselves come of a more refined and delicate stock, I cannot say; but certainly the employees in the large, well-lighted, and airy shops, factories, and public buildings, though they may have a lower social status, work under more healthy conditions than those in the smaller offices.

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It used to amuse me to notice the books these girls read on their way to and from town. At one time I kept a list during several months, and found that, apart from the little penny English papers, like *Home Notes* and *Home Chat*, Mrs. Henry Wood topped the list; then came, oddly enough for people who could not know his world, Dickens; and, still more odd, Thackeray.

In the dressmaking trade, at which many of these girls are employed, there is, as in all other recognized trades, a fixed minimum wage of half a crown a week for beginners—with a fixed rate of increase—so that it is impossible for an employer to use a girl without any payment under the pretence of teaching her, and then dismiss her when the time comes for her to receive an adequate wage. Indeed, the work-girl is most carefully protected, and her hours regulated in accordance with her age. In the tailoring trade the wages of female pressers and buttonhole makers average 21s. a week. Dressmakers' assistants, or ordinary hands, get 26s. a week; the woman in charge anything from £2 to £7; and ordinary machinists, 21s.

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As in all countries, the makers of underclothing, or white workers, are the least well paid, averaging only 16s. a week, the people who wash the clothes after they are made having far the best of it, as a fair laundry-hand, or ironer, can easily command £1 a week. Women working in the straw-hat factories are paid from 20s. to 30s. a week, and so are the pressers in the dye-works; knitting machinists, from 20s. to 28s.; printers' feeders (female), £1 a week; box-makers, 22s. to 25s. Factory wrappers and packers average from 15s. to 22s. a week; match-makers, 17s. 6d.; and warpers in the woollen factories, 25s.

Over four employees of either sex constitute a factory, the room in which they work being then under factory laws and the supervision of the factory inspector. On the other hand, the employment of but one Chinese also constitutes a factory, and I cannot help thinking that this is rather a mean little law; though in its own way far-seeing in the interests of Australia, for, of course, no laundry proprietor who wishes to engage, say, one or two hands to help herself and her family, is likely to engage a Chinaman, however quick, clean, and hard-working, when it means all the trouble of being registered as a factory, and the constant irritation of official inspection and interference.

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Among domestic workers cooks get from 17s. a week to 30s.; house-maids, 12s. to 15s., with everything found; thereby being much better off than many typists—who have themselves to keep—and in an infinitely superior position, from a pecuniary point of view, to the tea-room girls. These are for the most part ladies, and therefore, I suppose, expected to support themselves and keep up a good appearance on from 10s. to 16s. a week; whereas the hotel waitress gets from 15s. to 20s. and her board and lodging, besides tips, which no one ever thinks of offering to the pretty, refined tea-room girl.

I remember one such girl saying to me bitterly that men, when they wanted to show their appreciation of her services, sent her a box of sweets—or lollies, as they are called out here. A subtle irony to one who was so sick of the sight of anything in the shape of food, and would have been so truly thankful for some of the ready-money that the more plebeian waitresses pocketed gaily each day.

For girls wishing to enter the musical profession the premier University College, Trinity, is open

to men and women alike—the Trinity College Hostel adjoining it affording accommodation for the resident students—while the women doctors and dentists hold very high place in the Melbourne world. There is one hospital—the Queen Victoria—where all the visiting surgeons and physicians are women, and where operations of all kinds are carried out. Though it is small, consisting of but two wards, medical and surgical, the out-patients' department catering, as it does, for the needs of women and children only, is very large indeed. There are absolutely no men at all about the place. It might be the dream of the "Princess" come true, and rendered practicable, the very portress who works the lift in which the patients are carried up to the wards being a woman. I have been a patient in Melbourne hospitals more than once—Providence seeming to have constructed me in a gimcrack and random fashion. The last time does not bear thinking of, save for the delightful kindness and courtesy of the sisters and nurses, for Providence seemed also to have fatally muddled both the manners and the intelligence of the house physician. But the one really happy memory I have of hospital life all hangs round "the Queen Victoria." It was extraordinarily gay; I do not think I ever heard more laughter and more droll remarks than in that surgical ward, where most of the patients were either waiting for, or recovering from, some serious operation. I remember particularly the storm of laughter and chaff that greeted me the first time I was able to rise from my bed and stand upright They christened me the "Canary"—not on account of my voice, but because of the thinness of my nether limbs, which, as one wit remarked, reminded her of number eleven on a cottage door—cannot you see it, the two straight, stark lines of white chalk on the rough boards?—while others, again, declared that I was like nothing so much as two yards of pump-water.

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The work of resident physician and matron were combined in the person of one delightful woman, always immaculate in the whitest of white linen, who used to lend me books—her own books, not the hospital possessions—while the coming of the honoraries was always quite the event of each day. There is a fantastic illusion to the effect that women take no interest in their own sex. Anyone who could have seen how the coming of the visiting doctors was watched for by these poor women, many of them desperately ill, and have heard the conjectures made as to what they would wear, and the way the patients disputed together over the charms and "smartness" of their special honorary, might have lost all illusion on that point, once and for ever; if anything ever can destroy such a hidebound and century-old error. I think that convalescence was the most pleasant I have ever known, lying on a long couch in the balcony, looking out into sunlit courtyard with its huge fig-tree; the nurses in their pale green uniform flitting across it from the office to their dining-room; visitors coming and going; or the portress sweeping up leaves and burning them in a bonfire, from which the pungent smoke floated in a thin blue cloud up to the balcony. Then someone brought me a present of a soft grey dressing-gown, trimmed with pale blue silk, which I loved because I looked nice in it. I remember lending it one visiting day to a pretty girl whose young man used to come and see her—a matter of vast interest to us all; and she looked nicer still, because her blue eyes just matched the blue silk. She died a few months later, and I have always been sorry that I was not strong-minded enough to have given it her "for keeps," as the children say.

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Between the hours of seven and eight, when the ward was all tidied up ready for the night, the women's husbands were allowed in to see their wives. It was midsummer, I remember, for I had my Christmas dinner there—and at that hour the long ward was filled with a tender twilight. We women who had no one to come and see us used to turn over on our sides and gaze out of the window at the leaves of the fig-tree, black against the pink sky—at least, I did, because there were no beds that way, other lonely patients, with a husband and wife on either side, having to lie on their backs and stare out stolidly in front of them; still, one could not help seeing the men tiptoeing in—some in their Sunday black, others straight from work in their blue dungarees—and noticing how the faces of some of the wives would flush and glow, as if a lamp had been lit behind the transparent white mask. And how the man would hold one hand in his, and fling his other arm over the pillow, above his woman's head, and say very little, while she talked eagerly, incessantly, in a little weak whisper. We did not want to see all this. Not that they minded, as long as one was not ill-bred enough to stare deliberately; but it gave us a nasty lumpy feeling in our throats—*nous autres* who had nobody to come and see us during that twilight hour, which always seems so completely made for intimacy.

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There is, I suppose, no state of life that does not bring its own pleasure and its own pain; and though perhaps, the ups of life are the most comfortable, on the whole I would award the palm for interest to the downs; and I for one never learnt more, from all of the world that I have known, than I did from the eight weeks in that hospital ward, where the very atmosphere seemed to breathe content and good feeling as palpably as it did iodoform and carbolic.

Taking it all round, I should say that women in Australia, of the working and middle classes, have a much better time of it than in England. In some ways they do not expect so much. A girl marries a man who is earning a decent wage because she loves him—even in the upper classes there is very little question of settlements, nor does she expect to start at exactly the same point as her parents have reached. I have lived in countries where coolie labour of all sorts is ridiculously cheap, and where a girl whose parents have, say, two hundred a year, need not even trouble to put on her own stockings; is literally waited on hand and foot, and knows nothing either of cooking or house-work, and, after all, I have come to the conclusion that the servant difficulty in Melbourne is by no manner of means an unmixed evil, and that certainly it is a great factor in the making of good wives. In England the attitude of men towards women is completely different from what it is in Australia. At home they expect a tremendous lot of their women, but in the smallest possible way. They must be purely domestic angels on the hearth, and not over-

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interested in anything beyond it. If they have no hearth on which to practise their virtues, then they are indeed unsexed. The women in Victoria naturally do not like to hear of the stone-throwing, etc., practised by their own sex in the fight for political equality at home, and, I believe, are truly sorry that there seems no prospect of the brains of those in authority being reached in any less forcible fashion; but, then, they literally *cannot* comprehend a woman's side of the question being disregarded, simply because she is a woman. They have never themselves resorted to violence, because there was no necessity for it; the laws in Australia being the same for the women as for the men, in divorce, in labour, and the ownership and care of children. When one first lands in Melbourne one may, perhaps, form the hasty opinion that the men are not as courteous to women as they are in England—I am not speaking of the rich and travelled minority, who are much the same all over the world, but of the ordinary middle or lower classes. It is true that the men are not fond of parting with their hats, and will stand and talk to a woman with both hands deep in their hip-pockets. But, though they will not refrain from contradicting her because she is a lady, they will yet give her their fullest attention; and in business as well as pleasure weigh her opinion against theirs as carefully as though she were of their own sex. While men at home continue to treat girls and young women like pretty kittens, merely to be petted and played with, they must not be surprised that they develop at times into mature cats, using their claws, if only to show that they have got them. In England there seems always—everywhere—to be running beneath all social and political intercourse between men and women, and even beneath much domestic life—for nothing can be more bitter than the remarks some wives make on their husbands' characters, pursuits, and pleasures—a sub-current of fierce sex-antagonism that is very rarely indeed felt out here where there is so much true equality between men and women; they know here that it pays them, if nothing else, to stand shoulder to shoulder, and to make of themselves and their family a compact little commonwealth, protecting their interests against outside interference only.

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Certainly a very great number of women in Victoria do not use the vote now they have it, but that is no argument against its possession. A great many men—particularly in lonely, scattered districts, do not use theirs, either. Though voting by post is permitted to anyone living more than five miles away from the nearest polling-booth, or suffering from any illness or infirmity which prevents them from voting personally, this is not much help to people who are many more miles than five from a post-office, and probably quite unaware, even, that any election is taking place. As a matter of fact, the disparity between the number of men and women who availed themselves of their privilege at the election of 1906 is very small indeed—considering for how very short a time in the world's history women have been permitted or expected to use their faculties outside their own homes; the number of male voters in Victoria for the Senate being 335,886, and the votes recorded 209,168; while the female voters enrolled numbered 336,168, and the votes recorded 171,933. But even in Melbourne all women are not interested in the actual possession of this much-coveted privilege, and I remember one labourer's wife saying to me: "I don't want no vote, not I! Jim votes as I tell 'im to; an' if 'e didn't, I'd let 'im know the reason why."

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She was a wise woman, that labourer's wife, in more ways than one; an excellent help-mate, keeping her home spotlessly clean, and feeding her menkind—husband and grown-up son—thoroughly well—many a cup of tea and fresh-baked, featherlike scone have I enjoyed at her kitchen-table—but she insisted on her own rights and privileges, all the same. On Sundays her husband and son "lay in," as she called it, till midday, while she gave them their breakfast in bed. But every Friday morning she "lay in," and they lit the fire, prepared her breakfast, and took it to her in bed, cut their own lunches, and set off to work, leaving her to lie there quietly and rest till she felt inclined to rise and get herself a midday meal; usually a light one, in any case, for the Australian labouring classes mostly have their dinner, with hot meat and vegetables and, of course, tea,—when the men come back from their day's work. But in every way there is more give and take, and not only between the sexes. One family I knew, consisting of four sisters who lived with their old mother in the suburbs and went up to town every day for business. They did not have to be at work till nine, and breakfasted a little after eight, the one servant bringing them all round the inevitable cups of tea at seven. On Sunday mornings, however, one of them always got the early tea, and took the maid a cup in bed. I do not in the least suppose that she was especially grateful—though doubtless she enjoyed it thoroughly—but neither did the girls expect her to be so. They simply did it because it seemed to them "fair." And there you have the keynote of much which prevents the hardest work in Australia from developing into drudgery, or the poorest people from becoming downtrodden and hopeless; for, as far as is humanly to be expected, it is a fair country, while the people that are in it abide, at any rate, by this one great working ideal of "fairness."

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CHAPTER VI

VICTORIAN YOUTH

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DURING the first week I was in Melbourne I came across a notice in the daily paper among the police-court news, stating that "Percy So-and-So, aged two years and four months," had been "arrested on the charge of being a neglected child."

"What a brutal country!" I thought. "Can it be possible that any human being can be found so hard-hearted and inhuman as to condemn a helpless child to any form of punishment, because by

some tragic fate it has missed both a mother's love and a father's care?" Globe-trotters get all sorts of Adelphi-like impressions such as this, and then return home to rave in print about the barbarities and inefficiencies of other countries. Luckily for the correction of my ideas, however, I was to spend more than eight years in learning to understand this particular country a little better.

Very soon I began to realize that the most fortunate thing that can possibly happen to a child whose parents, or other guardians, persistently neglect or ill-treat it, is that it shall be thus summonsed; for then the State steps in in the place of its natural protector, and provides a decent home for it, food, clothing, and later on employment. In 1908 there were in Victoria 5,477 such wards of the State, and in all truth, however, the Government of Victoria may have been criticized for its management of other affairs, nothing—absolutely nothing—but good can be said of it in its position as foster-parent to this immense family. The 5477 children of whom I speak include 3,711 boarded out, 710 placed under supervision with friends, 748 maintaining themselves in service or apprenticeship, 306 in institutions or hospitals, and 2 visiting relations! By which it will be seen that a relation in Australia is no more overflowing with the milk of human kindness than in any other country. Among the newly-made wards of the State in 1908—numbering in all 1,240—the fathers were held to be blameable in 457 cases, and the mothers in 57; many of the heroic army of char-ladies being, I suspect, among the 457 who struggle bravely to support their offsprings unaided. There were 677 cases in which parents were held to be blameless; in some the family was too large for the father to adequately support all his children, while in others the father was dead, or an invalid, or in a lunatic asylum.

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When the father is dead or an invalid, or has forsaken his wife, and the mother is known to be a hardworking, respectable woman, and yet unable to wholly maintain her family, then some—or all—of her children are made wards of the State, and boarded out to their own mother, who receives five shillings a week for their support; and in addition the help and advice of the State in all matters relating to their welfare: help that continues during the time that it is most particularly needed, which is when the youngsters have finished their schooling, and are ready to be put out into the world, with the need of a firmer hand than their mother over them.

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If the children are committed to the care of private people, or institutions, these have to be approved of by the Governor in Council, five shillings a week being paid for each child boarded out to private people; unless it should be that they are voluntarily adopted, which is very often the case. I have not the faintest idea how many children are yearly adopted from hospitals and other institutions in Melbourne, but, judging by the number of cases I myself have come across, I should imagine it to be very large. In some ways people seem more humane, more primitive in Victoria than in England; certainly they are less easily reconciled to a childless home. They do not have large families, but if they have no child at all it is very common indeed for them to adopt one. Certainly I never personally knew anyone of wealth and good position in England to adopt a nameless child; but in Victoria I can bring to mind several cases in which this has been done, and the utmost care and love lavished upon it, while it never for one moment hears a single word that can cause it to doubt that the father and mother, of whose love it is so sure, are its own.

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Over the little boarded-out baby the supervision is most especially strict. The whole administration of the Infant Life Protection Act, which was passed in 1890, and amended in 1907, has lately been taken out of the hands of the police, and put under the care of the Department for Neglected Children, to whom power is given to establish maternity homes and infant asylums. Any person who boards an infant must be registered; male or female inspectors must be permitted free access to the house, and allowed to examine the children, and give any necessary advice or directions, while no one is allowed to board out a child without first applying to the secretary of the Department, stating what amount he or she is prepared to pay weekly for its maintenance, no baby less than twelve months old being allowed to be boarded out under ten shillings a week, and all payments having to be made through the secretary. If these payments fall into arrears for four weeks the child becomes a ward of the State, while a penalty of £100, with or without imprisonment, is incurred for receiving or making payment for any infant contrary to the regulations of the Act, while it further provides that no illegitimate child—or boarded-out child—under the age of five years, who has died in such registered home, may be buried without a certificate from a coroner, justice, or member of the police-force.

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That the need for such reform was pressing is shown by the vital statistics of the State for 1908; the number of illegitimate births being 1,790, and the deaths of these children under one year of age 354, the proportion of deaths among illegitimate children being between two and three times as great as that among children born in wedlock.

There are several foundling hospitals and rescue homes for women in Melbourne, but of these I am intimate with the working of but one—which for sheer humanity and complete realization of the claims of motherhood, apart from any other consideration, beats everything of the sort that I ever came across—and this is the Infant Asylum in Berry Street.

A girl who has got into trouble may apply at this asylum six or seven months before her hour of trial has come. She is taken in, fed and clothed, and—most merciful of all—given work to do, nobody, excepting the committee and matron, ever knowing her surname. When her time comes she goes to the Women's Hospital for her confinement; and after that is over returns to the Home, to help in the general work, and to nurse and care for her own child. The value of this is scarcely to be estimated. The poor little mite is unfortunate enough as it is in possessing but one palpable parent, and being born under the stigma that—even in so free a country as Australia—is

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still attached to the completely innocent. If it is then taken from its mother and put straight into a foundling hospital, that mother's whole memory of it will be so mingled with a nightmare of horror, and pain, and shame, that all she wishes for is to be able to forget its very existence; and so the poor mite is doubly orphaned. But I defy any mother—however reluctant—if she has but a spark of good in her, to suckle her child for a year or more, and not only feel bound to it by both love and duty, but capable of starting life again none the worse, and in many cases much the better—because more completely a woman—on account of its existence.

When the mother leaves the asylum, where she may stay for as long as two years, she is found a situation, and expected to contribute a percentage of her wages to the support of the baby who remains in the Home; unless, as is very often the case, she is allowed to have it with her; many people being quite willing—particularly in up-country districts where servants are scarce—to take a woman with a child, who as often as not becomes the pet of the entire household.

I have often seen mothers on Sundays at the Victoria Infant Asylum, who have called on their day out to see and have a romp with their children, who are all the dearer to them from the fact of the many small self-denials which they must practise to contribute to their support. To use the adjective "lost" or "fallen" to these women would be sheer nonsense. Personally I think they are infinitely and incomparably more moral than wives who sell their birthright by deliberately refusing the responsibilities of motherhood; while between them and the men whose name the children would have borne—had they entered the world with all honour and circumstance—there is no possible comparison, while it is due to the asylum where, in their blind terror, they first took refuge that these mothers have gained courage to stand upright, and face life as self-respecting women once more.

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I feel I cannot write too strongly about this; I feel very strongly about it, and for the women on whom all the burden alone presses. Mr. Foster Fraser speaks of the number of illegitimate children in Australia. He says nothing at all of all the splendid measures that are being taken to combat this great source of misery, nor the facilities which are afforded, if marriage takes place later than it should do, for legitimizing children. Nor, though he compares the dairy output of Denmark and Australia, to the great disadvantage of the latter, does he extend the same comparison to a more vital matter, to wit, the percentage of illegitimate births—at which he is apparently so horrified—which is in Victoria 5.8, and in the Commonwealth 6.2, against 10.1 in Denmark; while in Sweden, another Northern country, it rises to 12.3. Even in Puritanical Scotland this percentage is 6.5, while it seems to me that for a country where for many months of the year the smaller houses and cottages have by evening become almost stifling; where the only possible relief for young people, who have no gardens of their own, is to be found either in the streets or public gardens, or on the easily reached sea-beaches, that the percentage is wonderfully moderate, that of Portugal, where the climatic conditions are much the same—though the young women are allowed far less of the liberty which I have heard so condemned in speaking of Australian life—being 11.4.

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Education in Victoria is both free and compulsory, and yet the position of the State, or public schools is perfectly different from that of the Council schools at home. Once I was living in a little West Country town in England where the Rector, by sheer force of brains, had raised himself from a Board school to the position which he held. He was a most cultivated and charming man, but the matter of his education was never forgotten. Whenever he did anything his parishioners did not approve of—as even an archangel must have done, certainly he would have been no archangel if he had not—there was a shrugging of shoulders, and the inevitable remark: "Well, what can you expect from a man that's been at a Board school?"

In Australia the fact of a boy being educated at a State school tells against him no whit unless it be among the very few rich people who like to consider themselves exclusive, idle people, of no consequence whatever in any affair of moment. Many families who are but moderately well off send their boys to the State schools while they are quite young, as at home they would send them to a Preparatory. When they reach the age of thirteen or fourteen they then enter them at one of the big schools corresponding to the lesser public schools at home, such as Wellington, Clifton, or Cheltenham. In Melbourne the principal among these schools are the Church of England Grammar School, the Presbyterian College—a beautiful grey stone building, covered in the autumn with a mantle of crimson creeper, and presenting more the appearance of a dignified old English dwelling-house than any building I have ever seen in Victoria—and the Scots College.

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There is nothing higher than these—or need be, for the type of boy they produce, and the education both mental and physical, that they supply is most admirable. If an English Duke settled in Melbourne and wanted to send his son to school, it is between these three that he would have to choose; where his son's class-mate might be a boy who had received his primary education in a State school, absolutely no slur whatever being cast on him on that account. Boys in England are the most arrant snobs. They are inoculated with it from the cradle. They must not play with the coachman's children because they are common; they must not—if they belong to what is known as "the county"—play with the local lawyer's boys or the grammar-school boys because they are "cads," which reminds me of a fine definition of the two words "cad" and "snob": "cads are the people we won't know, and snobs are the people who won't know us." I find very little, if any, tendency of this sort in the Australian boy. A fellow is good at games or a "rotter," and who his father and mother are, and whether he was or was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, does not concern his companions in the very least. It is not that the boys are any better or any worse than elsewhere; it is simply that they have not heard all the talk about position that is constantly ringing in the ears of an English lad. When I took my small boy home

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there was so much objection made to him playing with what were called "common children" that I was forced to try to explain to him the difference between the classes, with the effect that his whole ideas of right and wrong became hopelessly muddled; the discussion, as I remember it, running somewhat like this:

"But why mayn't I play with them, mummy? They are good boys."

"Yes, dear, but they are not gentlemen."

"Why, what have they done?"

"Oh, they have done nothing."

"Well, is it their daddies or their mummies have been naughty?"

"No, dear; they are quite good. It's only that they are not in the same position that you are."

"Is it because they are poor that you don't like them? 'cause we are poor too." And so on, till the only way out of the difficulty—the true invidiousness of which had, by years of absence, grown to seem as completely mysterious to me as it did to him—lay in imposing upon him the meaningless command to "do as you are told, and ask no questions."

Among the State schools in Victoria there are bursaries and scholarships available for the secondary schools and universities; while for any boy to climb from the position of a State school pupil into that of Prime Minister is simply a matter of capability and grit.

Continuation schools have been established in Melbourne, Ballarat, and Bendigo for the purpose of giving a preliminary training to teachers, which must afterwards be followed by two years in the Melbourne Training College, when they are free to be appointed to sixth-class positions as State-school teachers, at an annual salary of about £120 for the men teachers and £100 for the women.

