

ADA CAMBRIDGE

THIRTY YEARS
IN AUSTRALIA

Ada Cambridge

Thirty Years in Australia

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Thirty Years in Australia

CHAPTER I "ISLE OF BEAUTY, FARE THEE WELL!"

I knew nothing whatever of Australia when I rashly consented to marry a young man who had irrevocably bound himself to go and live there, and, moreover, to go within three months of the day on which the wild idea occurred to me. During the seven weeks or thereabouts of a bewildering engagement, the while I got together my modest trousseau, we hunted for information in local libraries, and from more or less instructed friends. The books were mostly old ones, the tales the same. *Geoffrey Hamlyn* was my sheet anchor, but did not seem to be supported by the scraps of prosaic history obtainable; we could not verify those charming homes and social customs. On the other hand, cannibal blacks and convict bushrangers appeared to be grim facts. As for the physical characteristics of the country, there were but the scentless flowers, the songless birds, the cherries with their stones outside (none of which, actually, is the rule, and I have found nothing to resemble the description of the latter), and the

kangaroo that carries its family in a breast-pocket, which we felt able to take for granted. These things we did believe in, because all our authorities mentioned them. G. had a letter from a college friend who had preceded him to Australia, reporting the place not wild at all, but quite like home. He instanced an episcopal dinner-party that he had attended, and a church dignitary's "three sweetly pretty daughters," who had come in the evening, and with whom he had sung duets. But at time of writing he had got no further than Melbourne – knew no more than we of the mysterious Bush, which I thought of as a vast shrubbery, with occasional spears hurtling through it. When we had assimilated all the information available, our theory of the life before us was still shapeless. However, we were young and trusting, and prepared to take things as they came.

G. was an English curate for a few weeks, and an English rector for a few more. It was just enough to give us an everlasting regret that the conditions could not have remained permanent. Doubtless, if we had settled in an English parish, we should have bewailed our narrow lot, should have had everlasting regrets for missing the chance of breaking away into the wide world; but since we did exile ourselves, and could not help it, we have been homesick practically all the time – good as Australia has been to us. At any moment of these thirty odd years we would have made for our native land like homing pigeons, could we have found the means; it was only the lack of the necessary "sinews" that prevented us. Such a severe form of nostalgia is, however,

uncommon here, and would be cured, I am told, by a twelve months' trip. Certainly, in nine cases out of ten, where I have known the remedy tried, it has seemed infallible. The home-goers come back perfectly satisfied to come back. It is when they stay at home for more than twelve months that they want to stay altogether.

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

We were but four miles from our homes, and could see our people, who were to lose us in a month, while still ostensibly in bridal seclusion. A sister from whom I was separated for the whole of the thirty years, but who is with me now, to gossip, as we are always doing, of those old days, used to walk out before breakfast. We would have a quiet sewing morning, getting forward with the preparations still so far from completed; then we would perhaps drive her home in the afternoon, and get an hour with my mother, who surpassed all the mothers I ever knew in her unselfish passion for her children, and for whom my heart bleeds to this day when I think of what my going cost her – for I know more of mothers' sufferings in that way than I did then. She would be working her dear fingers to the bone over something to add to the array of zinc-lined boxes which were being fed by instalments in my deserted room, and I see now the flash of tearful joy that lit her fair, fine-featured face when I came with my poor crumb of comfort for her hungry heart. Intimate girl companions walked over to lunch or to play a game of croquet, or to make better use of the little time remaining to us; and we walked half-way back with them on the lonely road and through the leafy lanes. It was April and May, and, as far as I can remember, all fine weather – a last impression of English springtime that has lived with me like a beautiful portrait, an idealised portrait, of a dead and longed-for friend. "Oh to be in England now that April's there!" has been the yearly aspiration of my homesick soul, which takes no account of east

winds and leaden skies, but only of chaffinches and apple boughs, just as Browning's did. My birds are the skylarks above those fen-meadows, and the flower I think of first my favourite lily-of-the-valley, of which I carried a great bunch, with the dew still on it, to the cathedral on my wedding-morning. And those golden May evenings, when we wandered back along the empty road, after setting our friends on their homeward way – I see them in some of Leader's pictures, which, if I were rich, I would buy to live with me, for that reason only. The friends could dine with us at the then usual hour, and still get home before the slow twilight passed into night – a thing impossible in this country. They were the last hours that we spent together – all young things then, but now grey and elderly, though I cannot realise it; three of them widows, most of them grandmothers, but never old to me, nor I to them. For more than thirty years we have not met, and there have been long gaps in our correspondence; but friendship has survived all, unchanged. They still write to ask when they are to see me, and I still write back to make provisional appointments which I can by no effort contrive to keep.

I was married on the 25th of April 1870. On the same date of the following month I left them all, never – as now seems only too probable – to return. We buoyed ourselves up through the anguish of the last farewells with a promise, made in all good faith, that I should come back in five years. My husband promised to bring me. "We must save up," we said to each other, "and have a holiday then." It was an easy thing to plan, but

proved too difficult to carry out. After we became a family, going anywhere meant going as a family, and taking all the roots of its support and livelihood with it. Theoretically, I could have run home alone, if not in five years, in eight or ten – we could have afforded that – but practically it was as impossible as that we should all go, which we could never afford. So here we are still, and my poor mother, who lived to the last on the hope that we had given her, has long been in her grave. There is no trace of an English home to go back to now.

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

many a sick and shivering fellow-passenger had cause to bless his generous heart and hand.

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

Most of the night, as we travelled down to Plymouth, I talked with paper and pencil to my beloved ones at home. For change of position, and to get better light, I knelt on the carriage seat for a time, spreading my sheet on the leather of the back. Our one fellow-traveller, a stout clergyman, dozing since we started in his distant corner, woke up to see what I was doing, and remonstrated with me. "Don't you think," said he, "that you had better try to sleep a little now, and write your letters in the morning?" In the fulness of my heart, I told him that I did not know how much of the morning might be left me, and the pressing reasons that there were for making the most of my time.

Then he informed us that he too was to sail for Australia tomorrow, and by the same ship; and it immediately transpired that he was the person for whose sake that ship had been chosen for us. We had arranged a later start by one of Green's line, when a venerable archdeacon, visiting us at our rectory, urged us to change to one of Money Wigrams', because he knew of a Melbourne clergyman who was going in her. The clergyman had his wife with him, which our archdeacon thought would be so nice for me. With great difficulty we transferred ourselves, anticipating advantages that we did not get. The Melbourne clergyman – here revealed – was a good man, but an uncongenial companion at close quarters; his wife – she was his second, and had been the servant of his first – was more so, and a terrible stirrer-up of strife amongst the other lady passengers. She had embarked in London.

I remember the look of Devonshire in the early May dawn. My grandmother had died at Ottery St. Mary, and I loved the pleasant county and for years had wanted to explore it. But this was all I ever saw of its beautiful face – Ivy Bridge (was that the name?), one scene that has not faded, and the place where the railway ran close beside the sea. We reached Plymouth at a ghastly hour before anybody was up. At the hotel recommended to us by our latest friend we were shown into a room where the dirty glasses and tobacco ashes of the night before still defiled the air and the tablecloth. Here we sat until a bedroom was ready for us, when we went to bed – which seemed a most useless proceeding –

until there was a fair chance of getting breakfast. A bath and a good meal pulled us together, and then we went out for our last walk on English ground. A charming walk it was, exploring that old town – I would give something to be able to repeat it – and a sweet conclusion to our home life. We returned to our hotel for a bite of lunch, hired an old man and a barrow to trundle our few things (the heavy baggage having been put on board in London) to the waterside, and after him a waterman and a boat, and got out to our ship lying in the Sound – the first we saw of her – at a little before noon, which was her advertised sailing hour. The newspapers called her a "fine powerful clipper ship of 1150 tons," and boasted that her saloon, which was "a very spacious apartment," could "accommodate forty passengers with ease." We were thirty-two and a baby, which seemed just to fill it comfortably. Such were the mammoth liners of those days. As we were rowed up to her gangway, bashful under the eyes of a number of keenly-interested spectators, whose heads hung over the bulwark, we thought her wonderful.

