

# The Gumsucker at Home

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# **The Gumsucker at Home**

## I. Introduction

After my Wander Year, the story of which is told in “The Gumsucker on the Tramp,” I returned to the placid simple life in Dimboola. I, contentedly, went my way, taught school, played tennis, and read books.

So four happy years slipped away.

Then I became uneasy again. I knew it was another attack of the Wanderlust.

An idea came to me!

Why not explore Victoria?

True, it had been explored sixty or seventy years ago by some well meaning, industrious gentlemen, but their discoveries are all out of date now.

We read that Hume and Hovel quarrelled because one said the place, they were at, was Port Phillip Bay, while the other said it was Western Port.

To-day, such has been the great advance of knowledge, there is not a ten year old child in the State, who could not solve the problem in one minute.

Settled, then! I go exploring.

But the means?

Alas, how oft the means to do great deeds is not available!

So I joined the Relieving Staff of the Education Department. I hoped to wander all around Victoria, spending a few weeks in each place, and so in the course of four or five years to know all about the land of the Gumsucker.

Such was my plan, and in these pages will be found the veracious accounts of my peregrinations.

Two of these articles, “A Fortnight in Foster,” and “Where the Big Bream Bite,” have appeared in “The Australasian Traveller;” some of the others in the “Dimboola Banner.”

“Shulome,” Longwood,

24/4/'14.

## II. Our Gum-Trees.

Our fathers came from the war-stained North,  
The men who had strength to roam;  
They said "Farewell," and sallied forth  
To find for themselves a home.  
They sailed the sea to the bush king's realm;  
His groves, for their crops, they cleared:  
They thought of oak and of ash and elm;  
They looked at the gum and sneered.

They thought his leaves were of sombre hue,  
Too mean to provide them shade;  
They sniffed his scent, when the breezes blew,  
And sighed for a primrose glade.  
They said his limbs were of uncouth shapes  
Like threatening demon's arms,  
His strings of bark were like widow's crapes;  
They longed for their woodlands' charms.

From war-stained North have our fathers come;  
But we have the bush son's eyes,  
For we are kin of the gnarléd Gum  
Who hearkened our infant cries.  
By him we played in our boyhood hours;  
By him we have earned our bread;  
And he will scatter his scented flowers  
O'er us when we're lying dead.

We've seen the Red, like a thirsty king,  
Bend over the silent stream;  
We've seen the Mallee his tassels fling,  
To steal of the sunset's gleam;  
The Blue's young shoots, with his leaves gray pearled,  
A cloud that has gone awry;  
The Ironbark, with his limbs up-hurled  
As though he would win the sky.

The oak and elm are but fair-day friends  
That smile when the sky is clear,  
But close their eyes when the summer ends,  
And skies and the world grow drear.  
Our gum stands firm thro' the winter cold—  
There's never a change in him—  
He gives his best, like a comrade bold,  
When joy of the world grows dim.

He stands apart from the Old World trees,  
Unbound by the laws of form;  
He bows his head to the zephyr breeze,  
But laughs at the drought and storm.  
We stand alone, like our own great tree,  
Afar from the nations' hum.  
Come, brothers! Keep we our homeland free  
As limbs of our austral gum.

NATHAN F. SPIELVOGEL,  
(Our Gum Trees and Other Verses).

### III. In Our Cabbage Garden.

KORUMBURRA, which is the aboriginal cognomen of “blow flies,” is situated somewhere between Melbourne and Wilson's Promontory, three miles from the beautiful village of Kardella, where I educate the progeny of the cow farmer, and likewise it is some miles or other from the sea.

Having described its position, I shall pass on to the town itself. A greater contrast to The Wimmera is not possible. Instead of the great plains that environ the towns of the Wimmera, here it is all hills, lovely green hills that melt into each other, timbered with strange ghost-like black butt trees, and divided by deep shadowed fern groves. The timber is mostly black butt. The great fire of '99 burned miles and miles of these and now they stand dead. Fifty feet straight as a telegraph pole without a branch and then great skeleton arms reaching the sky.

Among the big quaint tree ferns on the hill sides, grow hazel, wild musk, blackwoods, supplejacks with their pretty white star flower and a brambly bush locally known as “Prickly Moses.” Possibly because like the bush of the Moses of the Bible—it will not burn. When a wind storm blows, on an average three times a day, these old blackbutts tumble and lie about till a bush fire comes along. It's rather interesting strolling through the paddocks on a windy day. Things might happen! Wild flowers are at present scarce and of not much beauty, and I have been telling some large stories about that view at this time of the year, looking from the old German school across the reserve at Dimboola.

The chief products of the 'Burra are coal, dairy produce, ferns and snakes. Things are very dull here now. The principal product at present is snakes. What horrible yarns I have been told. One told me that I must wear leggings all through the summer on their account. Another, that he killed nineteen in one week at his door. One of the boys told me that they average two a week in the school yard during summer and three of the boys always carry snakebite cure in their pockets. One man told me he always carries a bottle of fat which he throws over the snake's tail and then fiendishly watches the reptile chewing his tail till he chokes himself with it. I doubted his veracity.

My first week here it rained every day without cease. I walked to school encased in mackintosh, leggings and cap. It was told me that it rains six months here and then the winter begins. But suddenly the weather broke, and it became delightful and has been so since. In two days after the rain the roads were masses of dust, so wonderful is the drainage. I miss the placidity of mind that was mine while living on the plains of the Wimmera.

Here it is one of two things. When the weather is fine, the green hills bathed in sunlight, with lovely shades in the gullies, the great trees and ferns plaided with light and shadow, the air as buoyant as champagne, I feel as if the whole world were not worthy of changing with my ride to school. This, notwithstanding the fact that I'm passing the cemetery.

But on went days, with the gloomy skeleton trees, the misty dull hills, the dripping bushes, I feel as though I would like to drop in for a prolonged visit to the said cemetery. I feel like a worm and want to be left alone.

I wandered out to a fern gully recently; it was charming. All kinds and sizes from twenty foot tree-ferns to fairy maidenhair, staghorn, and a hundred other varieties.

I have visited Jumbunna the centre of the great coal strike of a few years back. I walked! What a walk! Up what to me seemed mountains, but are here politely called rises! Rises indeed! And me puffing and perspiring long before I was half way to the top.

This must have been a great place ten or twelve years ago. There is the remnant of a town called Jumptown (so named because the miners "jumped" a big Government reserve and built their houses on it) where at one time some thousands of miners lived. They built neat little two and three roomed houses and made nice gardens. Things prospered in those days in the Burra. Then came the strike. I cannot speak on the rights or wrongs of it as I am not aware of the facts, but the mine owners won and the glory and prosperity of this town has departed for—well, not for ever. Only nonunionists, locally known as free laborers, are employed, and of course there is a scarcity of these. Half the mines are shut down and the others are undermanned and Korrumburra is almost dead. I was warned to not even let my thoughts express the word "blackleg" when up in Jumbunna, not that such an idea ever came to my mind.

One heap of coal slag has been smouldering for eight years and a road is known as "the burning road," from the fact that it has been smoking without a stop, raining or dry weather, for many years.

Here in summer stock thrive, but in winter starve. Seems strange after the reverse in the Wimmera. Here there is no such thing as dried up grass. The land is always green, the grass never getting a chance to dry up.

The school at Kardella is very prettily situated right in the middle of ferns, and much timber and a beautiful garden is attached. How different is gardening here to the wearying attempts to keep a bit of green growing at the Mallee schools. Here roses, geraniums, pansies, violets and others grow almost without attention.

Some of the children ride to school. To see three little girls perched on a little Shetland pony is a sight for an artist—I've been trying to get a

snapshot but upset my camera every time through laughing.

Farming in this district is not the easiest job on earth, and yet it has ample rewards to the persevering and industrious. On the virgin soil grow great quantities of bracken fern, often as high as a man's head. This has to be eradicated. The land itself is very rich. One man at Kardella cleared £120 in one year off 12 acres of land. Small fruits and berries thrive wonderfully and the cow is a great asset to the district. But a few years and Korumburra will be a rich town, centre of all the grand dairying land that surrounds it, and, in addition, growing vegetables enough for the whole State. According to reports, it was exceedingly muddy in the early days. One told me that he was, one night in June, 1894, saying "Good night" to a lady outside her parents' house on Mine-road. After the twenty third farewell kiss he thought it was time to go. . . . After half an hour's futile strugglings, they cried for help. By means of a rope thrown over an arm of a tree, they were at length hauled out. "And," he added gloomily, "then I had to marry the girl."

It is remarkable how many grumblers there are in the world. Some folk when they get to Heaven will complain that there are not enough diamonds in their golden harps. But the worst of all grumblers is the one who reckons his own little town is the last place God made. These thoughts come to me on leaving Korumburra. On my first evening in that town, thirty-six men, whom I met, warned me that I'd come to a dead and alive hole, that the snakes and mud and people made life most miserable. They pitied me, and implored me to pray to my good angel to take me away before I became a melancholimaniac (that's a good word). It rained for ten days; it blew a hurricane for another week, and can you blame me, that I believed them? Still I try to remember that there is an end to the best and worst of all things, and that it is best to make the best of the bad, and the most of the good things of life. And therein is my creed!

So I battled on. Things did not tend to cheerfulness. I was staying at a gloomy, austere, cold hotel, with lively company. My corns became painful, and corns and cheerfulness do not often go together. I got a touch of sandy blight—and many other calamities pursued me. Still, I think, to-day, my last day at Kardella was the most happy day I have ever spent. Perhaps it was because it was to-day. It's good to always think "to-day" is the best day that ever was.

I walked out to Kardella, four miles. The hills, green as emerald with fresh grass, were a playground for a thousand sunbeams that danced a golden dance on them. A thin grey film of smoke from burning-off fires, half enshrouded the giant dry black butts, softening their hardness. Jacks, blue thrushes and magpies gave their morning notes. It was an idyllic

morning and all Kardella seemed to rejoice. Perhaps it knew that I was going away! I began to sing for very joy. It would have done you good to hear me singing "She wore a wreath of roses the day when first we met, and if she hasn't changed them, she's wearing of them yet."

The little folk showed their excitement at my departure. One little chap brought me a little bouquet, and was delighted when I pinned it in my coat. My successor took charge, and after my adieux to these little folk, who had befriended me for six months, I left. I walked back towards Korumburra but by a round-about road that took me through fern groves, past a great hillside on which thousands of white gums were putting on their new grey silvery leaves, in charming contrast to the garish gold of all the dying leaves of the thousands of fruit trees. I saw in the gaudy gold and red the old lands of this world, still grand and golden yet like the leaves nearing the end, and in the silvery innocent fresh gum leaves I saw Australia new among them all.

An unkind trick was played on me the evening I left. A number of friends gathered at the station to see the last of me. Adieux were said, and the train was steaming out when some silly fool hurled a packet of confetti over me. Me! Me! A hardened old bachelor! I retreated shame-faced. There were two strange ladies in the car and for the whole of the journey they watched each other suspiciously. Poor things!

## IV. Down The Jumbunna Coal Mine.

(N.B.—This was written before the opening of the Wonthaggi State Coal mine.)

NORTH OUTTRIM! North Outtrim,” cried the guard. We dismounted from the quaint little train consisting of one car divided into first and second class compartments and looked about. Ahead of us, perched on a rock, we saw the busy thriving town of Outtrim looking down on a great swampy dull-looking plain that extended away to the silvery Anderson's Inlet in the far distance. Turning round, we saw the fold hills of Strezlecki which terminate abruptly in Mount Misery. These are covered with gaunt, skeleton black butts interspersed with thousands of big tree ferns, relics of an antediluvian system of vegetation. The ground, hills and dales, have been sown with rye and clover and cock's foot grasses which now form a perennial carpet of green. Here a week without rain is abnormal, the average annual rainfall being over fifty inches.

Down in the valley before us, stood a collection of iron buildings, chimney stacks and radiating lines of tramways. Down the steep tramline we hurried. As we approached the colliery, there flashed past us, drawn by a steel cable, half a dozen coal-laden little trucks, known locally as “a set of skips.” Trailing behind the last one is a stout iron bar. In case the cable breaks and a skip bolt ensues, this bar digs into the ground and acts as a brake, bringing the cars to a standstill. We were met by the manager, a kindly Yorkshireman, who arranged to show us over the mine. But first we had to array ourselves in suitable attire. Suits of dungaree and boots that looked like canoes and weighed as heavy as a guilty conscience were placed at our disposal.

In a few minutes we were changed from nice, respectable looking citizens (no emphasis on “looking”) into four uncouth ruffians. The small one looked particularly ferocious. His suit was many sizes too large for him, his trousers were tied up above his knees and thrust into a pair of boots seven sizes too large. The whole was crowned with a hat that, assuredly, had at one time belonged to a pirate of the Spanish main. We were given lamps, in shape like little coffee pots with coarse wicks in the spouts and burning the evil smelling, thick “pit oil.” Grasping these lamps in one hand and our sticks in the other, we followed our guide to the mouth of the pit.

There is no shaft here. The mine is a long, sloping tunnel which gradually climbs down into the bowels of the hills for several hundred feet and then branches out into many drives. Parallel to this tunnel is another

one, an air shaft to carry off the foul air.

We climbed into a set of skips, after placing in each skip a cushion. These cushions are novel but not luxurious, being small logs of firewood of a particularly hard and sharp-edged nature. I suffered much from splinteritis.

We moved off towards the mouth of the pit. Soon, daylight was shut out, but incandescent electric bulbs gleamed along the tunnel which here is twelve by seven. Further on, it narrowed muchly. The slope at first was 1 in 3, but varied a good lot as it went down. The walls were heavily timbered and between the great beams we saw the pale blue shale.

Close to the ground was the great black seam of coal three foot six inches high. The tunnel followed this down till it was interrupted by a great limestone stratum. This was broken through and the seam found again. Coal is found like the meat in the sandwich. It is sometimes thick, sometimes thin. Gold is found in an underground river, coal is found in an underground swamp. The coal might be two or three feet high but spreads, perhaps two or three hundred yards wide.

On we rushed down, down, down.

At last we came to a stop. Here is the junction of two lines of skips and we dismounted. The air is beautifully fresh and clear. We were shown an electric pump that lifts the water from the pit to the surface. Through the winter it works twenty four hours a day, summer eight. I know nothing of machinery. I once invented a flying machine. It was well planned, scientifically built and a thing of beauty. But it had only one fault. It wouldn't fly. Since that episode I take no interest in machinery. Now, we seized lamps in one hand and sticks in the other and began our descent into the mysterious lower tunnel. With bowed heads we walked, not from humility but because the tunnel is but five feet high and in places not so high as that. Someone quoted "Bow down! ye slaves," and I a free born Australian instinctively raised my head. A big cross beam struck my forehead and sent me sprawling in the coaly mud. Thenceforth I walked with much humility. I felt as humble as a worm. I felt inclined to crawl.

The track narrowed till there was room for the skip track only. Here and there were manholes in the wall. On we toiled in semi-darkness. Now and again we noticed the skip cable move: then we heard a distant rumble; we hurried along to safety. Then with much chatter and noise, would fly past a set of coal laden skips. Hanging behind, was a grimy trucker, with his tiny coffee pot lamp fixed in his cap. These caps are the crowns of old boxer hats. With their black faces, gleaming eyes and lamps, these men looked like gnomes protecting their treasures of black diamonds. Once, when two of us, made slow and wary by reason of many bumps, had dropped behind,

we heard a terrific noise behind us.

“Look out!” came a loud voice from in front. We squeezed ourselves against the wall, trying to make ourselves small. I drew in that part of my anatomy usually covered by the bottom of my vest, shut my eyes and tried to think a prayer. All I could summon up to my excited memory was “God save our gracious King.” The set of skips flew past and I opened my eyes to see a grinning gnome at the back. I let out the breath I had held on to. Thinking it would be my last, I had stuck to it.

The roof now was a beautiful ceiling of pale blue hued shale, interspersed with strata of white limestone and pale yellow sandstone. Along the wall, by our side, was the coal seam, black and glittering. We paused and rested while our cicerone explained some machinery. Great drops of black perspiration were dripping from my face. Grimy channels streamed down inside my shirt.

We saw great props, 2 feet in diameter, breaking beneath the strain of the enormous weight they supported. The path became shallower. My neck began to creak ominously from much stooping. On we went, occasionally bumping our heads against the projecting beams. A distant rumble of approaching skips caused a rush and bumped heads and strange exclamations. When a mortal's head forcibly strikes an immovable beam suddenly, swear words seem to be jerked out involuntarily. A few weeks' back a parliamentary party visited the mine. I should have liked to have been present to hear them. We did fairly well.