These positions are often by no means the tame affairs that they are in England, particularly to the city-born boy or girl. Lately there has been much agitation about the question of decent dwelling-places for State-school teachers in country districts, some of the statements made in the daily papers by these teachers, about two years ago, being little short of revolting. Often the young teacher boards out with some neighbouring "cocky" farmer and his wife, and, at the best, this may be better than sharing a wooden shanty with flies and white ants, where water is always scarce, and company of any sort an impossibility. But at the worst—and the worst of these "cocky" farmers' homes are sordid beyond any word—it may prove pretty well unendurable, particularly to a young creature who has grown accustomed to the bustle and gaiety of college life; while the mental picture that rises to my mind of the sort of meal set out before a nerve-racked and wearied teacher in some such place, with the sickening slough of half-melted salt butter, the black, drawn tea, the indecent slab of boiled beef—the whole dotted with flies as thickly as a cake with currants—justifies completely the desperate assertion made to me by one delicately pretty young school-marm "I'd marry any man in the world who had a refrigerator."

But this is the darker side of the picture, though in any case the life of a teacher in a back-block school is one of "alarms and excursions" till time and experience have mellowed it. Still, in all but the loneliest places there are certainly compensations. People are hospitable and friendly; distances are ignored; there is generally someone to lend a horse to the teacher, particularly if she be a girl and a good sort, and someone to teach her to ride, too. There are dances and picnics, moonlight picnics being rather a speciality in Australia, and plenty of wholesome fun. People will work incredibly hard on their farms up in the back blocks, particularly if they go in for dairying; but with all this they have a most extraordinary faculty for enjoying themselves, and there is many a morning when the young school teacher will ride home with an admiring escort none too early to start morning school, after dancing gaily all night. Australia is a good place to be young in, particularly when riding through the Bush in the early dawn; the clear air sweet with the scent which the dew brings out from the young gum-leaves and sweet briar; a good horse under you—and "possibilities" of divers sorts riding by your side; while the Bush dances, where there are as often as not six men to every girl—the men dancing together when they can get no better partners—would be a revelation to any English girl used to balls at home, where, though all the arrangements are far more elaborate, partners are few, and it is the men, and not the girls, who can pick and choose.

In some country places the dwellings are so scattered that the question of schooling becomes a very difficult one. In thinly-populated districts, if an attendance of twenty children can be secured, a full-time school is established; under this number the part-time system is arranged for, one teacher attending at two different schools on alternate days. In other scattered districts payment is made to assist parents in conveying their children to school; in any case a great many ride, and it is no uncommon sight to see three or four youngsters astride upon a sturdy pony, with their school-bags slung over their backs. Often when the attendance is not sufficient to warrant the Educational Department in erecting a school-house, the parents will club together to build a room, at a very small cost, as they provide the labour themselves; while the importance which is generally attached to education is proved by the fact that there are some 600 State schools in Victoria, with an attendance of between twelve and twenty pupils only. In still more sparsely populated districts a teacher goes from house to house within a certain radius, giving a lesson, setting tasks, and correcting them at his next visit; while in New South Wales travelling schools have been established, where the teacher moves about, gipsy-like, with a van, which is at

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once his home and school, fitted with blackboards and books and all the impedimenta necessary for housekeeping—far less, it must be owned, than would be required by an English man or woman of the same class, for they all seem, somehow, to travel lighter out here, and both the personal and domestic machinery of life is far less complicated:—tea, flour for a damper, sugar, matches, a blanket, a waterproof sheet, and a billy-can, and there is little to fear save thirst—and incidentally bull-dog ants. In Melbourne one may, with a settled income at one's back, live as complicated and luxurious a life as is possible in any other city. But, on the other hand, when one has learnt the two great lessons of how to do without and how to put up with, one can get more fun for less money here than in any other country that I know of. The rural school-teachers may—and probably do—have a much rougher time than they would in England, but beyond a doubt they have a brighter and healthier; while their life is certainly far removed from the utter drabness which characterizes the existence of the ordinary middle-class man or woman at home.

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Essentially Australia is, as I have said, a country for the young. The children are thoroughly well looked after, while as they attain to a larger growth they look after themselves in a way that sometimes makes one squirm. One of the first things that I noticed when I landed was that, in the hotels and coffee-palaces, the girls walked into the dining-room in front of their mothers. They took up the menu-card, examined it, and made their choice before handing it on to their meek parent. For the mothers are meek, there is no doubt about it—the fathers being generally too busy over their own affairs and the making of money for their families to count for much,—and I often look at them in wonder, trying to imagine the modern, breezy, self-assertive young woman of the present day ever being trained to such a perfection of self-obliteration by her daughter.

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Partly, I believe, this supremacy is owing to the fact that there seems no stationary class. The people are always going up or down in the social scale. Those people who are rich, and in a way influential, to-day, are the people who served in the shops, dug the gardens, or washed the clothes of those who were rich yesterday; while the whole of the populace seems to slip about from one position to another like the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope. A great many of the people one sees in public places are “jumped up.” They had no chance of any education when they were young: their hands have been roughed and their shoulders bowed with toil during their youth and early middle age. Education—the mere getting of a certain form of stereotyped knowledge—riches, and what is known as “smartness,” are worshipped by the young—particularly those of the towns—in Australia. They are not ashamed of their parents because they are what might be called “common”; they are simply impatient with them because they are slower in their old-fashioned methods, and not so “smart,” so quick in the up-take, as themselves. In the main I think the children are very loyal to their parents. The lack of courtesy, of patience, and consideration is all fully *en évidence*, but I have never heard the sullen or bitter complaints against the tyranny and misunderstanding of fathers and mothers in Australia that I have heard in England. Apparently—and actually—the young people go their own way, and take the lead and tender their advice on every matter with a freedom unknown to even the most modern youth in the Old Country; but at the back of it all there is a real sense of comradeship.

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In a great number of cases the Australian mother has had a bitterly hard time in her youth, and yet there has lingered in her nature something eternally young that enables her to enter with the greatest zest into her daughter's enjoyment, by which she seems, indeed, to attain herself to a vicarious youth. You do not hear so many references to “the good old days” as in older countries, or the assertion, “I didn't go to dances when I was young; why should you?” “I didn't have any pleasure or amusement; why should you expect it?” etc., etc. On the other hand, you frequently hear the assertion, “One is only young once, and I am determined my children should have a gayer time, a better education, better clothes, and a better chance than ever I had.” It all goes too far, of course, and the children get an inflated idea of their own importance, as I once heard a Melbourne woman say: “The Australian baby begins to suffer from a swelled head at two months.” There is very little of parental discipline or of the machine-like regularity of nursery life—the machine-like servants stolidly going their inevitable round of daily duties; the machine-like, precisely punctual meals; the awful ceremony of the trivial daily round that bulwarks one's earliest days at home.

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In any but the largest households a proper nursery is unknown; in any case the youngsters have most of their meals with the grown-ups. Besides, domestic affairs are usually in the same kaleidoscopic condition as everything else. The servants leave *en bloc* before the Cup, or because some important ceremony in another State holds out to them the chance of larger wages as waitresses or cooks. Then the mother turns to and does the cooking; and the father brings back cold meats and salad-stuffs from the city, and helps wash up the dishes in the evenings, unless there are visitors to supper—and nothing of any sort ever stops the constant entertaining that goes on—when they are expected to do their share; the children run the errands, and dust, and sweep, and enjoy themselves thoroughly; adjourning with their parents, in a mass, to a restaurant for meals when they all get tired of the work, till a fresh domestic staff is procured.

The entire household is on a more intimate footing than at home. The children know all about Bridget's young man, and will give her a hand with the dishes on any one of her many days out; or, when her temper is good, wander at their own sweet will in and out of the kitchen, with incessant demands for what is known as “a piece”—a liberal slice of bread, butter, and jam.

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The Australian—both child and adult—devours enormous quantities of jam, particularly up in the back blocks, where butter is almost an unknown luxury; so much so that the cattle-men, shearers, and shepherds get their internal machinery completely ruined in time by the quantity of inferior

boiled sugar and fruit that they consume, and which they have inelegantly christened "rot-gut." But, still, one cannot live on boiled beef and damper alone, and as tomato sauce and jam are the cheapest relishes obtainable, every camping-place and hut is littered round with an inevitable medley of sauce-bottles and tins.

Everyone loves "lollies"—as they are called out here, the word "sweets" only being applied to what we generally call "puddings,"—and Melbourne and Sydney are the only towns where I have ever seen grown-up people gathered in absorbed and wistful groups round the windows of the confectioners' shops, both men and women, discussing the good things on show there as engrossedly as they would stocks and shares—or hats; this characteristic being so marked that I was actually told to observe it by the captain of the ship I travelled out on, who himself hailed from "the land o' cakes," while a young man here very rarely goes to call on a girl without an offering of a box of lollies, apparently not being so overweighted with a sense of his own sufficiency as he is at home.

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It is extraordinarily difficult to rid oneself of old ideas that one has imbibed in one's bread-and-milk days: to lose that inherent English faculty of taking "short views," which Sydney Smith recommends as a virtue, and look forward sufficiently far to realize what does really matter; what is, and what is not, of lasting importance.

At the best the independence of the Australian child—or "kid," as it is inevitably called—is piquant and rather charming; at the worst it is intensely irritating. Still, unless it resolves into rudeness, which in a child or adult is always repulsive, the idea of the deference due to age, merely as age, is after all only the result of our own idea of our own self-importance. If there ever was a youth that wanted to see "the wheels go round" it is the Australian youth, who must know the why and wherefore of everything. There must be a distinct reason, beyond mere years, to persuade him to show any deference to anybody, and some reason, beyond that of youth, for humility on his own side. The man who has kicked the greatest number of goals that year at football, or made the most runs at cricket, or ridden the Cup winner; who is palpably successful in business or pleasure—*that* they can understand, but little else; *he* is "a bit of all right," but the merely fictitious value of age they "have no time for," as they would say.

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All this tends, no doubt, to an ugly, offhand manner, a disregard of the claims of mere intellectual superiority and spiritual beauty, and a crudity of outlook. Opinions formed by the young on those of more mature and well-informed people than themselves, and handed down to them mellow with age and honour, tend without doubt to a greater refinement, but hardly, after all, to a greater vitality. Gradually I am growing to believe that to form even erroneous opinions of one's own is better in the end for one's character than to take them obediently like pap from a spoon; and the Australian child, gay and light-hearted, quick in resource, independent and self-assertive, is certainly more suited to the needs of the young country in which its lines have been cast than the more "set" product of the English nursery. "We" do this or that, says the Australian child, reckoning itself as part of a double commonwealth of home and State.

"Mummy and me, we are the boss of this place," I once heard a young man of five—who kept house with his widowed mother—declare, no trace of arrogance in his voice, simply making the assertion. "I think *we* had better marry again," he remarked once, deeply concerned over the fact of his mother having to go out to work at one time when she was ill, and—even to his childish eye—manifestly unfit.

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Somehow, in spite of all their crudeness, their irrepressible larkiness, and their precocious love-affairs, there is something essentially sound and wholesome at the bottom of the Australian youth, omitting, of course, the scum at the top and the dregs at the bottom which are much the same everywhere. Certainly, the boys, if they pass safely through the almost inevitable trip West and attendant gold-fever, make most excellent husbands, steady-going, hard-working, and considerate; while the girls settle down into good wives and devoted—often too devoted—mothers.

In Australia the child's future is generally very carefully considered, and the better class of parents will make immense sacrifices to fit it for some definite trade or profession. I believe a very large percentage of the girls marry; the amount of marriages in Victoria in 1908 being the largest total ever recorded—a sign apparently of prosperity, for between 1891 and 1894, which was a period of commercial depression, the number of marriages fell 20 per cent.—5,650 more persons having been married, allowing for the increase in population, in the last five years than between 1899 and 1903, despite universal suffrage. Naturally, though, now that there are so many more women than men in Victoria, the girls' chances are fewer than in the old days, when very much the reverse was the case, yet, in spite of all the talk here, as elsewhere, of the hopeless superfluity of women, there, somehow, seems to be a sweetheart for every girl.

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Still marriage is not regarded as a profession—though, on the whole, the girls are better equipped for it than at home, knowing far more of the value of money, cooking, and general house-work—and the daughters equally with the sons are prepared for some other and more certain mode of life. Men and women can be trained in Melbourne for almost any profession for which they show a bent, though there is no doubt that a year or so in England, Germany, or France is of immense advantage to them, particularly in medicine.

One would imagine that in a country still so largely in the making there would be ample room for any engineers, both electrical and mechanical, that it could produce, and ample facilities for training them. But people complain that their sons can reach a certain point in their engineering

training, and find no one to carry them on any further; while even for those who are most thoroughly trained and capable the openings are very few, and a number of the most promising young Australian engineers are yearly passing out of this country to America.

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There is little doubt that very soon, in all other professions as well as that of engineering, the scant population will mean a serious lack of employment for all the upper classes. The young doctors and dentists want patients; the architects want houses to build and towns to plan; the surveyors and engineers want new country opened, new railways, new mines; lawyers and land agents want clients. It is always the same; the educated few must depend for their living on the more or less uneducated masses, the people engaged in that class of labour for which numbers are required. A township with a bank-manager and clerk, doctor, parson, and lawyer would fare badly if it could show only an equal number of factory hands, labourers, or masons. And yet this is what education and prosperity seem likely to do for us, a tendency which the present influx of immigrants is too small to counteract. There must be more people to doctor, to bank for, to legislate for, and to teach, in proportion to the number of highly-educated young men and women who are now being prepared at school and college for professional life or clerical duties.

It seems to me that too many people have made money in Victoria; that too many have risen from the ranks of the manual labourers, with sons and daughters whom they naturally wish should go even one step higher than themselves.

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There was an old dairyman, I once knew, not far from Melbourne, who kept a dozen or so cows, milked them himself with the help of a boy, tended them himself, and drove his own carts to town. He was a peasant to the backbone—and that's no bad thing to be, better by far than any half and half—a delightfully genial old son of the soil, while his wife, who had probably never been in bed later than six any morning during her entire life—unless she was ill—and would not have dreamt of expecting the duties of her tiny household to be done by anyone but herself—washing, cooking, sweeping, scrubbing, making, and mending from dawn to dark—was just the same homely sort of old body as her husband. Still the boy who helped the old man with the cows was not theirs, but a mere, ever-changing hireling. Humble and contented as the old couple were, they yet cherished a wider ambition for their son, who had in truth nobly fulfilled their expectations; passing from the State school on to college; training for a doctor; walking the hospitals; passing all his examinations with flying colours; and, finally, with the old man's help—help that had been made possible only by infinite never-ending toil—bought a country practice, and took his place among the professional classes.

A thing like this is very fine. It stirs one's pulse, and warms one's heart even to think of the self-denial of those two dear old people, and the gallant success of the boy. But there is another side to the question, a prosaic, matter-of-fact side. If there had been ten sons, instead of one, there would have been no money to spare for extra education; there would have been less care possible, less thought, less food for every individual member of the family, and therefore less chance of development. The ten sons would have become milkmen, dairy-hands, labourers, or artisans—and a good doctor have been lost to the State. But still, which is the most needed? Now when the vast empty spaces of the Continent are crying out for population and subsequent cultivation? The small families, which are the almost inevitable rule among the better sort of people—the weak-minded and undesirable breed as freely here as elsewhere—may be for the good of the individual, but they are certainly not good for the State, where quantity is required more than quality—apart from that of good sound bodies—and where there is already almost too much "cleverness." The art, the literature, the general quickness of comprehension, the business methods, they are all clever—they are not profound or intellectual; neither are they plodding. They are the outcome indeed, for the most part, of the adored only child, whose every word and action is a miracle. Australia needs larger individual families, producing a deeper subsoil of hard-working people, without too many ideals, while as the mother of a nation it needs to open its arms, to enlarge its sympathies, and to get rid, once for all, of that "precious only child in the world" idea by which it seems each year to grow more completely engrossed—I mean the "Australia for the Australians" ideal.

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CHAPTER VII

ALIEN LIFE

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MELBOURNE is not a cosmopolitan city. It neither lies in the direct route of globe-trotters, who will, indeed, often miss the whole of Australia and pass on to New Zealand or the Pacific Isles, nor does it possess many natural interests or curiosities. It is a level-headed place, too, and, though it amuses itself well enough, it does not cater for that class of people who will search the world over for a new sensation or exotic pleasure. If strangers come to Melbourne it is for the most part either to find work and carve out a new future for themselves, or to escape from the responsibilities and duties which they have pressed too insistently on them in the Old World. In either case they find that their aim is best accomplished by identifying themselves as much as possible with the life of the country and people, which is, indeed, so vital and compelling that it quickly robs them of all national characteristics, so that they, or at any rate their children, very soon become completely Australian. It is very difficult for us, who in England count time by centuries, to realize during how very few years Australia has existed for the white man, and for

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how still shorter a period Victoria has had a separate existence to New South Wales. Indeed, only in the year 1855 was it declared a State, while but twenty years earlier, in 1835, Melbourne was for the first time occupied by white people.

That any country at the most between seventy-five and eighty years old—the average life-span of one man—should have formed out of the conglomerate masses of different classes which have poured into it from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and in a lesser degree from France and Germany, such a truly distinctive race is scarcely believable, while if it has a little outgrown its strength, if it does suffer at times from that complaint which its own people designate as “swelled head,” is it to be wondered at? For there it is, in spite of all, an indisputable fact, a nation in all its characteristics, and not a dependency.

That there must be some strange, ever-moving yeast at work, either in the climate or the circumstances of life, which shows an overpowering tendency to draw all within its grasp; to work on it and with it; to amalgamate it into the general mass, I can quite believe; and this yeast is the spirit of Australia. Something stronger than the entire pull of home apron-strings, of gratitude, of association, and of blood.

It all tends perhaps to the loss of individuality, but individuals are not needed in a new country; what is needed is one great family which will present as a whole an unbroken phalanx to the world. Exceptions, however brilliant, do but break the ranks; no one has time to bother with, or be bothered by them. One must keep step with the regiment, or one will be left behind to die of privation.

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Yet it is, on the whole, that very necessity for ever pushing onward, for hewing wood and drawing water to keep this marvellous new household going, that makes Melbourne such a cruelly hard place for the merely intellectual man or woman, the writer, the artist, the poet, the dreamer. Between the upper and nether millstone of the merchants, professional classes, and landowners, and the artisans, mechanics, and labourers, they are crushed so closely that their very existence is apt to remain unnoticed. It is no good blaming these people; it is not their fault; it is part of the rough, crude necessity of nation-building; we start by giving a naked man a shirt; there is no time to worry over people who offer to hemstitch frills for it, even gratis, while he is shivering.

All this is why I say Melbourne is not cosmopolitan. Sydney, older and more settled in her ways, perhaps also more languid from the effects of her relaxing climate, is far more so, but in no city anywhere near its size have I heard foreign languages so little spoken as in Melbourne. The newcomer must learn to speak with the tongue of the people, not they with his; in more senses than one. They have no time for “frills,” and as the spirit of the strange country is usually stronger than the homesick spirit of the stranger within its gates, it is the stranger who gives way. That is if he be anything but Irish. Generally speaking, Australia can do little with the Irish; as some old proverb has it: “You can’t hang soft cheese from a hook on the wall.” The summit of the ambition of most Irish colonists is to attain to the dignity of keeping a public-house. There are exceptions, of course. I have in my mind’s eye, as I write, a family of whom the two brothers hold the highest position in Melbourne—but it is not often the case. There is a free and easy feeling about the life which appeals to Pat. He has few ideals; he is too easily contented, and inclined to let things slide. Sad to say, if he loses these faults he loses most of his virtues with them. The successful Irishman in Australia is for the most part something of a toady—hard, and mean, and shifty. I am half Irish myself, and I have the strongest affection for the people. When I first landed in Melbourne I caught eagerly at even the hint of a brogue, or Hibernian name; but only in the poor, the struggling, the unsuccessful, did I ever find the true spirit of Ireland.

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I remember driving home from dinner one night, and as I paid the cabman on my return home, remarking his brogue, I asked him how long he had been in Australia.

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“A matter of twenty years,” he said, and he had come from such and such a place; in fact, his father, and great-grandfather, and progenitors for centuries back, had, as I found, worked for my own mother’s people, and his joy was unbounded at being able to talk over the old days and the Old Country.

Nearly a year later I was dining at the same house, and a cab was sent for to take me home. My host went out to interview the cabman, and describing my destination, asked if he knew it, whereupon, with a rolling brogue, all of honey and butter, came the answer: “God Almighty, shall I ever forget that. Sure I drove a young lady there from County Galway.”

It is odd how the brogue holds in Australia, so that it is as pronounced in people that have been out here fifty years as if they had landed this week. If you are ever in Melbourne, and want to hear such a round rich brogue as you will seldom chance on, even in the Ireland of to-day, drive out to Heidelberg, one of the loveliest of Melbourne’s offshoots, and ask to be directed to Flynn’s Hotel, a matter of a mile or two farther on. There you will find a little old man and his wife—if they are still alive, and God grant they are, for they are true Irish, warm-hearted, hospitable, and altogether delightful—whose language and outlook on life are still absolutely typical though they landed in Melbourne as much as fifty-five years ago, when the town itself was all canvas or weather-board, and a thickly-wooded creek ran down to the River Yarra, where the cable trams now rush through Elizabeth Street, one of the principal thoroughfares of the whole city.

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Still, in spite of all their undeniable cleverness and charm, the Irish do not, as a whole, attain to any high or permanent place in the country, even their adherence to their national characteristics representing a fluidity of will rather than a real spirit of patriotism; they will run

into any mould so easily, and out again so easily, that no change is permanent. There is about them none of the passionate desire to remain unchanged, which was shown once in a young Frenchman's answer to my question, as to whether he liked Melbourne. "I am afraid," he said; he used no adverb, but the intonation of his voice expressed all he meant in that one word "afraid," "that I may grow to like it." He felt the yeast working; he felt himself being chewed up, as it were, in the hungry and compelling maw of the new country, and all that was French in him fought desperately against the process. The Chinaman, of course, remains mysterious, immutable, unmatched; perhaps that is the secret in some measure of his unpopularity, but his unchangeableness lies in his decision, and the Irishman's in his want of it.

Still, there is one place in Melbourne where people seem to revert back to their original state: where the Frenchman, the German, the Greek, the Italian, and Russian throw off the garment of Australianism, and eat, look, and speak like men of their own country, glorying in it, too. It is as though a little patch had been cut clean out of Soho, and *planté là* in the midst of this prosaic city. The great and good of Melbourne do not know of its existence, by which I mean the great-and-good in family masses, all hyphenated together; but still, there is potential greatness to be met with there, and active goodness, and light-heartedness, and charm—that undefinable, subtle quality in which a balance at the bank mercifully plays no part. And yet it is only a little Italian café—what, in my ultra-English days, I might have called "a common little café."