The wife of our latest acquaintance received us on deck, but all she wanted of us was information as to where her husband was and what he was doing. We could not tell her; we had not seen him since our arrival in the town. She could do nothing but watch for him, fuming; and we went to our quarters and our discoveries of the comforts there provided for us by the thoughtfulness of our London friends. We had one of the only two large cabins on the ship; the other was the captain's; the rudder clanked between

us and him, behind the bulkhead at the end of our wide curved sofa, where the pillow, tucked into a bright rug, was a full-sized feather bed, a wedding present that at first we did not know what to do with, but which soon proved the most valuable of them all, as it still is, in the form of plenty of soft, fat cushions all over the house. I spent a large part of my days at sea reclining upon this downy mass, which began below my shoulder-blades and sloped upward nearly to the ceiling; as I lay I could look out of and down from the row of stern windows that made one side of my couch, and watch the following birds and fishes – sometimes a shark beguiled with a piece of pork – without lifting my head. It was an envied place in the tropics, when the air swept free to the main deck through open doors; but in rough weather – and it was nearly all rough weather – the swing of the sea-saw was killing. It used to fling me out of bed over a high bunk board until I was black and blue with my falls, and it kept me sea-sick the whole voyage.

We "settled up" our room according to our inexperienced notions, and at four o'clock we sat down to dinner in the "cuddy," still in port. Excellent dinners we had at that odd hour for dining, which was the regular hour, and really a very suitable one under the circumstances of sea life, breaking up the long day of which most of us were tired by the time the first dressing-bell rang at half-past three. The function practically occupied the afternoon, and, as I said, was carried out to the satisfaction of all save those who would never have been satisfied with anything. That the

company could feed us so well, and lodge and carry us, for less than ten shillings a day argued good management, but I think they must have relied on the dead cargo for their profits. We were in Plymouth Sound on Sunday morning. On Sunday evening a party of passengers went ashore to attend church. "Mind," said the captain, "if a wind gets up while you are away, I shall not wait for you." But no wind stirred that night, nor all the next day, nor the next. Our clergyman friend (without his wife) darted to and fro, for he was confident that no ship would venture to leave a person of his importance behind, but we dared not risk it. We spent our time leaning over the poop-rail, gazing at the dear land, so near and yet so far, and thinking of our mourning relatives, with whom we might have been if we had known. When I was not doing that, I was writing to them. On Wednesday morning, the 1st of June – we had embarked on Saturday – the post-bag was closed for the pilot, and I looked my last on England through a grey sheet of rain.

CHAPTER II

AUSTRALIA FELIX

The story of a sea-voyage thirty years ago, if it could properly be included in this chronicle, might interest the young reader, born since the era of the sailing ship, and to whom therefore the true romance of ocean travel is unknown. To me, who, if I could cross the world to-morrow, would choose the most civilised steamer I could afford, the memory of the *Hampshire* on her maiden trip brings regret for beauty vanishing from the world, as the Pink Terraces of New Zealand have vanished, or the big bird-thronged hedges of rural England in my nutting and blackberrying childhood. All such losses have been amply compensated for, no doubt – I am not of those who, having outlived them, insist that the old times were better than the new – but they are losses, notwithstanding. The fine old sailing sailor-men and their noble seamanship, and the almost sentient responsiveness of the "powerful clipper" of a thousand tons or so in their hands – the spectacle of her with all her tiers of sails full, leaning to the breeze, or fighting storms, bare-poled, by sheer brain sense and the inspiration of the divinest unconscious courage that human history can show – there is nothing in the splendid new régime to touch the heart and the imagination as these did. I forget the hard-bottomed and treacherous bunks,

the soon-carpetless, soaked floors, the dancing table that shot fowls and legs of mutton into our laps out of dish and fiddle, the cold that one could find no shelter from except in bed, the terrible gales, the incurable sea-sickness, the petty feuds of the lady passengers; that is, I think of them as not worth thinking of, with the feeling that it was finer to rough it a bit as we did than to be pampered at every turn as sea-travellers are now, and in recognition of the fact that my sufferings brought me many pleasures that otherwise I should have been deprived of. The captain wanted to – only I would not let him – give me his own swinging cot. The head steward used to smuggle in mysterious parcels, which, when unwrapped, disclosed little dainties, specially prepared and hot from the cooking-stove, to tempt her who was said to be "the most sea-sick lady they had ever carried." The other ladies, when not immersed in their little social broils, from which my physical state and geographical position detached me, were kindness itself. One of them gave me that nearly extinct article, a hair net – it was the day of chignons, the manufacture of which was beyond me – and seldom have I received a more useful gift. With my hair tucked into this bag, dressing-gowned and shawled, I used to go up after nightfall to a couch on the skylight; there I would enjoy myself, feeling fairly well until I moved to go down again – amused with the little comedies going on around me, and enraptured with the picture of the winged vessel as I looked up through her labyrinth of rigging to the mastheads and the sky, and

then down and around at the sea and the night through which she moved so majestically. Pictures of her sweeping through a dream-like world of moonlight and mystery are indelible in my mind. Sometimes the moonlight was so bright that we played chess and card games by it on the skylight and about the deck. At other times we lay becalmed, and I had my chance to dress myself and enjoy the evening dance or concert, or whatever was going on. But at the worst of times – even in the tremendous storms, when the ship lay poop-rail under, all but flat on her beam ends (drowning the fowls and pigs on that side), or plunged and wallowed under swamping cross-seas that pounded down through smashed skylights upon us tumbling about helplessly in the dark – even in these crises of known danger and physical misery there was something exhilarating and uplifting – a sense of finely-lived if not heroic life, that may come to the coddled steamer passenger when the machinery breaks down, but which I cannot associate with him and his "floating hotel" under any circumstances short of impending shipwreck.

We sighted Cape Otway on the 16th of August. Seventy-seven days! Yet the Melbourne newspapers of the 19th called it smart work, considering the sensational weather we had passed through. More than forty ships were reported overdue when we arrived – a curious thing to think of now, with the steamers crowding every port keeping time like clockwork. The pilots that bring them up the bay can rarely enjoy the popularity and prestige of their predecessors of the last generation. The sensation caused

by the knowledge that ours was on board, with his month-and-a-half-old letters and newspapers, filled with information of the happenings in the world from which we had been totally cut off for nearly a quarter of a year, must have been delightful to him. We came out to breakfast to find him there, crowded about by the young men, the honoured guest of the company, one and all of whom hung upon his every word – particularly the gamblers who had had to wait till now for the name of the Derby winner. I remember that this item of news was considered the most important; next to it was the news that Dickens was dead.

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

landlubber could not but admire and marvel at.