The rock is blasted with gelignite. Shot holes are visible in the walls and roof of the drive. The blasters are compelled to wear india rubber boots and thick gloves. Glad to say no blasting was going on while we were in the mine. Stop! I blasted a few beams that hit my head.

On! Now we came to a low dungeon. The entrance was not more than two feet high. We peered in. A man, clad only in trousers, was lying on his side—there was no room to either stand or sit—chipping away with his pick at the wall of coal. The dungeon was lit by the man's tiny coffee pot lamp, giving the scene a Rembrandtesque effect. The tiny cell, the big muscular, naked, recumbent digger, the gleam from the jutting points of coal in the wall and on the ground, all made a picture I shall never forget. It was not a very pleasant sight to look at. I shuddered at the sight of this fine big fellow lying on his side, eight hours a day in his little dungeon, far, far, down below the glorious light, digging, digging, chipping, chipping, day after day, week after week, to earn his bread. We moved on to another man working in more roomy circumstances. Seated on a heap of coal he swung his little pick, swiftly and rhythmically, his naked body shining and bending sinuously in the light of our lamps. I took a pick and chipped off

some specimens of coal which I shall show to my grandchildren as proof that at one period of my life I “worked.”

We had now between us and daylight seven hundred feet of solid stone held up by a few wooden props. Before we could see the blue sky again we had over 6000 feet to travel. It was creepy.

Time was pressing so we could not visit any other men. We turned back to the upward journey. Our guide took pity on us and our sufferings and put us into an empty set of skips that were being hauled upwards. We lay down in the bottom of the skips like dead men. More, I felt like one. I shut my eyes as we rattled and bumped along. I opened them and shuddered to see the grimy face and gleaming eyes of a gnome who was grinning at me, as he hung on the back of the truck. The light from his little lamp in his cap made his expression most saturnine. I shut my eyes. Rattle and bang! Rattle and bang! Then in the far distance, a faint grey gleam appeared. It grew brighter and clearer and nearer, till at last we burst out into God's good, glorious daylight again. It was delicious to see the sun and the trees, to feel the breeze blowing, to smell the scent of soil, to hear the note of a magpie. All the senses were gratified. All except that of taste. Coal dust? Pah!! We gazed at each other. Handsome men appeared to be black and grim monsters of ugliness.

Then we inspected the ingenious air fans, the boilers, dynamos. Everything was just the best. So I was told. I believed them. I know nothing of machinery. I once made a flying machine—Never mind about that, but I always take machinery for granted. More interesting to me was the man sitting before a set of many levers, his eyes constantly watching the electric signalling apparatus that connected him with every part of the mine. He is to the pit what the brain is to the body. Then to the bath! What washing! What splashing! What scrubbing! Coal dust finds its way into every part of the body. In our ears, up our nostrils, in the crevices of our false teeth; everywhere. But soap soon began to victor over coal dust and we again became a handsome, benevolent looking party of tourists. After changing our clothes, we wearily dragged ourselves up to the station after five hours of exploration. For days after, my head was aching and swollen, my neck had a painful crick in it and there was a feeling of depression about my legs. Reminded me of the days when I used to play football.

## V. Bound For Croajingalong.

BAIRNSDALE!

I saw it from a cab window and then we were alongside the Mitchell. It is a fine stream of water much wider than the Wimmera but lacking the glorious border of big red gums.

The folk have made the mistake of trying to make it an English stream by planting willows along the banks. They are undoubtedly very beautiful but they are but making for imitation. And we have too much of that same wretched article in Australia. It's like a man imitating a rooster crowing. It's the rooster's job. Let roosters crow and men talk. We have many fine trees native of Australia. Admit they are not so beautiful as the willow and the oak. But they are our own—these willow lined rivers can never equal the streams where these trees are indigenous, but in all England, or for that matter in all Europe there is not a gum lined river like old Father Wimmera.

To misquote a well-known battle field adage, “stick to your gums.”

Now I am aboard. Last time, it was the big 10,000 tonner “Barbarossa,” bound for England with its dozens of stewards and its 2000 souls. Now it is the 43 tonner J.C.D. with its tiny little deck and four hands. I must not forget the charming little waitress who made eating dinner a pleasure.

Gently we glide down the river on our twenty-four mile trip to Cunninghame. I noticed several jaunty motor boats from which the inevitable fishermen cast their lines. Fishing always strikes me as the most peculiar of sport. You go to a river and bait your hook and toss it out. Then you stand all the afternoon and watch your floater and think about your unpaid bills. When you grow hungry you roll up your line and go home and tell lies about the bites you didn't get.

I noticed a big shed, filled with thousands of maize cobs, for here that grain takes the place of wheat or oats.

Along we glide. A bare-legged boy runs along the bank and the helmsman leaves his wheel to heave him the daily paper. The kiddie seizes it and runs off home.

For ten miles we slip along the river and then we burst into Lake King, 12 miles long and 4 miles wide. As soon as we struck it, our tiny craft began to toss about like a cork on a dam.

As night came on, we ran through Bancroft Bay into Reeves River or the Main Channel. Then I turned my attention to the company. A couple of young bank clerks coming back from their holidays were helping two young ladies to fill in the time.

Besides these, there was a honeymoon couple on board, I took a lot of interest in them. They didn't appreciate the interest I took in them. They shifted camp about seven times and sniffed whenever I approached them. It was a romantic evening. One of those evenings when souls commune with each other and ethereal thoughts—you know, the sort of evening, a dim, very dim kerosene lamp, many cosy comfortable corners and the lap! lap! of the waves.

I was very lonely—and envious.

Then we arrived at Metung.

Here I saw for the first time the real genuine article in fishermen.

He wore big thigh boots, a sou'-wester hat, and a great red moustache. In the dim light of the lantern he looked the ideal bad, bold pirate.

The old fish basket, scaly and smelly, has gone. In its place are tidy little wooden boxes each holding 80 lbs. of fish.

Looking for fish and tourists are the principal occupations of the people of Cunninghame. Judging by the size of my bill they know their business well. I arrived at the town at 7 p.m. and left it at 7 a.m. so I'm not responsible for the following figures. They were given me by a man who looked reliable. He says that 2400 boxes of salmon alone were sent to Melbourne last year. That's nearly 100 tons of one kind of fish. Four motor fishing boats patrolled the coast and sent off during last winter 5000 boxes of bream, whiting, schnapper and ludovick.

The talk in the bar is not of wheat or sheep or cows but of the “ketch.”

At 7 a.m. we were waiting for the coach, our last stage 36 miles. As I stood on the verandah of the hotel smoking an early pipe, I could hear the deep low booming of the ocean, hidden by the long row of sand hummucks. The great ocean spreading away uninterruptedly to the great icebergs of the South Pole. I did the proper thing and said,

“Roll on, Thou deep and dark blue ocean! Roll!”

Everybody says it. So the ocean continues to roll.

Then along the street came the coach with its four sturdy but unbeautiful horses. Four of us got inside, if a roof entitles our vehicle to that word, for the leather sides were rolled up and admitted the cool salty air. We were four; two young fellows going up to the Delegate River to take up land, a man of many parts and many yarns, and myself. Crack went the whip! Round went the wheels and we were lumbering off.

Through the streets of Cunninghame, which by the way is mostly hotels and coffee palaces. The other places hung out cards “Apartments to let.” Soon we were passing Lake Tyers. On an eminence on the other side is the Aboriginal Station.

The going was heavy through the sand, so we dismounted and walked

along the edge of the lake and made friends with each other. On we walked, past the beautiful shelving beach, past the soft yellow sand, past a view of a picturesque fleet of distant fishing boats, past the far off sloping bank leading to a tiny settlement, past a dead cow lying in the water; we hurried on. The coach rolled on. So did the smell of the cow.

The ground rose and firmed after we passed what is locally and expressively known as "The Stinkpot." Imagine about a million developed eggs suddenly dropped, and you have the identical perfume.

And now we entered a great virgin forest; thirty miles of it with only two houses visible during the whole journey. Dense thick expanse of tall stringy barks interspersed with blue gums, wattles and ironbarks. Many of these stringy barks are lovely. Their trunks, blackened by fire, are enwreathed with close patches of new, daintiest of green foliage, with most golden of sunshine lighting them.

Yes! The scenery was much the same for the 30 miles through this untouched land. Some might call it monotonous, but constancy and work and life are monotonous to some folk. At Bellbird Creek I heard thousands of these little birds ringing their silver bells as though they were celebrating a fairy wedding in the bush.

A little further on, a five-foot kangaroo hopped out in the scrub and stared at us. It is twelve years since an old man 'roo stood up against me for Australia. It was in the Grampians, and I——well, never mind.

The track wound along a narrow path between big trees, and every trunk bore bruise marks where it had been hit by passing vehicles. In places we shaved trees by half an inch. Sometimes we didn't shave them. Then, we hit them. But that was rare. *I'd* have hit about seven trees a minute. There were wattles of all descriptions in blossom. The driver turned and told us that some wattle is in bloom at all times of the year. I saw golden wattle, silver wattle, wattle discolor, but I missed the wattle you drink. I was busy admiring the scenery.

And by this time we had tossed restraint to the winds, and chatted merrily.

On we rattled.

Someone suggested a song; and the young fellows sang harmoniously "Bayou" and other topical songs. I thought it was my turn. I sang a pathetic little ditty, and then someone suggested a yarn. My song was so sad that one man cried. I can't sing well, I know, but I can put a lot of feeling into my singing. It must be a gift. One man put his head outside to hide his emotion. We had no more singing. On we rolled, till 11.30 brought us to Hospital Creek, where we dined. Not a house around, and yet here was a public telephone. Guess, if I were living here, that telephone would absorb

my salary.

I dined, and strolled off to examine the surroundings. I'm always trying to find out things. I found out one thing when I returned to the house. The coach had gone off without me.

Horrible thought.

Was I down-hearted? No!

How I sprinted!

I overtook the coach as it was toiling up the hill. I looked at the driver, and he looked at me. I think he expected me to say something nasty, but I smiled and said "Thank you," and he kept on thinking.

Mile after mile slipped slowly by.

"Yes! You can always tell what part of Australasia a man comes from. If he comes from Wellington he puts his hand to his head to hold on his hat every time he goes round a corner. If he comes from the east coast of Tasmania, he drags his feet upwards as though pulling them out of the mud. If he comes from South Gippsland his eyes are glued on the ground as though looking for snakes. If he comes from the Wimmera he's always wiping imaginary froth from his moustache."

I indignantly repudiated the foul aspersion. But the twinkle in the speaker's eye reminded me how I had praised the Wimmera lands.

We crossed Wombat Creek and the bell birds again rang us a welcome. Tree ferns and hazel and still more timber. Acres and acres of it away to the Southern Ocean. Unknown and rarely traversed. What treasures, what hidden wealth is hidden behind those mighty stretches of timber! What future has this great land?

Now in the distance, we see the far off spurs of the Australian Alps; close beside us is the line of red marked trees, the survey line of the railway that will one day join Bairnsdale to Dalgety, and the great Monaro country.

Now the track opens down onto the Snowy Flats, or rather Orbost Flats, probably the richest 35,000 acres of maize land in the world.

We are crossing the great Snowy River, supposed to be Australia's finest stream. More about it later on when I have time to explore it.

And now Orbost is in sight. A little world of its own, cut off from the rest of civilization by seven hours' coach travel without the tiniest village near it. Sixty miles from a railway station.

It's been like a visit to the roaring fifties, this coach journey taken leisurely through the great virgin forest, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it all the time.

To-night I sleep in Orbost, the capital of Croajingalong.

## VI. Way Down Upon The Snowy River.

I HAVE been in the capital of Croajingalong for a month and have not yet adapted myself to circumstances. It is so self-contained, so different from any Australian town I have yet visited. In appearance, Orbost is like any other village of a thousand folk. It has the usual general stores, the usual hotels, in the bar-parlors of which the same crowd tell the same lies as they dally over the same drinks, the usual barber's shop where the same type gather to hear the news. So far as the town, itself, is concerned there is nothing unusual.

The famous Snowy River flows close to the town but, at present, in consequence of a long period of dry weather, it is disappointingly shallow. Now, it is only a couple of hundred of yards wide bounded by sand osierlined banks. I hope to see it in winter. Then it swiftly rises, and in a couple of days is a tumultuous, roaring river, overflowing its banks and spreading miles wide. It brings with it from the uplands a rich mud that remains after the river has subsided. This silt makes the soil wonderfully fertile. I have been shown places where there are three post and rail fences, one above the other, the lower ones being buried. The mud rise averages four inches per year.

The soil on the 35,000 acres of Orbost flats is probably as rich as any part of the world. It grows almost anything. Land values are between £60 and £70 per acre. I was recently shown a block of land, on which it is not considered safe to build, but which was lately sold at £33 per acre. Maize is the chief product, a fair crop being one hundred bushels to the acre and as maize is at present about 4s. per bushel, there's money in it. After maize come pigs. They usually do. The faint, melancholy grunt of the porker is often heard. It reminds me of Watt's immortal lines—

“ 'Tis the voice of the porker! I hear him complain

You are starving your bacon, come, trot out some grain.”

The next great product is pumpkins. They grow almost wild and to an enormous size. I showed a fellow lodger a post card of an Orbost baby reclining in a cradle composed of a monster pumpkin. “Pooh,” said he, “that's nothing! you ought to see the beets in Melbourne. Why! I once saw three policemen asleep on one beet.”

He is an abominable fellow. He make puns, a corrupt form of language which I consider is a sure sign of a degenerate conscience. Just imagine having to live in a house with a man who calls his horse “Egypt” because, as he says, “ 'e jibbed;” or having to nod to a man who throwing a maize cob at a passing horse says, “That's the most amazing cob I've seen this

year.”

I shall strike him yet.

Several of the farmers have motor launches and during the dull times of the year, they go off down the river on fishing expeditions. Ah! The fishing is splendid. Bream, trout and perch are caught by the ton up to five and six pound, and ten miles away, the best of sea fishing is to be had.

The climate is peculiar. It is like that of Spain. A sort of to-morrow-will-do touch about it. I find work a burden. I blame that to the climate, of course. Many of the shops are closed from 12 to 1, while their proprietors go home and eat their dinners. Many of them don't bother to open till half past nine in the morning.

The town is quiet and sober and respectable all the week but, with Saturday, come crowds of maize pickers, mostly half-caste aboriginals and large quantities of beer are drunk. Occasionally they take possession of the town and then things become most uncomfortable, especially as some of them have a habit of taking the middle of the road about midnight and eloquently demanding their rights, as true born, if black Australians.

Coming back to the vegetables, I was shown a parsnip five feet long. Don't believe me? Believe this if you like. A man, digging parsnips, three miles from Orbost, struck an extra big one. He dug for a long while, and, at last, getting one end on his shoulder, started off for the town. When he got there, three miles away, the other end of the parsnip was still in the ground. There now! And it's absolutely true! I ought to add that the end of the parsnip broke off in the ground.

If I started talking about the size of the walnuts you walnut believe me. I give this as a sample of my fellow lodger's punning mania.

Have you ever heard of Marlo? I guess not! well, I'm going to tell you about it! and a lot too!

I went there, one day last week. I left Orbost on a beautiful sunny afternoon and biked along the Snowy for the greater part of ten miles. As I kept close to the bank all the way, I could see what a fine river it really is. To save the banks from being washed away during the flood years, osiers have been planted along them. What with these and weeping willows and poplars in numbers, there is a peculiarly unAustralian appearance about the place.

The trees are all now autumn tinted and with the gleaming river make pretty pictures.

I complain about the state of the road to a passing farmer, who tells me there is a good metal road. I look round in bewildered incredulity till he adds with a gesture of his thumb, “Three feet down there, below ground.”

On I ride, watching the play of sunlight on water and tree and hillside,

past maize fields, past maize pickers' tents by the river, past great "crates" of maize cobs, past thousands of osier willows overhanging the bank, past the landing stage where hundreds of silver-tongued bell birds are noting, past the cliffs that herald the nearness of the sea.

Then the road leaves the Snowy, and, in a few yards comes alongside the Brodribb. I crossed the bridge, noticing the four heavy steel cables that strengthen it against the big floods that sweep along during the winter. But now the Brodribb is as calm as a baby's smile, with not a mark on it save the clear reflection of the trees.

Now, in the distance, can be heard the dull booming of the ocean and in a few minutes I am pushing my bike up the sandy hill that leads me to the comfortable hotel in the tiny village of Marlo.

First I bought as much ginger ale as I could get for sixpence. Then I filled my pipe and settled myself down to admire the view.

