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PASSAGES OF TIME
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PART 1

CASTING OFF
Mainly Miss Mallett

When my father died and the Senate and House of Representa-
tives in Canberra passed a motion of regret and sympathy for
his family, one speaker, Dr. Earle Page, ended his tribute with
these words:

I venture to say that he and his wonderful wife exerted in
Australia an influence for good that has not been equalled
by any other couple in the history of the nation.

I have always been grateful to that speaker for including my
mother — she was very much alive at the time — in his tribute.
The wives of distinguished men are seldom so honoured.

Born in England, Caroline Martha Mallett (she disliked both
her Christian names) was left an orphan at an early age. When
she was in her teens, her grandmother, recognizing her ability,
sent her to train as a teacher at Whitelands College in London.
Friends who knew her then remembered her as a beautiful, high-
spirited girl, fearless, self-confident, and an able public speaker.
The College authorities were prone to select her as an example
of their work when distinguished visitors were being entertained
there, and she was often chosen as the student to welcome them
and demonstrate the College curriculum.

She sometimes spoke of her Whitelands days to us children.
Much of this I have forgotten, but a few anecdotes remain
firmly embedded in my mind. One concerns John Ruskin who
lectured at the College on art. The students admired him
immensely and decided to demonstrate their admiration in a
practical manner. Embroidered waistcoasts being fashionable
for men at the time they set to work and embroidered the two
fronts of one. When the end of the course arrived, these, ready
for the tailor, were presented to the great man. He admired the
beautiful embroidery, and then, turning over the pieces, was puzzled by the rough finish on their reverse side.

“How is it that the under side is not the same as the upper?” he inquired.

One of the girls explained. “That will be covered by the lining”, she said reassuringly, “it won’t show.”

“Young ladies!” exclaimed a horrified Ruskin, “That is immoral!”

An interesting example of aesthetic criticism, perhaps, but not a very gracious way to receive a gift.

Another remembered story of her college days is not exactly edifying. She and another girl were out walking one day when they saw Thomas Carlyle’s carriage pass by. Hoping to get a glimpse of the great man they hurried after it. The glimpse was vouchsafed; he put his head out of the carriage window and blew his nose, au naturel, without benefit of handkerchief. I think I put that rather delicately. For some illogical feminine reason my mother never admired his writings again.

A third memory concerns upper middle class Victorian snobbery. My mother had a friend, a fellow student – we’ll call her Maud – who went straight from Whitelands College into a well-paid (for those days) position as a board-school teacher. Maud’s mother, the widow of a poor country vicar, up to that time had been accepted by the local “best people”, but when it was discovered that her daughter was teaching in “a common board-school”, they dropped her like a hot potato. In those days there were only two careers open to women of gentle birth – matrimony and the role of governess in a private home. To save her mother from ostracism, Maud was forced to abandon her well-paid job and eke out a miserable existence as a governess on a mere pittance. My mother, when she happened to visit them, found them not quite on the bread line, but very nearly so. However, the widow’s status in the community had been saved, and that was that.

At the end of my mother’s time at Whitelands – I can’t remember whether she was on the staff then as a sort of pupil-teacher, but I know she worked late at night correcting examination papers – she overworked and went down with
pneumonia. Her doctor, when she recovered, informed her that if she didn’t leave England at once for a healthier climate – he suggested Canada or Australia – she would have about six months to live. Her family was tubercular. As it happened, the government of New South Wales was advertising at the time for a principal for Hurlstone Training College for women teachers, on the outskirts of Sydney. My mother applied for the position and was accepted. Her passage was booked on the S.S. Potosi, an Orient liner of 4,219 tons, which sailed from Gravesend on 5 October 1882.

Unlike the man she was destined to marry, Miss Mallett had no comfortable home to leave, no parents to worry over her health or destiny. She was a free lance, and one who “ever with a frolic welcome took the thunder and the sunshine”.

Her system having reluctantly adjusted to the “thunder” of Biscay waves, she emerged to the “sunshine” of the ship’s deck. Here, reclining in a deck chair, and huddled in rugs, she was observed by an energetic young man pacing to and fro. In his pocket was a letter from Sir Saul Samuel, then agent-general for New South Wales, asking him to be kind to an Englishwoman who would be travelling to Sydney on the same ship. It so happened that Sir Saul, having met both Edgeworth David (the energetic young man) and the said Englishwoman (Miss Mallett), had made a bet with a colleague that before the voyage was out these two would be engaged.