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

Next morning the ship seethed with indignation because the doctor still made no sign. What happened to him afterwards I don't know, but the penalties he was threatened with for being off duty at the wrong time were heavy. He detained us so long that again our confident expectation of a shore bed was frustrated; for yet another night we had to camp in our dismantled cabin. The pair of tugs that dragged us from the Heads to Hobson's Bay, making their best pace, could not get us home until black night had fallen and it was considered too late to go up to the pier.

I suppose it was about nine o'clock when we dropped anchor. All we could see of the near city was a three-quarter ring of lights dividing dark water from dark sky – just what I see now every

night when I come upstairs to bed, before I draw the blinds down. We watched them, fascinated, and – still more fascinating – the boats that presently found their way to us, bringing welcoming friends and relatives to those passengers who possessed them. We, strangers in a strange land, sat apart and watched these favoured ones – listened to their callings back and forth over the ship's side, beheld their embraces at the gangway, their excited interviews in the cuddy, their gay departures into the night and the unknown, which in nearly every case swallowed them for ever as far as we were concerned. Three only of the whole company have we set eyes on since – excepting the friend who became our brother – and one of these three renewed acquaintance with us but a year or two ago. Another I saw once across a hotel dinner-table. The third was the clergyman who had been so kindly foisted on us – or we on him – before we left England; and it was enough for us to see him afar off at such few diocesan functions as we afterwards attended together; we dropped closer relations as soon as there was room to drop them. However, he was a useful and respected member of his profession, and much valued by his own parish, from which death removed him many a year ago. Quite a deputation of church members came off to welcome him on that night of his return from his English holiday, and to tell him of the things his *locum tenens* had been doing in his absence. He was furious at learning that this person – at the present moment the head of the Church of England in this state – had had the presumption to replace an old organ —*his*

old organ – with a new one. In the deputation were ladies with votive bouquets for his wife; the perfume of spring violets in the saloon deepened the sense of exile and solitude that crept upon us when their boat and the rest had vanished from view, leaving but the few friendless ones to the hospitality of the ship for a last night's lodging.

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

With what joy as well as confidence did we don our best clerical coat and our best purple petticoat and immaculate black gown (the skirt pulled up out of harm's way through a stout elastic waist-cord, over which it hung behind in a soft, unobtrusive bag, for street wear), and lay out our Peter Robinson jacket and bonnet, and gloves from the hermetically sealed bottle, upon the bare bunk! And the breakfast we then went to is a memory to gloat upon – the succulent steak, the fresh butter and cream, the shore-baked rolls, the piled fruits and salads; nothing ever surpassed it except the mid-day meal following, with its juicy sirloin and such spring vegetables as I had never seen. This also

I battened on, with my splendidly prepared appetite, though G. did not. The bishop's representative – our first Australian friend, whose fine and kindly face is little changed in all these years, and which I never look upon without recalling that moment, my first and just impression of it and him – appeared in our cabin doorway early in the morning; and it was deemed expedient that G. should go with him to report himself at headquarters, and return for me when that business was done. So I spent some hours alone, watching the railway station at the head of the pier through my strong glasses. In the afternoon I too landed, and was driven to lodgings that had been secured for us in East Melbourne, where we at once dressed for dinner at the house of our newest friend, and for one of the most charming social evenings that I ever spent. The feature of it that I best remember was a vivid literary discussion based upon *Lothair*, which was the new book of the hour, and from which our host read excruciating extracts. How brightly every detail of those first hours in Australia stands out in the mind's records of the past – the refined little dinner (I could name every dish on the dainty table), the beautiful and adored invalid hostess, who died not long afterwards, and whom those who knew her still speak of as "too good for this world"; the refreshment of intellectual talk after the banalities of the ship; the warm kindness of everybody, even our landlady, who was really a lady, and like a mother to me; the comfort of the sweet and clean shore life – I shall never cease to glow at the recollection of these things. The beautiful weather enhanced the charm of all,

and – still more – the fact that, although at first I staggered with the weakness left by such long sea-sickness, I not only recovered as soon as my foot touched land, but enjoyed the best health of my life for a full year afterwards.

The second day was a Saturday, and we were taken out to see the sights. No description that we had read or heard of, even from our fellow-passengers whose homes were there, had prepared us for the wonder that Melbourne was to us. As I remember our metropolis then, and see it now, I am not conscious of any striking general change, although, of course, the changes in detail are innumerable. It was a greater city for its age thirty years ago than it is to-day, great as it is to-day. I lately read in some English magazine the statement that tree-stumps – likewise, if I mistake not, kangaroos – were features of Collins Street "twenty-five years ago." I can answer for it that in 1870 it was excellently paved and macadamised, thronged with its waggonette-cabs, omnibuses, and private carriages – a perfectly good and proper street, except for its open drainage gutters. The nearest kangaroo hopped in the Zoological Gardens at Royal Park. In 1870, also – although the theatrical proceedings of the Kelly gang took place later – bushranging was virtually a thing of the past. So was the Bret Harte mining-camp. We are credited still, I believe, with those romantic institutions, and our local story-writers love to pander to the delusion of some folks that Australia is made up of them; I can only say – and I ought to know – that in Victoria, at any rate, they have not existed in my time. Had they

existed in the other colonies, I must have heard of it. The last real bushranger came to his inevitable bad end shortly before we arrived. The cowardly Kellys, murderers, and brigands as they were, and costlier than all their predecessors to hunt down, always seemed to me but imitation bushrangers. Mining has been a sober pursuit, weighted with expensive machinery. Indeed, we have been quite steady and respectable, so far as I know. In the way of public rowdiness I can recall nothing worth mentioning – unless it be the great strike of 1890.

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

We finished the week in the suburban parish that included Pentridge, the great prison of the State – an awesome pile of dressed granite then as now. The incumbent was not well,

and G. was sent to help him with his Sunday duty. The first early function was at the gaol, from which they brought back an exquisitely-designed programme of the music and order of service, which I still keep amongst my mementoes of those days. It was done by a prisoner, who supplied one, and always a different one, to the chaplain each Sunday.

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

Bishop and Mrs. Perry had a dinner-party for us on Monday. That day was otherwise given to our particular ship friend (of whom I shall say more presently); with him, a stranger in the land like ourselves, we had adventures and excursions "on our

own," eluding the many kind folk who would have liked to play courier. We lunched plentifully at an excellent restaurant – I cannot identify it now, but it fixed our impression that we had indeed come to a land of milk and honey – and then rambled at large. The evening was very pleasant. Whether as host or guest, the first Bishop of Melbourne was always perfect, and we met some interesting people at his board. Others came in after dinner, amongst them two of the "sweetly pretty daughters," of whom we had heard in England, and who did not quite come up to our expectations. They are hoary-headed maiden ladies now – the youngest as white as the muslin of the frock she wore that night.

We did many things during the remainder of the week, which was full of business, pleasure, and hospitalities, very little of our time being spent in privacy. The shops were surprisingly well furnished and tempting, and we acted upon our supposition that we should find none to speak of in the Bush. We made careful little purchases from day to day. The very first of them, I think, was Professor Halford's snake-bite cure. We had an idea that, once out of the city, our lives would not be safe without it for a day. It was a hypodermic syringe and bottle of stuff, done up in a neat pocket-case. That case did cumber pockets for a time, but it was never opened, and eventually went astray and was no more seen – or missed. Yet snakes were quite common objects of the country then. I used to get weary of the monotony of sitting my horse and holding G.'s, while at every mile or so he stopped to kill one, during our Bush-rides in warm weather. English readers

should know that in the Bush it has ever been a point of honour, by no means to be evaded, to kill every snake you see, if possible, no matter how difficult the job, nor how great your impatience to be after other jobs. That probably is why they are so infrequent now that any chance appearance of the creature is chronicled in the papers as news.