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When first I knew it, it was situated in a low, straggling building in a rather undesirable street. There were two private rooms in front where the family lived. I know that because I once penetrated into one of them to see a sick baby. Between these was a narrow passage leading to a large room, with one long table running down the centre, the kitchen, at the door of which one usually lingered to have a few words with the hostess, and a smaller dingy room lying to the side. At the end of the long room was a window, and a door opening into a courtyard, patched with yellow light and velvety black shadows; and shaded for the most part with a trellis of vines, most delicately and deliciously green in the spring and early summer, and great dark casks, which had come filled with red wine straight from Italy, the very blood of the country, and about which the old host was for ever busied with a funnel and many bottles, for white or red wine was supplied free of extra charge to all the customers. After a word with the two daughters, busy over the long table at which never more than thirty were served each evening, one moved out, if one were early, as I always took care to be, to a bench in the court yard, pleasantly cool even on the hottest evening to sip one's vermouth in the open air, and chatter to the old host, who would answer back in slow difficult English—only answering, volunteering no remark. Not that it mattered, for the peace, the sense of having slipped all the burdens of the day off one's shoulders on to that single meagre door step, made one discursive; besides, a little later on there would be so many people talking, so much to listen to, that one's chance would be gone.

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Then the other guests began to arrive, nearly all men. An Italian, the first violin from the — Theatre; the sub-editor of one of the "dailies"; a Member of Parliament; a man with a scar on his neck, who was said to be an ex-Turkish brigand; a few art-students—one with inordinately long hair, smoothed back from his forehead and cut all to the same length at the back, so that when he grew excited over a song and shook his head violently it all fell forward, like a lion's mane, well below his breast. Then there was a Frenchman, who owns a vineyard a little way out of Melbourne, a German merchant, and a Greek youth, but these were only a few. For the most part one could fix the people who frequented this little café with no particular place in life, their nationality alone being uppermost. There were usually a few girls, mostly of the quiet, rather wan, student type; saving one vivid creature, of immature years and marvellous maturity of intellect, whose knowledge and self-possession made one feel like a crude child; and who, if her lines had been cast in a wider sphere, and she had been less weakened by admiration, might have developed into one of those mysterious women that—at all times—have been found wire-pulling in court and diplomatic circles, even from the very back of the throne itself, using their wit and their charm with an equal sureness and audacity.

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Long before the last glow of day had faded from the little vine-shaded yard—where in a swinging hammock slept the much-pampered, and continually fêted, "Bambina" of our host's married daughter—the long, low room inside had to be lighted by the hanging kerosene lamp, which threw the corners into an even more sombre darkness, shining but dimly from the very first through the thick veil of cigarette-smoke, the incense of modernity.

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The talk was incessant, and perforce loud, for everyone joined in any topic which interested them, no matter how far down the long table it might have originated. If the young Frenchman on your right was discussing grape-growing in Champagne with the little wrinkled Spaniard, with waxed moustaches, on your left, of whom such stories were told—*mon Dieu, bombs*, and what not!—and their talk became wearying, what so natural as that you should join in with the fierce argument on the Fiscal Question that a member of the Upper House might be holding with the little Socialist, whose blood-thirsty policy, as exemplified by his scarlet tie, was for ever warring against his warm Irish heart; "The little Doctor," as he is fondly called by all the habitués of the place, for he is decidedly a better, or at least a safer, physician of the body than the mind, while it was declared that the all-adored Bambina owed life itself to his care and skill.

A young Greek talked of Athens, all aglow with fervour, to an art-student, one of those completely self-sufficient girls who are so typical of Melbourne. "But why?" I heard her ask, with the curiously drawled accent—also typical, both question and accent; for the Australian likes all his or her information to be precise—with the reason thereof plainly showed, and "but why?" is their crushing response to most of our enthusiastic eulogiums on the old order of things.

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They were an interesting couple from their very contrast; but soon, one's wandering attention would float away on a new stream, piloted most likely by one of the best talkers of the place, a man who was so completely soaked in the spirit and literature, the eternal glow and romance, of the Renaissance, that it seemed always as if Providence must have merely amused itself, in some freakish fit, by reincarnating him here in Melbourne. An atom of imagination was enough, and one was away with him, wandering through the sun-soaked street of old Florence. Gone the babel of talk and laughter, the queer, eager faces, the shabby coats, the bright eyes, and erratic locks; the kerosene-lamps and long table, with its vases of artificial flowers, all quite gone, as one paced demurely by his side, between the stately palaces and high, huddled houses. Peeped through the interstices of the iron gates into the great courtyards at the orange-trees in their stone vases, where such or such a great Prince lived, or such a lady—of a beauty, ah yes! But as to morals—well, a shrug of the shoulders told all there was to be told with propriety. Stopped at this corner, or that, where such and such a party-broil took place, or stood agaze at so-and-so, who wrote those sonnets, or so-and-so who painted so divinely. Then pressed back into a deep doorway while Lorenzo himself—Lorenzo the Magnificent—swept past, with all his gay and courtly suite, to see how the new frescoes came on, which were to make that young Michael and his great master famous throughout the entire world, or so said Lorenzo, bracketing himself and the artist urbanely together. Such a whiff of perfume, such a rustle of stiff brocaded silks, and flow of silver laughter as they passed; then, with a sudden rasping sound, which brought one back with a jerk to the world of reality, the chairs were pushed back over the boarded floors; there was a crash of notes at the piano, and someone would begin to sing. Perhaps the heart-rending words and melody of "A wearing o' the green," perhaps the "Marseillaise," or just as likely "Little Mary." The coffee was brought, the table cleared. Delicately burning his spoonful of eau-de-vie over his coffee, the Frenchman on my right would throw out some words on Arragon that set my other neighbour aflame, and a hot argument would ensue, each man speaking his own language with a wealth of expletives and abandonment of gesture. Feeling the fiery breath flame on either cheek, and catching the eye of our old hostess who, the night's work done, had joined her guests, knitting in hand, I would nod my response. For those eyes, so human, tolerant, and wise, said as plainly as any words could, "What children those men are! what 'blaguers!'" then draw back my chair, and place it near to hers; when we would talk, sober women's talk—reasonable and profitable—of the cost of food under the new tariff, and how the spaghetti had been cooked in that fresh fashion at dinner. And if I asked the man to the right of that big man—the German there—for a little tarragon for the vinegar, he would surely give it, for he had a large garden, and then the Signora would present me with a bottle. And of the Bambina, what gave it that little cough—cigarette smoke! But he had breathed little else since he was born!

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Someone would perhaps bang a fist down on the table, and fling the single word "separation" like a lighted torch among tinder, or the big German make bragging assertions as to the superiority of Goethe over Shakespeare. One caught the choicest morsels from that week's *Bulletin* with which the art-students regaled each other, for the *Bulletin* is the bible of the Australian Bohemian. Or the murmur of the perennial discussion on the Armenian question, in which the big Turk ensnared all newcomers; less effective than it might have been owing to the fact that in moments of excitement he forgot all the little English that he ever had, and reverted to his mother-tongue, which no one else at table could understand. But all this was mere sound and fury, leaving our little oasis of quietude quite untouched. Then an immense man, who looked like a Portuguese, but was in reality a half-caste Chinaman, would most likely draw his chair up to mine, and join in our talk of the Bambina, with some strange lore regarding the souls of children, and that little moment when they remember all of the life they have lived before, while the old woman dropped her knitting on her knee and listened open-eyed, till he drifted off to other subjects—art and literature for the most part. He had never been out of Australasia, and yet there seemed to be no historical spot in Europe which he did not know intimately, not a half-forgotten verse that he could not finish for me, not a writer whose works he had not only read, but whose place in literature and whose influence he clearly realized. And then sometimes he would quote Chinese poetry, accompanying it with a running translation which was a delight to the ear.

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One evening I remember some insolent, loud-voiced remarks on a "White Australia" were flipped down the table in his direction, but he only shrugged his great shoulders. "We shall see," he said; "after all it is the best who win."

It always seemed strange—I write in the past, for, though the little cosmopolitan restaurant is still in being, the old people have relinquished their share of it, and it has changed its quarters, thereby losing some of its indefinable charm; it seemed strange, I say, to come out of such an atmosphere into the wide, dreary drabness of Lonsdale Street, so nearly repellent, indeed, in its entire lack of expression or soul, that often enough we would turn aside toward Little Burke Street, to soak ourselves afresh in that "something different" towards which we are all for ever striving.

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Long ago I wrote for a Melbourne paper an article on "Lilly Bulke Street"—which, with the cosmopolitan café, was the only possible hunting-ground for "something different" in the whole city—that was translated and republished in a Chinese paper, giving me a sort of fame among its denizens; so that: "You the lady that like Lilly Bulke Street?" they would often say to me, with their slow smile of sympathy; and of appreciation, too, for a little thought, a little understanding.

Lately, since the opium laws have become so stringent, the people are shy of Europeans in their

shops and "fan-tan" rooms; but only a little while before I could go anywhere I liked, and did so. Into the upper rooms of the few Chinese who were married to women of their own race, to talk, and sip tea, and play with the solemn-eyed children; even into the opium dens, where men reposed sleeping off the effects of the drug with a seraphic expression; or sat puffing, fiercely and wildly anxious for the coming of the rainbow-tinted dreams, which would, for a while, shut away from them all the hard and sordid realities of life.

After dark Little Burke is bordered, save for a few Chinese chemists' shops and eating-houses, by jealously closed doors, through which not one single crack of light penetrates. p. 188

Some have a name above the lintel or a sentence in Chinese; and though one may not remember the name or understand the sentence, one soon knows what places are worth entering, and, pushing open the door, pass in, secure in the knowledge that though one may be met with the cold inquiring stare of many narrow inscrutable eyes—and a dead silence where there has before been a babel of voices—one will encounter no incivility, no insolent look or gesture.

Sometimes the dim, narrow door opens into an even narrower passage, or a little ante-room leading into a larger apartment, where in a recess, on a bracket—beneath which a joss-stick or so sends up a blue spiral of scented smoke—a plaster figure of Buddha, resplendent in gold and crimson, sits smiling his tolerant, far-seeing smile, out over the heads of thirty or more men all intent upon a game of fan-tan.

No European is allowed to play fan-tan with a Chinaman in Melbourne; so we must satisfy our lust of gain vicariously by watching the players, by putting ourselves in the place of first one man, then another, of all the throng who have placed their money on the table; or in the place of the loiterers who have lost all, and yet linger, gazing eagerly, with a hunger that nothing will ever satisfy, at the shifting piles of counters and coin. p. 189

There are two croupiers; one makes the stakes, entering them on a paper-pad with a long camel's-hair brush, which he holds quite upright, and manipulates with a marvellous delicacy like a watchmaker does his tool.

The stakes are made—that is, every man playing pushes out in front of him what money he wishes to risk—maybe a sovereign, maybe a single threepenny-bit—each being entered in the first croupier's book for fear of any dispute.

Then the second croupier shakes out of a basin a number of little greenish-white counters; and places over as many of them as possible a small metal cover with a stem to it. This done, he begins to rake towards him with an ivory paper-knife all the counters outside the cover, calling the numbers out loud as he goes. Soon all the loose counters are gathered aside, and no more bets must be made, everything depending now, for each man, on the number beneath the little cover, some having betted on the odds, some on the evens. For a moment or so the croupier hesitates solemnly, his delicately poised forefinger and thumb just touching the little brass stem, and looks around him. Feverishly the players push forward higher stakes, or stretch out eager hands to claw back what they have already placed on the table. There is an absolutely dead silence in the room; it would seem as if nobody so much as breathed. The shiny yellow faces are immobile, as if cast in metal, only the narrow dark eyes gleam, and shift, and glance. p. 190

Then, with a gesture of infinite ceremony, the little lid is lifted, and the croupier begins to rake the counters towards him one by one with his ivory knife. After the first two or three are moved the more seasoned players, who know at a glance what remains, odd or even, push forward their money and move away from the table; or draw out of their sleeves fat notebooks wherein to enter their winnings; but for us the breathless charm holds to the very end; and, till the last counter is drawn aside, we cannot be certain whether it will prove to have been ninety-seven or ninety-eight—a hundred, or a hundred and one.

One little old man I particularly remember, in a faded blue blouse, who one night began by putting down shillings and florins, and always losing. If he shifted his stake from odd to even, from even to odd, the game shifted too, till it seemed like some malignant fate. But still he went on, each stake higher than the last; from half-crowns to ten-shilling pieces, and then to sovereigns, and yet there was nothing reckless in his air, none of the fevered excitement a European gambler would show. Only an intense, silent, agonizing anxiety, which seemed to set such a strain on him that all his muscles were rigid, and he appeared like a dead man, not moving at all, excepting to automatically push forward his stakes. One felt that his blood had ceased to circulate, that his heart no longer beat. Only in his hungry eyes did there seem to remain a spark of life burning fiercely beneath the wrinkled lids, which it veritably seemed to shrivel as with fire. p. 191

At last, in a sort of desperation, he pushed forward four sovereigns—all that remained to him in the world, I believe—placing them on the even. Never, never shall I forget his face as the croupier raked aside with his ivory knife the scattered counters, then very slowly—more slowly than ever it seemed to me—with the air of performing a sacred rite, lifted the little lid. For one moment the old gambler gazed as if spellbound at the compact pile which remained; gave one awful shudder, which shook him like a reed, from head to foot, and then, turning, slipped silently away among the crowd, God only knows where, or to what—to some world of shadows, I veritably believe, that world which is so near, so easily reached, for a few short hours by the magic pipe, or for perpetuity by the merest prick of a "bare bodkin." Still I lingered, hoping past hope for the little grey man, till the very last counter had been drawn aside—one hundred—one hundred and one—one hundred and two—one hundred and three—odds!

From the gaming-houses we would drift into the eating-houses, and perchance sup on savoury ragout of duck, served in a porcelain bowl, flanked by lesser bowls, each filled with some mysterious odoriferous condiment, or venture daringly on eggs of an infinite age and most potent flavour; then pry into the kitchen, clean as a new pin, yet fragrant with all the mysterious scents of the East; peep into the great caldrons in which the brass-bound cooking vessels steamed and simmered; lift the green jade teapot out of its wadded case, and sip tea from one of the fragile little bowls, which are kept ever at hand in a basin of clear cold water.

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In some of the gambling-houses men were playing a game somewhat resembling dominoes, the slips used being cut out of black wood, and marked with any number, up to twenty, of sunken red or white spots, the arrangement of which seemed capable of infinite variation; one slip perhaps showing four white, two red, and again four white; or two red, three white, two white, three red; the different colours crossing the dominoes horizontally, or diagonally, or vertically. A croupier holds all the slips and plays them, the lookers on laying the stakes; but never for one moment does he glance either at what he holds, or places on the table, for all the time his eyes are wanted in case some hand should be pushed out furtively to rearrange the stakes. His slim fingers, however, are never still; like lightning they skim over the surface of the slips he holds, and he calls out the numbers as quickly as he plays them. It seems quite impossible to believe for a moment that he can really count them, as he brushes them with a butterfly touch; even if he did it is a mystery to any Western mind how he could differentiate between the colours, but the even monotonous voice never hesitates; though perhaps, all on one slip, there may be five or six different arrangements of dots, still his voice runs on without a break—"six red, four white, three red, one white, two red"—or again, "three red, four white, eight red, one white," slip after slip dropping with a little crack on the table, as he enumerates their marking as quickly as the words can be formed.

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I once had a long talk with a Europeanized Chinaman—who often acts as interpreter in the "Lilly Bulke Street" Court cases—on this subject, and he declared that it was only a matter of practice, that the old players know at once by the feel; the red dots are a little rougher than the white, or *vice versa*, while they count them by a sort of instinct, and yet the extraordinary swiftness of the process still remains, and ever will remain, perfectly inexplicable to me.

This wonderful sense of touch shows itself everywhere, in all that the Celestial does; in the swift, fan-like arrangement of a hand of cards—each suit holding four times the number of ours—in the way the cooks in the eating-houses—stout high-priests, Buddhas of gastronomy—slice the infinitesimal shreds of pastry, for garnishing soup, with the most monstrous of knives; in the deftness with which the men in the herb-shops mince and shave and weigh the aromatic herbs.

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These herb or chemists' shops are fascinating. There are to be found remedies for every disease that flesh is heir to.

"That never was ther grievance hot ne cold,
There was eke every holsome spice and gras—"

says Chaucer, in his, "The Assembly of Foules", and so it is in Little Burke Street. Chiefly I go there for camphor—granulated like brown sugar, and of a greyish tint, but of such a perfume! toothpowder made of the powdered ashes of scented geranium-leaves; and an unfailing remedy for toothache, put up in minute fairy-like bottles.

The interiors of the herb-shops are dim and mysterious; the dispensers—ever busy chopping herbs and weighing spices—and the doctor in attendance all of the most placid and confidence-inspiring solemnity.

One learned physician I particularly remember, a new-comer and speaking "velly little Eenglish." He was quite young, as far as years go, but his smile was the oldest thing I have ever seen. It seemed, indeed, as if since the days of Confucius he must have let the corners of his mouth curve, indulgently and mirthlessly, over the furtive strivings and droll pretensions of humanity. Indeed, one feels that everyone in "Lilly Burke Street," all the men in the china, the provision, and the herb-stores, the cook-shops, and gaming-houses, have existed since the beginning of time—till at last their souls have become indifferent alike to good and ill; life appearing, to each, but a task to be finished with, one bead in the necklace of eternity, an oft-repeated routine, where philosophy has ousted pleasure.

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To pass from this sombre and leisurely old world in among the flashing lights and loud twanging voices of Greater Burke Street makes one feel as if one had been roughly flung through the centuries, regardless of time and space—just flipped off from the thumb and finger of some potent, all-indifferent Deity, leaving the greater part of one's anatomy behind one in the process, and with it some subconscious memory, something far away and so deeply buried, beneath a weight of actualities that only in sleep, for the most part, can one catch a glimpse of its shadow, an echo of its voice; though among those inscrutable people, to whom a hundred years or a day are alike but a fragment of eternity, one may yet meet it face to face.

But the Chinamen do not all gather in Little Burke Street, nor do they confine themselves altogether to the making of that cheap furniture, for which they are equally well known and detested, for by them most of the market-gardens within easy reach of Melbourne are both owned and worked.

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The Chinaman is the most careful and thrifty, the most loving, gardener in the world. It seems as

if his little plot of land grows to be to him as his child—no matter how small it is. I remember once watching from my bedroom window, in one of the Melbourne Coffee Palaces of which the back overlooks Little Burke Street, a Chinaman in a blue linen coat, busied during the dinner hour, day after day, with some narcissus in blue bowls on a neighbouring roof, and marvelled at the infinite loving care with which he was tending them. As in the smaller so in the greater, though perhaps, on the whole, he is the truest artist in the minute. The Australian does not like the Chinaman; he resents his frugal ways—in a country that is certainly not frugal—his colour—his strangeness, his untiring, unswerving industry. You see a lot of white men working in the market gardens round Oakleigh and Garden Vale. They stop to talk with each other, to look round at the sky and distant landscape, to enjoy a few quiet puffs at their pipes; above all, to spit on their hands. The Chinaman never looks up, never stops from dawn to dark. He divides his ground into little oblong patches, with channels between to conserve every drop of moisture; he pampers the young weak plants, shading them from wind and sun with bits of sacking, boards, or slates; he loosens the ground unceasingly round them, and waters untiringly. I do not for a moment advocate Australians working in this manner; a man must sometimes straighten his back and look around him, must have something of a soul beyond early tomatoes and green peas; but still there is very much that he could be taught from the alien in his midst; and it is a schoolboy's poorest excuse not to learn from a master because he is personally distasteful to him.

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Australia, particularly in its up-country places, needs more vegetables most terribly, if it is to escape at all from the scourge of cancer which already lays such a heavy toll on its inhabitants; and if it needs more vegetable gardens to satisfy its human needs, it certainly needs more flower gardens for its spiritual needs, as a humanizing, home-making influence, nothing striking the new chum more forcibly than the utter lack of any attempt at beautifying the outside of up-country cottages, save with empty condensed milk and jam tins.

For many years squatters in the drought-stricken districts have employed Chinese gardeners, to whom they often owe the fact that their families grow up healthy, and their wives find some solace, some reminder of their girlhood's home in the lonely wind-swept plains, where the poor despised John Chinaman has—with unceasing toil, with infinite manceuvring, by means of prehistoric wind-wheels and pumps old as Egypt in design—made a little oasis to blossom for them.

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"I would give anything to have a Chinaman to teach my boys vegetable growing," said the Principal of a Horticultural College near Melbourne to me some years ago. "But the Minister would never allow it, and if he did I should have the whole country about my ears." He was right, for no freeborn Australian boy would tolerate for a minute being taught anything by an Asiatic. But are they right in this. One may perhaps despise certain traits in every race, in every phase of Nature even, but is that any proof that they have not much to teach us? And after all, as wise men of all ages have realized, it is from our enemies, not from our friends, that we learn most, and the Chinese native is after all perhaps a trifle older than the Australian—though you in my dear foster-country must really forgive me mentioning it.

CHAPTER VIII

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THE AMUSEMENTS AND THE ARTS

ONCE I lived in a house where there was a dog kept named Turk, presumably a watch-dog, but only presumably so, for he would follow anybody, welcome anybody, and almost go into hysterics of joy at a word of favour even from the veriest sundowner. At the gate-house of the railway crossing near by dwelt a fat old Irishwoman with a brood of children, one of whom, little Jack, a most lovable rascal of some seven or eight years, made a regular practice of stealing Turk, bringing him back after several days, and claiming a reward for having *found* him—usually in the most unlikely places. First of all he was paid for his trouble with a shilling, then sixpence, then the reward dwindled to a penny or an apple, as we all began to realize how we were being had, though we still kept up the solemn pretence just for the sake of the amusement we got out of it. Little Jack was a born bragger. His great boast was: "We've been keepin' gates fur years and years, ever since I wur quite a little chap; and we ain't never 'ad our gate carried away, all the toime we've been at thur job. Why thur's some as 'as thur gates carried away pretty near every week!" Jack had a great idea of fair play for everyone. Once he brought a very small brother with him, when he came to return Turk, and the master of the house took both of the boys into the orchard for the so-called reward. The tiny one, enchanted with the quantity of fruit, the pink-cheeked peaches and golden apricots, ran hither and thither ejaculating, shouting, and appealing for sympathy in his delight, till at last his elder brother, out of all patience with the constant interruptions to what the master of the orchard was saying, caught him by the shoulder, and, with a sharp shake, whispered hoarsely: "Can't yer 'old yer jaw, an' give the bloomin' bloke a show." It was his way of showing respect for his elders and betters.

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Some time later I was away for several months, and on my return was met by a still older brother—with all Jack's rascality and none of Jack's loveliness—who was returning Turk, oozing with easy affection, after some days' absence.

"Where's Jack?" I inquired, not at all in the mood to waste pennies.

The boy's eyes opened wide, with the peculiar hard stare of Australian youth. "Ain't yer 'eard?" he demanded. "Our Jack's drowned; we gets knocked out, an' our Jack drowned the sime day. Australia goin' ter 'ell, that's wot it is."