If you have power of visualizing, use it now. I am going to draw a picture with my pen. I would that I could use a clearer medium. Come with me and see this view. It's worth looking at. In the foreground, the buffalo grass lawn, overlooking the eau-de-nil tinted, three-quarter mile wide river, calm and unruffled. Then a long, yellow, sandy spit of land, fifty yards wide, running to the west, up to the olive green, scrub-covered hills and to the east, sinking into yellow distance. Beyond this, the mighty, deep blue ocean, marred fifty yards out by a long line of silver-topped breakers on the sand bank, that parallels the coast and spreading out to the distant Pole and to the apparently nearer, purple and gold red sunset.

I tripped down the little cliffside and rowed out on the river. The last time I had been out rowing was on New Year's Day on the Wimmera, amid the laughter and noise of happy children beneath the giant gums that enfold the river at Dimboola.

Then I went back to tea!

A ten mile bike ride, a lovely day, a row to the sea and a dip in the briny—I need not particularise further on the quantity of food I ate.

Then the mail came in, the weekly event of importance. The one link with the world. I watched the school miss, sitting contentedly happy, with her pile of letters and papers before her, her hour in the week. Then I went into the bar parlor and met all the residents of Marlo. I smoked and chatted with them. One, a Swede, was wrecked 16 years ago while on his way home. He put down his bundle here and is now a river pilot; a couple of English younger sons doing colonial experience; a blacksmith named Quinn, who left Horsham in '79—in fact, a strange motley little crowd.

Then I went out into the moonlight and wandered out along the silent river. Not a sound save the thundering boom of the ocean on the sunken

bank.

To-night thousands are rushing and bustling through the streets of Melbourne; crowds are sitting in theatres; friends are enjoying domestic pleasures, and I am walking alone not unhappy, by the moonlit river.

It is my birthday, and how could I have spent it better than wandering so, and allowing my mind to wander back to birthdays when I was not a wanderer on the face of the earth. I walked on and listened. But all I heard was the dull cannonading of the ocean. Now and again, a shriller note came loud and piercing. I tried to read some meaning into it, but all I could hear was a mocking defiance of man—

“I stood alone by Marlo Beach,  
Beside the broken sea,  
Without a care, without a fear,  
The world was far  
As sky-held star,  
And God came wondrous near.  
Together we, on Marlo Beach,  
The ocean, God and me.”

Next morning, I basked in the sun, watching sunlight and shadow on the water. After lunch, a party of us went aboard the steamtug Kerlup, a tiny 25-ton paddle boat, with asthmatic boilers, and boldly she pushed her way down the river to the sea. In '93 the mouth of the river was right opposite the hotel, but in consequence of the silt brought down by the river and also of the strange antics of the ocean, a long sandy spit has been built, and now the entrance is three miles further down.

We disembarked right close to where the river disembogues into the sea. The mouths of rivers have a fascination for me. The river has travelled for days and days, down hillside and through plains and now it is silently swallowed up by the ocean. It is Life and Death.

Then the “Wongra-belle,” two-masted schooner, came bustling in under a cloud of canvas. Gaily, her nose tossed the waves aside. Suddenly she baulked and stopped. She was stuck on the bar that encloses the coast. I became interested. Would she become a total wreck?

In answer to my thought, her crew put out long poles and tried to push her off. The little tug came out to her assistance. A tow rope was fixed between the boats. The Kerlup took it in her teeth and pulled and strained till I thought her boilers would burst. I sat on the sand and discussed Tennyson and tea parties with a nice young lady. An hour passed. Still the tug wheezed and dragged.

We got on to Goldsmith and cats and colds and predestination and—I forget the rest. Still the tug coughed and spluttered. Suddenly, the schooner

moved majestically forwards and we cheered. The tug gave a triumphant blast with her whistle, the Wongra-belle shook out her sails and, we shivering marooned folk cheered.

What a silence, a woful silence! The ship coming right into the mouth of the river had stopped again. The tug went out again. A motor launch came along and rescued us.

The ship was in a hopeless position and must remain beached, till high tide would let her off. This should be entitled "The Wreck of the Wongra-belle." As we reached the landing, one grumbled, "It's all through this blessed Licensing Bill; not allowing the bars to be open on Sunday." No one smiled. We were all sniffing dinner. I sprang to my bike and away, for I wanted to be back in Orbost before dark.

As I neared the town, I heard a band of maize pickers, gathered round their camp fires, singing "Annie Laurie." The distance effaced all the discords and in the still, sharp air, the chorus sounded most harmonious.

Strange contrast! Last night, drunkenly brawling in hotel bars; to-night, sitting by the noble Snowy under the star-spotted sky and singing—

"And for bonnie Annie Laurie  
I'll lay me doon and die,"

Humanity, like a diamond, has many facets. Sometimes the light strikes one, sometimes another. And each is true in its own way.

Once more, in the dusty streets of Orbost and—home.

## **Young Orbost.**

The second class at the Orbost school was asked to write about a picture of King Edward placed before them on the wall. The following are extracts from the results:—

"King Edward is a very nice man. In the picture he looks nice, too. I think he is the nicest man I ever seen. I would like to see him in his face. He has a lot of meddlers on him and a bread knife in his hand."—Very complimentary to His Gracious Majesty.

"He looks very nice. He has had his foter taken, and he sent it over to our school. He is standing on his throun. He has his yuniform on and he rules over the world and pays the pleeceman."—Rather awkward position to be standing!

"The King is a pretty feller. He has kids on his hands. He is still alive and getting a hole lot of money, about two pounds a week."—His idea of affluence!

"The King is hanging up on the wall. He uster be hanging up in the old

school on the wall. He has been hanging a long time on the wall. It is verry nice to see the King hanging on the wall.”—Now what did he mean?

## VII. Where The Big Bream Bite.

LET it be understood this is no fish lie. I hate fish lies! They are so useless! No one believes them! A glorious summer afternoon in Orbost, on the Snowy River.

“Rotten,” growled Bruce, as he started his horse down the stony road that leads to the banks of the river. “First, you waste time over your fancy fishing flummery, and now there's a blithering east wind blowing.”

I was merry, and hummed to a tune of my own—

“The good east wind springs up behind,  
We fisher folk will follow,  
Let's hope when we get to the sea  
The Marlo fish feel hollow.”

“Ugh!” grunted my companion; “No fish in an east wind.” And we drove on in silence.

How beautiful are the osier-lined banks of the Snowy. One time these banks were hidden by wattles and lilli pilli and kanuka and a hundred other jungle trees. But the axe of the pioneers cleared these away. Then came the great floods of '91, and away went the banks. Then came the planting again. Now, for miles on either side, is a dense mass of weeping and osier willows. And the osier is a dream of hues. We drove along. On the one side was the broad Snowy shut in by its barricades of willows. On the other, great green crops of maize, and beans, and pumpkins. A garish crop of sunflowers, all in golden flower, gives colour, while the distant blue mountains complete as fair a pastoral as eye could wish for. Truly, this Snowy Valley is a place of milk and money.

Our conversation consisted principally of remarks uncomplimentary to east winds.

Marlo, a little fishing village at the mouth of the Snowy, brought us no consolation.

“What! fish in an easterly?” said an old red-nosed fisherman. “I never did hear of no such thing! Why, I remember——”

But I turned away in disgust. I scented the old fish lie. And I hate them! They are so useless!

We took our tackle, and embarked with a couple of friends on board “Maris Stella,” and sailed down towards the mouth. The river is about a mile wide here, with the great castellated cliffs—“The Bluff”—on one side, and the narrow strip of sand hills—“The 'Ummocks”—on the other.

As we passed the entrance, where dies the Snowy, born near icy

Kosciusko, we could see the great waves outside tumbling over each other to get a look at us. Only a sand-bar blocks their ingress.

We slipped past the entrance into the big, placid lake-like sheet of water, known as "The Backwater." But a narrow strip of sand separated us from the great ocean that extended to Shackleton Land.

We baited our hooks, and cast anchor. Long rods, silk-cased lines with gut bottoms, double hooks, no floats, and mussel bait. An hour passed.

Watt casually remarked that it was inhuman to drown poor shellfish in that heartless manner. Then the east wind blew harder.

I sat alone, and watched the sun set, and smoked much tobacco, and drowned more innocent mussels. I heard Young telling the old fish lie. I groaned. I hate fish lies.

We had tea. It was a morose meal, with many cynical remarks *re* fish and fools and life in general.

We wanted to get away from each other, to avoid bloodshed. I got up in the stern, and communed with Nature. By that I mean, I smoked hard, and looked out to sea, and thought vigorously about nothing.

Suddenly, I heard a rustle in the gloom behind me. Bruce, with eyes alight with excitement, was swiftly reeling in his line. A flash of amethyst in the water. A wriggling, squirming gleam in the landing net. Then a bonny, broad bream had his collar bone dislocated.

The wind suddenly dropped.

The fish began to take some interest in the juicy mussels lying on the bottom. But the bream is a wily fish.

He swims round and sucks off the bait, but declines acquaintance with the barb.

For the sixth time I squeezed the white body of a mussel on my hook, and savagely cast it into the water.

Each of the others had a little heap of fish by his side. Why should I be the only one ——. Whizz! Away went my line. Forgetting I was sea-fishing, I swirled my rod up with much muscular effort. A gleam of struggling silver fluttered round the boat, and landed near Bruce.

"Sit on him! Sit on him!" I cried.

"Sit on him be blowed! You've got your hook in the seat of my trousers."

"Oh! please don't mind your trousers! Sit on him! Do sit on him!" And he sat on him, and got up angrily.

But I disregarded his well-meant advice to me to buy some goldfish, and put them in a bowl and practise fishing. I was unhooking a fine two-pound fish. And the full moon smiled, and then the fun began.

Bream and mullet and ludrick developed a sudden and vicious interest in mussels, and we were kept busy showing our disapproval of this unhealthy

craving. At some hour far after midnight we paused and weighed our fish—Sixty pounds of as dainty fish as man could wish for.

We went to supper. As it had grown chill, we drew close to the fire, and watched Watt cooking the fish.

What a thrill I felt when my line slipped away with a run! What a thrill I felt as I sought to hook my fish! What a thrill I felt as I drew him out of the water! But all these thrills are poor things compared to the thrill I felt as I used a bit of bread to wipe up his remnants.

The others went back to their rods; but I coiled up on a heap of firewood and slept. A heap of two-foot firewood does not sound sleep-inspiring, but to the innocent the resting place is immaterial. (N.B.—I am the innocent.)

And I dreamed.

I had a fish hook embedded in my upper lip——

“Wake up!”

Someone was pulling up my nose. I remonstrated; said it was a rotten way to wake a man.

“Well, I've shouted till I'm hoarse, and I've pulled every other limb of your body.”

“Rot! I'm a light sleeper.”

“Yes! when you sleep on firewood.” (Now, I only mention this specimen of alleged humour to show what sufferings I had to endure on this boat. It's intended for a joke. Light! Firewood! I'll kill him if he continues this sort of thing.)

There was not much room, so we lay close, with the stars for the pattern on our counterpane, and many thick rugs between. The energetic one kept up a stream of advice to the fish not to be impatient, as there were plenty of mussels left for breakfast. I mildly remarked that it was wonderful how lively he was at that hour of the day.

“That's nothing,” he chirped. “I can keep going three or four days without sleep, and be quite frisky.”

A grunt came from the other side:

“Then I hope to Heaven this is the fifth night.”

Then there was silence—grim, stolid silence, broken only by the booming of the breakers, the curious cry of the curlew, the whistling of the weary wind in the ti-tree, and the abominable snoring of——.

I got a dig in the ribs, and the silence became real.

Daybreak found us at work again. But the east wind came back with the sun, and the fish grew shy. Two hours, and never a nibble! We breakfasted on fish. We got into the dinghy, and went ashore. Then, thigh high in water, we tried again. Hours went by.

I began to brood over my sins and over ill tidings, my unpaid bills, my

bald head, my friend M.'s approaching wedding, and other misfortunes. I inquired of one of my companions what he thought about while waiting for a bite, and he laconically replied, "Nothing."

And I saw the main requisite of the successful angler, the ability to stand for hours and think of nothing.

Lunch-time came. More fish!

Fish makes brains. I ate so much that the skin peeled from my forehead. Bruce declined to believe that this was caused by a superabundance of brains, but put forth the absurd reason that it was caused by fishing all the morning without a hat.

The afternoon dragged wearily on. I left my rod to look after itself, and wandered out on the clear sheet of sand, broken only here and there by battered timbers from some unknown wreck. I stood and gazed out on the great ocean, spreading out without intervening land to the mysterious Pole.

We moved Marlo-wards again. We hadn't had a bite all day. As we got near to the pretty little village, we passed groups of sour-faced, morose anglers, who had vainly drowned bait for hours.

We are the modest folk. We didn't crow over these unfortunates. Not a word of triumph; but hanging from the stern were two lovely lines of silvery fish.

Once more we were at Marlo House, where the landlord sold the lemonade. We listened to the anglers telling their tales of wonderful catches, made some other day at some other place.

I hate fish lies. I said nothing, but showed them our 100lbs. of beautiful bream and mullet.

We were the people. They enthusiastically fell over us to buy us liquor and hear us tell of "just how we did it."

Hours passed, and so did the lemonade. Then, as the shades of night were falling over each other, we put our cwt. of fish into our buggy, and drove off.

Across the bridge over the Brodribb; once more by the broad, silver, silent Snowy, now barriered by parapets of inky darkness.

We lifted bag after bag of fish on to the hotel verandah, till all our 2 cwt. of the Snowy's best was piled. The landlord's face beamed as he saw the catch.

"It reminds me of once when I was fishing—"

I hate fish lies. They are so useless. No one believes them. I gave him one look of disgust, and went inside.

## VIII. The Caves Of Buchan.

NOW this is the tale of the caves of Buchan.

It begins at a period before a great brain had thought out the mystery of the shirt button, in fact before even shirts had been invented. At that period, full dress consisted of a suit of coloured paint applied to various parts of the anatomy. This had advantages, as a new suit was both cheap and easy to fit.

At that remote period, a river gradually cut itself a passage through the limestone mountains. It cut deeper and deeper till it dashed through a great deep gorge.

Then came a tremendous earth movement.

The earth was tossed about like the dust in a storm. Hills were thrown up and valleys torn. A great block of world enclosed this river gorge and the stream was diverted round into a new direction.

The moisture, from soakage, hung in myriad drops from the roof of this subterranean waterless river. The land is all limestone and these drops held in solution much carbonate of lime and sometimes oxide of iron.

In the course of years, these drops either evaporated or dripped to the floor, leaving behind tiny nodules of carbonate of lime.

This proceeding continued at the rate of 1 inch every 150 years till columns of 30ft. were formed, some of them 12 to 15ft. thick. Work out the age in years. It's a good sum.

Nature is a clever artificer. See here, her work. As the long slender stalactites let drop their moisture constantly on one spot, and as this moisture evaporated, columns growing upwards, called stalagmites, gradually rose. In the course of ages, these grew higher and taller till at length they united with their parent stalactites and formed columns. Now, these columns by the continuance of drippings grew thick and solid. It was a case of "constant dripping building up the stone."

Then, Nature, having set her playhouse at work, cunningly hid it. Alexander the Great had his hour of conquest, Julius Caesar had a trip to Britain, and kings and queens and common people lived and joined each other below ground, Cook let loose pigs in New Zealand, and still Nature's Recreation Reserve lay hidden.

Then, one day, in this modern age of cigarettes and soda water, a youth, Moon by name, squeezed through a crevice in the rocks and found himself in a large airy cave.

Since then he has given his life to explore these subterranean caverns. And excellently has he done his work.

Such is the tale of the caves of Buchan. This spot where Nature has been amusing herself for millions of years, now belongs to the Victorian Government. Belongs? Yes! It boasts a special Act of Parliament, smoking is strictly prohibited and you spend 1s. 6d. to see through them.

And further, it has a caretaker at a salary of £150 per year. I wonder, what salary drew old Oomptie, the hobgoblin, who acted as caretaker for old mother Nature, and in which of the dark recesses he is now hiding.

There were three of us—H., N., and myself—Oh! I must not forget the motor car party. I feel a bit uncharitable to these motor folk. They are the first to bring a car through the wilds of East Gipsland to Buchan. The town is running round looking at their evil smelling monster, and one poor child on seeing it coming up the road, thought it was the Evil One and “went into stirricks.”

Judging by the smell, the child wasn't far wrong in her assumption. Not that I know much about the said Evil One.

We climbed over the hill, and H. made sarcastic remarks about me puffing and grunting as I climbed. Wondered if it were the car coming on behind.

Then we wound down to the bottom of the hill, where a little iron building proclaimed the entrance to the caves.

We were each handed a candle and descending a series of stairs where our guide armed with a magnesium lamp led the way, which was protected by a wide meshed wire netting. This prevents vandals from carrying off bits of the stalactites. Some folk, when they get to Heaven (if this type ever gets there) will want to chip a bit off the Great White Throne for a memento.