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

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

CHAPTER III

THE BUSH

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

a cheerless effect upon our minds. Perhaps the weather had changed.

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

Sunday was certainly wet. The two parsons drove out to a Bush service in the afternoon, and we their wives had a bad quarter of an hour listening to the bell ringing for the evening one, while yet there was no sign of their return who had promised to be back for tea; the boggy roads and swollen water-courses so delayed them that it was on the stroke of church time ere they turned up. But next day the sun shone again, and we were taken for a drive over macadamised roads and shown things that corrected our opinion of Bush scenery. And that day, neighbouring clergymen, Sunday off their minds, came to make our acquaintance, all full of information and advice for us, all eager themselves for news from the "Old Country." Mrs C. gave them shakedowns on sofas and floor, to which they repaired at disgraceful hours of the night,

because they could not stop talking. Where is that party now? – the merriest clerical party I was ever in. The host, our friend from that day, and godfather to one of our sons, was made a bishop, and died but a few months ago; his merry wife is a broken-hearted widow, crippled with neuritis. One of the guests, in after years still more intimately dear, became an archdeacon, and is now dead also. Two others are past work, resting in retirement until the end comes. We, the youngest of the group, bar one, are beginning to realise that the evening for us also is drawing on.

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

Holiday travels ended on the last day of August. That night we started for the up-country post to which G. had been appointed, and where he was expected to begin his duties on the following Sunday. August 31st was a Wednesday, and therefore ample time seemed to have been allowed for a journey from Melbourne

which the daily coach accomplished in less than a couple of days (and which is now done by the Sydney express in four hours). However, "the year of the great flood" was already making its reputation. Bridges and culverts had been washed away, and the coach-road was reported impassable for ladies. Men could wade and swim, assist to push the vehicle and extricate it from bogs – they were expected to do so – but the authorities in Melbourne advised my husband that the conditions were too rough for me. Consequently we took a round-about route, whereby it was still reckoned that we should get to our destination before Sunday.

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

I can only with an effort remember how uncomfortable that boat was; when I think of it at all, my mind fills with recollections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We climbed over our boxes, which filled the body of the vehicle, settled ourselves upon them as comfortably as their angles permitted, and started merrily on our way. It was the morning of the day, of the season, of the Australian year, of our two lives; and I could never lose the memory of my sensations in that vernal hour. I can sniff now the delicious air, rain-washed to more than even its accustomed purity, the scents of gum and wattle and fresh-springing grass, the atmosphere of untainted Nature and the free wilds. I can see the vast flocks of screaming cockatoos and parrots of all colours that darted about our path – how wonderful and romantic I thought them! And what years it is

since the wild parrot has shown himself to me in any number or variety! Like the once ubiquitous 'possum, he seems a vanishing race – at any rate, in this state. I suppose they still have sanctuary in the larger and less settled ones. I hope so.

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

I had been told to "follow the track," and I followed it for

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

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

At last it was all silence. I waited for the cart, and it did not come. I called – there was no answer. At the end of an hour – it may have been two or three hours – the situation was the same. What had happened was that the horse was at last in a bog that

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

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

Ah, those dear Bush-houses – so homely, so cosy, so hospitable, so picturesque – and now so rare! At least a dozen present themselves to my mind when I try to recall a perfect type, and this one amongst the first, although I never was in it after that night. They were always a nest of buildings that had grown one at a time, the house-father having been his own

architect, with no design but to make his family comfortable, and to increase their comfort as his means allowed. And this must have been the golden prime of the squatter class in Victoria, for the free selector had but lately been let loose upon his lands, and the consequent ruin that he prognosticated had not visibly touched him. In the early stages of home-making, his home-life had been rough enough; but there was no roughness in it now, although there was plenty of work, and although the refinements about him were all in keeping with his hardy manliness, his simplicity, and sincerity of character. I used to be much struck by the contrast of his cherished "imported" furniture with its homely setting – the cheval glass and the mahogany wardrobe on the perhaps bare, dark-grey hardwood floor – incongruities of that sort, which somehow always seemed in taste. Never have I known greater luxury of toilet appointments than in some of those hut-like dwellings. In the humblest of them the bed stood always ready for the casual guest, a clean brush and comb on the dressing-table, and easy house-slippers under it. And then the paper-covered canvas walls used to belly out and in with the wind that puffed behind them; opossums used to get in under the roof and run over the canvas ceilings, which sagged under their weight, showing the impression of their little feet and of the round of their bodies where they sat down.

The country-houses become more and more Europeanised, year by year. The inward ordering matches the outward architecture, and, although Australian hospitality has survived

the homes that were its birthplaces, one hesitates to present one's self as an uninvited guest at the door with the electric bell and the white-capped maid, who asks, "What name, sir?" when you inquire if the family are at home. There is an off-chance that you may be unwelcome, or, at any rate inopportune, whereas it was impossible to imagine such a thing in what we now lovingly call "the old days."

I came in, an utter stranger, out of the dark night and that wet and boggy wilderness, weary and without a dry stitch on me, to such a scene, such a welcome, as I could not forget in a dozen lifetimes. The door had been flung wide on the approach of the buggy, and I was lifted down into the light that poured from it, and passed straight into what appeared to be the living room of the family, possibly their only one. The glorious log fire of the country – the most beautiful piece of house-furniture in the world – blazed on the snowy white-washed hearth, filling every nook with warmth and comfort; and the young mistress, a new-made mother just up from her bed, in a smart loose garment that would now be called a tea-gown, came forward from her armchair to greet me as if I had been her sister, at the least. The table was spread for the dinner, to which the husband had been riding home when I encountered and delayed him; and what a feature of the charming picture it was! I remember the delicious boiled chicken and mutton curry that were presently set upon it, and how I enjoyed them. But first I was taken into an inner bedroom, to another glowing fire, around which were grouped a warm

bath ready to step into, soft hot towels, sponge and soap, and a complete set of my hostess's best clothes, from a handsome black silk dress to shoes and stockings and a pocket-handkerchief. In these I dined, and, retiring early, as she had to do, found a smart nightgown, dressing-gown, and slippers toasting by my fire. And I sank to rest between fine linen sheets, and slept like a top until crowing cocks, within a few feet of me, proclaimed the break of day.

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

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST HOME

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

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

Speaking of breakfast reminds me of the luxury we lived in, in respect of food. Never was such a land of plenty as this was then, when no one dreamed of butter and beef at what is their market rate this day. We had young appetites, in fine order after the sea-

voyage, and the more we ate the better was our landlady pleased. It hurt her as a hostess and housewife to have any dish neglected. And she simply stuffed us with good things; the meal prepared for us two might have served half-a-dozen, and given bilious attacks to all. One mistake only did she make in the arrangement of her bill of fare – she gave us too many quinces; apparently they were a superfluity in her garden, as they have since been in nearly all of ours. At first they were a novel and welcome delicacy, but when we had had them at every meal for weeks – in jam, jelly, tart, pudding, and pie, with cream, with custard, with bread and butter, and inlaid in sandwich cake – we were so thoroughly sickened of them that neither of us have wanted to look at a quince since. We have given the fruit away in sacksful to our neighbours, season after season, all these thirty years, and not cooked one; just lately – tempted by a brilliant carbuncle-hued jelly presented to me by a gifted little cook in my family – I have suddenly re-acquired a taste for it (which G. says will never happen to him), and now for the first time we have no quinces in the garden. That is to say, we have quinces – as also pears and almonds and other fruits – but the thieving little town-boys that live around us steal everything before it is fit to pluck. And I may here add, in regard to this sad fact, that when we came to our town-house we found a notice-board up in the orchard-paddock at the back, offering a reward of £5 for the apprehension of "trespassers upon these premises." While it remained up, there was always a policeman outside the fence. It was the joy of our