True enough the Australian eleven had lost the first test match of that season against the Britishers, and little Jack had been drowned in the river the very same day. What does the boy's calm account of the two events show? An immense patriotism or a lack of natural affection. Neither the one nor the other, but simply and entirely that the very heart and soul of the Australian of to-day—even of the smallest larrikin—is completely engrossed with games and sport; not so much personal sport, such as hunting or shooting, but anything that brings with it a chance of gambling. If you walk through any wide bit of park land or open country near Melbourne, in some hollow or other—perhaps in many—you will chance on groups of men squatting on their haunches, with bent heads, engrossed in some mysterious occupation, while one of their number stands at a little distance on watch. If a policeman comes anywhere within sight the sentry whistles, and the men—or youths, as they mostly are—disperse aimlessly in every direction; hands deep in their pockets, hats on the back of their heads, complete vacuity on their countenances; for it is a "Two-Up School" that they have been forming, and Two-Up is illegal, though it is still played persistently in every quiet nook and corner.

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Australians are born gamblers. It is in their blood, I suppose, like restlessness, for there are still to be found in Tasmania secluded spots in the middle of the forests, much like the old native "corroboree" grounds where cock-fights used to be held by the convicts in the early days, and every possible stake that could be mustered laid on the contending birds. Now the tiniest children bet, and bet on anything and everything, while the newspaper boys have a bit on each important race or football match, and an intricate system of gambling with cigarette cards. I think Melbourne is, on the whole, a very sober town—most extraordinarily so—considering the dry heat and the dust. Men go on the "bust," and "paint the town red," but there is very little of that persistent soaking that one meets with in London, where the drunkenness, particularly among the women, strikes me as more and more horrible every time I return there. I have been in Melbourne during elections, and high days, and holidays of all sorts, and have always been struck with the good-tempered sobriety of the people. During the five years, 1893-1897, which was a period of general drought in Australia, there was even a further decrease in drunkenness, people having no money, I suppose, for what out here they call "irrigating." Now that good times have come again the convictions for drunkenness have, unfortunately, also increased. Still, though Victoria drinks more wine than the other States, she consumes considerably less beer and spirits than any, excepting Tasmania. While as for Denmark, which has been held up to her as a model, it consumes 2.54 of spirits per head to Victoria's 0.67, and 20.6 of beer to Australia's 11.92. Might it not therefore be suggested that some of the pats of butter, on which Mr. Foster Fraser lays such stress, may perchance have been seen—and counted—twice over?

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By some irony of fate it seems as if the different vices and virtues in different countries are in the end pretty nearly balanced. England needs a society to protect the health and lives of its children from unutterable cruelties, though it holds up holy hands at the way an Italian treats his horse. It is shaken through its length and breadth at the idea of the Portuguese persisting in slavery, and yet when the women slaves of the North—who, naked to the waist, swing a heavy hammer at chain and nail making for ten hours a day—strike for a princely minimum wage of 2½d. an hour, the Board of Trade decides that they shall go on as they are for another six months—or, if they can be cajoled into it, for yet another six months—or eternity.

The people in Victoria are not cruel either to their children or their wives, even among the lowest classes, as they are in England. Ask anyone who has nursed in the slums of London—if you doubt this cruelty—how many of the women with cancer in their breasts owe it to their husbands' playful habit of knocking them down and kicking them; or examine some of the reports of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Neither do the Australians, as a nation, ill-treat their horses or their cattle, or give way to the sexual excesses of the Latin races, but, on the other hand, they most certainly are inveterate gamblers; a far less repulsive vice than many, I admit, but all the same as far reaching as any in the trouble that it causes.

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Every Saturday there are races somewhere within easy distance of Melbourne, and by tram and train, carriage and motor, people flock to them. It is part of their religion, their Sabbath falling on a Saturday, like the Jews.

Of course the Cup week in November is the high festival of the year, but the race for the Caulfield Cup runs it close. The Caulfield course is most beautifully situated in wide, open, common-like country, dotted with dark masses of pines, and fringed in the distance with blue tinted mountain ranges, while the air blowing from the sea, across the almost untenanted land, is extraordinarily clear and exhilarating. Then the race is run at the very apex of spring, and the day is as inevitably fine as the week of the Agricultural Show is inevitably and hopelessly wet. Everybody dons their best and newest clothes, the men for the most part showing their sense of the festive season by the exuberant colouring of their socks, which, like the burnished dove, of which Tennyson speaks, shows an even livelier purple than usual. The Australian men do not, as a rule, dress well. If they are commercial or intellectual their clothes are too loose; if they are sporting they are too tight, with overmuch of "fit" and not enough "cut." But they make up for it with their waistcoats, and socks, and ties. I remember once being at a seaside picnic where there was a beautiful youth in a pale grey suit; his straw boating-hat was bound and banded with mauve, his tie mauve, his shirt a paler tint of the same, his socks a discreet violet. In clambering about the cliffs a bramble impertinently ripped a long tear in the nether part of his nether

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garments; but he bore it with the sweetest equanimity, in the full knowledge that his under-clothes, thus inadvertently exposed, were also mauve—of the palest tinted silk. It is rather the same with the women. They are very dainty in all the accessories of the toilet, colouring, and trimming, but they do not pay as much attention to cut and material as their English sisters; which is perhaps why they look infinitely better in the summer than the winter, while the girls in white muslins, and silks, and flower-trimmed hats that one sees at the Cup or a Government House garden-party are very hard to beat.

There is an idea that the Australian women's complexions are not good, they themselves being the first to rave about English roses; but I think their complexions are exquisite, though far more delicate in tint, and perhaps not of so lasting a quality as those seen at home. Still the Melbourne girls resemble the English girls infinitely more than do their Sydney sisters, who are more exotic and altogether fragile in appearance.

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New fashions come in slowly and dubiously, for the people luckily possess a strong sense of the ludicrous, and are very much afraid of being made to look foolish, some snapshots taken of the wearers of the hobble-skirt at the last Cup sealing once and for all its inevitable doom.

To this day I smile at the remembrance of the one and only true Directoire costume which ever graced a Melbourne racecourse—worn as it was by a beauteous, though unorthodox, lady—I believe on the Oaks day, the most exclusive and smart day of the whole Cup week. The dress was slit up one side in true Directoire fashion, showing a length of shapely leg well to the knee, and—or so some whispered—a jewelled garter. When scandal reaches a certain point it becomes almost fame, and certainly that particular lady on that particular day was the most discussed person in Australia; her name and that of her protector being on everyone's tongue.

It was the year in which Lord Nolan won the Cup. He was a complete outsider, and nobody had the slightest idea that there was any chance for him. Just before the race a man belonging to our party came up to me, and advised me to put something on him; for he had got a tip that he was bound to win. But I was adamant. I very rarely bet, and I never win if I do; while it takes such a terrible amount of hard work to make any money that I dare not risk losing it.

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I shall never forget the excitement of that race. Opposite the Grand Stand—where the Government House party is always enthroned among a perfect flower-garden of gaily-coloured frocks—and another small stand, over the far side of the course lies the hill, where people do not have to pay any entrance fee, while they have a most perfect view of the races, so that whole families camp there day after day. One could see the people plainly through a glass as Lord Nolan began to gather up the course in his stride, and it seemed as if the whole hill-side shook and swayed with the wild excitement of the swarming masses upon it, while a roar rose on the air like the sound of an inrushing tide upon the shingle. People on the lawn beneath—with all its roses, a mass of quiet and delicate beauty—began to run, mostly backwards and forwards in sheer excitement, waving programmes and shouting. The first round the occupants of the Grand Stand kept quiet, a sort of thrilling quiet—then they arose, and shrieked and waved, just like the crowd on the hill. A little way off I heard a woman's voice rise to the highest note that I should think possible for any human throat to compass, and remain there, vibrating in a long-drawn out scream, while a well-dressed man in front of me kept tearing at the lapels of his coat, and calling out "My God! my God! my God!" at the top of his voice.

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The whole stand seemed to sway. Everyone was shouting wildly, while more wild and amazing than all was the atmosphere of utter savage abandonment, as if for the moment the garment of civilization were literally ripped from hem to hem. I do not think I screamed, but I know my hands and feet were stone cold, while my cheeks flamed, and I felt as if someone were pouring icy water down my back in one small continuous stream.

"There's a cool hundred for me—whoever would have thought it!" said my companion when it was all over, trying to speak indifferently. "Come along and have some tea." And I went, regretting my strength of mind too deeply for any words—even more deeply next morning, when I fared forth, prepared at least to get a little change and amusement out of life by paying my debts, and had my bag cut off my wrist by some thief, unnoticed in the jostling of the crowded street; so losing alike my hardly-earned money and my belief in the beauties of self-denial.

Flemington racecourse—where the Cup week is held, and many lesser races run throughout the year, and which covers an area of 301 acres—is most beautifully kept, and in some spirit of alliteration is almost as famous for its roses as its races. I never saw such standards, arches, bushes of them as there are, all aglow with colour. In front of the Grand Stand and the smaller stand is the lawn, as smooth as a billiard-table, and affording a splendid show-ground for the women's dresses. To the right, beyond the Grand Stand, is the paddock, and the ground where the less wealthy people are massed, shot through by the smart costumes of those who penetrate there from among the more select, to have a look at the horses, and so on to the betting paddock, where numberless bookies congregate, shrieking themselves hoarse. The crowd is simply gigantic—and well it may be, seeing that not only is pretty well every soul there from within easy reach of Melbourne, but all who can afford it—sometimes by means of a year's strenuous saving—from other States and up-country districts. But though the actual size of the crowd is perfectly amazing to any newcomers, who have heard much in regard to the scanty population of Australia, what is even more amazing is to see so enormous a concourse of well-dressed, thoroughly prosperous-looking people; for though individual toilettes may not reach to the same high pitch of extravagance and costly beauty as they do at Ascot, the average is very much higher; shop-girls, servants, mothers of large families, factory hands, and sempstresses alike all having embarked on

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something new for this great festival of the year.



Generally speaking, it is the New South Wales people who—apart from the Victorians—have flooded Melbourne during the Cup week, with the addition, after a good season, of a fair sprinkling of Queenslanders. But this last racing festival has been marked by a quite new influx of South Australians. Of course, some of the very wealthiest have always come up for the week; but the ordinary South Australian farmer is a slow, steady-going person who does not take any risks. Lately, however, the system of close culture, which he has practised with the greatest possible success, and a series of magnificent seasons, have not only given him a feeling of security, but have rendered him so prosperous that he and his family have flocked to Melbourne for this year's sport with light hearts and full pockets. The New South Wales man would venture if he had as much as his train fare, and trust to luck to get back again, but one may feel sure that the South Australian is conscious of a solid balance at the bank before he will come so far away from home for his amusement, nothing showing the difference in the character of the people of the Australian States so plainly as the way in which they take their pleasure. In itself the very fact that there were some 150,000 people at the Cup this year is a very fair sign of the country's prosperity—150,000 well-dressed and keenly alive people, all intensely alert and charged with the nervous energy that is such a characteristic of their race, all hanging like one, with heart and soul and the stored-up excitement of days and hours, on the result of two and a half minutes: no wonder that the very air seems charged with electricity so intense that the only possible relief is to be found by forgetting that we are the civilized product of an artificial age, and by yelling as a savage or a child would yell.

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All the shops, excepting the tobacconists and confectioners and restaurants, are shut on Cup day, which is, indeed, a national holiday, and rather amusing efforts are made by the religious authorities to get their flock out of the way of temptation on such a day. One year, I remember, there was a large Sunday-school picnic at a public park some three miles from Melbourne, under the command of a portly Church of England dignitary. All through the earlier part of the day he was bland and cheerful, though occasionally absent-minded. About five o'clock, however, he became distinctly restless. He walked up and down the park gravely discussing the affairs of Church and State, but I observed that each turn landed us distinctly nearer to the fence abutting on the public highway, while again and again he paused to take out his watch and glance at it with an air of elaborate carelessness. As dog-carts and traps of all sorts—buggies they are called here—began to rattle along the road from the direction of Melbourne it became very evident that my companion was, as they say, "talking out of the back of his head," while constantly interspersing his remarks with ejaculations regarding those misguided souls who had by that time lost their little "all," or been precipitated, by their unholy gains, further than ever on the downward grade. At last he could bear it no longer, and with a decided step, which absolutely disregarded my mischievous attempt to turn, reached the fence, and hailed a passing vehicle: "Hey! hey! You there! who won the Cup?"

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He might just as well have said "How did it go?" or just raised his eyebrows, with an interrogatory glance, for anyone in Australia that day would have known what he meant, or merely have kept silent and waited for the gratuitous information to be tossed to him. I did not dare to ask, but I wondered then—and have wondered since—what he "had on." Something considerable—and misplaced—as I should guess by the expression with which he received the reply.

Everyone goes to the theatre the evening after the Cup race; at least, everyone who has any money left, or can find even standing room. The plays produced during this famous week are usually of the lightest description of musical comedy, or at the Royal and King's the most sensational melodrama; the managers seldom taking the trouble to stage their best play, for people will go whatever happens to be on, while they are too completely in the humour to have a "good time," or too sleepy after long days spent in the open air, to be severely critical.

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Though the totalizer is not legal in Victoria, and the State does not stand to make anything by the betting, 10 per cent. being deducted from the proceeds where it is in use—7½ for the State and 2½ for the race-course expenses—still it gathers in a matter of some £5,800 a year from licence

fees and the percentage of legitimate receipts, the annual sum payable being 3 per cent. on a gross revenue over £1,500, 2 per cent. under that sum, and nil on anything less than £600.

The Melbourne people are inveterate theatregoers, everyone, even the artisan and his wife, regarding a visit to the play as a fitting ending to their week's work; so that, though the theatres are always well filled, they are literally crammed on Saturday nights. The people are very particular, and they will have their plays well dressed, and well staged, and played, but all the critical faculty begins and ends with the audience, for the papers—both daily and weekly—seem to be absolutely lacking in any powers of discernment or courage, being far less exacting, indeed, than the veriest larrikin among the gods.

It is curious to note the different classes of people that are attracted by different plays in Melbourne; the people with the money—evidently here as elsewhere—not being the people with the intellect or taste. Plays like the "Merry Widow" or the "Dollar Princess" fill the stalls and dress-circle to overflowing; but for more serious comedy, or for Shakespeare's plays, the bulk of the audience is to be found patient and watchful in the cheaper parts of the theatre, and it is extraordinary what patience these people will show when it is a question of procuring a good place to see any special play or actor.

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When the adored—and rightly adored—Nellie Stewart returned, some two or three years ago, from a prolonged absence abroad, her admirers began to take their places on the theatre steps for her first evening's performance at about midday—and consumed sandwiches for their lunch. All through the afternoon they waited, persistently cheerful and good-tempered as an Australian crowd usually is. About five o'clock Miss Stewart could stand it no longer, and ordered the doors to be opened, when the wearied but indefatigable "first nighters" flocked thankfully into the pit and gallery. But this was not all. Realizing the hours that must still pass before the people could get a proper meal, she ordered tea, bread-and-butter, and cakes from the nearest caterer's, and fed the waiting multitude liberally. Is it any wonder that so warm-hearted a woman should be adored as she is, as much for her nature as her art. There was a collection of coppers among her guests, I remember, and someone slipped out and bought a huge floral trophy for their hostess, which I am sure meant more to her than all the many elaborate bouquets she had ever received. It is things like this that mark the essential "humanness" of people in Australia and help one to realize the warm heart beneath the curt off-hand manner.

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The actress in Australia, if she touches the popular fancy, is simply overwhelmed with flowers, and I never saw such wonderful bouquets, such intricate and glowing baskets, and harps, and crowns, all bedecked with immense streamers of wide satin ribbon, as are heaped round the feet of a popular star in Melbourne; and not only flowers, elaborate boxes of "lollies," also, and jewels, the summit of originality being lately reached when a flower-bedecked crate of tiny yellow chicks was handed up over the footlights; though this was closely rivalled by a popular actor being presented, some time ago, with a medley of gorgeous socks.

The Melbourne maiden frankly loves a successful actor, particularly if he be handsome in addition; and is no more ashamed of this taste than of one for Paris frocks or sweetmeats, trailing him about after her with as much naïve pride as she would a real lace flounce or any other new importation. I do not think the Melbourne men run after actresses much; they are too busy, as a rule, and girls of their own class are sufficiently bright and smart; but an actor is asked out to tea, and fêted and entertained to an unlimited extent, which, I suspect, accounts for the smug self-satisfaction of most of his kind after a few months in the country, the partiality they arouse being quite frankly shown, as are all other sentiments and proclivities.

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The Australian audiences are for the most part clean-minded, and there is little encouragement given to the problem play out here. Frank vulgarity the people can understand and laugh at, as they did for so long at poor George Laurie's delightful absurdities, but for the stuffy atmosphere of "double entendre" they have no time; while they are frankly disgusted at many of the plays that appeal to the English, and I do not believe for a moment that productions such as I have seen in London, adapted—and badly adapted, too—from the French, would have the faintest success in Melbourne. There is only one music-hall, "The Opera House," as it is misleadingly called, or more familiarly, "Rickard's." Most nights there are a couple or so of good turns on here, usually by some imported star or trick artist, who comes rather late in the evening; but the whole affair is very dull in comparison with any European show of the sort, and overhung with a rather gloomy air of middle-class propriety. Melbourne boasts of but few gilded youths, not sufficient to make any show of; while, though the "demi-mondaines" certainly do patronize "Rickard's," they are studiously quiet, both in dress and demeanour. I suppose there is vice enough in Melbourne, as there is in any other town, but it certainly does not "glitter," and for the most part the seats of this one variety show are filled by bourgeois families, of intensest gravity and decorum, which is curious, for, on the whole, the Australians seem to take their pleasure—and in Melbourne even more so than in Sydney—with a sort of jollity that is essentially youthful. This spirit of youth I attribute to the open-air conditions of most forms of amusement—cricket and football, racing, boating, and picnicking—while, with a climate warm enough to enjoy themselves in such a way, and with a summer-heat that is neither relaxing, nor sufficiently overpowering to forbid physical exertion—I believe that all these people, as long as they continue to take their pleasures in such a wholesome fashion, will still keep themselves free from the worst sort of dissipation.

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Next to racing I should certainly place football first in the popular affections, particularly among the lower classes. During the season the whole talk on the trams, or in the trains, is on that one

subject, "Well, who won?" or "How did it go?"—being the inevitable question asked of the gripman, by everyone who boards a tram coming from the direction of any of the suburbs where there has been a match. At first you are puzzled by the gratuitous bits of information the conductor deals out to you with your ticket, or your neighbour, out of sheer philanthropy, beguiles you with, the information often being rendered all the more puzzling by the fact that many of the localities from which the teams hail bear famous names.

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"Did you hear Balaclava's won?" or "Windsor's clean wiped out" or "Mentone"—in which the final "e" is not sounded—"has been knocked to bits!" Gradually, however, one gets to adapt one's mind to the new conditions among which one lives, and realize that if the people are discussing "Burns" on the trams, it is not the poet nor the politician; it is the prize-fighter; while any unknown name which strikes your ear—and which, from the way it is uttered, you might make sure belonged to some all-powerful politician, at least, is probably that of the latest hero who has kicked a goal or won a race.

The Melbourne men work hard enough when they are at it, but once free of their offices, they are like boys out from school. They do not talk shop, they do not even think of it; and at one o'clock on Saturdays I believe it is only by some stupendous effort of will that—as they flock out from chambers, offices, and counting-houses, off to a cricket or football match, race-meeting, or golf—they desist from throwing their hats in the air and shouting from sheer delight.

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It is strange that, in the face of all the indomitable pluck and light-hearted gaiety these people show, that their literature should be permeated with that uncouth melancholy which gives other nations so false an idea both of the country and the people.

"Most wretched men
Are cradled into poetry by wrong;
They learn in sorrow
What they teach in song."

Shelley says; and perhaps this is most truly the case in Australia. That it is not prosperity, wide sheep-runs, good seasons, horse-racing, and theatre-going that has produced the literature of the country, but loneliness of heart and soul; the terrifying size of the country; and poverty and misunderstanding.

Literature began early in Australia. Among the first writers Barron Field—whose name, particularly in conjunction with his book, "The First-Fruits of Australian Literature," touched Charles Lamb's whimsical humour to such a delightful issue; C. H. Harpur, who struck a typical Australian—if not a particularly musical note, despite the fact of being hailed as the Australian Wordsworth; John Dunmore Lang; John Farrell; and Matthew Flinders—whose every word should be read for the sake of the character, personality, and achievements of the man who wrote it, and the direct, tense style of his sturdy prose.

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Arthur Lindsay Gordon is still the most widely read and quoted poet in the country, yet, though he had a great feeling for and knowledge of Australian life, he was, in his appearance, in his ways, and his outlook, to the very end, most essentially an Englishman; though, perhaps, on the whole, he saw and realized more of the character of the people and the aspects of the country than one who had always been familiar with it, just as any artist is more successful in drawing a face which he does not know too well.

Still, it was as one who has deliberately observed a country and adapted himself to its life and needs that Gordon wrote. There were no pre-natal and unrealized impressions at work before the birth of his Southern muse; it was all conscious and intentional.

On the other hand, Henry Kendall was innately Australian—the first, and as yet the greatest, of her true poets. He was saturated with the spirit of the place long before he ever wrote a word, before his childish fingers could hold the pen; perhaps, even, before he ever saw the light of day. He read English poets with avidity, and yet he judged them by his own involuntary standards—the standard of one for whom Nature wears a completely different face from that which she shows to those whose childhood has been spent among English meadows and woods. And because he was so true to himself and his country, and because his art was so simple and so sincere—and he wrote from his very heart and soul—if for no other reasons, Kendall's writings can never fail to be dear to the best of his countrymen; deserving, indeed, to be far more dear than they have yet become. The verses on the death of his little baby-girl, Araluen, might have been trivial, even mawkish, if it were not that their heartbroken words ring with such truth in our ears that we cannot fail to know that the poet is not writing about what he saw or heard, but what he felt, wrung to the soul, as he already was at the time that those lines were written, by poverty, by shame, and sorrow.

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Nowadays the Australian poet has but little excuse for melancholy, though he still seems to be "saddest when he sings," unless he happens to be affecting a Kipling-like jargon. That is why his sentiments do not ring so true as they might do—as true as in the days when his life in the New Country was so bitterly hard and barren, and when such horrors as that murder of the colonists by blacks—which led Kendall to write "On the Paroo"—could stir a poet's soul to a finer frenzy than any merely personal suffering.

"The wild men came upon them like a fire
Of desert thunder; and the fierce, firm lips

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That touched a mother's lips a year before,
And hands that knew a dearer hand than life,
Were hewn like sacrifice before the stars,
And left with hooting owls and blowing clouds,
And falling leaves and solitary wigs. . . .

"Turn thyself and sing;
Sing, son of sorrow. Is there any gain
For breaking of the loins, for melting eyes,
And knees as weak as water?—Any balm
For pleading women, and the love that knows
Of nothing left to love?"

Compare this, which is very typical of Kendall, with the following, as completely typical of Gordon:

"Here's a health to every sportsman, be he statesman or lord;
If his heart be true, I care not what his pockets may afford:
And may he ever pleasantly his gallant sport pursue
If he takes his liquor fairly, and his fences fairly, too."