Now for a few descriptions:—

The Frozen Cascade is a solid 20ft. stalactite of snow-white whiteness, ending abruptly; while from the base hangs ten thousands of tiny stalactites as though a water-fall had suddenly been turned to ice.

Titania's Bower is a wonderful study in prismatic hues. The magnesium made this beautiful roof glittle and sparkle—I mean sparkle and glitter (pardon this—I'm trying to be poetical) the long, thin, white stalactites, the mysterious darkness, behind, and a recumbent stone female figure asleep (that's good. Read it again).

Nature is a tricky artificer! Her work is ever complete! The fairy cave has a wonderful roof of big candle-like stalactites, revealing while concealing sights that entrance the eye and enrapture the imagination. In this palace of the fairies, H. struck a discordant note by suggesting that a curious stalagmite that resembled a fat, stumpy and bald headed man, should be christened “Spielvogel.” It was a very discordant note, and the others

showed their disapproval by laughing at him.

The Icicle is a taper snow-white stalagmite that hangs as naturally as an icicle on the frozen Niagara Falls. The guide pointed out a natural statue of Queen Victoria. If that lamented lady were anything like this, then she was a most uncommon looking person. Still if you get in a certain position and the guide holds his light at a certain angle and you have a painfully vivid imagination and not over particular as to the truth, you might see a resemblance to a woman. And, after all, wasn't Queen Victoria a woman?

The Blankets are marvellous and—aye, ridiculously marvellous. Nature here plays a joke! And what a stupendous joke it is. She had seen blankets hanging on a suburban clothes line and she has copied them. How wonderfully well!

Here they hang from the roof, with the broad and narrow dark bands near the edge, with the heavy fold clearly depicted, with the bands following the folds carefully and even to the finishing scollop around the edge. It's a great Rabelaisian joke, and how I enjoyed it. The usual thing is for Art to imitate Nature, but here was a reversal. Nature was imitating Art, and how successfully.

The Spaniels' Ears long, white pendant stalactites like in shape to some dogs' aural appendages hanging loose after swimming.

Besides these there are the Crystal Canopy, Oberon's Throne, to say nothing of a shank bone of some prehistoric monster half-excavated from the Devonian limestone.

There are others yet—The Petrified Shower, the Fairies' Bower, the basins and the grottoes.

The temperature never varies. It is always, summer and winter alike, 59 deg. F. Our guide goes down here in winter for warmth and in summer for coolth. Nature is kind!

“Here we must stop,” said our guide; “in front lies a bank of earth that we have not yet penetrated.”

“Is there anything beyond?” N. inquired.

Mr. Moon held his magnesium lantern up till its white light illumined the wall and he murmured “Miles.”

And I thanked Nature for her kindness in dumping that hugeosity of stone right there, for we had been tramping for two hours, with bowed heads and bent backs. And I was tired.

That lovely drive home! That 44 mile journey behind a pair of fine horses along an ideally Australian bush road! A narrow long track bounded on both sides by clean, straight ironbark and stringy barks, the occasional grey trunk of a white gum, the silver blue leaves of the blue gum, the daring red of the hakea or bottle brush, the long thongs of the flowering

clematis, the sunlight prancing and dancing in and out among the trees, the few wallabies quickly loping away among the bracken—this real bush of Australia, unmarked by fence or house, or any sign of humanity save this long narrow winding thread connecting Buchan with the world!

Who is there would say to me to-day that life itself is not good. True the tide sometimes ebbs out, but we who enjoy the glorious flow must take the ebb when the time comes. But let us go up on the flow. Let us not hang back, afraid of the coming ebb.

So we arrived at Nowa Nowa at the head of Lake Tyers. Fond lovers! Contemplaters of matrimony! Are you listening? Here is the spot for the nectar month! Here is all beauty and poetry! Romance and splendid fishing! When the moon is young, there are idyllic little bays, where, as Tennyson doesn't say, they might

Gazing in each other's eyes,  
Ignore such things as pork and pies.

And when the moon begins to wane there are all the charms of fine scenery, of rowing and motor launching, of driving along beautiful roads and listening to the lovely tales of one of the residents.

One, he told me. "There's a creek you passed over called Kani Creek. Once a fellow was driving with a girl and when he was crossing that creek he wanted to kiss her, so he said "Kani! Kani!" He kept on saying that for some miles till they came near this one. She began to fear he might go too far. (It's only 15 miles to Cunninghame from here), so she assisted him by saying "Nowa! Nowa!"

And some foolish people still think they are aboriginal names.

We left our buggy and slipped out, in a skiff, on to this lake. We rowed for a mile in this Australian garden. Gums and wattles and ferns and lilli pilli! Neither poplar nor pigstye, neither willows nor woodheaps! Nothing but the big Australian scape! Then the evening light began to shine low down among the trunks of the trees, and we drove on.

And as night drooped her mantle over everything, we caught a glimpse of the silvery Snowy and once more we were in Orbost.

## IX. A Fortnight In Foster.

HOW good it is to leave the conventions and artificialities of the city and return to the true and big-hearted bush, to depart from the cramped atmosphere of the terraces, with their lack of privacy and their bolted doors, and come back to the roomy country town, where the only use keys have, is to be dropped down boys' backs when their noses bleed.

I arrived at Foster.

On the station, I was introduced to a local store-keeper by one of the clan, who do such a great humanitarian work by carrying to the quiet bush towns the latest in delaines and good yarns, well spun.

“What a delightful place,” I said. “What a charming climate! I've been pent up in drab Melbourne for two months, mid rain and cold and mud. And here, it's Heaven-sent.”

So it was. A blue, cloudless sky. The green hills with the tall white timber all bathed in sunlight; the air exhilaratingly fresh. It was good to be but living on such a morn.

Mr. Jackson eyed me suspiciously.

“Yes,” was all he said.

Alas! I now know too well the reason of that suspicious look. A fortnight have I been in Foster, and every day has it rained; more so, I have been reminded of an old proverb—“It never rains in Foster, but it pours.”

Once upon a time, long years ago, there was a week in which no rain fell—of course, anything under half-an-inch is disregarded here—and, lo, there was a drought in the land.

They tell me that the second generation are web-footed, but I have had no ocular proof of this remarkable phenomenon. But some Yankee poet writes—

“It ain't no use to grumble and complain,  
It's better far and wiser to rejoice;  
If God who rules the thunder sends down rain,  
Wa'al! Rain's my choice.”

So I made up my mind to enjoy myself.

The first afternoon, I put on leggings and raincoat and went out to spy out the land. After ten minutes' walk I met a lad.

“What road's this?” I inquired. “Amy's Track,” he replied. And I went on.

Amy's Track! What romantic tale was attached to this winding, hilly road? Who was Amy?

I visualised some hardy selector's fair daughter who had, long ago, left

the shelter of her father's home in search of a lover or firewood or crinolines, and had wandered on and on and on——. Flop! Up to the knee in a mud cavern (“pool” would insult that spot), and I woke from my dream to find myself bogged.

With much muscular effort I released my leg from the quagmire, leaving my boot at the bottom—nearly. As I splodged out, I cast reflections on the character of the unknown Amy and her tracks, into one of which I had stepped.

But the view from the top was full meed. Looking south I saw Wilson's Promontory, like a crouching lion, far more imposing than famed Gibraltar. The rocky Anakies Isthmus and the blue scintillating waters of Corner Inlet completed a fine panorama. Turning round, I saw a typical South Gippsland scape—a winding, narrow, sunlit path, guarded on both sides by slender giant blackbutts, straight and white as the good genii from the “Arabian Nights.”

On my return to the hotel, I was informed that the road received its name because it led to the selection of John Amey.

Bah! Romance and Reality. Then it rained. So I gathered to me the local historians and listened unto their talk.

In the sixties there was a cattle station in the vicinity, with a big stock yard where Foster stands. So far, true, or how else could the river be known to-day as Stockyard Creek?

In '70 some adventurous souls did a bit of illicit stave-splitting, and were chased by the police. They took refuge in the scrub by the creek, and built a hut. While one of them, John Northey, was shovelling up some gravel from the creek to make a chimney, he saw a yellow patch in the clear water. This Northey was no fool, and Fosterity says he lifted two tons of gold from a narrow strip of six chains long.

The usual thing followed. Three thousand miners rushed to the diggings, and I was told with much pride by 97 different people, “There uster be 26 pubs here once.”

What a rowdy, rollicking, roaring, rampageous time there must have been!

The gold was found in trays in the bed of the creek. From alongside one log there was found as much as —— No, I won't say how much I was told.

How the gold got there is a mystery. It is right off the great line that extends from Stawell in the west to Beechworth in the east, and also off the tributary that runs through Omeo and Wood's Point to Walhalla. No gold has been found anywhere in the vicinity except in this tiny strip of creek bed, less than a couple of miles long. (I'm quite certain there's silver under the local school. I know, for I dropped a shilling through a crack in the

floor.)

Then the bottom fell out of everything. A remarkable epidemic of fires broke out among those 26 pubs, and someone made the epigram, “We must ask each morning which hotel was burnt last night, lest we miss the free liquor of it.”

Then Foster died.

It's still raining.

Now of all the miners and mining and gold naught remains save some score of cairn-like mullock heaps, and a few imaginative battlers still seeking in the shallows and the hills.

Stay! In the middle of the town stand the melancholy poppet-heads of the Victory Mine. Aptly named, for it victoried over all the efforts of man to make cash out of it. Now it stands ghoulish in the rain.

Within the last ten years the people “in the hills” have altered things. The Cow has come, and once more the gold has been struck—not the dull gold from subterranean darknesses, but the rich, juicy, golden butter.

What hardships these dairy farmers have to encounter! Their homes are situated in perennial rain and mud. Their produce is sledged down the steep hills to the roadside, where it is picked up by the perambulating cream cart.

Would that I could sing the tale of these heroic out-posts. Bold-hearted men, grinning at hardships, breaking down the walls of disasters, battling on till they victor or die. Few of words, slow of brain, but greater conquerors than Alexander or Napoleon, for those fought but with men, while these fight and conquer Mother Nature herself.

I just pause here to mention that the rain is still falling.

The distinctive feature of South Gippsland is the blackbutt timber. These trees grow close together, and look like a great white army with tufted hair. At their feet cluster the great tree ferns, nestled in bosky brooks full of maiden hair, coral fern, staghorn fern, and dainty little ferns of nameless beauty, all shut in from the sunlight.

Waterfalls, fern gullies, gurgling brooks, chattering cataracts—why, the place is just full of them!

Deakin's Falls, Weston Falls, Little Franklin Falls, Deep Creek Falls, and, as the daily papers say, “others too numerous to mention.”

We went to see the Mud Hole (of course it was raining).

I pushed a 12-foot pole into the quivering mud. One told me that if I came along in the morning I would find that the pole would be vomited out, and would be lying on the surface. My guide became angry when I asked if he always pulled it out, in wet or dry weather. He said I could sit down and watch it coming out inch by inch.

I hastened to assure him I wouldn't doubt his word. Still——

Though eight inches of rain has fallen during my stay, Mrs. Lake has looked after me so well that I have enjoyed myself muchly.

So I left Foster.

It was raining now in real earnest. The tiny rivers were raging torrents. The Tarwin, which I had leaped across, was now a mile wide. As we passed Leongatha the rain ceased. I guess supplies had run out. The sky cleared of clouds; the sun shone out gaily; joyous, merry beams of sunlight flitted on tree and fern and water, on hazel and heath and sturdy blackwood, on sloping green hill and raging water.

Now it so happened I have some friends at Kardella, three miles from Korumburra. This train is not a fast express; so as the day was set fair, and the sky so cloudless, I determined to get out at Kardella, see my friends walk into Korumburra, and wait for the train there.

I said before, the train is not a fast express.

My plans were well made, but——. Half-way in, the great clouds gathered again and burst on my devoted head.

I lost my goloshes, my temper, and my train.

As I plugged through the mud and rain I tried to cheer myself with that Yank's verse, but it would go wrong.

“It ain't no use to grumble and complain. (Confound it! There, I've lost my new golosh.)

'Twere better far and wiser to rejoice. (I'll have to battle through. Here goes. Splash! Splosh!)

If God who rules the thunder sends down rain— (He does. He does. There is no doubt of it)—

Wa'al! Rain's my choice, (At least, when I am safe right out of it.)

As I approached Korumburra in the darkness, the rain stopped altogether. Not a drop fell. Were my troubles at last over?

No! It was snowing.

## **X. Where There's Lots Of Time.**

BERWICK. Some time in the forties some immigrants from Berwick, on the Border, came and took up land here, and that is the history of this place. No exciting mining days, no ups and downs, no droughts, no floods. Nothing but peace.

As it was fifty years ago, so it is to-day, save that the folk have grown richer, and apparently older and more conservative.

It is as peaceful as a football ground two hours after the match is over, as sleepy as—well, comparisons fail. It is only 28 miles from Melbourne, but so that fact may be forgotten, the station was built one mile from the town. Melbourne, from here, seems a place on some other planet.

The town is situated in a rising valley with delightfully green hills on all sides. These verdant hills with their clumps of peppermint gums each enshrouded in its patch of rich deep shadow, would enravish an artist's sense of form and color. Down the main street is a beautiful garden, but, in truth, the whole place is one great, glorious, glowing garden.

Upon the hill, live two little ladies, Kathleen and Marcia, charming little products of this Castle of Indolence, who take me for long walks up the rounded hills. From the top, a view like far off Kent, hedged and close cropped paddocks (I want to say “fields”), a score of which would barely make a decent Wimmera wheat farm. Beyond this, is a grey line, which the girls gravely told me was Westernport.

“Smoke,” I suggested, but they seemed so hurt that I hastened to assure them that I was quite certain it was Westernport. Still——

Oh! It is a lazy place! A place for lying about, with a novel that doesn't matter much, a good supply of cut up tobacco, an easy lounge chair, and no belated work to annoy one's conscience. A haven of rest for the brain fagged, and a paradise for the lazy.

I'm one of the two! I'm not sure which! So it suits me! There's one big industry, a big quarry from which comes all the ballast for the Gippsland railways.

Mr. Wilson, the proprietor, took me round.

It's on the big side. A million cubic yards of stone have been taken out. A hundred feet deep. Its walls are a geological treat. One can read world history here.

Volcanic upheaval, sea swamping, volcanic upheaval, sea swamping (with some odd millions of years in between) shown by thick belts of basalt crossed by narrow bands of compressed lime.

Quite simple! And probably quite wrong.

But that's what I think of it, and that's not saying much.

The men work on narrow ledges, called benches, and each man is compelled to attach to himself a long rope tied to a stake at the top.

The men grow careless, and, if not watched, soon drop their ropes. One man, Mac Something, was repeatedly warned. Even the threat, "Look here, Mac, you'll have to wear that rope. We're too busy to leave off work to bury you," had no effect.

He, finally, met the fate of the foolhardy. He was paid off and now keeps a pie shop.

Holes are drilled into the rock, and charges of dynamite are put in. When blasting is going on it's a good plan to have pressing business out of the vicinity. Large chips of hard, blue basalt are tossed around for hundreds of yards. One requires a tough skull to be able to meet one of these chips with a placid and unmoved mind. The broken lumps of basalt (many of them absurdly like plum puddings, but harder than even the wickedest machination of a young wife's first attempts) are trucked to the crushing machine, where they are reduced to regulation size, and are trained off to Mirboo, Leongatha, and Maffra.

The first proprietor let it on royalty, and after he had cleared £17,000, he reckoned there was some money to be made out of it, so he worked it himself.

I felt inclined to offer myself as a partner. Didn't. Afraid he might refuse. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I'm a tender-hearted man.

I got some excellent fossils in the quarry, clearly defined leaves in the marl. I saw some other curious fossils in Berwick—mostly at the hotel.

A good fellow, staying at the hotel, complained of insomnia. I recommended a glass of milk every half hour from seven till ten. He promised to try it. Next morning he was worse. Called me a fraud. My inquiries provide the information that he had unwarrantably added three fingers of whisky to each milk. He was quite disgusted when I mentioned this.

"What! Drink six glasses of cowjuice? Not much! I'd rather have insomnia."

He's still at the milk cure.

Last night, the peace was rudely disturbed by shouts and cries.

"Hurray! Hurray! Here he comes! Hurray!"

I sprang up in excitement. Some great military hero returned from the Wars? Not much!

That day, had been held the Shire elections, and the free and independent ratepayers were escorting the successful candidate to the — bar.

You can get a lot of enthusiasm with a lot of beer.

There is a large German settlement here. I taught the successful candidate several German phrases to use in his canvas. Fortunately for himself he forgot them all.