own school-boys to bamboozle him by scaling the fence at night or in some surreptitious manner, pretending to be trespassers, and only when they had given him all the trouble and satisfaction of apprehending them, revealing their identity as sons of the house. But I could not bear this board – such an anomaly in the colony, as I had known it; I thought it horrible in any case, but on a clergyman's land quite scandalous; and I did not rest until it was taken down. Now I understand the meaning of it. No sooner was it gone than the policeman disappeared for ever. And the thieving boys took, and keep, possession of the place – at any rate, of the fruit; and of the flowers when they fancy them, as occasionally they do. The fowls are locked up in their house at night, and could defend themselves with audible squawks in daytime. The back gate is also locked. But those young villains make their own gates; they breach the defences by simply tearing down a few palings, and pass through the hole. We mend it up, or hire a man to mend it – more than the £5 of the reward must have gone in this way – and next night they break it open again, or make another in an easier place. Then quite calmly, and boldly they come in and out, sit in the rifled and broken tree or on the top of the fence to munch their spoil and "cheek" the poor maid who goes out to expostulate; and, the once zealous policeman steadily holding aloof (he has been appealed to for succour a dozen times in vain), we have no redress, except when we take the law into our own hands, which is an unprofitable proceeding. One of my ex-schoolboys administers justice occasionally, in a fashion to bring

irate parents, and threats of summonses for assault about his ears, but he cannot be in two places at once, and his long absences from this place are calculated upon. As for Bob, the current house-dog, a fox-terrier of some intelligence, he behaves like a perfect idiot in this case. He will bark furiously at the boys when ordered to do so, but will neither initiate the chase nor follow it up with effective action. My idea is that he takes them for permanent members of the establishment. Or "boys will be boys," he thinks. Or he has seen me bribe them to come and ask for fruit, instead of stealing it. Anyway the result is that we have no fruit for ourselves. Year after year we see our trees blossom and the young crop set and swell, knowing we shall gather no harvest beyond a few hard, half-grown pears, which can be stewed soft. If I want to make quince jelly, as now I do, I must buy the quinces.

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

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

made the seat of a bishopric.

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

are now good mothers in their turn, sharing her society between them.

Next to the P.M. in the social scale came the doctors. There were two, English gentlemen both. One had emigrated for adventure and the goldfields, and spent good years seeking his fortune by short cuts, but had been glad at last to return to his profession for a living. He was courting a girl of exactly half his age when we came upon the scene, and their wedding was the first smart function that we attended. The other doctor and his wife were new arrivals from home, like ourselves; they had landed but a month or two before us; and they were our special and best-beloved companions and friends. Alas! he too – one of the most delightful of men – died suddenly and dreadfully, shortly before the death of the P.M., also leaving six mere babies and a wife to whom he was perfectly devoted, as she to him. She came to stay with me after the funeral, and the almost simultaneous birth of my first child – the latter event hastened, it was thought, by the shock and grief that I had shared with her. She was the most uncommon woman I ever met, as she was one of the most adorable. Superficially, both in face and figure, with the exception of her beautiful hands, she was quite plain, and absolutely without trace of conscious fascination or coquetry – the only instance I have known of a woman of that sort being irresistible to every man she came across. The story of her engagement, as told me by her husband, was exactly appropriate to them both. He was leaving England for a foreign appointment,

with but a few days to spare, when a friend or relative – a high church dignitary – wrote to beg a farewell visit, mentioning by way of special inducement that a charming girl was staying in the house. The doctor responded by falling in love with her on sight, in such a desperate and successful manner that she married him within those few spare days and accompanied him to his foreign appointment. Perfect love and bliss had been their portion ever since; it was an ideal union. They had the habit of driving up to our door, just as we were finishing dinner, and calling us, one or both, to come out with them. The country was new to us all, and we spent many of the evenings of our first summer exploring it together. We made common cause as new chums, although they were such citizens of the world as to feel at home anywhere. Even the little ones in the nursery could put us to shame in respect of their cosmopolitan experience. It filled me with envy to hear them chattering their pretty baby French to their Swiss nurse. The mother married again some years afterwards. And not a man of her acquaintance but felt and said – as my own husband did – that the not-too-well-off bachelor who saddled himself with the almost penniless widow and her six children did by that act the best day's work for himself that he had ever done or was likely to do. He, we have been told (for it is many a year since she drifted out of our reach), followed the example of his predecessor in marital behaviour – waiting on her hand and foot, writing her letters and packing her trunks to save her trouble, and generally worshipping the ground she walked on. That also is considered

matter of course. But I wonder how it is with her now? She is living still, I hear. And she is considerably older than I am.

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

There were bazaars and church teas and such things — quite as exciting as the private functions — at which our circle of friends and acquaintances was augmented by the leading tradesfolk, between whose class and that conventionally supposed to be

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

And as for the cottage people – the marked thing about them was that they were not "the poor." There was none with whom a clergyman or his wife could safely take the liberties so customary

at home. When a sister-in-law, once my fellow district-visitor, came out to be our guest for awhile, and started to make herself useful by teaching our parishioners their duty on the traditional lines and by bestowing doles of old clothes and kitchen scraps upon them, she got some tremendous surprises – "insolence" that simply staggered her. No, what they loved was to bring us little presents of new-laid eggs or poultry or what not, and to charge us less than they charged the laity for what they did for us in the way of business. The whole attitude of parishes and lay people in this country towards their spiritual pastors is benevolent to a degree. The parental spirit, tolerant, indulgent, making allowances (in more senses than one), is here on their side. The schools teach their children for half fees; the doctors doctor them for no fees at all; the very shipping companies – some, at least – make special fares for them. And so long as they accept this rôle of the lame dog that needs helping over the stile, so long will there be that tinge of contempt and patronage which embitters these favours to some of us who receive them.

Coming straight from our dignified Cathedral life, with its high and mighty Church-and-State traditions, into this democratic Salem-Chapel-like atmosphere, we still found nothing to disagree with us – only one circumstance excepted, for which neither the country nor the parish was to blame. Pure loving-kindness and open-armed hospitality to strangers surrounded us on all sides but one, and the unexpected welcome went to our young hearts. The single disappointment came from

a quarter whence it was least expected. But, as to that, bygones may be bygones at this time of day. I shall not tell tales.

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

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

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

The landlord papered the front rooms for us – for those to be occupied in day-time we chose from a local store an appropriate

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

all the sins of amateur workmanship in our springless couches.

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

But after all, humble as it was, it was a sweet little place when we had fixed it up. Bishop and Mrs Perry, paying us their first call, were enthusiastic about it. They had been making a long tour from country parsonage to country parsonage, which, notwithstanding the benevolence of parishioners, are as a rule struggling homes, "shabby genteel," in their appointments; and this bright, simple, tidy (though I say it that shouldn't) little toy dwelling was, to use their own word, an "oasis" amongst them. One truth that I have learned from my manifold domestic vicissitudes is that you can make a nice home out of anything, if you choose to try. You do not really want all the things that you

are brought up to think you want. Sometimes it is even a relief to be without them.