And yet a hundred copies of Gordon's poems will be sold to every half a dozen—or less—of Henry Kendall's.

Later on, among other worthy followers of Kendall, Boake—another truly Australian poet, of whom great things might have been expected save for his early death—left at least one masterpiece in "Down where the Dead Men lie"; while Victor Daly and Harry Lawson have both done memorable work, no one having more completely got at the heart of things, at the spirit of the Bush, and the soul of the bushman—ay, and of the swaggy, too—than has the latter.

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Lawson is not in the least dazzled by the melodramatic aspects of the country, the beautiful wild young man type that Gordon depicts, the dark and daring braggadocio. Indeed, he speaks with the bitterest scorn of those who use their art to immortalize.

"The gambling and the drink that are their country's greatest curse."

But in the pathos and the humour of the commonplace his genius burns clear, with rare glimpses of a spiritual insight far above that gospel of mere revolt with which so many of his fellows are imbued.

Another Australian favourite is A. B. Paterson, whose "Man from Snowy River" has met with such immense success—a success that is not for a moment to be wondered at, for if his poetry is not of the highest type, Paterson paints the Australian Bush with such truth and vigour and such true affection, that, to those who dwell in the cities, it is like a veritable breath of the wild open country and the wild free life.

"For the drover's life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know:
And the Bush has friends to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him;
For the murmur of its breezes, and the river on its bars;
And he sees the vision splendid, of the sunlit plains extended
And at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars."

Australian writers up to the present time seem to have been at their best in verse, and after that in short stories, Lawson's collection, published under the title of "While the Billy Boils," being hard to beat, particularly the stories of "The Bush Undertaker" and "The Drover's Wife." But it yet remains for a great Australian book to be written, and for the undoubted latent talent that certainly exists to establish itself by some more solid effort. Perhaps one of the most vivid works that has ever appeared, regarded as a true product of this country, was "My Brilliant Career," by Myles Franklin, which, in spite of its crudities and egotism, gave rise to a hope of great things from the same pen, particularly as it was written when the authoress was only seventeen years of age; but nothing more of any note has appeared, and one fears that it was only a case of another meteoric flare. Among other more or less well-known writers Marcus Clarke was English; Mrs. Humphrey Ward left Australia when she was a small child; Mrs. Campbell Praed, Mary Gaunt, Guy Boothby, were all born in Australia; but it is for the most part in England and of England that they write. Of course, there have been, and are now, many lesser lights in addition to those of whom I have written. Among them Roderic Quinn, Brunton Stevens, and Rolf Boldrewood, who has in his own particular, obvious fashion—or, at least, in his one famous book—reached as high a level as any. Yet it is in the future that we must still seek for a sustained work of fiction, worthy both of the people and the country, a book at once as true and simple as "Marie Claire," or Yoshio Markino's "A Japanese Artist in London," of which every line of writing tells as delicately and yet vividly as does each touch of his magic brush. America seems to have taken to fashioning her literature with a crimping-iron and "sheer-lawn," while Australia hacks hers out with a billyhook from back-block and Bush. Still, there is something between the two, as perhaps Mrs. Æneas Gunn, among all the writers in this new world, has been the only one as yet to discover.

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In art as in literature there seems to be an idea that crudity is strength, even at times a real

brutality, as in much of Norman Lindsay's clever work. Though it is little wonder if the Australian artists feel, as well as paint, with a sort of ferocity, seeing that art is about the last thing which appeals to those who are in the position to buy pictures; and, if they do buy, they want size, they want show, something "pretty," and highly coloured, and smoothly finished; while it remains to the eternal credit of the artistic fraternity that they certainly do not pander to this demand, even if they go too far in the opposite direction. The trustees of the public galleries seem to try to elevate the masses by leaving their own artists severely alone, and spending enormous sums on pictures that are undoubtedly "caviare to the general," Melbourne being far worse than Sydney in this respect, one of its most recent acquisitions being an ineffective and rather colourless Watteau, for which the trustees paid £3,125. Meanwhile the prices offered to local artists are often little short of ludicrous, the £100 paid to George Lambert for his picture, "The Shop," which was lately hung in the Victorian Artists' Exhibition, being regarded as something quite abnormal; while Mrs. Ellis Rowe's wonderful collection of paintings of native flowers went begging for years before they were ultimately purchased by Sydney.

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It is odd that a country so frankly egotistical, so frankly immersed in all that is new and fresh, should allow its money to be spent on pictures which must represent—to 90 per cent. of those who see them—nothing more than a mere name. It is, indeed, as odd a contradiction as is the alacrity with which titles are seized by the representatives of this people, who so greatly pride themselves upon their democracy.

Only a few years ago a really very large sum was spent upon a Corot for the Melbourne Gallery, "The Bent Tree." Crowds flocked to see it, because it was the thing to do; but from the remarks I heard several times as I stood near it, they were only asking each other in sheer bewilderment, "What came ye out for to see?" very little admiration being expressed, save for the frame. Still, it is now only a matter of time, I really believe, until someone will find leisure to rebel against spending so much on a style of picture that is supposed to mould the tastes of the people—quite erroneously, for we are but little influenced by what we do not understand—and paintings which show an art as beautiful and more vital, and more comprehensible, to the people will be insisted on; for each year shows the Australians rebelling, with a greater persistency, against the adaptation of themselves to past ideals, the pouring of new wine into old bottles.

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Australia has not yet produced any great composer; and yet it has gone far, and will go still farther, in the musical world, fresh young talent passing over to London or Paris almost every year to complete its training; while the number of beautiful voices that a further opening up of the country, and further facilities for recognition and teaching, will bring to light, can scarcely be over-estimated. The Australian's ordinary uneducated speaking voice is curiously harsh and raucous. But, in spite of this, the percentage of singing voices is wonderfully high, owing, perhaps, to the light, dry atmosphere and the absence of fogs; while I believe that the best way of improving the natural intonation will be found to be by teaching singing more carefully and consistently in elementary schools, and thus bringing out all that is best in the children's voices.

Mr. Marshall Hall, who was formerly Professor of Music at Ormonde College and the head of the Conservatorium, is the ruling spirit of the musical world in Melbourne, in spite of having completely shocked the Nonconformist conscience of the town by his somewhat erotic writings and the liberty he took in managing his private affairs for himself—the difficulty always being that nobody is supposed to have any private affairs out here. Still, in the end, people's love for the beautiful music that Mr. Hall made for them triumphed; and at his fortnightly concerts, held during the winter months, the Town Hall is usually crammed, for it is not only what he does himself that is so wonderful, but what he manœuvres his supernumeraries into doing. Here for a shilling—the highest-priced seats are only three shillings—one can slip off the cares of the world for three hours on a Saturday afternoon, and, freed from all the petty obligations of life, listen to some of the best music in the world. All honour to those who have found the best and held to it, and even imbued the rich people in Melbourne with the idea that there is something higher in life than racing and football-matches; or, at least, that it is "the correct thing" for them to "patronize" such concerts and help on the expenses by taking the dearest seats. The money is the same; while for the encouragement of the performers there are always the rows and rows of ardent, enthralled listeners in the shilling seats.

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CHAPTER IX

RURAL LIFE, MOUNTAIN, AND FOREST

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PEOPLE at home do not know the true meaning of the word "loneliness," and we often hear English labourers and their wives talking of isolation, when there is a church and village only a couple of miles off, or other cottages and farms, at any rate, within walking distance of them. Indeed, we are, in general, so used to living closely huddled together that we get scared when we are alone in any large open space, with no single sign of humanity, fenced and cultivated land or smoking chimney within sight. The less educated people are the more awful this loneliness seems, till the wild cliffs of Cornwall and the moors of Yorkshire and Devonshire become to their distorted fancy fearful and pixie-haunted places. And yet even the loneliest of all these lonely spots is densely populated in comparison with the country districts in Australia where one meets with people who have lived all their lives as much as 200 miles away from any town or railway-station, and with

children, and even grown-up men and women, who have never seen any white person outside their own families. If you can imagine that,—imagine that there are women who have never seen how other women dress or do their hair, and young men who have met not a single person of the opposite sex beyond their own mother and sisters; whose stores are brought to them by bullock-waggon or team from a far-distant town, having themselves never even seen a shop-window; who receive no letters because there is nobody to write them; who would not know if the whole of Europe were convulsed with war because they see no papers; who have no knowledge, no aspirations, no hope, simply because they see no outside person whose life they may compare with their own—if you can imagine this, I say, and all that it means, then you may realize a little what true loneliness is.

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To be able to ride mile after mile, day after day, and see no living soul; to know that nothing can happen beyond birth and death, rain or drought; to live only with animals, and with two or three of your own kind, whose every vice and virtue, expression and thought you know as well as you know the nature of your own sheep and cows; to be a man or woman, with all the strong passions and instincts of your sex—all the stronger from the fact of living so perpetually among animals—and yet with no chance of honourable marriage before you; no games, no society, no diversion, no possibility of any change: if you could only realize it all—you women gossiping over your gates through the long summer evenings in England, with your children playing before you in the road; you men gathered round your village club or public-house fires, on cold winter nights, grumbling about the weather, discussing the news of the day together, walking home through the village, flinging a “goodnight” on this side and on that; all of you living your human, homely lives; every boy and girl with a sweetheart to walk out with on Sundays; and the squire and the parson at hand if you are in trouble, and a club doctor within reach if you are ill.—If you could only realize what it means, this awful loneliness of the far places of the Empire, you might be a little more contented with your own lot, and have more respect for the men and women who have fought through such frightful conditions, who have kept themselves and their children clean and sane, and with it all, helped to the making of a new nation.

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The question of eugenics is a difficult one for a mere scribbler to touch upon, but it seems strange that a people which is endeavouring so strenuously to keep itself entirely white—realizing fully the danger of mixed marriages—has not also realized more completely the grave danger arising from intermarriage—and worse—among these isolated families, ^[232] and the appalling percentage of lunatics which it produces.

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All this is but part of the crying need for closer settlement; it is also a proof of what I mentioned in my last chapter regarding the accommodation needed for agricultural labourers; the irrigation which will make closer settlement a possibility, and—conversely—the closer settlement which will make irrigation practicable. Still, I believe that married men with families, and not stray bachelors, are the people needed in the agricultural districts, or, to go even farther than this, little colonies of people from the same country, county, or village; while, on the whole, it is more in Southern France, Italy, and Spain, than in England that suitable families, with some knowledge of working in hot, dry climates and of the possibilities of irrigated land, are most likely to be found.

People, at home, attempt to judge Australia as they judge some people. “Oh, all the Smiths have tempers!” they will say, and imagine that thereby they have disposed in half a dozen words of twice as many individualities, and root and branch of the entire Smith family, whose characters may be as divergent as the points of the compass; and:—“Awful place for drought, isn’t it?” is the almost inevitable question asked when I have mentioned Australia; usually followed by the remark, “Awfully hot, too.” Size means nothing whatever to such people; if they have any idea of any variety of climate in Australia, they think that it must be “cooler up north,” quite ignoring all that they have ever heard of Queensland and the Northern Territory, which alone covers 523,620 square miles. Victoria is the smallest state in Australia; still, it contains, roughly speaking, 87,884 square miles and an extraordinary diversity of climates.

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About eight years ago I met a Victorian schoolmaster whose little boy of seven had never seen rain; and shortly after that another who lived in a district that was under snow during the greater part of the year. There are dense forests—notably those in the Western districts, where the trees grow so closely together that the people spend their lives in a sort of semi-twilight: while the mud is so deep along the forest tracks that they have to do all their travelling on horseback; and their carting by means of sledges, the runners of which will slide along over the top of the mud instead of sinking and sticking in it as wheels would do. Once I was staying with some people near Camperdown whose parlour-maid hailed from the depths of the forest, some thirty miles away. An afternoon a week off to see her parents was out of the question, but occasionally she had a couple of days’ holiday, and then thought nothing of the thirty miles or so on horseback each way. Though to my English mind it seemed an odd way for a parlour-maid to take an outing. And such an immaculate parlour-maid, too! waiting at table in such a neat black frock, with such snowy apron and cap, that it was difficult to realize her rising at dawn and riding off cross-legged on the wiry little steed, which the servants had for their special use, into the mysterious twilight of the forest.

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In sharp contrast to such places as this is to be found the bare, sun-baked, torrid region of Mildura, a place where at one time there were more aristocrats to be found than in the whole of Australia; Englishmen of good families having flocked there, some for the sake of health, some attracted by the wonderful fruit-growing capacities of the place. I remember one beautiful young man “batching” there for years—cooking his own dinner, doing the house-work, such as it was,

washing up the dishes and working meanwhile like a fury on his little fruit farm—who would come down to Melbourne for the Cup looking as if absolutely fresh from Bond Street. He went home for a trip not long ago, and when he came back amused me very much by a description of a dinner which his people had given by way of welcoming him back. He was a gay person; he had been interested, and amused, and stimulated to talk by the evident interest everyone showed in his adventures, and still talking and laughing, not thinking what he was doing, as the ladies rose to leave the table, from the long force of habit he began to collect the dishes and plates, to scrape them, and pile them one on the top of the other, under the very eyes of the amazed butler and his minions.



LOADING FRUIT ON THE MURRAY AT MILDURA.

The first settlement of Mildura, which is on the border of Victoria and New South Wales, was in 1884, the settlement being run and the first irrigation scheme inaugurated by the famous Chaffey Brothers. In 1887 the Chaffey Brothers Company, Limited, was formed, and recognized as supreme until 1895, when the place was taken over by the Mildura Irrigation Trust. The population, which, when the first census was taken in 1891, was 2,321, has now increased by another 5,000, and may well go on increasing, for Mildura is in a thriving condition. Very nearly all the dried fruits which come from Victoria, and the greater part of the canned fruits also, have been grown in Mildura, which is very certainly the garden of the garden State. In 1908 the value of the fruit exports of Victoria—nearly all of them from there—amounted to £153,062, the dried raisins and apricots alone being worth £84,627; Mildura's one rival in this respect being Renmark, in South Australia, Mildura heading the lists with sultanas and other raisins, and Renmark with currants and other dried fruits. Still, in 1908, dried fruits were imported from overseas to the value of £99,518, and fresh fruit to the value of £107,666, so there is still an opening for "noblemen's sons and others" in Australia. Among these, men with the right sort of wives will certainly prove of the most value to the country; though I would not wish to be as invidious as the lady whose advertisement I once read in the *Melbourne Age*, and who proffered herself as prepared to fill the post of housekeeper to a "bachelor or gentleman."

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Australian scenery has earned for itself the title of "melancholy," and in places this can scarcely be wondered at. One can well realize the feeling of depression and foreboding that is produced by the wide stretch of unhumanized country—covered for the most part with a short khaki-coloured grass, and rendered spectral and unreal by the white ring-barked trees that dot it—in the mind of people fresh from the lush greenness of Devonshire, or the closely cultivated land of the English Midlands; crossed and recessed as it is with flower-decked hedges; cut up into little compact, sheltered fields; having nothing in common at all with those vast paddocks, the stretch of which is scarcely broken by the wooden posts and wire which separate them from each other at the distance of many acres.

That there are numerous districts such as these in Australia I must confess, though far fewer in Victoria than in other States; while it seems to me that the very last adjective to be applied to the landscape around Melbourne is that of "melancholy"; if one must use a hackneyed phrase, "smiling" would be far more to the purpose.

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Take the train from Melbourne and drive out to St. Kilda, the Brighton of Melbourne; there is nothing to depress one there—plenty of trees, blue sea and sky, crowds of well-dressed, cheerful people: Jews—Jews in plenty—yet not the Jews of the poorer quarters of London or other European towns, but prosperous, well-dressed Jews that are a credit to any country.

Then change from the cable to the electric tram, and go on to the *bona-fide* Brighton and Middle Brighton. There is the remains of a swamp at one side of the line, it is true, but that is being drained and made habitable as quickly as the work can be done, and already there is a fringe of houses among the trees at the edge of it nearest to the sea, while at the other side rises a soft green mass of tree-decked undulations, dotted with clusters of pleasant villas.

Once Middle Brighton is reached there are trees either side and prosperous houses standing in wide gardens; the brilliant blue sea to the right, a couple of hundred yards from the line.

Then, again, take the train and go farther along the coast, to Hampton, where the Ti-trees are a study in themselves and the grass above the cliffs sheeted with yellow Cape-weed during the

spring months.

Then take another short train-ride, or walk to Sandringham, with its fine club-house and beautiful undulating golf-course; to Mentone; to Frankston; to a dozen other places, all within an hour's journey—or but little more—from Melbourne. Or stay a week at Mordialloc, with its exquisitely appointed little hostel, reminiscent of all the best in our old village inns at home—a peaceful, shady place this, with a long arm of the sea winding for miles inland, dotted with white-sailed pleasure-boats, or bright green tubs, in which misanthropic fishermen sit smoking, day after day, as they watch their float—the only melancholy note in the cheerful scene. p. 238

Or break away inland on to the high, bracing, open country around Oakleigh, with the blue Dandenong Ranges in the distance, and many acres of market-gardens, from which a long procession of carts trail down to the Victoria market three times a week—at an hour when all the lights of the town are still burning, to be met returning again as the inhabitants of the suburbs flock in to their work—laden high with manure from the city stables, on the top of which, more than likely, the wearied-out husbandman is sleeping peacefully, while the horses make their decorous way homeward, with a wise air too dependable to be described as human. Where there are no market-gardens on the heights there is rough common land, white with heath and kindred shrubby plants, while across the open country there blows such an air—clean, and clear, and invigorating. Still farther on the line runs right up into Gippsland, the black, luscious soil of which grows the finest grass in Victoria, a paradise of a place, where drought is hardly known—a district showing, indeed, only one blot on its scutcheon, and that—shared by almost every other dairying centre, and the work of man and not of Nature, who has, indeed, been bountiful to Gippsland—the terrible overworking of the children by their parents, in the greed for quick gain and dislike of paying out any money in wages, which is such a crying disgrace to the country. p. 239

Children, who often have three miles or more to walk to school, are expected to be up at four in the summer, and but little later in the winter, and milk ten or twelve cows before they start off on the long tramp to their legitimate day's work. To the young Gippslanders the cow seems indeed an awful and all-devouring Moloch, eating up alike their youth, their hours for play, their strength, and vitality. I once had a most charming girl, the daughter of a prosperous Gippsland dairy farmer, as a sort of general household help. She could not touch milk—she could not bear the sight of it. If she brought me a glass of it on a salver, I have seen her throat swell and the tears come into her eyes in her effort to keep from retching. She was very pretty and refined, and her people were well off; but every day, almost ever since she had been able to reach the cow's udder, she had milked from ten to fifteen cows, morning and evening, till—luckily for her—body and soul had alike rebelled. Her parents considered it most derogatory that she should be working with a stranger for a fixed wage; but she declared that she would do anything rather than go back to the farm, where her two little brothers of ten and twelve were already doing their share of the milking, each morning before they went to school and each evening after they returned. That the brains of children so overworked cannot be of much use to them during their school-hours is beyond a doubt; and that their physique suffers equally with their intelligence is clearly shown by the stunted and jaded little old men and women who fill the benches of the preparatory schools in the dairying districts. p. 240

Quite the most beautiful piece of country within easy reach of Melbourne is, to my mind, to be found along the Healesville line. By the time that Croydon is reached, one hour only from the city, the scenery becomes completely rural. Here at least there is not the faintest hint of melancholy to be seen. The lie of the land is delightfully undulating. At every turn of the line one catches sight of compact little orchards, and gardens, and prosperous homesteads. There are trees everywhere, and peeps of the clear blue of the Dandenong ranges between them.



RING-BARKED TREES AND MAIZE.

It is indeed all "a dimplement of ups and downs," a prosperous, smiling land. In the early spring, when the orchards are out, and hillsides and valleys are white with plum-blossom, and the wattle runs a line of pure yellow along every hedgerow, rioting out in places, from sheer exuberance of growth, into veritable forest trees, each like a bouquet of yellow bloom; then, indeed, there is p. 241

little of sadness to be seen, and if any is felt, it is but that we cannot renew our youth in common with Nature.

From Croydon upwards the valleys grow deeper, the hills higher, the paddocks wider; the whole country less snug and compact. One passes vineyards, the largest belonging to Victoria's adored Madame Melba; and beautifully fenced and kept pasture-land, part of the estates of the prima donna's father, Mr. Mitchell, famous not only for his daughter, but—quaint enough contrast—for his pigs and his bacon factory. The trees are big here, and cast wide-stretching shadows, beneath which the cattle congregate during the heat of the day. How I wish I could paint the landscape! It is all a study in pastel tints, with none of the crude primary colours seen in tropical regions, no vivid scarlets or emerald greens. The distant hills are grey-blue, the middle distance a brownish-blue, the fields, even in spring, of a yellowish tint, save where they are blotted by velvety shades. The gum-trees, here in the open, are very large and beautifully proportioned, with their huge limbs growing to within four feet or so of the ground; and the foliage is grey, or golden, or brown, or shaded with madder tints—but never an absolute green; while over all hangs for the most part a delicate shimmer of heat, the colour of the palest blue larkspur.

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Finally, as you disembark at Healesville Station the arms of the hills enfold you, while in every direction around you swell the bosoms and shoulders of them, deep with massed trees. The township itself is clean and cheerful, yet inclined to stuffiness; so one hires a horse and buggy and drives farther afield up the mountain-side, or else adventures one's life in the public motor—which has replaced, within my memory of Australia, the tranquil old coach—and starts away up over the Black's Spur, along a road which follows the actual track made by the aboriginals in those days when they divided the forest ranges among themselves—the opossum, the native bear, and kangaroo.

Better abjure the motor, though—it is a brute—and, waiting until it and its smell are past, hire a couple of horses at the hotel and drive up the mountain far enough in its wake to be able to forget it.

The road is wide, and for a while it runs along comparatively level ground, in one place crossing a bridge, and passing a wilderness of overgrown gardens, where some earlier settlers' dwellings must have been, and where there is still a lilac-bush that blossoms bravely each spring, and pink monthly roses, and clumps of fuchsias, a few rough broken walls and a blackened hearthstone—a melancholy sight this, that all the gallant gaiety of the flowers fails to modify.



A BUSH GIANT. Photo King & Co.

Then the road begins to wind steeply upwards, up and up. Every now and then one catches the delicious sound of running water from the jealously guarded stream that helps to supply Melbourne. As the forest grows more dense the trees rise higher and higher in their efforts to catch the light, their white-skinned forms hung with long, russet-tinted rags and tatters of bark. Such trees! One's eye follows them upwards with a feeling that is little short of worship—not for the trees themselves, though one might adore worse gods, but for the something pure and elevating to which they seem to lift one. Surely no cathedral ever built with hands could be so sacred or awe-inspiring as this sanctuary of the woods, with its tapering white pillars, some as much as 300 feet in height.

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Far above one, on the right as one winds up the tortuous road, tower these giant gums, their very roots adapting themselves to the steep graduate; those on the highest part of the slope short and sturdy, stuck out like feet at an acute angle to the trunk. The tap-root thick and straight, and the

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roots on the lower slopes long and slender like ropes, while beneath them flourish a mass of saplings and tree-ferns. To the left one looks down on a sea of green, out of which the tallest of them stretch white arms, and now and then, as the road turns, one catches a glimpse of more mountains, blue with distance; or a stretch of hillside where the trees have been stripped by fire, or ring-barked, and stand all naked and ashen white, strangely glacial in appearance, against the blue background.