But to-day all is peace again.

There is little to say of Berwick but that it is lovely and lazy, a place to forget the world and its worries, a place where the natives of fifty years of age look but thirty, where poverty is unknown, where work is but a delusion and hard toil a folly.

This is a short letter but—I'm in Berwick. If you knew Berwick you would understand.

## **XI. Dimboola Revisited.**

THE afternoon train trailed leisurely through Wail, and I watched from the window, the far-spreading expanse, yellow to the horizon with paddocks of straw. Along the dusty road leading to Humbug Corner, teams of stout, sturdy horses dragged big loads of wheat. The drivers smoked stolidly. No wonder! Thirty-six bushels to the acre and wheat at 3s. 8d.

I stood up and straightened myself, and breathed in the air of the plains. I have been shut in by Gippsland hills and enclosed in a prison of trees. But here I am as free as a ship upon the ocean or a bee in a raspberry crop. How big this all is. The great, unclouded, blue sky! The great areas spreading back to the farms where the big men live.

My thoughts went back to my first coming to Dimboola twelve years ago.

A fellow traveller, hearing of my destination, commiserated me.

“Poor wretch! Dusty, dry, dull, dreary, Dimboola.”

And, so, in truth, I found it.

A bush village with dusty, shadeless, shabby streets. A few clumps of trees in front of the hotels made the thoughts of the refreshment sold within, cool and inviting.

Perhaps three or four comfortable private houses and one good shop! A river that was an insult to the name and in which for a few weeks in the year flowed a species of pea soup. Sometimes even this failed to appear. In fact, the whole place was so uninviting that men preferred the interior of the hotels to——(Ah! There's the school, little wooden school, where I spent eight happy years! How the trees have grown! There's a welcoming little hand waving to me! Who are you, I wonder?) It was said in those days that Dimboola was the one town in Victoria that the Salvation Army abandoned in despair. They had a grand rally there, but the result was absolutely nil.—(Look at that lovely splash of silvery water embowered in the gum trees).

I walked down Lochiel street.

What magician has waved his wand over the town?

What genie has turned these drab, dull, dusty streets into cool, shady walks. The long avenues of sugar gums and pepper trees soothe the heated body.

I know this magician!

He is a prosaic sort of fairy with a white beard and a penchant for billiards. He and I have wrangled more than once. He is no Puck, nor yet an Oberon, but he has done much of their work.

And Mr. D'Alton deserves well of Dimboola.

What a change the weir has made to the river, and thereby to the town and therefrom to the lives of the people. Now there is a pool, 30 feet deep and ten miles long.

And the great red gums hang out their branches to lovingly greet their reflections in the calm waters. What a wealth of color there is in the red gum. I smile when I hear folk talk of the monotony of the bush. It is a smile of pity for them that they have eyes and cannot see.

I think of the big tree by the boat shed and compare it with the gaudy, snivelling, weeping willow.

But who can know Australia but we Australian born?

With the big river came irrigation and gardens. Then the Dimboola people suddenly woke up to the knowledge that Dimboola was worth living in. It was more than a place to flee from as soon as enough cash was collected.

Houses of architectural ambitions began to appear, and the old order departed, and a new one appeared.

I stroll down the street. Almost every house has some memories for me.

Well I remember issuing from you gate like the spies from the ancient land of Canaan, with a gigantic cluster of grapes on a pole. Here we often met and sang at the "Dead Willins" (so called because we were all dead willing to sing) and jested and ate suppers. There's the spot where B. fell headlong over a sleeping cow, and yonder is a well cherished verandah where many a summer night was laughed away.

Yon is the hall where our local parliament argued fiercely on great political happenings till hands clenched and eyes flashed fire. Then came an invitation across the road, and all resentments were soothed in lemonade. Here's the shop where I daily played chess across the counter, while customers looked after themselves. There's the road leading down to the river, and through the trees I see flannelled fools chasing the tennis ball, as I loved to do in the days of my folly. And there's the little house where I lived, so merrily, so happily, so carelessly.

And that's not all!

Almost every house has some interest for me and—There's the dear old stile. No! Not a word about the stile! Not a word! But I'll sit on it for old time's sake. Dimboola has many beauties. I've sat on the stile with some of them! I'm sitting on the stile again looking out across the park. Often have I paused here on a winter's morn and watched the wonderful lights and mysterious shadows among the giant gum trees. Oft have I paused on a summer's evening and watched the sun set behind those self-same gums, with the ever golden line on the far side of the river.

So I wander round. Newcomers, who knew not Joseph, shake their heads when I stand before their houses and muse. One man came out and told me his house wasn't for sale, and he wasn't taking boarders, and he kept a very hungry bull dog that was always unchained at night.

I left, and walked up the white metal to Clement's corner and gazed out on a much loved view of mine, of the great Wimmera plains. I always loved this great space. How many guises have I seen it in?

May time! The great horizon-bound spread of rich brown earth, ploughed and worked.

July time! The palest green tinge over it all as the wheat made its first appearance.

September time! The sea of scarlet field poppies among the waving emerald wheat, patched with brown fallow lands.

December time! The yellow ripe wheat, all abending, all a-bowing beneath the combs of the harvester.

This sense of bigness is the charm of the Wimmera plains.

And I must not forget a night with that charming old Bohemian, Dad Klowss. First we played skat with him. Then the boys came in at the same time as supper—"Quark," a luscious compound of white cheese, spring onions and cream, and "Wurst," a compound of mystery.

Then this genial eighty year old youngster gave the keynote by striking his finger against his nose. August sang out his famous song "The twelfth regiment." How the rafters rattled when the boys joined in the merry chorus and how the boarders cursed.

The General with twinkling eyes started each verse and August thumped his chest and roared about Vaterland and the wonderful Twelfth Regiment.

It reminded me of a never to be forgotten occasion when Dad regaled us with some special for supper, to wit, a tin of Limberger cheese. I always had a horror of uncouth scents, and surely that Limberger—phew! They told me it tasted delicious, but I couldn't get it to my mouth to try. My nose was in the way. In five minutes one man fainted and another staggered outside, pale and agitated. The party broke up suddenly, leaving half a tin on the table. Next morning, the housemaids searched everywhere for the dead cat. When one of them opened the parlour door, she suddenly sat down, said she felt giddy. After much toil, the girls got a long-handled shovel and pushing it through the window, lifted the tin out into the air. A dog, passing by, tucked his tail between his legs and bolted, howling dolorously. They gave a boy, Mac-Something by name, a shilling to bury it. Mac-Something couldn't go to school for three days. Then, next day, Dad's favorite calf strolled over the spot. With a sad, convulsive sob, she sank down, and after three heavy breaths, got up again, and staggered over,

and leaned feebly on the fence. In two years' time the aroma had almost disappeared, but never a blade of grass has grown on the spot.

The children I had taught of old met together and we had a picnic. They are not all children now. One gave me a piece of her wedding cake and another was absent because her baby was sick. We played about till dark, and then we filled the boat with twenty little ones and rowed up the silent Wimmera.

Good people! I have seen many beautiful rivers of the world, but, believe me, there is none I love like old Father Wimmera. Sloping banks, and giant red gums, drooping over to meet their reflections in the mirror-like pool. Somebody has planted willows along the bank. They have not grown. I have been accused of pulling them up. But I am innocent. I wouldn't do such a thing. Besides, I didn't think of it.

The children's voices sounded sweetly harmonious as they joined together in the old-time choruses.

A gentle breeze moved the branches. I let myself, my emotions, my feelings be wrapped in the glory of the night.

Surely there never was such a night ever before in the history of the world. Surely there never was a happier mortal than I to-night, lying here in the boat between the great black trees and listening to the children singing.

But, next morning, I stood and gazed a few minutes at the great walls of bags of wheat. The train whistled. A few farewells to old friends, a waving handkerchief, a glimpse of a well-known track and I was off—back to the world.

## **XII. At The Hub.**

MELBOURNE is the hub of Victoria. And the corner of Swanston and Flinders Streets is the hub of Melbourne. Come and spend a day with me. We shall station ourselves at this corner and study humanity. It is 6 a.m. on a spring morn. On one corner is a stately Cathedral, now a sombre mass of darkness; opposite is a big hotel, already lighted with many electric bulbs. Beyond is the huge entrance to the Railway Station, looking like the huge mouth of some prehistoric monster. From this mouth, dribble out a few men, early toilers, on their way to prepare the factories for the day's work.

The dawn comes slowly, casting long copper splashes on the high walls of office and warehouse. The first tram comes lazily down the hill, carrying its load of sleepy passengers for the early trains.

Eighty years ago, there was not a hut here. Now half a million and more eat and drink and live in this city; while its factories employ enough work people to produce twenty million pounds worth of goods annually.

Shall we moralize?

No! Let us just watch and see.

The clock strikes seven!

From that great mouth opposite, pours a stream of men, all toilers with their hands. They bustle down those stone lips, and turn East, West, North, South. As the time nears eight o'clock the crowd becomes denser. Winding and parting at every street corner, are long, moving snakes of factory folk, merry, careless girls and stout lads, all hurrying to their daily toil in Collingwood and Richmond and the City. There is laughter, banter, "barrack," till the street hums, but there is no stay.

As the hands of the clock draw near nine, that huge maw is emptying into Melbourne a still mightier crowd.

But it is a different crowd. It is a more mature, more sedate crowd. Business folk, office clerks, shop assistants.

How sweet and dainty these girls look! How different to the London shopgirl. And no wonder! Legislation has compelled shopkeepers to pay them decent wages. No abominable "living in" here.

These girls live at home or in comfortable lodgings. They are all educated, and they look the equal of any in the land. Notice the little bundle of wattle at the waist of her dainty frock, and the book in her hand.

Work in Melbourne shops is an occupation, not a slavery.

Nine o'clock strikes.

The monster is tiring. For the next hour it sends out the fashionably clad and prosperous looking, the professional men of the city. The nearer to

eleven o'clock the more important, the more portly, the slower walkers are the arrivals.

They come but in twos and threes.

All that have gone before are working for these.

But you feel the city is now throbbing with life; the great god Mammon has all his priests and slaves at work; the "call" is on at High 'Change, the banks are crowded, factory machinery is humming vigorously, great and small transport waggons and carts and motors are passing swiftly before us.

It is the epic of Work.

'Tis lunch hour. Yon station is quiescent now. Only an odd handful pass in and out, and these loiter round under the clocks as though in doubt which way to turn—our bush brothers holiday making.

Let us leave our vantage point for an hour and stroll down Collins Street.

Someone has said, "If you wish to meet anybody, living in Victoria, do 'The Block' daily. You'll meet him some day there."

Now, the North side is crowded with a pleasant, smiling band of loungers, who have lunched and are now taking their ease in the joyous sunshine.

No hurry! No scurry!

It is the hour of digestion and all's right with the world.

But the clock strikes two!

And the Block empties. Whither have gone all these dainty ladies and brave gentlemen of ease? Back to counter and desk and typewriter! Hard at work, once again.

The Block has lost its midday clientele.

Let us back to the Station corner!

It is the baskers' hour.

Ladies lounge from the station, ladies in costumes of latest cut and fashion.

But they are not many.

Australia has no charms for the idle rich. If you wish to see them you must to Rotten Row, or Unter der Linden, or anywhere but Australia.

The baskers nibble dainty cakes in the fashionable tea rooms or visit their dressmakers.

Towards four o'clock the great Station monster wakens.

Feeding time is approaching!

The giant begins to swallow up what in the morning it cast out.

Those who came into the City last, go out first.

At five o'clock, a hundred "knock off" whistles sound their jubilant notes above the din of the city's sounds. No factory hand in Melbourne works

more than eight hours and Saturday afternoon is the joyous release to all — factory worker, shop assistant, banker, and civil servant.

From five to six an incessant, bustling, anxious crowd hurries along the streets, climbs the under lip of the monster mouth and disappears.

By six o'clock we can no longer hold our position before the great Cathedral, now bathed in the glorious light of the setting sun. We are swept forward with the crowd up the steps.

Shall we be swept on too?

We edge out and watch.

What a sight? Fifty thousand folk all hurrying—home.

Then comes a quiet hour.

Just a few scampering procrastinators left behind and now rushing to make up for lost time.

And we can imagine how in a hundred thousand homes a hundred thousand teapots are being tilted at this moment and the merry tale of the day's doings is being told.

The great world is shut out with the closing of the street door, and each soul drops back again into its own little world, happy or miserable.

Each of those suburban homes is a little world.

But now it is seven o'clock.

The tide has already turned.

It is the pleasure-seeker's hour.

Already that mouth is evicting a stream of young people after early seats at the theatres, happy youths and laughing girls. As the hands of the clock approach eight the stream becomes greater. Ladies in silken evening frocks and gentlemen in sober black hurry along.

All the streets are full of laughter, of light, of life.

There is no sign of poverty, no hungry derelicts like one sees in London. Even what beggars there are, are sturdy, lusty gentlemen of leisure.

Ten o'clock brings us to the last turn of the tide.

Jolly streams of happy folk are going back home again from theatre and concert and picture show.

So it goes on for a couple of hours.

Midnight strikes.

A rush for the last train!

They are all men in the streets now!

The day is done!

The last train has gone!

Scavengers and street cleaners are out sweeping and hosing the streets.

A solitary pie seller cries his wares. An odd reveller or two staggers drunkenly along into the darkness, followed by ugly night birds, watchful

for the police.

A distant cock crows.

And the great monster opposite closes its mouth at last.

Silence!

### **XIII. A Chapter Of History.**

CASTLEMAINE.

One moonlight night, I sat in the Imperial seat in the Colliseum in Rome and looked down into the great arena. I sent my spirit back two thousand years, and the place was filled with its hundred thousand spectators. But I could summon up no spirits from the past.

Came a voice from the arena below.

“Si! Si! Signor! Colliso in moonlighta! Verra fine sighta! Up der, sita Julius Caesar, who fighta Inglise when he see wild besta.”

“Gee,” drawled a gaunt Yank. “At the Zoo, sure.”

“Si! Si! Signor!” said the guide with both hands and one leg.

I bared my head and looked out.

“Great Caesar's Ghost!” said the Yank. “How do, Juley?”

Then they passed on and left me with the moonlight, the bats and my thoughts.

Then came to me a longing to hear the Roman talk, to hear Marc Antony plotting with crafty Cicero, or to hearken to austere Cato recommend to Caesar white mice boiled alive in milk as a cure for baldness.

But the ghosts would not walk. All I caught was a cold, so with a sigh I wandered back to my hotel.

But, during the last fortnight, I have been listening to the men who did to Victoria what these Romans did for Rome. I have been listening to the pioneers of one of the goldfields.

Not the ones who succeeded, for they have gone; gathered up their gold and gone to their home lands, or settled on farm and station.

Here are the failures, who missed their chances, and are now in the shallows, still sturdy and independent, pitching their tales of “them good old times.”

I am in Castlemaine, and here is a chapter of Victorian history.

Dr. William Barker ruled here first. He was monarch of all he surveyed. He did his own surveying! And as I said, he was a squatter who was monarch of all he surveyed.

When in '50 a shepherd found some gold on Specimen Hill, the said squatter threatened him with large quantities of wrath if he mentioned this discovery.

Next year the news leaked out, and the “Argus” of '52 informed its readers that rich gold had been found at Mount Alexander, and told them that Mount Alexander was near Western port.

Some thousands of diggers set off for Western port and came—back. I

wonder what they did to the “Argus” office. Probably nothing, for Melbourne was mad with news of Ballarat, Bendigo, and Forest Creek.

All were off to the diggings.

Thirty-eight out of the forty police in Melbourne deserted, and the other two regretted they didn't keep sober long enough to get a start. Ships were deserted in the bay and the Public Offices were closed, for all the clerks converted their quills into spades.

“Eh! Them was good days,” quoth one old battler as he sipped his beer. “Forest Creek was rotten with gold. I wish I'd had a bit o' sense! Uster get 60ozs. a day among five of us. We'd work a day a week and drink and chuck quoits the rest. Then the water beat us. Wish I'd had a bit o' sense! Why, in the first six weeks of '52, 120,000ozs. was sent away. Them was the days! In the end of '52 there was 60,000 diggers living about here in tents. Every morning and every evening they'd all shoot off their guns together to scare off the devil. And we was all getting gold. Wish I'd had a bit o' sense! Wouldn't have et fi' pun notes in sandwiges if I had. Why, one day, I was dozing on the Kyneton road and I counted 1,028 diggers pass along. You wouldn't count six people now. I remember, too, a parson, coming from Kyneton. All his congregation had left, so he followed them. He went up and down ringing a big bell to tell everybody he'd preach at such a stump on Sunday. But only three turned up, and one was drunk. That was me. I wish I'd had a bit o' sense. We uster pay 2s. 6d. for the “Argus” and £3 10s. for a bushel of oats.