CHAPTER V

DIK

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

He joined our ship in London, and during the voyage we noticed that he was a lonely traveller, silent and sitting by himself. We therefore made little overtures, thinking to cheer him for the moment, and not foreseeing what they would lead to. G. played chess with him a good deal; when I was well enough to join them

I undertook the difficult but interesting task of drawing him out of his shell, where his thoughts were. Although we learned from him that a knowledge of the English language was imperative in Holland amongst cultured people, it needed friendship to cast out of him the fear of making himself ridiculous by his manner of speaking it, which certainly was quaint. Without protestations on either side, friendship was established, and then he talked, and did not mind our laughing at him. We instructed him in our idioms and customs, and he us in his; some of the Dutch names for things that we learned from him are in domestic use to this day. I cannot remember that he overcame his sensitive reserve in respect of any other passenger, unless in the case of a childless married lady who was accompanied by her pet cat and dog. Pussy lived with her and her husband in their cabin, where the arrangements for its accommodation, and the cat's own intelligent adaptation to them, were so wonderful that it caused no annoyance either to them or us; the dog, for whom a high passage fare had been paid, spent his nights somewhere under the care of the butcher, but his days with his devoted mistress. Dogs were a passion with our friend, and there was soon an affectionate understanding between him and this one. He got permission to give it lessons, and at stated times went off with it under his arm to his own cabin, where they would be closeted together for an hour or two. Not a sound would we hear of what went on, but at intervals there was a public performance by the pupil, which, eye to eye with its teacher, would go through tricks and evolutions

that a circus dog might envy. This was the only instance I can recall of social intercourse on his part with anyone on board, save us.

He was intensely proud, with a temper behind his pride that could never be safely played with, even by his familiar housemates; life itself was a trifle compared with any point of honour in his code – to be given in its defence, if need were, without an instant's hesitation; but there was not a trace of false pride in the whole warp and woof of him. This, however, goes without saying, since I have already said that he was at all points a gentleman.

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

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

His name was Diederik, which we shortened to Dik. His other name was not undistinguished in his own country, as we learned from his family photographs and the casual but complete evidence provided by the conditions of our joint domestic life – not by direct statement from him, the most modest of men.

The picture of his home in Leyden showed a beautiful old house on a tree-bordered canal; in this house, it seemed, each member of the large family had his or her suite of rooms and separate personal servant. "This is a brother of me," he would say, as we turned over his album; and questions would elicit the fact that the person indicated held a court appointment at the Hague. Another "brother of me" filled an important post in the Dutch East Indies; he was governor – kontroleur 1st klasse – of Riouw. Dik was a younger son, born with that bent for wandering which is not confined to any class or nation. And his equipment for the enterprise to which he had committed himself was almost ludicrously elaborate. He had a perfect arsenal of deadly weapons – for the native savages and wild beasts, I suppose. Guns and small arms of all sorts and sizes, the finest of their kind, with tons of ammunition to match, enough to furnish forth a small regiment. I still have a stumpy little six-chambered revolver, which he insisted on my keeping by me, in case I should be molested while alone in the house; and I ought to have also a beautiful inlaid hair-trigger pistol, which was the instrument with which he taught me the art of self-defence. Daily he would call me from my sewing or cooking to shoot bottles off the yard fence, until my execution upon ounce phials satisfied him that I was able to protect myself from the marauding black or bushranger. He had a tool-chest which contained every tool, and large sets of most of them, that handicraftsman could need under any circumstances – even to a turning-lathe, with which, and a

great hunk of ivory tusk, he used to make me buttons and sleeve-studs. As for "hempjes" and such things, they were in dozens upon dozens. And all that costly outfit to be so soon disintegrated and dispersed!

The first thing he did at W – was to help us into our cottage, himself inheriting our lodgings and the quinces from us. How useful he was! Until I had a maid – the last piece of furniture procured – he was up o' mornings to chop wood, draw water, boil kettles, and so on; and all day he was on the look-out for a job, the more menial the better. Tears, even now, are not far from my eyes when I open my old diary upon such items as these: – "October 31st. Dik beginning to make a garden for me." ... "December 7th. Dik up in the dark to catch fish for breakfast." ... "December 8th. Dik up early again to get me fish." Whenever he was at home this sort of thing went on, and all without the slightest fuss or gush, and with a frown for thanks. When there came the prospect of a most important domestic event, we had every reason to flatter ourselves that he had not the dimmest notion of it, from first to last. I made every scrap of baby-clothes myself, and he, being so constantly with us, must have seen me doing it; in fact, I abandoned the usual precautions just because he seemed too utterly dense to notice anything. He was nothing of the sort. It was part of his perfect gentlemanliness not by word or sign to show that he knew, even in his private talks with my husband, otherwise the talk of brothers. One evening he left for his lodgings, as usual, and the great business was comfortably

disposed of before the hour of his return in the morning. G. and I, in the midst of our excitements, found a moment to laugh together over the tremendous shock of surprise that we were going to give him. But lo! when he came he manifested no surprise – only quite broke down in trying to express his thankfulness that it was safely over. He was brought in to peep at the new arrival, and I felt like a scoffer at sacred things to have met with a jest that smileless and speechless emotion. On leaving my room, he dashed for his horse, tied to the front gate, and galloped off towards the town; thence in a few minutes he returned, bearing as his offering to the new master of the house a wicker cradle on the saddle before him! He must have looked a ridiculous object, but was lifted above all care for the opinion of the street. That was the cradle I had to wedge into such a tight place that rockers were no use to it. Later it was his joy to nurse the little one, to watch his first movements of intelligence, and speculate as to what period "his nose would come downstairs."

I ought to mention here that his attitude towards women was one of austere respect and dignity. I shall never forget the blackness of his brow and mood when we returned one night from a day's outing, having left him to keep house for us. It appeared that our Irish maid had taken advantage of the opportunity to make tender overtures to him. She had come behind him as he was reading and smoking, stroked his hair, and addressed him as a "poor feller." I was not supposed to know anything of this, but got the tale from G., and was thus

able to take steps to prevent such assaults in future. To me, for whom he had so deep a regard, Dik was a brother, without ever using a brother's familiarities. No man ever treated me with such absolute reverence and respect.

Between the 30th of that first October, when he was making me a road through the "common" that the continued rains had turned into a swamp, and the 7th of December, when he went a-fishing for my breakfast, he made a start upon his own Australian career – the bright beginning that declined to so sad an end. By no fault of his, poor boy! unless his breeding was his fault. He was young and strong – immensely strong – the typical big-limbed, burly Dutchman, eager to work and to rough it, afraid of nothing; he simply failed as I have seen dozens of young men of good family fail – as they all do, if I may judge by my own experience – who come out to make their fortunes under the same conditions. Had he been a skilled mechanic, he would have found his luck immediately; had he been prepared to pay his premium as a "jackaroo" —*i. e.* an apprentice to the run-holder, who charged £100 a year or so for imparting "colonial experience" – he would have been taken into one of those delightful Bush-houses that I have mentioned, and might have risen (without capital) to be a station manager. But as an amateur who did not know the ropes, his ideas of the situation gathered from books or evolved from his inner consciousness, Dik fared as I shall describe. I give his case because, in its way, it is so distinctly characteristic of the country, and as such may be instructive to the English reader.

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

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

– possibly decent work fellows, who had not understood him; he had come through personal foulnesses not to be mentioned in ladies' company. G. told me all about it afterwards.