Over the mountain is "Lindt's," where the motor disgorges its passengers for a couple of hours or more before the return journey. There is no need, should you wish to go there, to waste your breath in explanations to anyone around Melbourne; you have simply to mention the name, and they will all be ready to tell you the distance and the way to reach the place. It is a boarding-house, such as in England we could never even imagine, built all on one floor, with many meandering passages and odd corners, the whole structure having spread gradually to supply the demand made upon it. But, after all, it is not an ordinary boarding-house, and it is not an ordinary hotel, though as many as twenty casual guests will often lunch there on a fine day, while a number of the best class of Melbourne people stay there from Saturday till Monday, or even for the entire summer holidays; though, to my mind, in the winter—when the big wood-fires are all burning and the forest shivers around it—there is a more subtle delight to be found in the place; besides, though high, it is sheltered from the coldest winds, and it is glorious to feel fresh and vigorous enough for real long walks. Still, it is not the scenery, the giant gums, and tree-ferns, the mountains, and the peep between them of an immensity of distance—no words can ever describe the all-exquisite blue of the distance in Australia—that makes the place so distinctive, for there are other spots as favoured. It is Lindt himself, the great man, the mighty talker. He is so vigorous that he must be moving and talking the whole time, and he moves in a large breezy way; while he talks—well, he talks like nothing in the world so much as Longfellow's "Hiawatha." For years he lived in New Guinea, and has some of the most beautiful photos I ever saw taken there by himself. He will show them to you—he will show you anything, including his own heart—I do not know that he would not even show you his bank-book.

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The coming of the motor every day is either a tragedy or a comedy to Herr Lindt; it is quite enough, anyhow, in the play of the emotions that overflow on to you from "mine host" to make an entire drama.

Each midday when he goes down to the gate to await the arrival of this chariot of fate, it is heralded by a sort of Greek chorus, in which all the parts are taken by Lindt, at one moment a pæan of hope, and at another a dirge of despair. As the motor rounds the last corner—even if you are some yards away up the rustic steps which lead to the house and cannot see it approach—a subtle but distant change in the atmosphere tells you in a single moment whether the luncheon-table is going to be full to overflowing or graced only by a bare two or three beyond the resident guests. But deep as Herr Lindt's feelings are, they do not long remain too deep for words, and if the worst has happened, the storm bursts in a torrent.

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"Nobody coming!" he will cry, as if the expression of his grief was literally squeezed out of him by some internal agony. "Nobody—nobody—One gentleman and a female—and the driver! O mein Gott! mein Gott! Ach Gott in Himmel what have I done to be thus ruined? Ach! tut! one mann mit a female, and dinner ready for twenty! It is mein death, mein ruin!"—and the huge man will almost weep with sheer disappointment.

Sometimes, out of mischief, I would remind him: "I am here, Herr Lindt; you have me, you know." And this was always the last straw. He was too uniformly courteous to express his opinion as to what I might amount to as far as money went, but you should have seen the look that he would cast on me as he opened the little gate, with all the air of a fallen monarch, to the one or two passengers that the motor had brought to him. Still, in general, he was the most genial of hosts; no trouble was too great for him to take for the comfort and amusement of his guests. Besides, he is the Lindt of Lindt's! He has created Lindt's, adapting one of the most beautiful spots possible to human needs; not merely the needs of food or shelter, but that other need which we all feel—for a flavour of personal liking and interest that will hold us, even when the best scenery in the world seems but dust and ashes.

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An alternative of Lindt's—and in some moods, also in some company, a very seductive one—is afforded by supplying oneself with a luncheon-basket, and driving in the motor merely to the summit of the hill, then camping till it returns. The spot to choose is just where the clear waters of the reserve pass at a distance of some fifty feet below the road, separated from it only by a steep bank and a thick belt of tree-fern and forest myrtle—another tree like the Ti-tree most absolutely Japanese in form, every curiously twisted bough soft and grey with lichen. The stream is looped here, and there is a little plateau of the greenest moss—real green this time—within the arm of the loop, on which to build one's fire, kindling it surely and quickly with what is called "bull's-wool," the thick, dry fibre, like fine cocoa-nut matting, which forms the hair shirt of the gum-tree between the white skin and the cream and green and madder-tinted bark.

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Billy-tea—the leaves thrown into the billy while the water is boiling fast and furious, just before it is lifted from the fire, then let stand till they have settled—is like no other tea in the world for aroma and flavour. A hint of the wild has somehow become imprisoned in this domesticated beverage; it is impregnated with the scent of the gum-trees and a species of smokiness that is somehow delicious, and, above all, it is hot and fresh, a drink fit for the gods—though by no means to be wasted in libations—the blue smoke of the fire, rising so steadily to the still bluer sky, forming the incense of this woodland communion. Chiefly I remember the thinnest slices of

ham—at such picnics *à deux*—and brown bread-and-butter, carried in the true wanderer's fashion—a solid wad cut out of the brown loaf and a small pat of butter inserted, then the bit of bread that has been removed cut to a thin slice and replaced on the top—an altogether ideal arrangement, as in the hottest weather the butter kept cool and firm, while even if it did melt a trifle, it would only melt into the bread, and none be lost. All this, and that divine beverage, and the clear racing stream at our feet, and the ferns and the trees all about us. I would draw you a little map of it—but we must each find our own way to Paradise, and I would hurry no one, for, after all, we cannot live our lives out in such a delectable place; while, when once it is passed, there is one oasis the less on the desert way.



A HAELESVILLE GULLY.

In England everyone speaks of the gum-tree, or eucalyptus, as if there was only one possible species of it, as they speak of Australia itself and its climate. But, in truth, the gum-trees are almost as varied as the country and the climate. They are a “pernicketty” family, too: one sort will flourish in one place and wilt away only a few miles distant, another grow to profusion in one district, and elsewhere hardly be met with. Besides, all the forest growth is not composed entirely of the eucalyptus tribe, although it is to a very large extent.

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In the Victorian Grampians is to be found for the most part blue gum and messmate, stringy bark, and red and white iron bark. In the Wombat Forest, extending along the dividing range from Cheswick to Mount Macedon, is found messmate, peppermint, and swamp-gum. Farther eastward iron bark and stringy bark prevail, and red gum follows the course of the Murray and its tributaries; while on the Wimmera Plains is massed the dwarf eucalyptus known as the Mallee Scrubb, the roots of which make such ideal firewood. In the Haelesville Forests, of which I have been writing, is found spotted gum, mountain ash, messmate, and white gum, the prevailing timber in Gippsland being the stringy bark.

Apart from the wattle, the most striking note of colour in these softly-tinted forest masses is afforded by the sarsaparilla, which creeps up the young trees or low-growing scrub, and hangs them with a mantle of imperial purple. In general, however, the country regions round Melbourne are not rich in wild flowers. There is a bluebell, more like the Scotch harebell; a wild scabious, very similar to the English one; little yellow bachelor-button-like flowers; and an infinite number of tiny little blossoms, exquisite in themselves, but in no way comparing with a field of poppies, or coppices carpeted with the true bluebell, such as are seen at home.

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The woods and forests in Victoria are under the supervision of the Conservator of Forests, who has under him nine men on the office staff, and seventy-seven on the field staff, a meagre enough allowance, in all conscience, when one remembers the vast distances even in this, the smallest of all the States; and yet, more power to it, topping all the others in this matter, for in New South Wales the staff, including the Director, comprises only seventy-two persons; in South Australia, forty-four; in West Australia thirty; and in Queensland nine—Queensland! covering an area of 670,500 square miles as compared with Victoria's 87,884, and holding, as it does, an untold mine of wealth in its vast forests. Queensland! the home of the red pine and the kauri-pine, the red cedar, the Moreton Bay pine, and black-bean; and nine men to guard the interests of all this wealth!

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The Pyrenees, which, with the Bald Hills, are a continuation of Mount Macedon, are really all a part of the great dividing range which enters Victoria at Forest Hill, and in which is included all the most important mountain peaks in the State; those mountains which are not actually part of the main range being mostly offshoots from it, while not only in Victoria is this the case, for Australia, in fact, is federated by her mountains more completely than she is ever likely to be by her people.

The great main Dividing Range, indeed, can be traced from New Guinea across the Torres Straits to Cape York, and thence southward through Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria to Wilson's Promontory, being from there continued by the Flinders group of islands to Tasmania, a second spur traversing Victoria in a westerly direction. South Australia and Western Australia alone lie out of touch of this great backbone of the continent, possessing a mountain system of

their own. Thus, by the help of forests, and mountains, and streams, the continent does not, on the whole, present to its inhabitants such a flat desert waste as is popularly supposed. How oddly English it is, too, in parts! I know one place on the Dandenong line, not half an hour's journey from Melbourne, where there is open waste land, broken by pine-trees and ablaze with yellow gorse in the autumn. I remember, the first time I saw it, getting out at the nearest station and hunting about till I found a decent lodging, then staying there for two months, and enduring all the disadvantages of a daily journey to town—a thing I abominate—merely for the sake of living within sight and scent of the gay homelike stuff, with its delicious perfume.

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CHAPTER X

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OF THE COUNTRY AND CLIMATE, AND OF MELBOURNE GARDENS

VICTORIA, and, indeed, Australia as a whole, has been spoken of as the "Paradise of the working-man"—a paradise in which Melbourne, as the busiest and richest city in the Commonwealth takes the foremost place, this according to its people. The inhabitants of Sydney think differently, so do those of Adelaide and Brisbane. Yet, on the whole, I think Melbourne has the best reason for her proud boast. Wages may not be higher than they are in Sydney, while they are certainly lower than they are in Brisbane or the West; but the disadvantages are far less. The heat is never really unendurable, while at the worst it is stimulating, instead of enervating as in Sydney, only coming in bursts, with constant cool intervals between in which to recoup. For two or three days it may perhaps be over 100 in the shade, when the asphalt in the street bubbles and the pavement feels red-hot beneath one's feet; but after about three days comes a change, and only once during eight whole years have I known the thermometer remain for a whole week above 100° in the shade. That was, if I remember rightly, in 1907, when whole families turned out to sleep in the public parks and gardens. But usually at the end of about the third day of heat there comes a terrific scorching north wind, laden with thick yellow dust, a thousand times worse, if the Australian would but believe it, than any London fog. It whirls in through every crack of window or door, it fills eyes, and lungs, and mouth, and nose till one feels on the verge of choking, and one's skin is so gritty that one could smooth a plank with it—a demon of a wind, making every woman it encounters look a hag, and every man a fiend. If the women of Melbourne would really put their brains to work in the matter of complexions, instead of supporting a whole army of skin specialists and spending incredible sums upon creams and washes, they would see to it—holding a vote as they do—that every member of the municipal council were hung, drawn, and quartered. Then they would pour all their messes upon the streets instead of upon their faces, and go on appointing fresh councillors and killing them off, till they lighted on even "one righteous man" of sufficient intelligence to grapple with that dust-fiend, which draws such heartrending lines round pretty eyes, and plays such hopeless havoc with even the freshest and most youthful of complexions.

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I speak feelingly, because I love Melbourne; because I adore its sunshine and the crisp, light air that might be so clear; because I hate to have its most perfect days—days that in the country are a pure delight—absolutely spoiled by what, one can but believe, is a remediable evil.

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But I have wandered away from the red-hot, north-wind days, which I believe are thoroughly intractable—save, perhaps, under some immense system of afforestation. The only possible good point about this north wind is that when it gets to its very worst it usually changes. But oh! with such a flame of fury! One can almost hear it stamp its foot as it flings round. There is a whirl of skirts, an inarticulate shriek of fury, and—bang goes the door of the north wind. The thermometer drops, perhaps as low as to 70° within the hour, and one hurries home, folding oneself upon oneself as well as possible—shivering and shaking in the thin clothes, which had seemed of a blanket weight when they had been donned that very morning—to spend the evening over a flaming wood-fire, listening to the lovely drip-drip of rain upon the leaves, picturing how the earth is palpitating into growth beneath its caress, hugging to oneself the thought of the cool restful night, the glorious sleep, and the enchanting air of spring that the whole world will wear on the morrow, for the spring in Australia seems veritably to arise afresh after every shower.

In Melbourne gardens there is no dead season. The borders and beds are for ever full of surprises. It seems sometimes as if, for no particular reason, the flowers have a fancy for coming out; and out they come. It is a country where people please themselves. So, all the year round, one may gather roses from some bush or other, a little hectic, perhaps, but none the less beautiful for that; while the autumn and spring literally run to meet one another in the gardens, overlapping winter in the most cavalier fashion. I have seen willows along the Yarra bank all dark tresses of drooping twig, and two days—only two days—later, thickly veiled in a vivid green, not a hint of brown bark visible.

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During the winter, which is marked more by an unpleasant damp and chilliness than real cold, will come sudden, fervently warm days, which bring all sorts of unlikely flowers into bloom, so that one sees Oriental poppies flaunting among the primroses, and heliotrope, and carnations out with the first daffodils, while it is seldom indeed that there is not pink bloom on the ivy-leaf geraniums.

Some writers on Australia complain that because most of the completely native trees do not shed

their leaves, Australians do not know what a true spring is like. Perhaps they are right in one way; the longer a man has been starved the more completely will he appreciate a good meal when he gets it; and there is no such length of colourless winter days to struggle through in Australia—living only by this one hope, that the spring must come at last, however tardily—as there is in England, and therefore relief must be felt far less ardently. But against this let us weigh the thousand and one subtle surprises of Nature in such a country. Autumn, indeed, comes sobbing through the land, sweeping her heavy rain-drenched garments over lawn and border, till the flowers drop to earth, flattened, brown, and bedraggled; while “envious, sneaping” frosts nip the dahlias, and flush the roses with hectic tints. It is nonsense to say that the leaves do not fall, for they do, even from the native trees, not in a mass, it is true, but even more sadly, one at a time, as if the tree were with infinite reluctance slowly parting from each emblem of her youth, the tattered bark hanging in ribbons round her, the sport of every breeze; while everywhere in the cities and gardens there are English trees of all sorts to be seen, with leaves that fall in a fashion almost cheerful compared with the slow agony of their Australian compeers.

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Then suddenly the sun breaks through the clouds. Brilliant patches of blue spread over the sky till they join in one unbroken sea of cobalt. One forgets to put fresh logs on the fire, which the sun is laughing out of countenance, flings open doors and windows, orders tea in the veranda, and fares forth with little packets of seeds and bits of sticks, to grub in the sweet teeming earth. What matter that in a couple more days winter may be back again? Anyhow, it is only a matter of three months, and that with innumerable such breaks.

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The dahlias and the cosmos may have been all uprooted and the chrysanthemums have blackened in the borders; but by that time the narcissi are out, and the forget-me-not beds are alive with colour. There are violas, too, and grape hyacinths, and what in England we call “summer snowdrops,” and wallflowers, and periwinkles, while the japonica is jewelled with bloom, and the lawns are a glory of green. If the curtain of winter does slip down again, it does not matter much, for all these are sturdy people, and not easily discouraged; while when it lifts once more, the daffodils are ready to break into bloom, and the tulips and irises; while the wattle is a veritable masque of spring in itself.

With such a climate it seems extraordinary that the private gardens in Melbourne are not more of a success than they are. One reason, I believe, is that the people are too busy to trouble, another that they are too restless: they are always moving house—sometimes literally so, for it is no uncommon thing to meet a fair-sized wooden edifice coming along the road drawn upon wheels, by a long train of horses, and looking like a gigantic snail. I really believe the idea of settling down in one house for life would be—to use an Irishism—the death of any Australian. The servants in Melbourne will inform you, almost at the moment they enter your door, that they have “not come to stay”; and a man takes a new house in much the same spirit. I believe it is all owing to the lack of tradition. In England many of us have been born in the same house where our progenitors have lived for centuries, and where, perhaps, the descendants of our eldest brother may be expected to live for centuries longer; while we ourselves fare out in the world with the hope of founding some such enduring dwelling-place for ourselves, the need of a permanent home being inherent in our blood.

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But though the Australian’s great-grandfather may have lived in some such fashion, it is more than probable that his actual grandfather lived in a waggon or a tent, and that both he and his son were, from the exigencies of the New Country, for ever moving on, seeking fresh pastures as the country became more open and settlers began to thicken.

The discovery of gold alone was enough to instil this restless drop into the blood of a people whose very presence in the country was indeed first proof of such a tendency. In the wholesale rush which followed the first discovery of gold in Bendigo and Ballarat, it must have seemed to onlookers as if the merely agricultural and commercial Australia would cease to exist. Vessels lay in the docks, rotting for the want of men to repair them and hands to work them; for the sailors and the dock hands, the Government clerks, the policemen, the shopkeepers and their employees, even the very domestic servants, all joined in the stampede to that delectable land, where a casual miner could earn from thirty to forty pounds a day; while the Governor, like a modern Alexander Selkirk, was left “monarch of all he surveyed,” with no one to dispute his rights, certainly, but equally with no one to obey his orders. In the year following the discoveries at Bendigo—1851—ten tons of gold were said to have been taken from Victoria, gold then being worth £4 an ounce, while a quarter of a million of presumably adventurous spirits landed in Melbourne, all eagerly confident of making their fortunes. When this lure was sufficient to induce people to risk the discomfort and peril of the long voyage in a sailing-ship, and all the dangers of an unknown land, it was not to be wondered at that the earlier settlers, who were already on the spot, relinquished their ideas of a pastoral life in favour of the enthralling possibilities of mining, and, forsaking their farms, joined in the general rush to the gold countries.

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You will say that all this has very little to do with Melbourne gardens. But really it has a great deal to do with them, in that it has produced a people with very little of the real home-making spirit; while if a man will not trouble to make a home, it is certain sure that he will not trouble to make a garden. There was one man in Melbourne—I except, of course, the curator of the Botanical Gardens, whose work is too well known to need any comment—who veritably created a garden out of a rubbish-heap—a garden such as Australia needs, full of shade and greenery, and massed flower and foliage that helped to conserve the moisture of the ground. But there did not

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seem much money to be made out of it, and so one of the endless succession of Ministers for Agriculture—with that eternal craze to be up and doing which makes Australian officialdom so galling to the real worker—decided to change the garden into a dairy farm. It had not been in any way a useless appendage, for it was a public place, and thronged with people on Sundays and holidays; moreover, it had a horticultural school attached to it, where boys and girls whose parents lived near, and who could not afford to send their sons to some distant and costly agricultural college—for their daughters no other possible training-ground existed—could be taught fruit-growing and horticulture. At the time the place was started the then Minister for Agriculture was interested in fruit-growing; and by some good chance the next Minister happened to be the same, judging, rightly enough, that it was likely to be one of the most profitable minor industries of Victoria. But after them arose yet another Minister, whose interests were all on the side of dairy-farming, and the garden—to many a veritable oasis in the desert—was, as such, condemned. What has ultimately happened I do not know, but I believe that one flower-bed, some six half-starved cows, and as many boys, instructed after the methods of Mr. Squeers, somehow fight it out together, though certainly when I last saw it all the beauty and repose of the place had vanished for ever. Yet this is but a single example of the restlessness with which the country is infected, and the difficulty of producing and maintaining anything really staple under such constantly-shifting conditions.

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The suburbs of Melbourne are beautifully wooded. If you climb to any eminence of the city, such as the fire-station, and look down and around, it seems as if it were indeed built in a veritable forest of trees, while you imagine the most beautiful gardens luxuriating beneath their shade. But, on the whole, you are doomed to disappointment.

The owners or tenants of the small villas seem to do the best with the scrap of ground that is at their disposal. But the cottagers make little or no effort to beautify their houses even when they are their own possessions; while the gardens of the wealthy people—say at Toorak, which is supposedly the most select suburb—are certainly very disappointing. One sees hideous corrugated iron fences round really fine houses, with gardens out of all proportion to their size; Gothic mansions, in a setting worthy only of a little villa at twenty pounds a year, looking like nothing so much as a very big joint on a very small dish; gardens where there is no shade nor retirement possible, and with the aggressive fence visible from every point; while the parsimony in the matter of water is almost beyond belief, fine shrubs that may have cost pounds, rare plants, and well-laid lawns, all being reduced to a khaki-coloured waste for the want of a few pounds spent in watering them. Really, I believe that if the gardens had to be watered with champagne the wealthy Melbournian would not hesitate; it is spending his money on mere water which he dislikes: that is the clouds' job, and not his, and he spends his life waiting for them to do their duty, though he ought to know them better by now.

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All over the country it is the same, in the great as well as the small. People seem to resent money being spent on any form of irrigation. They will plough and sow, they will reap when the crop is ready, and in any well-conducted climate that ought to be enough. But the Australian climate, like all beauties, has its very distinct failings, and in the matter of rain it is, to say the least of it, capricious. In most countries a caprice such as this, when once fully known, is provided against. In time, perhaps, the Australians also will grow to realize their country's shortcoming, and a vast system of irrigation be carried out that will make a veritable Paradise of Victoria; but until that is accomplished, one can only say that its agricultural qualities are, like the curate's egg, "good in parts."

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Still, something has been done, though any movement to further irrigation has received very lukewarm support from the public.

As early as 1884 an artesian well was formed at Sale, which for a number of years gave out 100,000 gallons a day. When that failed—whether from the choking of sand or from corrosion of the casing I do not know—a new bore was put down; but, as the water was impure, containing too much sulphuretted hydrogen, a third had to be sunk, which now yields as much as 145,000 gallons of water a day.

In 1906 eight bores were put down on one estate. Overnewton, Maribyrnong, all of which yielded good supplies of water for stock purposes, though from only one was water obtained fit for drinking; while quite recently a number of bores have been sunk on the Mallee, that drought-tortured district, where the almost ironical existence of a large underground lake has lately been discovered, the bore in one place striking water at 190 feet below the surface.



EXCAVATING AN IRRIGATION CHANNEL.

Under the direct control of the "State Rivers and Water-Supply Commission," which came into force in 1906, are the Goulburn River Works, which include the Waranga Basin, with a storage capacity of 9,500,000,000 cubic feet; the Loddon River Works, with storage capacity of 610,000,000 cubic feet; and the Kow Swamp Works, with its capacity of 1,780,000,000 cubic feet. Then there are the Broken River Works, the Kerang North-West Lakes Works, the Lake Lonsdale Reservoir, the Lower Wimmera Works, and the Long Lake Pumping Works, the two irrigation areas of Nyah and White Cliffs, and some thirty distributory works; also the Mildura Irrigation Trust and the Geelong Water Supply, these last being governed independently of the Commission.

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Now there is a plan mooted for damming up the Upper Goulburn River with a gigantic weir, that would have to be about 1,700 feet long, and, at the deepest part of the river, 140 feet high, by which it is estimated that a reservoir with a capacity of 60,000,000,000 cubic feet would be obtained, and 20,000 acres of gullies and river flats permanently submerged, making it the largest reservoir in existence.