Did we have any row over the licenses? Well, we just did. D'ye see that hill over there? That's Agitation Hill! Well, I seen 20,000 diggers there! What a lovely row it was! The Government wanted us to pay thirty bob a month to just come on the fields! Didn't matter whether we was digging or not. Most of us wasn't! I wish I'd had a bit o' sense! Why, in '53 Castlemaine was sending away two tons of gold every week! Every week, sir. I've got it writ down that on July 2nd, 1853, one escort took away 83,592ozs. of gold! Straight!

About that time the first pub was opened. They took £600 in the first day. Drinks were a shilling and upwards. As the drinks went down, the prices went up. I wish I'd had a bit o' sense! I could always get £2 a day as a bush carpenter! Anybody could make money in them days! One chap, —— by name, had a pound from the Government! Good horses would be pounded and sold before the owner knew anything of them. The poundkeeper got £5,000 the first year, and the next year he got five years in quod. Them was the times.

They had the first race meeting here in '54, and all the pubs had the right to have booths on the racecourse. And they all had them. And that night the

supply of handcuffs ran out, and the police had to tie the drunks to trees with bits of rope. Wish I'd had a bit o' sense!

I looks towards you, sir. Them was good times.”

And he hobbled off.

A Castlemaine paper of '57 gave a prophecy of what the town would be like in 30 years' time. It predicted a city of a quarter of a million people, of beautiful parks, spacious theatres and music halls! Alas! Today, Castlemaine is but a wreck of what it was in the fifties.

A beautiful, pleasant, healthy town with a lovely avenue of blue gums extending out to Campbell's Creek, one of the finest avenues in Australia.

I have been interested to hear the number of important men, who some time or other, lived in this little town. According to Castlemaine, Mark Foy had a stall in the local market, Sir William Zeal humped his bluey, Cole (of the Book Arcade) was the first bell ringer, Deakin (father of him with the silver tongue) was a coach contractor.

From the hills, a pitiless scene of savagery spreads out.

The green hills, which had taken Nature millions of years to cover with soft brown soil, have been mauled and butchered by man in search of the dull yellow stuff. After a million years' soil culture the trees were goodly and the grass rank and green. For one decade the human ants burrowed and tossed and toiled. Then they departed, leaving a barren, unsightly waste behind.

The beautiful mansions of our big cities have been built at the expense of the ruined soil of the gold mining centres, and these now lie naked and dead.

There is one quaint little hostelry here—“The old lady of Threadneedle Street.” A tiny little bar that has not altered since diggings days. On one side, is an old-fashioned corner nook with table and forms like an old Devon inn. Here came the red-shirted diggers (my father perhaps among them), sat round this table with their pouches of gold at their waists, singing “All round my hat” or famous “Villikens and his Dinah,” paying for their liquor with nuggets. Let the old lady who keeps the place talk.

“Yes! I've been here forty-seven years, and never had a bad mark against the place. We had a beer license in those days, could only sell beer and had to shut up at eight o'clock sharp. There used to be twenty beer licenses along here in those days, but they all were burnt down. Yes? Been here forty-seven years and never had a bad mark against us.”

There are all sorts of strange little streets running every way: quaint architectural freaks and mounds and tunnels and strangely named places as Ranter's Gully, Milkmaid's Flat, Deadman's Gully, Grave-St., all with more or less picturesque tales attached.

Then—but one could spend a couple of months wandering round these delightful bowered roads, to say nothing of the ruins, architectural and human. Many an evening have I passed listening to grey-bearded veterans talking of “them good old days,” and a picturesque lie miles ahead of a bald fact. It cost a bit for beer, though.

## **XIV. Among The Fruit.**

DONCASTER.

I've discovered a cure for insomnia.

Come to Doncaster and invest your capital in an orchard. That's not the cure. That's only the way to get rich. A mere nothing.

Marketing your crop is the remedy.

You leave your home at midnight with your waggon loaded with fruit. Through the night you drive along the white road. Dawn finds you in the great fruit market eager to get the best price. While the sales are proceeding you'll have to be extremely wide awake.

By the time you have sold your load and taken in your empties the day is well on. Then you come home.

The betting odds are about 20 to 1 that when you pass the Tower of Doncaster, you will have forgotten that such a thing as insomnia exists. More, you'll probably be lying on the bottom of your waggon, dead asleep.

Your horses? Lay not up worry to yourself re them. They are all used to it. Every afternoon along the white road, come teams pulling their waggons, without any apparent drivers. They're asleep.

If this will not cure your insomnia there are only two alternatives. Either die or confess the murder you committed.

The whole of Doncaster is an orchard, miles and miles of fruit trees all in blossom.

In this month of October it is a great spread of white and pink and cream blossoms set in a fair verdant garden with the purple hills behind.

And the native trees have not been eliminated. Here and there are clumps of peppermints in whose rough bark the sunbeams delight to play hide and seek. The blackwoods are in flower. The peppermints are here, but where and oh, where is the gin?

Strawberry patches half a mile long, with millions of berries hidden in the straw placed around them to keep them clean from mud, and that most horrible of wild animals—the strawberry bug. Should you ever take a mouthful of strawberries and then suddenly feel the light of the world fade away into nothingness—then you know you've struck that same bug. Lines of cherry, plum, peach and apple trees radiate out over the hills away to the symmetrical pines, the cemetrical cypresses and the dainty, delicate peppermints.

The roads remind me of a many-legged M till the famous Tower of Doncaster is reached. This ancient landmark was originally built in the year 880 by a bold seer. No! I'll start again. This ancient landmark was

originally built in 1880 by one who sold beer, and was the model for the Eiffel Tower in Paris (so they say). A wonderful panorama was to be seen from the top. I take the Doncastrian's word on the matter. I have conscientious scruples against climbing 597 steps or so. (Since this was written, the Tower has been demolished.)

“Cherry pickin' ” is the occupation here just now. I felt inclined to write an idyll on the matter till I saw the pickers at work. It's not romantic! From early morn till dark, every available hand from the five-year older to the octogenarian, picks, picks, picks, till the eyes dim and the hands numb.

I, when I tried, had another sensation. It occurred next day, and is a painful subject, so I shall say no more than that I don't care if I never eat another cherry in my life.

Many are spraying peach and plum trees with arsenate of lead. The orchardist should be a religious individual. His first creed “Let us spray,” and his second “Let us spray again.”

Every evening along the road, come murky teams of horses, murky carts, murky machines and murky men—all of one murky hue—arsenate of lead. “And ars'nat do make you thirsty.”

There's a big German settlement, all orchardists and good Australians withal.

I visited one. It was good to see him and his wife and his baker's dozen of lusty sons and pretty daughters gather round the board. And how that giant joint of beef suffered under their attacks. A real old-fashioned farmer's family.

All was merry till I began to talk German. Then sadness prevailed.

The scent of fruit was over the place. Trees weighted down with luscious oranges showed how prolific the soil has been made and how Nature multiplies if she be kindly treated.

It reminded me of the schoolboy, harassed by the multiplication table, wishing he had been born a rabbit because they multiply rapidly.

Doncaster is the great haunt of the Melbourne picnicker. Every Sunday motors, bikes, buggies, cabs and vans bring crowds of pleasure hunters.

The amusing feature is that they all behave exactly alike, be they stout merchants or the boys from the factory. They all are anxious to give play to the Adam they hide carefully all the week. It's good to allow the “bloke” part of us to peep out occasionally. It must be a bit dreary to be a saint always. *I* know that. These folk spend much of the day repeating jovially, “Oh! I am enjoying myself! What a good time I am having.” The rest of the time they spend in wandering along these delicious, leafy lanes, picking the wildflowers, reading Wordsworth and—shaking fruit. When an orchardist sees a picknicker, he scowls. He has barb wire and wild dogs to

guard his property from them. Pained by these distrustful devices—more so, often in his tenderest feelings by the barb wire—the picknicker returns to the hall attached to the hotel, where is a piano and also thick walls, specially built for his benefit.

Then, when the night is spent, they mount their motors or the furniture vans (as the case may be). The same gleam of blokerie in all their eyes, the same worn joke of “No ‘arm in it,” as masculine arms find their natural resting place, same chorus going as they move away—in motors or vans. Never before have I so clearly realised the equality of Man.

Then a solemn hush falls over the place, broken only by the melancholic droning of a distant harmonium playing hymns, ghastly slow, or the complaint of the washers up, “Bring up that blessed hot water, will you?”

The Government have provided the orchardists with a cool store. When you hear a contemptuous remark to the Government stroke just refer the maker of it to this place. I'll wager there's not a tidier or sweeter engine room in the Commonwealth. The tale goes that a spider one day looked in at the door, saw about a million reflections of himself in the polished brass work, reckoned it was too densely populated for him and retired, never to return. I believe the story; I was ushered into the store; I got a cool reception. The temperature outside was 92 degrees, inside 34 degrees. The sudden change reminded me of the average Ballarat weather. I instinctively turned up my coat collar. Here I saw some hundreds of cases of apples from last year, that, under ordinary circumstances would have rotted under the trees or brought 1s. 6d. a case in market, but now being retailed at 15s. to 18s. a case.

And all the orchardist pays for this storage is 1 1/2d. per case per week.

Who whispered the word “Socialism”?

Don't dare to say it in Doncaster.

And then there is Warrantdyte, the lovely and the bowered reaches of the Yarra. But, alas, while I should have been visiting these beauty spots for your sakes I was daily playing tennis for my own. Peccavi?

A happy six weeks I had here in this charming spot, 'mid these kindly people, who seemed to be worried to make my stay among them pleasant.

## **XV. The City Of Home.**

BALLARAT.

After all, Ballarat calls me home.

Shall I describe it? Can I disparage it? As well ask me to describe my father or to tell you the faults of my mother.

They give it fancy names, Golden City, City of Statues, the Athens of the South, but I call it by a sweeter name: I call it Home.

So to-night, I shall not be descriptive. I feel a little pensive, so I'll let my pen run on as it will and so—let it go.

Whenever I think of Ballarat I shudder at its climate. The time of the year has little bearing on the weather in Ballarat, for that town has a curious habit of having four seasons in one day. My father (sage old man) had a pet saying for Ballarat, "When it's fine, take your umbrella; when it's wet, please yourself." The weather is as changeable as a woman's mind. Can I say more?

How well I know your every lane from Wendouree to Canadian Flat, from Little Bendigo to Redan.

I know Sturt Street. In olden days how oft have I sat under the great gums that one time divided the "Noble Mile." Alas! Those grave and reverend seignours have gone. A beautiful garden takes their place. Beautiful indeed, but I liked the old gums best.

And the happy, cheery, careless crowd that sauntered up and down on Saturday nights. At the end of the Mile, the business part ends and the residential part begins. The street is still wide, but here it has two avenues of magnificent elms and oaks.

Here, often on hot summer nights, a little blue-eyed boy sat under the trees listening to his father's wonderful tales from the Arabian Nights. The lights in the houses, the sighing of the leaves, the star-studded sky, the red tip of his cigarette, his soft melodious voice, all enwrapped my senses. And each night I dreaded the time, the inevitable time (like man dreads death), when he would take out his watch and say, "Ah! The witching hour of midnight."

And I took his hand and returned to the stodgy house.

I remember one night, a little twelve year old boy stole out of his home and walked out to the Eureka Stockade, site of the only battle ever fought in Australia. He climbed up on the stone blocks and waited in hopes of some of the diggers' ghosts appearing. Hours passed, and he shivered in the cold, but he had his questions ready. "Did Vern run away? What was the flag like?"

Suddenly a form appeared beside him. His questions burst from his lips, but a tired, weary father took him by the hand and led him home.

I remember glorious Wendouree in summer glory and in winter gloom. Broad bosom of sky-reflected colors, with the dainty curves of rushes and water weeds, that saved it from being just a lot of water. Its willow fringe, its background of Buninyong volcano and its sweep of olive rushes!

And we sailed on summer nights in the good boat, Wyuna, a merry party of boys and girls, our banjos tanged, our voices joined in merry glees and eyes of youths looked lovingly into eyes of fair maidens.

And they're doing the same thing now!

Every Sunday afternoon, we three, Taffy, the Laird and Little Billie arrayed ourselves in all our fine linen and purple, and paraded the lawn and looked at the girls.

Oftentimes, we would find that we had spent every penny in buying ice creams for ladies, whose dresses were not quite down and whose hair was not quite up.

So, perforce, we walked home—what was four miles to us then—and we talked, grand talk; what we were going to do, what we were going to be.

I remember Old Ballarat, then a relic, now a memory. Old crooked Main Road, once flowing with a stream of gold-laden men, eager to spend, eager to enjoy.

There lived old L——, left behind when the stream went westward.

“The East will come again,” he said again and again, until, though not believing his prophecy, he persisted in refusing to admit his mistake. Often and often have I made myself luridly sick with his cigars for the sake of hearing him pitch yarns of the old days of the golden fifties, of the old Charley Napier Theatre, of the pelting of a Hamlet with nuggets of gold, of the great fire, of the whipping of Editor Seekamp by the more beautiful than virtuous Lola Montez, of the tramp of the men to Eureka, of the escort of ten thousand miners in red and blue jumpers who followed the Duke of Edinburgh from Smythesdale in '68.

Content was I to get to the climax of his yarn before I had to bolt outside to the vicinity of the wood heap. And, I verily believe the old rascal would enjoy himself by watching me from behind the curtains in his room.

I remember the long walk to Sebastopol past the mammoth, dead gold mines where fortunes were made in the seventies. I remember carrying home lumps of grey slaty stone and labouring to dig out the mundic, thinking it was gold. And how the folk gathered round and laughed. It has been, in latter years, a grim satisfaction to me to see how much of what they thought the Gold of Life turned out to be but base mundic.

I remember making many a shilling at the exciting pastime of

“specking.” After a heavy shower of rain, we would walk along the old gold fields with eyes glued to the ground for the tiny bits of gold often laid bare.

I remember climbing up the dark winding tower of the City Hall and looking out on a “City in a cup.” How I gloated as I saw my father down below, who little dreamed his pride and hope was so near Heaven, when he thought he was down in—school.

I remember the quaint old Museum, a one time Church, in Lydiard Street. It had an extremely interesting collection of stones. Below was a cellar. One Saturday afternoon we coaxed the curator down here and locked him in. Then we stationed ourselves at the entrance and collected 3d. for admission. The trouble was that we had collected 9d. when an infuriated curator who had escaped through a window, chased us for two miles down Grant Street.

I remember the old smoke room at the Mechanics' Institute. Old loved room with its hard wood chairs and pungent odour of fifty years' tobacco smoke. My father would see me into my study with my books, murmur some sage advice as to the value of learning, and depart. Then leaving the light burning to deceive him, I would steal down to the smoke room to play chess with Don Ricardo (the Spaniard with a Galway accent), or draughts with the great Dick Mitchell, or better still to smuggle up and listen to Andrew Jack and Tom Muir and the many others of that ilk talk of olden days when the giants lived. Or perhaps some battle of heroic politicians took place. How hot the arguments waxed. I remember one being suddenly ended by one man calling his opponent an iconoclastic calithumpian. There was silence for a few seconds. Then there was a fight. That vile cognomen was too much.

And then, wicked youth, at ten o'clock, I would steal back to my study, and presently father would come out and tell me not to study too hard, as too much was as bad as too little.

He was proud of me those days.

I remember all the half moribund townlets round Ballarat, Haddon, Scarsdale, Smythesdale and a dozen more, all once golden towns with wonderful stories, and with, who knows, what future. But oftentimes we three went out flitting along the perfect roads in search of wild flowers and whisper it not in Gath—shandygaff.

I remember the Town Gardens, cool sequestered spot of peace and beauty, where oftentime I took my books to study with a fellow pupil teacher. My heart grows tender to you working out your life as a cocky farmer's wife in the mallee. I hope those days are as happy a memory to you as to me. How we talked! Books, books, books! And not the wretched

text books lying neglected at our feet. When darkness stole down upon us I would proudly escort you to the tea room, and a shilling was a day's pay in those days.

And they're doing the same to-day!

Surely, there is not another town with such streets. Lydiard Street North was always my favorite walk. It, alone, has gum trees planted along it. But every side street from Sturt Street makes a charming stroll. Many a night we three musketeers loitered along Raglan or Drummond or Ripon Streets, talking the Good Talk, of the worlds we should conquer, and our castles in Spain.

And though the worlds were too difficult and our castles faded, still the joy of building was worth the doing.