On the 26th that job was done. He returned to us like a released convict, and we made much of him for a time. This would not do, however, and again he sought for employment. One night, in a fit of desperation at the delay in finding it, he took a sudden resolution to go out into the Bush, with a swag on his saddle, and ask for work from station to station, resigned to the men's hut – to anything. I remember my feelings as I saw him start in the moonlight, just before I went to my own comfortable bed. He was going to ride all the cool night, and take his rest in the fiery day; for it was December now, and horses and dogs were as children to Dik. By the way, he left his dogs with us while on these expeditions. Their puppy exuberance got us into many scrapes, although I do not believe that all the tattered fowls brought to us by our neighbours, with hints that we should make their excessive value good, came by their deaths as we were told they did. Otherwise the keep of the playful creatures cost little or nothing, because they were fed mainly upon opossums. Nightly, after dinner, the gun or guns were taken out, and I don't know which enjoyed the expedition most, the sportsmen or the dogs. There were 'possums in every tree in those days, and Dik and G. were both good marksmen. When too dark to distinguish 'possum or gun-barrel, they tied a white handkerchief round the muzzle of the latter and located

the former (already approximately located by the dogs) with the stable-lantern usually held up by me. An artificial light not only fascinates but paralyses the little animal, draws him like a magnet, and then holds him rigid, his large, liquid eyes fixed upon it, so that he is as steady to shoot at as a target at the butts. Under those circumstances he seems completely indifferent to his shrieking enemies at the foot of the tree, ready to tear him in pieces the moment his limp body thuds down to them. Although our valuable pair flourished upon it, I am horrified now to think of feeding dogs upon such meat. Well, we could not do it now, if we wanted to. At that time 'possums were vermin to the white man, pests of the fruit garden (though we never found them eating fruit, but only leaves), like the parrots and minahs, from whom nothing was sacred. Not that they could have troubled us, for all the fruit we had was a double row of peach trees down one side of our back paddock. We had peaches of the finest quality literally in tons – and nothing else. In their season I would peel the flannel jackets from half a dozen before breakfast, and go on eating them at intervals all day (whereby I destroyed my taste for peaches, as it had already been destroyed for quinces, for the rest of my life); and the ground was so cumbered with them that we were grateful to the neighbours who came with buckets and wheelbarrows to get them for their pigs. The railway absorbed the peach trees with the cottage, and I buy peaches at the door to-day at a shilling the plateful. And the opossum seems in a fair way to become extinct – at any rate, in this state.

I still go, almost yearly, to rest from town life at a station in the neighbourhood of W — . The house — one of the first English-style houses in the district — is the same that it was thirty years ago, except that its red walls are mellower and its girdle of choice trees more grown and beautiful; and the dear family is the same, only the young ones now the elders, and a new generation in their place. On a late visit they drove me to W — , some eighteen or twenty miles distant; strange to say, it was the first time I had been into the town since those early days of which I am talking, although I had passed it many times on the railway; and we started on our journey home in a soft twilight, prelude to a clear, faintly-moonlit night — such a night as, thirty years earlier, would have shown us an opossum in nearly every tree we drove by. It was country road or bush-track all the way, and "Now, surely," I said, "I shall have the long-desired pleasure of seeing a 'possum again." I settled down into my front seat of the waggonette, laid my head back, and watched and watched for little ears sticking up, and bushy tails hanging down, which I should have been so quick to distinguish if they had been there. Not a hair — not a sign that a 'possum had ever lived in the land — all those lonely miles!

But a few nights afterwards I had my wish in rather a strange way. Being sleepless, I lit a candle at twelve or one o'clock, and tried to tranquillise myself with a book. The candle made a little halo about the bed, but left the rest of the room dim. One window was wide open, as I always had it; an armchair, with a cushion in its back, stood near the window. I heard no sound, but suddenly

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

To return to Dik. On the 18th he came back to tell us he had found a job. I do not remember what it was, but it is recorded in my diary that we had a gala dinner in honour of it. He returned again before breakfast on Christmas Day. G. had distant country services afternoon and evening, and the three of us went together

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

One night a mysterious message was brought to G., who slipped out of the house in answer to it. It transpired later that Dik was lurking in the vicinity wanting to know if there were any letters for him. He had sent word secretly to G., not wishing me to know, because he was "not fit to see her any more." Of course,

I was not going to stand that. We dragged him in, gave him a bath and clothes, fed him and talked to him – scolded him well, indeed, for his obstinate refusal to write to his father, a course that we had urged upon him until we were tired of the hopeless conflict with his preposterous pride.

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

The change was so great and sudden that he did not all at once "know how he had it with himself," to use his own phrase. He wrote to us from Melbourne before he sailed (April 20th, 1872): – "You know me enough for being a bad hand in making speeches. What I want to let you feel is" – and he made a very touching one upon the subject of our friendship for him. Then he mentioned his state of mind. "The time passes quick away. At day-time I have plenty to do, and in the evening I am in the opera, what makes me a little jolly, but yet there is a kind of stupidity about me. I don't know what it is." From Galle he wrote at length,

and with his old ease, describing his voyage in detail, and his fellow-passengers, of whom one was a wholesome annoyance to him. "When you are talking with somebody he always will put his nose between it, and the rest of the day he whistle tunes out of operas." In Ceylon he made a sporting expedition into the country, and "after you have seen so long the miserable Bush of Australia is this beautiful." He had some delightful shooting, in spite of the fact that, in consequence of having cut his feet against a "coral riff" while swimming, "the only way I could go shooting was on a pair of slippers." Then, with the Dutch mail from Singapore to Batavia: – "it was very pleasant for me, as you understand, to hear the Dutch again. Everything was so as it was at home, no more puddings on table, but delicious vegetables, and the bitterjes like the home ones." And he had once more that first thing necessary to a happy life, his dog; not one of those mentioned, which remained with us, but a new one. On landing at Batavia, "I give my hondtje a walk. This is a beautiful creature, and came all the way good over. From Melbourne to Singapore was it expensive. I had to pay five pounds for him." Here he met Leyden friends, with whom he "passed the time jolly," and who led him to a place where he "had to get a ticket to be able to stop in this country;" and "the last days," he writes, "I feel me quite different, more as I was at home, surely in better spirits as on our road to Melbourne."

His brother shepherded him for a short time – took him to a place or two, from which, when they left, were "fired from shore

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

The next letter (Deli, March 20th, 1873) was all unclouded joy. He had left "that fellow" and was now "as jolly as possible," settled down in partnership with four other gentlemen of his own class, one Dutch and three English – "so you see there is no fear I will forget my English the first time." They had 250 "culies." "I

have a field where 100 are working, and go there and see them work every day, with Victor my dog, named after Victoria ... so you see at last I come to a good place, and hope to stick to this ... if I don't get along will be my own fault."

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

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

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND HOME

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

Distance lends enchantment to it, of course, but it is impossible that "Como" could have been other than charming, with its then surroundings. It had been the dwelling of two police magistrates, and the first and longest occupier had made the place, while his wife had been a gardener. My journal reeks of that garden. In the prime of the spring season (October 12th) there is an entry which credits it with "innumerable varieties of everything," including, naturally, "roses all over the house" and "our own asparagus for dinner every other day." The (even then) old house, masked with shrubs and hedges, surrounded by beds and borders full of sweets, turned its face upon a wooded

paddock, through which a path led out to the road; the ground behind fell steeply to the "lake" so ambitiously named – a large backwater of the river, preserved by the landlord (who allowed only himself and his tenant to shoot over it), and therefore the sanctuary of native aquatic fowl.