Of course, this latter scheme is only *sur le tapis*, remaining, indeed, to quote the Australian Official Year-Book's tactful statement, "in abeyance." But still things are, as the American would express it, "beginning to hum" in the irrigation line, and when once the people grasp its enormous significance, it is impossible to believe that they will not only insist on more irrigation schemes being inaugurated, but also see to it that they are not allowed to remain "in abeyance." Meanwhile, imposing as some of the figures may seem, when one thinks of the size of Victoria, even if all these already completed schemes were successful, they could but appear almost as inadequate for the necessary supply of water as was Mrs. Partington's mop for its dispersal.

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But, alas! even the schemes which have been carried through have not proved altogether successful. With her usual courage and tendency to rush her fences, Victoria embarked quite blithely in the first place on the Mildura scheme, which has at last struggled to success through a series of depressing failures, while the history of the other schemes has been far from cheering. The fact was, nobody knew anything about irrigation, or thought for a moment that there was anything to learn. In many places huge lengths of channelling were badly constructed, badly laid, and so badly placed that the land which would have profited most by the water was left completely dry, while the distribution was so wide that a very great deal was lost in the long channels. As a matter of fact, I believe that the estates in Australia are too large and the population too small to admit at present of a very great deal of effective irrigation, much as it is needed. For a good many years I lived on a sugar estate in Mauritius, which depended completely on irrigation. But, though one of the biggest estates in the island, it would have been altogether lost in any corner of an Australian station; while it was continually thronged with workers, always ready to correct any defective flow or clear out any blocked channel. As Victoria increases her country population, so also will she increase her chances of success in irrigation, for I feel it is only on small, densely cultivated farms that it can have a proper chance of paying for its working expenses. As it is, an extract which I must quote from a Ministerial statement, made not so very long ago, is anything but encouraging:

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"The State has already spent £1,450,000 on irrigation works. Interest on this at 4 per cent. amounts to £98,000 annually; maintenance, about £47,000; receipts from rates and sales of water average about £35,000. The State irrigation channels command 1,104,000 acres of land, of which 218,000 acres were irrigated last year; but the crop return was trivial (over half the irrigated area was native grass), when compared with the results obtained from similar irrigated areas in other countries having no greater natural advantages."

The great fault of the system seems to have been that, instead of paying a certain percentage on the value of their estates regularly, be the season wet or dry, just as a man will pay a life or fire insurance, the landowners have been allowed to pay only for the water they use. In this the holders of the largest areas were the most culpable. Their estates were extensive enough for them to be independent of very heavy crops, while the smaller men, to whom close cultivation was a necessity, and who used water—and therefore paid for it—at all seasons were in time of drought deprived of what they needed by the sudden demand made on the supply by the large

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holders; therefore it is not to be wondered at that the system resulted in what the *Melbourne Age* has described as a "colossal failure."

At last, however, a new policy has been instigated. In the future the distribution of water is to be controlled by State experts only, landowners who are within the irrigation area having to pay for it whether they use it or not, so that when holdings become smaller and settlers more plentiful there is every hope that the desert may indeed "blossom like a rose." Æsculapius, in his "Birds," tells us that it is from our enemies, not from our friends, that we must learn; and it is equally so with our failures. Australia has had a good many nasty jars, mostly caused by that impetuosity that is part of her political youth; but nobody can say that she does not profit by her mistakes, that she immortalizes them as some older countries do, or that she is willing for a moment to remain beaten.

Meanwhile, from the farmer's point of view, comes the complaint that irrigation costs more than it is worth, and that he cannot get sufficient labourers to work irrigated land. But, with all due respect to the Australian farmer, this is mainly a case of having taken up more land than he can cultivate. He idealizes size. He would rather have a thousand acres of drought-stricken and useless land than he would have a hundred densely cultivated, and paying hand-over-hand. He himself will work incredibly hard in bursts, while his wife and children toil like slaves, but he does not care to face the constant, steady round demanded by what he would scornfully describe as a "pocket-handkerchief lot."

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The scarcity of labourers is indeed a difficulty, and it will remain a difficulty till the farmers provide more adequately for the comfort of their hands. The married man is altogether at a discount on the Australian station and farm. In the former the men, all more or less casual employees, live together in a large hut, served by a special cook; in the latter they live with their employer. Any accommodation for wife or family is very rare indeed, so that a married man who secures work in the country must, for the most part, maintain his belongings separately in lodgings in town. One hears a very great deal of virtuous indignation expressed in regard to the overcrowding of the towns, and the fact that men who are out of work there will not take billets as farm labourers. Also, on the other hand, that men do not marry as they should, that the legitimate birth-rate is so low and the percentage of illegitimate children so high. But if a man is normal and honest-minded, with a liking for clean living, he needs a wife and children and a home of his own. As a single man, wandering from station to station for shearing and harvesting, he has, on the whole, a very good time, plenty of company, plenty of money to spend, and no responsibilities. But the better sort of men do not fear responsibilities, and they want something more than a good time; so that, after a few years, they get sick of the wandering life and wish to settle down. In the country, however much they might desire it, there is, indeed, very little chance of this for farm labourers when once they are married.

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They may, perhaps, have saved enough to start a tiny farm of their own, but it means ceaseless drudgery, and only too often a life of complete isolation both for husbands and wives, while the masters, whom they would be only too willing to continue to serve, have no place for them.

There is a great deal good in Australia that is not at all good in England, particularly in the life of the working-man; but I have found no parallel to the comfortable two-storied cottages, surrounded by good gardens, which one sees gathered round English farm-houses. When cottages such as these are built; when a labourer can settle down for life on one farm, and grow his own vegetables, keep poultry, and purchase a cow; and can see his own family growing up healthily and happily around him, then I believe that Victoria and her sister States will have no need to complain of her working-people all flocking to the big towns; while a new generation of agricultural labourers, bred and born to country life, will thus be insured, the number of illegitimate children be lessened, and emigration bear a more tempting face to the English labourer than it has done heretofore—so far, at least, as Australia is concerned.

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This short-sighted policy of the banning and barring of the married man is evident in many other branches of Australian industry besides that of agriculture; and only the other day I cut the following out of the *Sydney Bulletin*, which has a happy knack of putting its finger directly on the weak places in the administration of its country:

"The old, old policy of baby-prohibition, this time from the Victorian Police Department:—'Wardsman wanted at Police Hospital, Victoria Barracks, St. Kilda Road. Salary, £75 per year, with board. Applicants must be single, etc.' It is a wonder the unfortunate baby ever contrives to get born at all, when one considers the number of awful bosses who fine the father in his whole salary if baby happens."

All this time I seem to have got very far away from my first subject of gardens, but it has been merely from a natural discursiveness of mind, and not from any lack of legitimate material, for, indeed, the paucity of interest to be found in the private gardens of Melbourne is amply balanced by the beauty and variety of the public ones; among which the Botanical Gardens must be accorded the first place, both in importance and size—covering, as they do, eighty-three acres—exquisitely situated, for the most part on either side of a deep valley, along the hollow of which runs a thick grove of moisture-loving palms.

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To the right of this, as one looks towards the city, is the Alexandria Avenue and the winding, silver ribbon of the Yarra, which is gradually being made as beautiful at close quarters as it now appears from the all-enhancing distance. Besides this deep valley, one elevation of which is topped by Government House, there is an infinitude of ups and downs, sweep after sweep of

undulating greensward broken by many flower-beds and by jutting masses of trees, fringed with blossoms of every colour. It seems that anything will grow in Melbourne if only you water it enough—the old, old grievance again—and both subtropical plants and the hardiest English varieties flourish amicably side by side in the Botanical Gardens. Still, it is in the diversity of its trees rather than its plants that it really gains most over an English garden of the same sort, the shapes and colouring of the trunks, the almost human turn of the branches, the size and luxuriance of the leaves, proving an endless source of delight.

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Best of all I love the gardens in the autumn, when all the borders are gleaming with the pale masses of chrysanthemums, bed after bed, border after border of them, tawny yellow and pale gold, white and amethyst, not one single glaring or sharply-defined tint, the very soul of colour. The autumn in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens is exquisite. The little, sharp chill in the morning air, the noon of clear warm sunshine; and the mist-haunted evenings, when standing on the high ground, one watches the trees grow ghostlike and unreal in the fading light, while the lamps of the distant town glimmer out beyond the grey veil of the river. Autumn evenings in England smell very good, but not as good as autumn evenings in an Australian garden, where the sun has been shining warmly through the day, drawing all the perfume from the blossoms, the fallen leaves, and humid earth. Then, there is not the same sense of sadness, of loss, which is inseparable from the autumn at home; for here it is not the end, but rather the beginning, the time when the burden and heat of the long summer is past, while life is all ready to start afresh during the damp coolness of the winter days; for, however cold it may be, it is always a cold that quickens, and does not deaden as does that of northern climates.

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Besides the Botanical Gardens, 'Melbourne boasts, among others, the Exhibition Gardens, famous for their roses, and the Treasury Gardens, windswept, and dirty, and desolate, their ragged garments incongruously patched by a Japanese garden, railed all round with spiked iron rails, into which no one but the gardener can ever penetrate, though city urchins sit on a mangy bank near and toss stones into it. Just beyond these gardens, separated from them, indeed, only by a road, lie the Fitzroy Gardens, which come first and foremost in the affections of many people. They have not the grandeur of the Botanical Gardens, though they display an even more perennial greenness and a certain wild charm of their own, and the lawns are not so smoothly kept, while in places the grass grows deliciously lush and high. There are more English trees there, too, and in the autumn the ground is all golden with fallen leaves, while there are fewer precisely-set flower-beds and more borders—a far more artistic arrangement, to my mind.

They are, indeed, lovely gardens—gardens where old Andrew Marvell might well have brought to life his all exquisite conception of "A green thought in a green shade," if—and, alas! that there should be such an "if"—if only it had not been that—by some impish freak of, God knows what, Mayor, Corporation, or City Council—these sylvan lawns and glades are decorated, the horrible word stands well here, with a redundancy of statues, beside which some of Madame Tussaud's figures might well be considered as works of art. I have often wondered that the puritanical City fathers have not raised objections to these figures on account of their classic want of drapery—the only classical thing about them—but perhaps it has been realized that they are too utterly hideous to arouse any feeling but aversion, even in the most ardent and youthful breast. However it may be, there they remain, and are likely to remain, till that golden age when education has been digested into something at least resembling cultivation.

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CHAPTER XI

PRIMITIVE VICTORIA

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CHARLES DICKENS has created characters which will assuredly live for ever. If he had invented real animals instead of imaginary people—who are much more real than many real people, because more clearly drawn—I would attribute to him all the strange beasts of Australia which, for the most part, are absurdly Pickwickian. They are so clumsily and curiously formed, their expressions are so alert and inquisitive, their limbs are so oddly proportioned. Indeed, I could never see a kangaroo without thinking of a picture by Cruikshank of the Artful Dodger, with his long trousers, huge feet, and look of cocksure cunning; or a native-companion, without reviving at the same time a mental picture of the fascinating Jingle. Besides, though, like the characters of Dickens, the Australian animals are so odd as to be almost unbelievable; they are yet intensely human. They have not the expression of animals. They know really too much. Of course, they were like that long, long before the days of Dickens, but Nature has odd freaks of humour, and perhaps they were the outcome of one such freak and the novelist's imagination of another. I know one has no business to propound theories like this in a book that is trying hard to be matter of fact, but it is no use blinking the fact that the Australian animals are pure farce, save only, and above all, in their management of that greatest of all affairs—maternity.

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What an extraordinary thing it does seem that Nature should have invented anything so absolutely perfect as the pouch, and then, apparently, forgotten about it. To see a woman—a mere woman—her baby, with its pathetically nodding head, clasped in one arm, which, in addition, is, as often as not, further weighted with string bags and baskets, while the other hand clutches skirt, and umbrella, and the wrist of a toddling two-year-old—to see this, I say, and then to think of the safe babies of the Australian forests, gives one pause. The lubra does her best, in

spite of Nature's stinginess, and slings her baby across her hip or over her back in a shawl or length of calico, or at the worst a strip of gum-fibre. But the European mother, even in Australia, for the most part sits it upright on the crook of her arm, or clasps it with agonizing firmness round its middle, at an age when the little marsupial, swinging at ease in its mother's pouch, learns to know the look of the world, while it sniffs the fresh air and crops the daintiest fronds of grass; all in perfect safety, with no risk, even, of damp feet.

At times I have literally haunted the Melbourne Zoo just for the fun of watching the kangaroos and seeing the tiny little heads peering out from the mother's pouch, and particularly remember one snow-white mother-kangaroo I once saw, a rare and beautiful creature.

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I do not quite know the difference that exists between the kangaroos and wallabies, excepting in point of size, the wallabies being a good deal the smaller. There is a walking club in Melbourne to which a good many professional men belong, calling itself "the Wallaby Club," the members of which walk—every other Sunday, I believe it is—mostly from somewhere where they have had lunch on to somewhere else where they have tea, and then stay and dine; also indulging in periodical dinners in town, with punning menus and toast-cards, often exceedingly witty. Then, again, an expression used for what in England we call "tramping," is "going on the wallaby," otherwise "humping the swag," or "the bluey," or "sun-downing."

Smaller still than the wallabies are the kangaroo rats, which are about the size of a large cat. I do not know if they are ever seen in Victoria; but my only acquaintance with them was in New South Wales, at a little farm where they used to come in any number on to the veranda at night, after the house was shut up; seeking for crumbs and scraps, I expect, as we had many of our meals there. The sound of their jumping feet on the bare boards used to make such a noise that I would often get up to "shoo" them away; then stand quite fascinated watching their antics in the bright moonlight. I believe they are quite easy to tame, if only they can be caught young enough, like all the kangaroo tribe; but as yet I have never had the chance of trying, though for a long time I had a tiny tame opossum, who used to love to creep up my coat sleeve, and sleep comfortably against my shoulder, in the little pent house formed by the fulness at the top.

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In Victoria kangaroos and wallabies are still to be found in the woods and on the wide, open plains, though each year they become more and more scarce; while among the forest trees, if you are very quiet and patient, you may yet meet with a wombat—particularly in the eastern part of the state—or a lumbering native bear, like nothing on earth so much as a child's woolly toy, really the most ingratiating creature. Standing about two feet high, and covered with soft, thick fur, it has an odd, blunt, wistful sort of a nose, with little round eyes like boot-buttons, and makes one of the most charming of pets, if it can only be caught young enough. The native bear carries its baby on its back—the two little paws clasped tightly round its neck and buried deep in its fur—and climbs, thus encumbered, up the highest gum-trees, and from bough to bough, nibbling at the tender young leaves; the mildest person in the world, the very turn outwards of its toes giving it an almost absurdly apologetic air. "I have been left behind," it seems to say; "but do, please, let me go on in my own way—I and these wise old woods; we understand one another, and life and leisure are pleasant things." The wombat is heavier and clumsier, and its fur darker in hue, but it, too, is slow and peaceful in all its ways, the opossum, indeed, being the gadabout of the forest.

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There is now a national park at William's Promontory, which is the most southern point of Victoria—indeed, of the whole of Australia—where it is hoped that many of the rapidly-decreasing and unique wild animals of the continent may be induced to breed and otherwise make themselves at home, though, oddly enough, the kangaroos—true kangaroos, for there are any number of wallabies—have been found the most difficult to procure of all the animals. Still, there are koalas, and wombats, bower-birds, lyre-birds, and many others—though whether there is or is not a platypus I am unable to say; but the scarcity of kangaroos is appalling to all lovers of Nature-life, who remember how Flinders, in his book, tells of the huge flocks of those animals abounding along the shores of the new colony, so numerous and so tame that they could easily be killed with clubs or the butt-end of the men's guns.

Every year, however, the number of truly wild animals of Australia is—sad to say—lessening as surely as are the aborigines, though, perhaps, more slowly. In a book about Victoria, written by the old colonist, modestly hiding his identity under the pseudonym of "A Pioneer," we are told of the immense numbers of the kangaroos, which in the old days were a source of serious worry and loss to the squatter, who used to gather together parties of his neighbours—anyone within a hundred miles coming under that heading—and, forming a cordon, drive them into some enclosed place and then shoot them. The scene is described in stilted Early Victorian phraseology, but yet brings to our mind the most vivid picture of the intense excitement of such a drive. On one station of 100,000 acres some 5,000 kangaroos were killed by driving them into a specially prepared cul-de-sac, ending with a great pit at the far end of a blind fence, as many as 500 a day having been destroyed, while as the animals began to realize that some awful danger was overtaking those in front of them, their efforts to escape, says "A Pioneer," both by creeping under the horses and leaping over them, became little short of frantic.

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When "A Pioneer" first landed in Melbourne in 1840, there was, where Port Melbourne now stands, one "mean, solitary cottage on the beach, boasting the name of Liardet's Hotel"—rather an ominous combination of syllables, one might imagine. But the owner of it, Captain Liardet, seems to have been a very good fellow, and, meeting the newcomer at the ship, rowed him up the river, thick with wild duck and black swan, to the city of tents and shanties, where the entire

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space now occupied by Government buildings was one dense scrub. Later on he writes of his experiences at the time of the gold rush, when he and his partner drove a mob of cattle to Melbourne, and found there neither butchers, slaughterers, nor buyers.

He tells, too, of the annoyance that the “cocky” farmers even then were to the more settled colonists; how, on paying one pound an acre, or five shillings down and promising the rest, they could pick out the very best bits from the run; often ruining the squatter by taking the entire river frontage or water-holes, till the banks came forward, and in some measure checked the evil by advancing money to the squatters on the security of their leases, to a sufficient extent to enable them to buy the land.

Mrs. Frank Madden—the Speaker’s wife—once told me a very amusing story of the biter being bit by overreaching himself. A “cocky” had picked out a very fine slice of an estate on the Murrumbidgee, at the river-edge, as he thought. The squatter and his wife had been as kind as possible to the man and his wife, and the kindness of the people in the country districts in Australia is something worth having. But the new-comers, a common, mean, little Glasgow man and his wife, had been bitterly jealous of the comfort and refinement of their neighbours’ home—in which, by-the-by, they had been staying while their own was building—and, once settled, they determined on equalling matters up. They had picked out and fenced a long narrow strip along the water-edge, and absolutely refused to let the squatter’s sheep be driven through it to drink, so that the poor beasts had to trail many miles before they could reach the water, many actually dying of thirst on the way, for, as the whole estate had originally run along the river-edge, no water-holes had been dug.

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In vain the squatter and his wife remonstrated and pleaded, and offered money; the mean little wretch’s envy and spite proved even greater than his rapacity, and he absolutely refused to concede an iota of his right.

The squatter might well have been driven distracted, but for one thing. He knew that it was only a matter of time. Before the “cocky” had taken up the land there had been heavy rains, and the river had swollen, and flooded fully a mile of the land at either side, and along the edge of that flood the stranger had pegged out his claim. Gradually it began to seem to him that the water—day by day, inch by inch—was slipping away from his border. Then, as the whole truth dawned on him, he drove off post-haste to the nearest town to buy up the rest of the land between himself and what he had begun to suspect was the true river-bank. But he was too late; the squatter had been there before him and already completed the purchase; so that as the water sank back into the river-bed and the billabongs gradually dried up, the “cocky” found himself obliged to beg the same boon for himself as he had refused to his neighbour, which—as the squatter was a man, and not an archangel—was promptly and consistently refused, till there was no choice left for the interloper but to move on elsewhere.

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In those days the “cockies” pegged out their claims and took the land for themselves; nowadays the Land Board takes it for them—not a bit here and there, as they did, but large areas of the very best part of the run—sometimes even the entire estate.

How deliciously Robert Louis Stevenson writes in his book “Travels with a Donkey,” of the delights of sleeping out of doors! I wish he could have spent even one such night in the Australian Bush.

There was a round pool, deep among the trees in one forest that I know of, and there at dusk the drama of the night—which is really the woodland day—used to begin with the ibis, that came each evening to bathe. I used to go into the wood and sit down under the trees just to watch and wait for them. Punctually, just as the sky changed from blue to pink and grey, they used to arrive—from some mysterious world of shades, I veritably believe—and, floating down silently from above the tree-trunks, step delicately into the water. It is lovely to see them fly; their necks arch back like the handle of some Ionic vase, purely Greek, though as they alight and stand in the water they are completely Egyptian in form, and with all the mystery of Egypt in their mien. They do not splash and flutter their wings in bathing, as other birds do, but, when they move at all, do so very slowly, lifting first one foot, then another, high out of the water; while they stare persistently, without the faintest trace of alarm at any intruder. All the other animals here are the remnant of the true wild, left far behind by the ages, uneasy, wistful, and half ashamed. But the ibis is the spirit of a civilization older than any other; and if it does not speak, it is only that it has learnt how futile are all words.

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One very hot night I took a blanket with me and camped out beside that pool. But I did not sleep, simply because everyone else seemed awake, and all the time things were happening. The lorries sat up far later than they ought to have done, chatting among themselves. Then, as the ibis all floated away over the tree-tops once more, a white sulphur-crested cockatoo came down to bathe with a most prodigious splashing and fuss.

After this the forest rested tranquil for a little while. Rolling myself tightly up in my blanket, I turned on my side and laid my cheek against the earth, mossy and sweet-scented, sweeping aside with my hand all the little nobbly gum-seeds. Away back in the scrub a lyre-bird gave a hoarse, angry cry—on one never-to-be-forgotten day in that same spot I had seen one of these shyest of all the denizens of the forest, with his lovely tail spread, treading arrogantly with his great feet across the very moss where I lay—then there was another spell of silence, broken only by the whispering of the leaves and an odd little complaining sound, where, high up above my head, a dead bough had fallen across another and sawed gently backwards and forwards, with a note like

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that of a 'cello.

A tree fell in the distance, with no tearing shriek of perturbation, but with a resounding crash, which told me that its death had come to it, perhaps months before, and that only now were its neighbours letting it slip from their supporting arms to the earth, where unnumbered seedlings would, in a few weeks, spring to life over and around it. Another silence—during which I lay and watched the moon climb up over the tree-tops, the way the ibis had come—and then a harsh, guttural complaint broke on my ears from just above my head. “Ug-g-g-, ug-ug, ug—?” It was an opossum just awaking from his cosy sleep. I could almost see him shake himself and snap his little sharp white teeth. “Ug-ug, ug,” he seemed to say. “What a nuisance! Another day’s work all to start over again! tut, tut!” Then a little pouched mouse hopped airily out into the moonlight right under my very nose; sat upright, stroked his whiskers thoughtfully, and started off, on what cannibal orgy I almost trembled to think, remembering Mr. Hall’s story of how fifty of these bloodthirsty beings were sent to the University—were sent, I say, for but two arrived—with a little heap of skin and fur to tell the tale; while, in the very bottle in which they were put to be chloroformed, the survivors indulged in a mortal combat. There are other tiny pouched mice in parts of the State which jump like kangaroos, but that night I was not in range of them; and this one cannibal creature was the only one of his kind that I saw.