I remember Black Hill (there was a favorite orchard near by), once a densely timbered mountain, now a bleak white eminence, split down the middle by fifty years' mining. Do Ballarat boys of to-day know the great tunnel there? How our hearts beat as we crawled through its inky depths. How we thrilled with delicious terror when, half way through, a ghostly voice uttered "Who dares to walk through the dead man's retreat? Beware!" How we scampered to the light and each denied that he had spoken.

I remember the coming of all your sculptured charms, the beauteous Pompeii group, the tricky "Modesty," the charming "Susana," Bobbie Burns (and the old Ballarat gag comes to mind, "Bobby Burns is going to be prosecuted because his dog is not registered") and Tom Moore and Peter Lalor, arrayed, alas, in the robes of the Speaker instead of with pick and spade and other accoutrements of the fifties, aye and bold Hercules and swift-heeled Mercury and the dozen others scattered about.

And oftentimes we went fishing out to Bo-Peep Creek. Yes! I think I caught a 6oz. fish once.

Then big Windermere, believed to be bottomless till the '02 drought dried it up right to its lowest parts, and so shattered a Ballarat ideal. So Nature breaks many of our ideals.

And, I remember the quiet God's Acre in Creswick Road, where lie all the tumultuous spirits of the fifties, where soldiers and diggers rest side by side, and here at peace are they who gave me birth. Here beside them, where the wild flowers now grow, one day I shall find an end to a sweet, sweet existence.

The little wild blooms are there now. May they grow as pleasantly here when I lie below.

Truly, this is Home to me.

## XVI. The City Of The Hills.

BEECHWORTH.

Wangaratta is a lively, bright town. But don't say so in Beechworth. I never heard so much contempt in a girl's voice as I did when I praised Wangaratta to a Beechworth girl.

"Wang," she said. "Why! Its name even is Chinese." But the fishing at the junction of the Ovens and King is splendid. I caught—No! I won't tell you that the cod I caught weighed 25lb. 83/4ozs. (that 3/4ozs. sounds like truth), because you might think I lied. I left Wang about mid-day. For ten miles the scape was flat and uninteresting ("of course that's Wang," whispers my Beechworth friend), but in the distance, the hills prepare us for what is to come.

I note a curious bit of English on one of the stations:

NOTICE.

Passengers are requested to exhibit the red flag, which will be found adjoining to the engine driver during daylight, only that they wish to stop to pick them up. The passenger trains will absolutely stop after dusk at the station.

Between Everton and Beechworth the train climbs some 1,000 feet in 10 miles. The country we pass through is wild and wooded. Native apple and hops twine around the messmate and stringy bark. The pretty but much cursed century weed speckles the Kangaroo grass, and the tall grass trees lend an air of novelty to all.

In the distance, the roof of Victoria, the Bogongs and Buffalos tumble up to snow clad peaks.

Beechworth reminds me of the old Italian towns. They live in the past. Its golden days are gone but it yet holds up its head. Where once it was proud of its gold fields, now it is proud of its rocks. It has reason to be proud of them. Oh, my poor, torn, blistered feet!

The whole town is built on a great sheet of granite, which in places protrudes above the ground in great flat sheets. The Beechworthies use these for grandstands in the parks for their moonlight concerts. It is a curious sight, on a concert night, to see hundreds of people making for the park each with a cushion, for, verily, the rocks of Beechworth are hard.

I was ciceroned to most of the sights, but thought best of the streets. I have seldom seen a more charming walk than the Acacia Avenue. On one side is a picturesque, romantic old stone wall. On the other is a long row of noble trees, whose branches completely close in the whole footpath and allow the gentler beams of sunlight to slip through. (N.B.—I've just

discovered that the picturesque romantic old stone wall is the gaol).

Sydney talks of "Our Harbour," Ballarat of "Our Lake," and Beechworth of "Our Hills."

Beechworthies have been kind to me. One offered to take me to gaol, another, to the Lunatic Asylum, but my lady friend inspired me to go to Ingram's Rock. It was a broiling hot day; my camera was lead about my neck, my feet were tender, but she said I must go. So we went.

We climbed down a steep, gorge-like opening with great round boulders lying about as though a band of giants had been playing bowls here long ago.

Then we climbed up and reached the vantage spot. I drank in the view.

It was the only thing to drink. Worse luck. Out beyond was the famous old Woolshed, one-time gold diggings with 12,000 men. Now, nothing!

And there was Aaron Sherrit's hut. He was the gentleman who belonged to the Kelly Gang. He became rather friendly with the police, and Mr. Kelly objected to him keeping such company.

He showed his resentment rather rudely. At least I think so. One evening he watched some policemen go into Sherrit's hut. Then he went up and tapped at the door, as would some neighbour come to borrow a pie dish. When Aaron went to the door, Mr. Kelly forced into his body a small piece of lead, which terminated Aaron's interest in things mundane.

When we climbed back, every stone had a needle point, and likewise every one found my pet corns till I groaned.

That afternoon I absolutely refused to go out and see the Sphinx. I said I was satisfied it was the most wonderful thing in Victoria, in Australia, in the world. I went instead and had a chat with Mr. Ingram, father of Beechworth, fifty-five years Secretary of the Cemetery Board, and fifty years on the Hospital Committee. He talked.

"It was called May Day Hills in those early days. There were fine fellows here, but they were too fond of the grog. I came here in the fifties. It was a rough time. I got the paper agency—the opposition man had a horse—when the papers came he would jump on his horse and off to the Woolshed—seven thousand men on gold there then. I would take my bundle and go on foot, up hill, down gullies, wet or dry. I'd get there first. Two shillings a copy, I'd get. There was plenty of money in Beechworth then. I had the first shop here not made of canvas, and all the Scotsmen would make it their club. Good fellows, but too fond of the whisky. I used to give them coffee and try to coax them off it. One day, a young fellow came in eating a sandwich. Instead of meat he had a ten pound note. He got typhoid. I reckoned we ought to have a hospital. I started collecting. First ten minutes got £114; they put me in office; that was '56; I've been there

ever since. It's a long, long time. Yes! my lad! I know it.

Do I remember Cameron and the Golden Horseshoes? I was sitting in this office when he rode past. Cameron was a good man, and the diggers wanted to put him into the first Parliament. Needed a property qualification of £2,000; he didn't have it. It was raised here in nine minutes. They were fine fellows in those days. There was a circus here on the day of the election. The proprietor shod a horse with gold, and Cameron rode the gold-shod horse from the Woolshed for seven miles to Beechworth. Ten thousand cheering diggers behind him.

His drink bill at the hotel that night cost Cameron £224.

You don't look as if you believed it, but it's true. No sixpenny drinks and no shilling ones either. Yes! He died a poor, poor man.

Bad liquor too!

Yes! There were three thousand Chinese diggers up the Buckland once. There was many a fight between white and yellow. But they hung on and got the gold.

Burke was a policeman in charge here. He was a hot-headed, quick-tempered fellow; he had a lot of friends here; you know which Burke; he that died with Wills on Cooper's Creek; we built a Museum in his memory; have you seen it?

They were good days. Up to '65 we got fourteen million pounds worth of gold. Yes! Dead now, but there's as much more here.

The Kellys? The place was full of their sympathisers; old lags from New South. They always knew what the police were doing. The schoolmaster at —, who was postmaster also, would open official letters and let them know the contents; then seal them again. When these sympathisers were caught and brought up at court, the J.P's. would be frightened to sit on the bench. I wasn't. They were a fine lot of fellows those days, but too fond of the whisky.”

Then I went to gaol.

It is known as “The Summer Residence” by the Bill Sykeses, of Melbourne.

There were thirty-five gentlemen here when I visited the reception room!

Here the prisoner says farewell to freedom and picture shows; his ugly conventional drab clothes are disinfected and bagged. In their place he is presented with a charming costume ornamented with broad arrows.

Then he is weighed and washed. After this, impressions of his finger prints are taken for future reference. Then he is courteously conducted to his suite of rooms (I mean his cell), and he is a full member of this select club.

Now, I saw, it's all nonsense about the criminal face. I know a highly

respected clergyman in Melbourne who, if he were judged on his face alone, would get six months on sight. And here I saw an elderly gentleman, who, on his face value would seem to be an ideal Sunday school superintendent, and yet he is here for ten years for an atrocious crime. Don't judge people by their face values.

The prisoners, on good behaviour, have from six to eight every evening, for reading. They are served with stumps of candle which vary in length according to the time of the year.

They have a library of a thousand books, and they do not altogether consist of the improving books we all detest to read, but love to talk of.

One was reading Valentine Vox, another was deep in Macaulay's Essays, and a third was apparently enjoying—surely the last book to be expected in a prison—Shelley's Poems.

I saw dinner served, meat and potatoes (all weighed out), and good looking brown bread. I thought of the food I had to eat at —— (unfortunately justification is no defence for libel), and I reckoned that gaol wasn't too bad.

We went out into the quarry where the men were doing hard labor, breaking stones. Hard labor do they call it? One man lifted his knapper as the town clock began to strike 12, and it reached the stone on the 11th stroke.

Every man's unspoken thought seemed to my telepathic mind to be “Tobacco.”

Some good folk had sent up flowers for Xmas and these were distributed among the prisoners. It was pathetic to see how these hardened ruffians cherished them and tried to keep them fresh. One man, here for a dastardly assault on his wife, had a little bunch of violets lying in a little hollow in the stone ledge of the narrow slit in the wall that gave light. He, morning and night, gave them half his water allowance.

I stood on the scaffold, above which was a beam with eight dints in the wood, the marks of eight ropes suddenly jerked downwards by eight heavy, struggling men, paying their debts.

One curious fact I noticed. The percentage of uneducated people here is far, far above the percentage of the State. So, ignorance is a crime, and is punished as a crime.

There's a great Lunatic Asylum containing 700 inmates. I did not visit it. I was on holiday only, and not looking for my friends.

Finally I was driven out of Beechworth by an abominable whistler, who slept next to me, and welcomed the dawn by whistling all the latest comic songs and some old ones. When he whistled, “There was I waiting at the Church,” in my agony I shouted “For Heaven's sake, go in,” and the din

stopped till next morning. I went down to the bar and said that either “67” or myself would have to go. The landlady smiled sadly and said, “I suppose you'll have to. He won't, worse luck. That's where my husband sleeps.” So I departed.

## **XVII. Among The Potatoes.**

I'VE struck a new type.

I believe that in a few years we'll have as many types as England has. Her Yorkshire "tyke," Hampshire "hog," Wiltshire "moonraker," Devon "dumpling," are all distinct. So will soon be our Malleese, our Gippslander, our Mittans and our Croajingolites. The Malleese are big men, physically and mentally. Big skies, big holdings and big families. They may do vicious things but they cannot do the petty things.

The Gippslander has a horizon bound by his hills. He suffers from one gulligism. He is tied to Queen Cow. He sometimes laughs but he works always. But this Koroiter is a new type.

His grandfather was born in the same house as he was. He knows the blessings and curses of the squire. His father and his grandfather have been tenants of his father and his grandfather, under the "co-acreage" scheme, which seems to me to be about the easiest way of making money possible, always excepting stealing and playing football. The district was settled back in the thirties. If to-day you wish to become possessed of land, in any other place but the cemetery, you must pay over £100 for each little acre, but then you may get 6 ton of potatoes from it and they are sometimes worth £5 per ton.

"I ses, that forty years ago, we did grow potatoes here. We never used no bags. We just tied two of them together with a rope and put them on the dray. But the ground's potato-sick now! They've been growing potatoes too long here." I suggested growing shorter potatoes, but the old man looked at me and sniffed.

The town is like most other bush towns save that I reckon it's hollow below. Vehicles in the street seem to make over-necessary din; hence my assumption that it's hollow below. Another explanation is that axle grease may not be in general use.

The Show place of Koroit is Tower Hill.

Listen! I'm going to be instructive and illuminating.

Aeons ago (I won't use years; too many cyphers required), there was a mountain here about 21,969 feet high. If you doubt my figures, I'm sorry for you.

Then came a time when Mother Earth felt sick. And what a vomit! It lifted miles of mountain up and scattered it for miles and miles. In some places, as at Crossley, a layer of only a few inches fell; in others none at all; and, again, in others it was feet thick. In one place a huge lump fell in the midst of stony plains. That little patch of land is, to-day, worth £100

per acre, while the surrounding land fetches about thirty.

Even the ocean was invaded. A great strip of the sea was seized and changed to rich land. To-day, the potato fields go right down to within a few chains of the shore.

This little job finished, Mother Earth rested, leaving a gigantic basin, ten miles round—the biggest crater in the world. The sides slope down evenly to the lake that now fills the bottom. Exposed here and there are long strata of cinders. Pure cinders, such as one sees at every railway depot. The roads about are natural cinder tracks. They are so perfect that you would believe, were you told, that thousands of pounds had been spent on them. Someone says Koroit must be a wicked place because there's any amount of *cinder*. Bah! These jokers! Some years later, nine new craters began business in the centre of the old crater. They were small affairs compared with the earlier one, still, they built up Tower Hill to the height of 540 feet, and the island containing over 3000 acres of the richest soil in the world. The craters are all perfect specimens, one at least being fully 300 feet deep.

From the top of fine panorama is to be seen. Twenty-four miles of sea, from Lady Bay and Warrnambool to Boarding House Bay and Port Fairy, while in the far distance the square Lady Julia Percy Island looms (the adjective “square” qualifies the noun “island” not “lady”).

A score of cosy little villages, Crossley, Killarney, Kirkstall, Illowa, Rosebrook, almost run into each other. It is probably the densest populated rural district in Australia. My friend, Mr. Butt and I watched a storm brewing over Port Fairy and he told me the mysterious tale of the “mahogany” ships.

The only clue to the whereabouts of the valuable cargo of these ancient Spanish galleons blown out of their course and wrecked while returning from the Indies is a paper (that, by the way, has never been seen).

“Climb to the top of the great hill and look unto the due South.”

There you are!

While I was cogitating over this romance, the storm from Port Fairy, turned in our direction. How it rained as we raced down the crater. I guess that storm was a brother to the one that quenched the fires that burned here long ago.

We carried a few gallons of water in our clothes as a memento of the crater. It required another sort of “crater” to make us feel comfortable again.

There has been two big rows here, one not so very long ago, and there may be another soon. Who knows? I guess land will drop a bit then. Likewise the prices. The climate will be unhealthy in those days.

Once more I mounted a bike. I was off to Warrnambool on a typical

September morn. Through Southern Cross and Illowa—there's a resting-place every two miles, and I felt as chirpy as a sixteen-year-older.

The land is all under cultivation, every blessed inch of it. Why! In some parts they stack their firewood on the road to save the ground space.

Everything is sacrificed to utility. Not a tree along the road. Plantation of pines in the paddock for shelter. Everything has its use. Otherwise it is destroyed. It is an excellent road, running between green fields, past comfortable homes, near plump cattle and stretches of rich potato fields. An excellent road. But I like that avenue of blue gums out of Castlemaine far better. Aye! And the rough, bumpy, bush track from Buchan to Orbost. Yes! And the breakneck pass from Eskdale to Granite Flat along the Mitta Valley!

This is but Man's work. That is Nature!

Old-fashioned stone posts mark the miles. I timed myself between two of them and broke the record. Nobody had even done it quicker, carrying exactly £1/16/9 1/2 and two pieces of chalk and two ounces of tobacco in his pocket.

Every couple of miles there is a butter factory. It's not like a road. It's like a street. Now I fly (note the verb) through Dennington, where they concentrate the milk, and now Warrnambool appears up on a hill.

Before we arrive, we pass what appears to be cheese quarries. They are, really, sandstone. This stone, when first unearthed, is cut into blocks by means of curious curved saws. It soon hardens, and is much used for building.

Warrnambool is a town of wide and windy streets. Its burghers have an idea that it ranks in importance a little after Paris. It does.

One man on hearing I came from the Wimmera said, "You must find this a great change," and I replied, "Yes! I do! Worse luck."

Then he turned away.

Along came John Little, old Wimmera friend, with his family buggy, and I mounted behind. He drove off towards the beach. I carelessly watched the same old things to be seen at every watering place, the strip of sand, the tumble down huts, the cheap-looking lolly shop.

Suddenly we turned a corner and I stopped breathing. (I began again thirty seconds later.)

What a sea scape.

My inertness left me. I was eager and silent. Nothing on the famous South of France surpasses this Shelly Beach. It was dazzlingly bright. Big, red, rocky water-chafed islands on which the waves smashed into breakers of rainbow-tinted foam. And the great blue sea beyond. I climbed up to Thunder Point and sat for awhile taking in the ozone and the view.

Then I waddled down to the caves.

The tide has an unpleasant habit of waiting until some credulous sightseer has gone inside, and then suddenly turning and half drowning him.