That lake was the region of romance to me. The sunrises out of its mists and shimmers, the moonbeams on its breast at night, that I used to step out upon the terrace-like verandah to feast upon – they are pictures of memory that can never fade. Flocks of black swans used to sail past the kitchen door within reach not of a stone, but of a potatoe peeling; early and late the air was full of the quick beat and rush of wings – wild duck in hundreds and thousands going out or coming home. They quacked and scuffled in the thick reeds at night, as we walked near them. The two sportsmen could not resist the temptation to shoot more than we could eat. I have it down in my diary that on the 28th of July 1871 G. killed three teal with one shot. I saw it done, and it was no great feat, seeing that the little birds were so thick that their flight at the moment was like the flutter of silver cloth. In that watery time the lake was generally brimming. One night we were called up by the bellowing of the cow, and Dik and G. rode naked into the inclosure where her calf had been submerged to its nose by a sudden rise; they were only just in time to save it. We had a roomy boat, in almost constant use. A friend or two would come out to dine, and after dinner we would paddle them about in the moonlight – explore the "North-West Passage," which reminded

me of a "fleet" in the Broads at home. We fished sometimes for next day's breakfast; I believe they were catfish and other coarse things, but we seem to have eaten them contentedly; I remember how we used to light a candle to see to bait our hooks. And it was, of course, a very paradise for 'possums. So near the water they swarmed – water being no less attractive to trees, which crowd upon it wherever they can find footing. Under the trees around Como we and the dogs enjoyed such 'possum hunts as we never had elsewhere. It was mostly dark, and on warm nights dangerous – though we never thought of that – snakes being as partial to the water-side as 'possums and trees; many an one did we encounter when looking for something else, and we have seen them undulating in mid-stream like miniature sea-serpents.

But a greater danger than snakes attended these expeditions, as we discovered on a certain night (August 28th). The sportsmen were too well trained to be careless with firearms, but when you carry them in the dark through a thicket of saplings and stumps and prostrate logs, accidents are liable to happen. On this night we were proceeding Indian file, Dik leading, I next, G. protecting my rear, when Dik's gun, carried muzzle down, touched an invisible snag, which jerked it from his arm. In falling forward the trigger was struck or jagged with sufficient force to explode the charge. I saw down the barrel as the flame leaped out, apparently at my breast; and then we all stood still for some seconds, expecting horrors. When nothing more happened, and each was proved unhurt, we returned home very soberly, Dik

himself much shaken. I then went to my room, took off the thick shawl in which I had wrapped myself against the night air, and held it up before a light. It was riddled with little holes. I took it back to the sitting-room, and spread it between Dik's eyes and the lamp, and made some joke about his having tried to kill me. I never joked that way again. He could not have felt it more deeply if he had really injured me and done so on purpose. I don't think he ever got over it.

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

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

For some minutes I stood within a few feet of it, the baby in my arms, cutting it off from its lakeside lair; and it must have been my formidable calmness which kept it from flinging itself upon me, as I have seen other snakes do when thus desperately at bay, although they will always wriggle out of a difficulty if a loop-hole is left to them. We killed it with the clothes' prop and

put it under an inverted wash-tub, whence I proudly drew it in the evening when the doctor came to dinner. I gave him the history of the execution, and he read me a serious lecture. I promised him never to "hold up" a cornered snake again.

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

What alarmed me much more, though with less cause, than snakes were the blacks, which at that time wandered into one's life as they never did afterwards. Some remnants of the river tribes remained about their old haunts, apparently in their old state of independence. I had seen them from the deck of the steamer, squatting on the banks in their 'possum skins, or fishing naked from a boat that was simply a sheet of bark as torn from the tree; in W – they trailed about the streets in some of the garments of civilisation, grinning amiably at the white residents,

on the look-out for any trifles of tobacco or coppers that a kindly eye might give hope of. They are hideous creatures, poor things, and their attempts at European costume did not improve their appearance. The most extraordinary human figure that I ever saw was a black gin in a bird-cage crinoline. She had something else on, but not much – only what would drape a small part of the lattice-work of steels and tapes, through which her broad-footed spindle legs were visible, strutting proudly. When I, being alone in the house, saw a black fellow evidently making for it, I used to think of all the horrible tales I had read in missionary magazines as a child, and wonder where Dik's revolver was. He only wanted bacca, or an old rag of clothes, or a penny, or a bit of meat – bacca first, always; and there was nothing savage about him except his looks. Some of the stations in that district made a point of protecting and showing kindness to the blacks. On these they made their camps, and swarmed like the dogs about the homesteads, bringing offerings of fish, and receiving all sorts of indulgences in return. I visited at the one of those places which was most notoriously benevolent in this direction. The gins whose husbands had used the waddy to them used to come to the house to have their wounds plastered; the nursing mothers got milk and other privileges; some of the least lazy and dirty young ones were put into the family's cast-off clothes and taken into a sort of service – given little jobs of dish-washing and wood-chopping, for which they were overpaid in such luxuries as they most valued. I was deeply interested in seeing them at such

close quarters, and studying their strange habits and customs; it was a valuable and picturesque experience. But there was not a lock or bolt on any door, and a half-witted black woman who was a particular pet used to roam into my bedroom in the middle of the night, to examine me, my baby, my clothes, my trinkets on the dressing-table – which was too much of a good thing. When I hinted as much to the hospitable family, they used to say easily, "Oh, she's quite harmless." But I never could get used to it. After leaving W – I saw little more of these disinherited ones, until many years later a few visited us in the Western District. These were refugees or escapees from a neighbouring Mission Settlement. Theirs was a tale of tyranny and injustice to melt a heart of stone. They had been compelled to sing and pray without getting any remuneration for it. "Not a farden!" said one black man, solemnly, with a dramatic lift and fall of the hands. "Not a farden!" I remember wondering how he had come by the phrase, since I do not recollect ever seeing a farthing in this country. The Australian despises a coin so petty. He treats it as though it were not in the currency. To be sure, the tradesman charges elevenpence three-farthings for many things, but an odd farthing on the total of his bill always becomes a halfpenny.

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

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

When not far from Melbourne we fell in, towards evening, with the most ferocious thunder-storm of my experience – and that is saying a great deal. All we could do was to get ourselves and the horse away from the trees and the buggy, over the tyres and metal work of which the lightning ran like lighted spirit, and then stand doggedly – the horse with head and tail between his legs, we three tightly clasped together, our faces turned inward and hidden – and silently endure until the fury of the elements was past. When it was passed, and we drove drenched and dripping to the nearest hotel, which fussed over us with fires and hot drinks, it was found that my little portmanteau (frocks folded close in those days) had been put into the buggy that morning

wrong side up. The deluging rain, running inside the flap, had saturated all my best clothes! My wedding-dress was done for; my next best gory all over with the dye from cerise ribbons that had lain next it; muslins and laces a flimsy pulp. And the ruin was irremediable, except in the case of the latter (I sent the two silks to be dyed black, and they were returned after some months stiff and crackly, so obviously dyed that they were no use as frocks again). Literally, I had not a stitch to wear. My companion lent me clothes while my travelling things were drying, and when I got to Melbourne I could hardly put my nose out of doors. Instead of enjoying myself with my friends, I had to scheme to hide myself from them – the only thing to be done, since I could not afford to repair my losses on the spot. As soon as G. had done his necessary business, we turned round and came home again.

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

safely, although she lost him afterwards – her only son.

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

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

I may say, at once, of my Bush life that, from the housekeeper's point of view, it has been full of comfort – always.

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

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