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By the time the mouse had passed, literally brushing by me in search of a more sizeable prey, the owls had started, and the doleful cry of “More pork, more-pork!” echoed from tree to tree. More opossums began to stir, leaping and scolding among the boughs, while all the undergrowth seemed alive with the oddest rustlings and little whimpering cries. Of a truth night in the forest holds an infinitude of wonder and delight, but little enough of sleep, unless you are so inured to it as to cease to start and wonder at every sound. Once there were Titanic marsupials as large as a rhinoceros, and phalanges monstrous as any polar bear, and giant kangaroos a dozen feet high, and a wombat as great as an ox, in these very woods, away back in what I believe is called the Eocene Age—and what must the stir and turmoil of such a night have been in those days, when all these small people make such a bustle now from dark to dawn!

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The mammals in Australia are divided into two groups, to one of which—the egg-laying mammals, or prototheria—only two specimens belong, all the rest coming under the other section, the theria. The platypus and the spiny ant-eater, which comprise the first group, are—to the superficial eye—as different as any two animals can well be, the anteater not being unlike a slender light-coloured English hedgehog in appearance, and covered with similar prickles, while the platypus is covered with the softest and closest of brown fur. I have a little toque made of platypus—in defiance of all law, for, rightly enough, the weird little animal is most strictly protected—which has often been taken for a very close, fine sealskin. The platypus has a wide bill, like a duck, and webbed front feet; but its hind-feet have claws on them, rather like an otter, while it lays eggs and suckles its young, and does everything else by means of which it is possible to puzzle the zoologist. It is an intensely shy creature, and, living in the burrow by the river’s edge, as it does, is as much at home in the water as on land, and very difficult indeed to catch a glimpse of.

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Once I numbered among my friends a very likeable vagabond, who for years earned a sufficiency of food by selling the eels he caught in a bend of the River Yarra, about three miles above Melbourne. He had no roof over his head, excepting the trees, or perhaps an empty cattle-shed in the wettest weather, and he possessed neither wife nor children nor domestic impedimenta of any sort, nor any wardrobe—except what he carried on his back—while he was so frankly idle—apart from his occasional and leisurely occupation of letting down eel-lines—that at the last census he wittily suggested he should be described as a gentleman. This man told me—and I believed him, for he had nothing to gain by lying—that he had seen a platypus in that very bend of the river; but, though I crept out evening after evening and watched untiringly in the same place, I never met with the same luck; perhaps because I had not, like him, such fine “estates in time,” as Charles Lamb would put it.

The “native-companions” are among the strangest sights of the Australian Bush, and if you are lucky enough to see them dancing out in the open on a fine moonlight night, you will not be likely to forget the sight. I do not know if they are a species of crane, but they are certainly very like them in appearance—tall and slim, and of a delicate grey colour; while if some forerunner of Mr. Turveydrop’s was responsible for their mien and deportment, he might well be proud of his pupils. They do not play about at random as some animals do, apparently intoxicated by the night air and the moonlight, but they literally dance; with a decorum and grace which belong, in truth, to the days of the dandies. Picture, if you can, an open stretch of country, moonlit and veiled in light mist; the white, ghostlike trees, and these shadowy figures stepping so lightly, bowing and bending with such solemn grace; twisting and turning in a maze of intricate figures, seemingly governed by some unbreakable law of etiquette, like ghosts from bygone ballrooms.

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All the Australian birds, however, seem to me extraordinarily different from the English birds in character and expression, as well as plumage and note. They are less simple, or guileless, if one may use such a word. They are wild with the sort of wildness that gives one the idea that they are the imprisoned souls of wood-fawns and satyrs, older and wiser than any other birds, with an odd sort of cunning in their aspect. I have watched them again and again beside the pool of which I speak, which seems, indeed, a veritable show-ground for them. There the mud-larks, rather like our water-wagtails, only much larger, come there with the most wanton flutter of broad black and white tails, to disport themselves upon the patch of green at its verge. And the laughing jackass and cockatoo, wild-duck, and even an occasional wild-swan; lories and galahs,

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and innumerable little green and grey birds; owls and hawks, the blue goshawk, and the rare white hawk.

But these are not all the strange characters to be found in the book of Nature, which lies open before us in the Australian Bush—a book of fantastic contradictions, of Rabelaisian twists and turns, and of the oddest humours. There is the flying squirrel—which does not fly, and is not a squirrel at all,—with a long fold of skin stretching from the front to the back leg at either side, enabling its possessor to glide through the air for a considerable distance, though always from a greater to a lesser height. And there are kangaroos—though not in Victoria—which climb the trees and browse on the top of the highest eucalypti; and birds which hatch their eggs, after the manner of reptiles, in the warm sand or gravel; and there are so-called legless lizards, peculiar to Australia, and the water-holding frog found in the central deserts, which can blow its body out with a sufficiency of fluid to support it for a year or more in a dried-up mudhole—completely independent of any “Wowser.” And there is a fish with a lung, and in Gippsland an earthworm 7 feet long, and the thickness of a man’s finger—fit bait for the leviathan, indeed.

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There are now in Victoria 4,016,995 acres of state forests and timber reserves, apart from the other tracts of forest land, and this in spite of the fact that ever since the white man put his foot in the state he has been, year in, year out, stubbling up and cutting down, burning, and ring-barking. Once up in the woods above Macedon I remember coming across a tiny two-roomed cottage in the heart of the forest. For the distance of a hundred feet or so the ground had been cleared at either side, save for ragged stumps, while all around tall trees stood in thick ranks, like the straight white pillars of a cathedral, in the middle of which the tiny homestead appeared like an altar, with the curl of blue smoke uprising from its chimney as incense; the only tree quite near, and, indeed, towering over it, being one gigantic gum, on which, even as I lingered there, the men were busied with their hatchets; and I remember it seemed to my mind an incredible piece of vandalism that such a beautiful tree should be destroyed, the one possible shade that the little house could hope for through the blazing summer day; more particularly as there were miles upon miles of forest all round if they needed wood.

I stood and watched the men at work till they had chopped all round the tree, leaving only a slender spindle of wood in the centre, when, by the help of ropes which they had already fastened to it, it was dragging, crashing, to the ground. It hurts me horribly to see a great tree fall, for it seems to tear the very heart out of one with its last rending cry. Something in my throat chokes me, and my eyes grow misty. To see a tree fall, or a mighty ship launched, both overpower one with the same intense excitement. Birth or death—they are much the same in their first breath—joy or sorrow, they tear you alike.

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A woman, one of those flat-chested, neutral-tinted women one sees in country districts, came out of the cottage and stared sombrely at the fallen giant, while the two men—her husband and grownup son, as I afterwards found—walked round it, lopping off a bough here and there. I went up and asked her for a glass of water, impelled more by curiosity than thirst; then, as I sat on the oozing trunk and drank it, I asked her why the tree had been cut down. Surely they would miss it when the summer came, for the shadows of the other trees would not reach to the house.

“Well, it ain’t always summer, you see,” said the woman, and she looked at the tree with a sort of sickened dislike on her dull face. “It wur a deal too near to be pleasant. Night after night I laid awake in the winter when the wind wur blowin’ and ‘eard it moanin’ an’ cryin’ out, thinkin’ it ‘ud crash down on us one o’ these nights. And where ‘ud us be then?”

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I gave a little shudder. “I never thought of that,” I said. “And it is horribly big.”

“Big! Yer right there! Ah! when I wur lyin’ in bed thur a’ nights with the wind blowin’ across it and across us, it seemed like as it growed bigger an’ bigger, an’ we growed littler an’ littler. Why, I mind when my Jim there wur born—” and she jerked her thumb in the direction of the younger man.

“Why, was he born here? and with that tree—”

“Yes—twenty years ago, come next July. Awful the weather was, I mind; snow an’ rain an’ wind—the wind fair terrible, an’ that tree a-shriekin’ an’ moaning. There weren’t no doctor anywhere in reach, and there weren’t no nuss; my man ‘ee did all ‘ee could fur me. But, Lord bless you, miss, when I were in my pains it seemed as if I wur a-bein’ torn up by the roots, the same as that there tree was, an’ I didn’t rightly know which wur goin’ ter end me fust. My man, ‘ee promised ‘e’d ‘ave it down first thing when the weather cleared. But thur was allus a powerful lot to do, an’ it got put off an’ put off; though I wur never not to say easy about it fur one minute o’ time. Allus afraid, then, that it ‘ud fall on the kid an’ kill ‘im. An’ the higher an’ heavier it got, the worse it seemed, fur them gum-tree roots don’t run not no depth ter speak of. But there it stayed, till only this very mornin’ the boss said as ‘ow ‘e an’ Jim ‘ud ‘ave it down. An’ thur it be, but I reckon as ‘ow I’ll never quit dreamin’ on it. All my folk were woodcutters, an’ my feyther wur killed by a fallin’ tree, just the dead spit of this one.”

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It was a bald enough narrative, rendered all the balder from the sing-song, drawling voice in which it was recounted; but I have never forgotten it. The long, uneventful years there in the clearing, more than twenty years from the time that the drab-faced woman arrived there as a fresh young bride; the fear and fascination of the tree gathering to an obsession during those long nine months before her child was born—with no nurse or doctor to stay her fears. Then that awful night, when she did not know rightly whether it was her or the tree that was to be torn up

by the roots; the twenty years of busy days, when doubtless it seemed less terrible, and when her husband was too hard-worked to bother about it; and the twenty years and more of nights when it had seemed to tower over the tiny house like some wild beast; tugging at a too slender chain, which some night would—and must—give way, leaving it free to spring; the only rest possible being when the wind was blowing steadily in the other direction. And, above all, the man who had the strength and the knowledge to rid her once for ever of such torment sleeping heavily night after night by her side.

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Still, it is not only women who are tormented by such fears. Men have spoken of having been possessed by a horror of the loneliness of the Bush that has half driven them mad, while a Sister in one of the large Melbourne hospitals told me that they had far more cases of nervous breakdown among men than among women, particularly from the effects of isolation and loneliness; perhaps because, on the whole, a woman's day is more filled up with a succession of trifling duties, so varied in themselves that she has but little time to brood. Curiously enough—though the number of male and female lunatics in Victoria is very nearly equal—the number of women who had committed suicide during the year before the latest statistics were compiled is less than a third of that of the men; while I honestly believe that any man who had been obsessed by fear during all those years, as was the woodcutter's wife, and yet was unable to remove the cause of it, would have put an end to himself.

About a couple of hours' journey from Melbourne, and within a short drive from Haelesville, there is a Blacks' Settlement, where there is gathered together a remnant of those people who, with their four-footed fellows, were once in undisputed possession of these mountains and forests—before the days of the axe and saw, the "stump-jump," and the "mallee roller."

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It is a good many years since I was at Coranderrk, as the settlement is named, and therefore I have no very clear memories of it, excepting that the people all seemed exceedingly leisurely and good tempered, and childishly clamorous for pennies. Two or three men emulated each other in throwing the boomerang for our amusement, and in this the older men were certainly by far the best, literally bursting with pride at their achievements; one grey-haired man, taller and bigger-built than his fellows, sending it to such a height and distance that it had dwindled to a hardly distinguishable speck against the blue sky before it turned and came whistling back, in a sweeping semicircle, to drop almost exactly at the place where its owner stood.

The little huts at Coranderrk are tidy and comfortable, and the people well fed and cared for; but there is something inexpressibly sad about the whole encampment. It is bad enough to see one person dying—say of consumption, or some such fatal disease—but it is worse by far to see a whole people die, no matter how ineffectual they may be in their powers of grappling with the conditions of modern life, for those individuals who are not actually dead are yet in a state of senile decay, and, having lost the wonderful instincts of a savage, are still groping wistfully and ignorantly among the intricate ways of civilization. Still, sometimes if you can borrow a black fellow, to go fishing or trapping with, you may yet catch sight of a spark of the old bushman's cunning and mysterious lore.

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Altogether there are in Victoria seven mission-stations and depôts for aborigines, the number they house being in all only a little over 260. Besides this, there are still a few wandering black fellows, who are given food and clothing when they call at the mission-stations, but they are very few in number, many of them being but half-castes, the total number of the pure-blooded blacks, in 1901, being estimated at only 271, with 381 of mixed blood. ^[298]

Once, when I was staying up in New South Wales, a little old black fellow, apparently a most genial person, was pointed out to me, who had married a white woman. After a while she had grown tired of the union and forsaken her Othello, on which he brought her back, with the aid of a club, and, finding her still restless, broke one of her legs. Directly the bone had set she ran—or rather hobbled, with the help of a stick—away again; on which he brought her back once more, and broke both her legs, to make sure of her. After this—or so I was told—they remained a most happy and peaceable couple, while, though she was still lame, she was quite sufficiently recovered to limp about the *mia-mia* and attend adequately to her lord's wants, which, after all, were not much more numerous than those of old Omar—less, indeed, by the book of verse, for which might be substituted a pipe. Who can say now that, tactfully managed, mixed marriages are not a success?

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The lower a man is in the scale of nature, the more compensations he seems to possess. If the brain and reasoning powers are imperfectly developed, the sense of smell, of touch, of hearing, and of sight is intensified. As his brain becomes more mature, he learns a better way to catch and kill his prey than by chasing it on foot, and therefore loses his swiftness. His teeth and jaws become weaker because he can cook his food before eating it. He loses his sense of time because he has clocks and bells to tell it to him; and his instinct for locality, because he has grown to depend on a compass, roads, or signposts. In all matters connected with hunting the aboriginal, in the hard school of necessity, has brought his powers of observation to a fine point that is little short of marvellous to us, who have grown to depend on books for the greater part of all we wish to know. To go to the public library, look through the catalogue, and hunt up the best book on any subject we wish to master; to stuff ourselves up with some special information, so that we may wriggle our way through an examination. It is all very different from the years of patience and endurance that a black fellow brings to the accomplishment of any special task, the mastering of any peculiar knowledge. With the passing of the Australian aboriginal will pass also a minute and intimate knowledge of animal life and habits that no European zoologist can ever

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touch, and of which the average sportsman, with all his improved appliances for transit and slaughter, has no idea. He will watch a laughing-jackass for hours so that he may track and kill a snake. He will know in what hollow stump an opossum may be lurking, simply by the movements of the flies which are hovering near. He will slip silently into a pool, or billabong, and, diving under the water, seize a duck and break its neck beneath the surface, so noiselessly that none of its companions swimming around it will be disturbed, and so will kill one after another until he has enough; while, when he wishes to decoy pelicans, he will throw stones into the water in such a manner as to give the precise effect of a fish rising. He knows—with an almost unerring knowledge—from which direction the wind may be expected to blow during the night, and so makes his little shelter of boughs on the side from which it will come; while the opening of his camp is always away from it, with the fire in front; and he is the most expert water-finder in the world, knowing at a glance, by the way vegetation grows, where water will be found, and at what a depth, and in what places and where, after a heavy dew, he may be able to collect enough to fill his water-bag, or the shell or skull, with the orifice sealed up, which serves the same purpose; collecting, even in the heart of the desert, where any white man would die of thirst, a sufficiency of water from the long tap-root of the gum-scrub. He knows how to throw the boomerang so as never to miss; how to carve the returning one—short and flat, with a curious twist on its own axis—which is used mainly in trick-throwing or among large flocks of birds, and the long heavy one, which does not return, and is used in all serious hunting; how also to make, and use in the chase and fight, two-handed wooden swords, and clubs, and shields, sometimes beautifully carved, though with handles that are for the most part too small for a European hand.

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AN ABORIGINE CLIMBING
A TREE.

The black man's razor is a bivalved, sharp-edged shell, rather like a mussel, with which he tweaks out the hairs—a most painful proceeding, I should imagine. Needles and awls he makes from the leg-bones of the kangaroo, and nets and bags for hunting from the tendons of the larger animals; while he grinds his corn, as does the Indian, between two large stones, the lower one being very slightly hollowed out, and the upper—about the size of a man's fist—rounded, and usually of a harder kind, a good nether-stone being often carried for many miles.

All fighting laws among the aborigines are as ceremonious and well arranged as those of any medieval tourney, while the marriage laws are exceedingly stringent. A man may not marry a woman of his own family name, which is usually that of some plant or animal, while tribes in some districts are carefully divided into two "phraties," to guard against possible intermarriage, each half possessing a different "kobong." Neither will he, except under pressure of the direst necessity, kill an animal that bears that name, for it is his "kobong," and so sacred to him that, even if he is starving, he will not touch it while it is asleep, but gives it every possible chance of escape.

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Some people believe that the black fellow has no religion. This, I really believe, is chiefly owing to the general tendency to so name only our own particular belief, lumping all the others together under the name of "superstition." "Orthodoxy is my doxy, heterodoxy is another man's doxy," as Bishop Warburton once said. Mr. Ramsey Smith, head of the South Australian Department of Public Health, declares the Australian native to be saturated with religion, and, truly, if we would comprehend anything of a people's beliefs, we must know everything that there is to be known of themselves, their surroundings, and their lives. There is a spiritual religion which strives for purity and goodness for its own sake alone. But most religions, including that of the ancient Jews, have been mainly based on a fear of consequences, which governs alike both civil and personal character. The laws of the black fellow—in spite of the name he has for being at once

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dirty, primitive, and debased—are, particularly in dealing with all matters of sanitation, even more stringent than those of the Jew, and though the reason he will give you for destroying every scrap that remains over from any animal he has eaten will be that—if an enemy should get hold of it, he would cause him serious injury, or even loss of life; still, in all probability, it was the law of cleanliness which first gave rise to such a belief.

The black fellow's Bible is his stock of fables, repeated from mouth to mouth, as were the tales of Homer. Most of these legends enforce some lesson or moral, though how much of the actual tales themselves is believed, and how much is recognized as being old wives' fables, especially concocted to point a moral, it would be hard to say. But this we do know: that the black fellow's gods are numerous, consisting alike of good and bad spirits, round which are hung legends of the Deluge; of the manner in which the sky is supported; of the origin of the sun—which is a woman—and the moon—which is a man—and why they wax and wane; of the meaning of comets, stars, and eclipses; while his entire moral code is embodied in a series of elaborate laws and ceremonies in connection with phratrises and totems, child betrothal, infanticide, and marriage,— in connection with which the laws are extraordinarily strict—corroborees and initiation, from which last ceremony all the women of the tribe are warned away—under the penalty of death—by the “bullroarer,” or “bummer.”

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Mr. Rowland, in his book “The New Nation,” tells an amazing story, which I cannot resist repeating here, from the simple fact that it shows so plainly the way that the wits of the black fellows are, in some cases, more than equally balanced against those of the white. In the time of Governor Arthur a drive of natives was attempted, so that they might be separated from the white populace in camps under close supervision, and the constant evils of massacre and outrage between the two races be put an end to. Some 2,000 soldiers, convicts, and settlers were engaged for the task, and a cordon was slowly drawn, in the toils of which it was implicitly believed that every single native in the district must of necessity be confined. Some £30,000 were spent over this human net, with the idea that, once drawn, all the troubles with the natives would be for ever at an end. At last, after many days, the sides of the vast semicircle closed one upon another, and amid the breathless excitement of the entire colony the catch was counted—one boy and one man, at £15,000 a head.

It is odd, in the face of the strenuous All-White Australian policy of to-day, to find that at one time—in South Australia, at least—there was an idea that all the difficulties between the blacks and whites could be settled by intermarriage—an idea even then, I should imagine, held only by the minority, though, unfortunately, they happened in this instance to be representatives of the Crown—and a regulation was actually passed by which any white man marrying a lubra got a grant of ten acres of otherwise free ground. Just about as much as a lubra could work, I suppose they thought. Nowadays marriage with the blacks is not even thought of—much less provided for—though any tampering with a black woman on the part of a white is regarded as a criminal offence, and is punishable by imprisonment; while the sooner all lubras in the Northern Territory are separated into strictly guarded native settlements, the better, judging from appalling medical reports which occasionally reach the public ear.

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In Victoria nowadays the black fellows are few, and ravaged by the diseases which the white man has brought to them, and by smallpox and consumption. But in Queensland and the Northern Territory they are more numerous, more virile, and more like their old selves, and therefore it is to the people who have known them in these places that we must turn to satisfy any curiosity or human interest that we may feel; for humanity to Mrs. Æneas Gunn's beautiful and sympathetic books, “The Little Black Princess” and “The Never, Never Land,” and for more exact and scientific knowledge to Professor Gregory's book, “The Dead Heart of Australia,” among many others.

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Nowadays one may live among the Victorian forests and never even see a black fellow, but the names that he has given mountain, district, and river still remain, like a mocking echo of his voice. The Barambogie, the Buckrabanyule, the Barramboot, the Bulla-Bulla, the Keil-warra, the Koorooyugh among the mountains; the Benambra Creek, the Marraboor, the Kororoit, the Kiewa, the Toonginbooka, and the Wonnangatta among the rivers; the Durdidwarrah, the Corangamite, the Koreetnung, and the Turang-moroke among the lakes, being a few of the soft-syllabled words which rise at random to my mind as I write, while from river bank, mountain, and forest, that the Black Fellow has thus christened, out of the tangled scrub and down from the tall gum-trees, peer the bright-eyed wistful Bush beasts, as if wondering why the world has so changed, leaving them there still unaltered, the very flotsam of time.

Even now, by good fortune, we may still come across the remains of some of the forest sanctuaries of the aborigines, breaking through the wall of forest trees which surrounds them, and stepping into their silent places with a sudden sense of intensest pity for a dying race, and awe and reverence for a life and faith of which we can have no true conception.

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In some parts of Australia, more particularly in Northern Queensland, these are to be found, in the very heart of the Bush—surrounded by high walls, of dense forest growth—curious circular clearings, too completely denuded of undergrowth and too symmetrical in shape to be for one moment regarded as merely accidental. These are the ancient “bora,” or “corroboree,” grounds of the aborigines, formed, for the most part, long before Captain Cook—or any other white man—set foot in the continent, though to this day the remnants of the dying race meet there periodically to conduct their most important ceremonies and hold their most solemn parliaments—or, to use a more precise word, conclaves, for mere speech occupies a far more restrained and

less important place in such meetings than it does in the political discussions of the whites. These clearings have been in existence for so long that even the very oldest among the aborigines has never even heard of their beginnings; and though apparently they can always be easily located, no regular cut track is found to lead to them. To this day they are kept absolutely clear, save in an instance where all those people whose sanctuaries they represent have died out or been hopelessly scattered—and it is another example of the resourcefulness and industry of the black fellow—when any of his cherished beliefs are at stake—that he should have been able so successfully to grapple with all the quick-springing mass of undergrowth which leaps to life, almost in a night, in such places.

What mysterious ceremonies, what awful initiations, have been performed in these “bora” it needs an authority on such things to say. But surely there were never such sanctuaries apart from the sacred groves of Greece, never such temples built by hand, provocative at once of such peace and such reverence—silent, open places of the illimitable forests, carpeted over by the native grasses, which will only grow where the clear light of the sun can penetrate—fit emblem, indeed, of all the virtues.

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NOTES.

[232] In Europe the density of the population, or number of persons to the square mile, is 112.58; in Australia it is 147.

[298] At the first colonization of Victoria, the number of blacks was estimated to amount to 15,000.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE WALLABY THROUGH VICTORIA ***

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