Should one feel inclined for swimming here, one need never feel lonely. There's always the companionship of the festive shark. Sometimes, swimming is very interesting—for the shark.

If you wish to see the beauty of the sea, spend an hour or a month on Shelly Beach. Warrnambool doesn't matter much. You can always get down to the beach and forget the town. The beach is worth travelling a thousand miles to see.

Sydney folk ask your opinion about “our 'Arbour,” Ballarat folk about “our lake,” and Warrnambool folk about “our breakwater.” It cost a quarter of a million pounds and it's undoubtedly a fine piece of masonry.

The town possesses a quaint museum. The local folk take a great pride in it, so when any of them become possessed of anything curious—from a Boer Bible to a Silver Penny, in it goes to the museum. As a result there's a most interesting collection of odd, fantastic and curious things.

The Warrnamboolite, when making a tour of the Old Lands, always has his local museum in his eye. One gets a bit of Shakespeare's oak, another a set of Indian idols, another a Burmese hat—and so on.

But the most interesting exhibit was of local origin. Long, long ago a prehistoric bloke took his girl for a stroll on the beach. He sat down on a rock and she coyly sat beside him. He probably asked her to name the day, and she turned her head away and giggled and said her hat wasn't on straight.

That's all we know for certain. Whether she accepted him or not is “wrappt in mistry.” Two years ago, some quarrymen working far inland found upon a slab of sandstone, their footprints, clear and unmistakable. Moral. When you go courting by the seaside, walk where the sea will wash your footprints out—or wear boots. Anyhow, the slab of sandstone with this romantic tell-tale, is to be seen in the museum to-day.

Now the little family are all aboard and we are off to the village of Wangoon, over whose educational establishment my friend rules.

But I feel out of place in this money-making district. This one time well-wooded plain is now as devoid of trees as Bourke Street.

Soon the comfortable school house is reached—the one timbered spot in the district and words run riot. Old tales are told, and old reminiscences recalled.

Early next morning, while the magpie was still warbling his delicious morning notes, we set out for the Hopkins Falls.

It was in flood and presented a magnificent spectacle. Fully a hundred yards wide and fifty feet high, it springs off a battered ledge of rock, bashed at the top, smashed in its flight and dashed at the bottom into snow white foam.

What a fall!

I could not help comparing it to the dainty little Gippsland creek falls, bowered in tree ferns and scrub, falling in tinkling sweetness into their sheltered basins. This is big, bare, bold and brazen-tongued.

It makes me feel so impotent and weak. Like a fly, if it could understand the power of a steam hammer. And little Douglas Little cried enthusiastically,

“Oh! Daddy! Look at all the soapy water.”

We wandered into school and looked up the old registers.

The school was first opened in '57.

What a reflection on our land laws is the fact that there were more children attending the school in '64 than there are now. It struck me as tragic, and I thought of Goldsmith's lines (I've not got them quite right)—

“Ill fares the land to—something or other—a prey, Where thingambobs increase and men decay.”

There was a night school also in those days, and one dear little chap aged thirty one, was presented for examination. Happy dominie!

And so the afternoon passed and my noble iron steed carried me back in the moonlight over the fine road to Koroit.

I believe there's a fine lot of river scenery along the Hopkins River, but you can't expect a fellow to see everything in a couple of hours. Everybody was too busy telling me that Melba was coming, to let me know what I was missing.

Had another afternoon's outing the other day. Took the Port Fairy coach. Rounding Tower Hill along the cinder road, we turned to the way of Crossley.

In '46 there was a potato famine in the “Ould Dart.” Crops failed and “the hunger” spread over the land. In spite of assistance from England and the United States, thousands died from sheer starvation. We fortunate dwellers in this glorious land cannot realize anyone starving to death. An Australian reckons he's starving if he hasn't had meat three times a day. But in '46 the poor folk in Ireland died like flies. Tens of thousands of them left their homes for the States. Some of the pluckiest of them set out on the hundred day trip to Port Phillip.

Sighting the whaling station at Port Fairy they declined to go further. They landed and spread out over the country behind Port Fairy. They brought with them all the habits and customs of their native land. Cut off

from all intercourse with the world, save the occasional boat from Melbourne, they built themselves a new Ireland in the South.

Some came from Killarney. You know the song,

“By Killarney's fakes and sells.”

And here is Killarney the second.

It is as like the original as the beautiful climate will permit. One incongruity though! Belfast Lough is right alongside instead of being at the furthest possible distance.

Killarney looks like an Irish village picked up and dumped here.

The stone walls along the roads, the boxthorn hedges, the squat little houses right on the road, all whitewashed and made of big stones, the capped and shawled old woman sitting at the door, the “gentleman who pays the rint” in possession of every puddle on the road; the pleasant, jovial brogue of Tipperary and Cork; and the entire absence of the gums all help the deception. Only needs a wicked landlord, a jaunting car and a few slips of blackthorn. Till the railway came, this was a colony to itself, and many of the children who are trebly true Australians—their grandparents being born here—speak with a rich and unmistakable accent.

Here still live the “gossoon,” and the “omadhaum” and the “achushla” and the “ben macree.” I hope you know what those names mean. I got them out of Handy Andy and Rory O'More.

Here comes a dray. Lying in the bottom is a real red-bearded Shaughraun, while driving the horses is his little daughter—Eilleen Allana surely—a typical Irish type, blue laughing eyes and dark blue black hair.

Oh! The little rascal winked at me!

Och!

Yes! 'Tis Ireland surely. There's one of the old Ogham stones so common in the Green Isle, erected two thousand years ago. Let us decipher the inscription. Tut! Tut! “Five miles to Belfast.”

There's never a State School from Koroit to Rosebrook though the country is densely populated, but there's a big Catholic school—St. Brigid's to wit. The State had one school, but had to abandon it. There goes a little chap, an Irishman through and through, though his father and grandfather were born in Australia. He's nearer the Logan Stone at Alton and the Castle of Carrig-on-Lea than to Kosciusko.

I saw a number of men in the paddocks kneeling and most devotedly bending their heads to the ground.

At their prayers? Not much! But still at something that often brings unwilling tears to our eyes.

Weeding onions!

Of all the crops that are grown, surely this must be the most tedious, most uncongenial and most unpleasant. For seven months in the year the onion grower does “knee drill” pulling up the weeds.

If you want something to take the pride out of you, go onion weeding. I tried it for ten minutes and my knees felt—well, uneasy.

Anyhow, these onion growers should sneak past St. Peter at the gate, if they show their knee callosities as signs of piety.

Onion growing can be classed with horse racing as far as certainty goes. One season they fetch £2 10s. a ton and another £20 per ton.

But we pass through Rosebrook, and now the Moyne River and a whiff of sea air tells us that Port Fairy is near.

It is a quaint, curious, strange, old fashioned, interesting place, is this Port Fairy from the comical, squat, eight foot high, horizontal cypress trees that line its streets to the oldest public gardens in Victoria.

The houses are all basalt. Many of the walls are two feet thick and contain more stone than their interiors contain air space. The roofs are sloping, with attic windows like old English houses. In fact, one might easily fancy oneself in some old forgotten village on the west coast of England or Ireland.

But the gardens are the thing. I have seen little better than the great old horizontal cypress that shades an area of 150 square yards. . . . I was told it was a hundred years old. It looks a thousand.

The elm avenue is worth travelling many miles to see, especially at this time of the year.

A few chains to the south is the beach, a broad sandy spread. Turning back, we wandered on to the famous island, now a sheet of fire with the misembryanthemum (call it “pig face” if you like). The Moyne disembogues into the sea and here is one of the finest natural baths in the State. The water is exceedingly clear and transparent, with a slate bottom. It would tempt a Chinaman. Then further east are the crags with the cubical Lady Julia Percy Island in the distance (still adjective “cubical” qualifying “Island.”) This island of Port Fairy was where the whalers camped in the thirties and forties. An old sea captain, Dunton by name, was the first of them. A trip to the Southern Seas after whales; all the excitement of the hunt; then this island played its little part.

And a wild lawless crowd these whalers were. Escaped convicts and ne'er-do-wells. The only character needed was a bad character. On the mainland just opposite, stood the Merrijig Hotel. And a nice sort of place it must have been in '40. If any of the whalers required to be punished, he wasn't imprisoned or whipped or sacked. Nothing so gentle as these! His

grog was stopped. That was the only thing to frighten these desperadoes. There's a tale told of the solitary policeman, Hill, going over to the island to arrest a whaler.

When these gentle folk heard what his mission was, they picked him up, and gently but firmly threw him into the sea, and told him that it was with deep regret that they must decline his further acquaintanceship.

Hill swam ashore and, wisely, looked after the perambulating goat for the future.

No one dared to venture on the island while these hundreds of whalers held possession. It wasn't considered healthy. For many years the beach was strewed with whale bones, but the kindly sea has heaped sand over these and obliterated all traces of the disreputable and unprosaic days of old.

One little yarn. It has nothing to do with Port Fairy, save that I heard it here. McKenzie reproved Doolan for his conduct last night. "You got verra verra bad last nicht, Doolan. Why dinna you do as I do. When I've had suffeicient whisky and I'm asked to hae ane mair I always say saraspaeela."

"No good to me! When I've had sufficient whisky I could'nt say sarsaparilla to save my life."

## **XVIII. In The Land Of Milk And Money.**

COLAC has had a prosaic history. The land was taken up in the late thirties by sheep squatters. A little town evolved in the centre of the stations and for fifty years remained a poor sordid village, dependent on the surrounding "gentry" for its very existence.

Then a marvellous change took place. Some of the wiser squatters subdivided their lands and rented them to tenant farmers. Others, not so shrewd as their fathers, had wasted their substance and these cut their lands and sold them outright. The Cow became a power in the land.

Now, the town is the centre of a rich district of dairy farmers, many of whose homes are more sumptuous than those of their landlords.

There is a big butter factory in the town, and it pays out about £3,000 per week to the dairy farmers for milk. Huge motor vans go daily round to the farms and carry in the milk to the factory, where it is changed to golden butter. And the town has thriven marvellously! It is now one of the busiest towns in the State! The streets are beautifully planted, one avenue of elms being worthy of a journey to see.

The town is named after the lake. The yarn goes that the first arrival meeting an aboriginal, pointed to the lake and asked him what was its name.

The black gentleman, thinking he was pointing to a bank of sand, said "Koluk" (which in his language means "sand"), and "Koluk" or Colac it has been ever since.

This lake is the largest sheet of purely fresh water in Australia. On the far side, the dainty Warrion hills form a perfect background to this beautiful spread of water.

I was so taken with it, that I spent several afternoons making a water colour sketch of it. I thought it was very good till I showed it to my friend Firth. He looked at it for a minute, and said, "Very nice! Those apples in that tray look very nice! Why don't you try to do a painting of the lake now?"

The lake is at the bottom of a huge basin, so the banks slant up gradually, making a fine natural amphitheatre where on New Year's Day, many thousands gather to see the annual regatta and the Colaquatics. One of the boys at my school, a suburb of Colac, played a sad joke on me. My predecessor taught "Milk Testing." Each day, half a dozen boys brought samples of milk from home and tested them. I knew no more of milk testing than Marc Antony knew of cigarettes. Yet, as I was to be in charge but a few weeks I did not wish to break the continuity of the work, so I let

the boys continue their tests.

Now this is a true axiom! No teacher can delude boys as to his knowledge. In two days these lads found out how much I did not know of milk testing.

On the third morning, four boys were making the test. It is made something like this. A certain quantity of the milk is put into a graduated flask. A certain quantity of sulphuric acid is added. These flasks are put into a machine. A handle is turned a certain time; the acid eats away all the milk except the butter fat, which remains on top, and is measured on the graduated flask giving 3.8 or 4.1, or some other percentage. Well! These lads did the thing all properly, and I measured the tests. One went 21 per cent.!

All I could say was, "Either your cow is the most wonderful cow in Australia, or this machine lies like a tombstone."

I shifted quickly to arithmetic, where I was safe. I found afterwards, that this humorist had brought for his test some thin cream instead of genuine cow juice.

Near the hotel, where I resided and nightly heard some hair-raising yarns from the gentleman who dispensed the beer, lives a barber, Duckworth by name, who, in his spare time, carves wood. I had often noticed farmers carry into his shop big, charred, ugly lumps of wood. I had also noticed young men of extremely bucolic appearance and dress, but each carrying a beautifully polished, beautifully stained walking stick. So I made inquiries, and these led me to Mr. Duckworth.

South from Colac are the wild jungles of Beech Forest with wondrous waterfalls, beauteous fern groves, magnificent forests of valuable timber, and the home of White Shirt Jones, so called because he actually wore a white shirt every day.

And the Wood Carver agreed that anyone who brought him a log of blackwood, or messmate, or native beech, or native musk or native sycamore, should receive in return a walking stick. From the rest of the logs he makes the finest walkings sticks in the world, and retails them to any who will buy.

He also makes furniture from these woods, and right royal things they are. He even uses the fungus known as "Blackfellow's Bread" for the crooks of sticks.

I got him to make me a Smoker's Companion. He used a dozen different kinds of local timbers, and a more beautiful little cabinet it would be hard to find. I refer to the colour and marking of the timber.

I am sure that before long Australians will appreciate the beauties of their own timbers, and our choicest furniture will be made of kanuka and

blackwood instead of oak and chestnut.

One day I did not feel well. The world was out of joint. I was tired of work and play and everything. My friend, Firth, came in and saw me taking some medicine.

He laughed. "Throw physic to the doctors! Come! I'll take you for a drive and cure you! Get on your coat and hat! I'll be round in five minutes with a buggy."

We drove away.

We went briskly along a fine road lined for miles on either side by great gloomy pines. There was a wonderful absence of native timber. Here and there were the comfortable homes of the tenant farms. Occasionally, we would see the mansions of the squatters, all that remains of their one-time wide-spread stations.

Through Corroroke, with the inevitable butter factory. Vast stretches of potato crops, onion crops, lush green grass.

Now we are driving by Lake Colac. Pines! Pines! Pines! A few oaks and elms and poplars. A poor lone blue gum looks out of place, like an aboriginal in Collins Street, a stranger in his own land.

On through the tiny village of Alvie and up the Warrion Hills till we reached, per foot, the top of the Red Rock.

One of the finest panoramas I have ever seen.

At our feet, the huge lake of Corangamite, ninety-two miles in circuit, and shining now before the setting sun like a great silver pan. Beyond the Lake are Mount Leura and Mount Elephant.

No less than twenty perfectly circular, volcanic craters each with an exceedingly deep lake in its cup.

Beyond is Lake Beeac, very salt, but a few miles from Colac, which is fresh.

Why? I don't know.

Local tale is that there is a subterranean passage uniting Lake Beeac with the sea. One man told me, without a blush, that the water in it rises and falls with the tides.

I was struck dumb with admiration.

Then the pleasant villages scattered around; the bright green of the onion crops; the darker green of the potato crops and further out the big expanses of grass lands, still held by the Squatters.

The whole scene is closed in on the one hand by the Otway Ranges and on the other by far away, dim blue Buninyong.

The Rock itself is a big weather-beaten tor of red stone, that has been through some ancient fire. It is not lava, not at all like Tower Hill near Koroit. This looks like as if, at one time, it has been in the heart of a

gigantic fire, not hot enough to melt it, but yet hot enough to burn most of the matter from it. I can form no explanation of it. We opened our basket and ate and drank, watching the sun slowly settle down behind the mountains.

Then we stretched ourselves on the sward and as the moon rose over lake and mountain, over bush and crop, over farm folk preparing for bed, and town folk for pleasure, we two lit our pipes and talked the Good Talk, of Browning and Goethe and Ruskin and Tolstoi of glorious thoughts and inspired language.

And I felt like a king of the Warrion Hills, and  
“God's in His Heaven. All's right with the world.”

We returned. The first thing I saw was my medicine bottle. I opened the window and threw the physic to the dogs.

Colac is a town with a great future. It is remarkable that wherever the Cow has come (Cow in capitals) prosperity follows. Here, big motor vans go out daily to the dairies, to bring to the big butter factory the tins of butter fat. It is no unusual thing to pay out £3000 per week to dairy farmers and the butter made brings top prices in the London market. There are no poor. One day, when I was feeling charitably disposed, I searched the town for a means to satisfy my good intention. I finally had to buy myself a new pipe with the money.

## **XIX. Conclusion.**

AND here came an event that put an end to all my wanderings, that cut short this eventful history when all was going on swimmingly.

Man proposes and ——.

I spent my Long Vacation in Sydney town. A casual introduction to a certain lady came . . . and then. . . Well, the rest of my story concerns but two people in the world, my wife and myself.

Verily, man proposes and woman accepts.

And so ends my veracious story.

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