Young David, pacing to and fro, and wishing to make the acquaintance of that pretty girl in the deck chair, was presently given a chance to do so. A sudden squall of rain descended on the ship, and he rushed to help her put up her umbrella and fix it over her chair. The ice was broken and their acquaintance began. It was not till two days later he discovered her identity, when he happened to remember – somewhat guiltily – his letter from Sir Saul Samuel which ran as follows:

Dear Mr. David,
Miss Mallett who is going to Sydney under engagement with the New South Wales government will be a fellow passenger of yours by the S.S. “Potosi” – this will be an introduction for you to her. I shall feel obliged by your rendering her any assistance or
attention within your power. I am yours very truly Saul Samuel.

Did Sir Saul have that bet in his mind's eye when he wrote the letter? Mr. David, who had heard that this Miss Mallett was to be principal of a training college for teachers, visualized her as a middle-aged woman of commanding aspect. He inquired of his new young acquaintance if she could point out Miss Mallett to him among the passengers. One can imagine his delight at finding he had been asked to render this attractive girl "any assistance or attention" within his power. He and his cabin mate, Mr. Cecil Sharp (later well known as a collector of English folk songs), and Miss Mallett were a happy trio on that voyage, but Sir Saul lost his bet. The *Potosi* berthed in Sydney with Mr. David and Miss Mallet unengaged, though, to quote Jane Austen, "one of them at least knew what it was to love . . . that the gentleman was overflowing with admiration was evident enough."

Mr. David began his work as assistant geological surveyor in the Department of Mines, and Miss Mallett took up her position at Hurlstone Training College. This was situated in Canterbury, a suburb of Sydney — probably all concrete and brick now, but then largely open country. A kindly climate, to say nothing of the long sea voyage from London to Sydney, had restored Miss Mallett to her usual vivacious self. Her work in the Education Department was stimulating. She had to battle with some strange ideas; for instance, the teaching of English literature she found consisted of learning by heart the names of well-known authors and the titles of their books — the actual reading of them was considered unnecessary.

If her working life had its problems, her social one was novel and happy. To begin with, she acquired a horse and learnt to ride. The horse was a large white one called Bunyip, gentle and friendly, and supplied her with a healthy recreation, cantering along the semi-country roads of the district. She was often accompanied on these outings by one or other of her many admirers. She received numerous proposals of marriage during her time at Hurlstone College, but for the first eighteen months not one from young Edgeworth David. However, though he was
Caroline Mallett, later Mrs. Edgeworth David, before leaving England in 1882 to take up the position of principal of Hurlstone Training College for women teachers in Sydney.

Professor and Mrs. Edgeworth David with Margaret (Madge) in 1887.
Edgeworth David (sitting) in 1886, at the coffer dam around the prospecting shaft sunk by the Geological Survey party on Greta coal seam discovered by him on that expedition.
often absent from Sydney for many weeks at a time, when he was there he seized every opportunity to further his friendship with her, and was a constant caller at Hurlstone College. Whether he was aware of his many rivals, I do not know. Mention of these admirers recalls an anecdote my mother once told us. She was out riding one day with a friend — *not* Edgeworth David — when in the course of a smart canter her hair came down. It was beautiful chestnut hair that fell to her knees, and which she wore in two plaits wound round her head. On this occasion, which calls to mind a similar predicament in one of the Irish R.M. tales of Somerville and Ross, Caroline Mallett could not spare both hands from her reins to do up the fallen glory. Neither were long skirts and a side-saddle conducive to hopping on and off a horse. My mother's admirer, unlike Major Yeates, eagerly offered to pin up his companion's hair. She assented, and he began the repair work. Feeling that he was not getting on very fast with the job, she glanced over her shoulder and saw him surreptitiously kissing the long tresses he held in his hand. The anecdote stopped there, but I can imagine my mother, who was a very unsentimental person, suggesting that the young man should hold her reins while she bundled up the hair herself.

One evening in 1885 Edgeworth David made a vital decision. He was due on the following day to begin a long sojourn in the field, and felt he must know before he went whether he had any chance of succeeding with Miss Mallett. Accordingly he went to Hurlstone College, only to discover visitors already there. He waited patiently for some time, hoping to outstay them, but as time went on he became desperate. Naturally a shy, reserved young man, he overcame these inhibitions, and in a few courteously but firmly expressed words told them of the purpose of his visit, and asked them to leave. One woman, whose brother had been hopefully courting Miss Mallett for some time, uttered a dramatic cry of “Oh, poor Robert!” (or whatever his name was). The visitors left, and a panic-stricken Miss Mallett fled upstairs. However, after hearing an ultimatum from her reckless suitor that if she didn’t come down within five minutes he would go up, she came down. My mother’s
account of the proceedings ended there. After a six months' engagement they were married at a little stone church at Canterbury.

Their first home was a small, semi-detached house in Ashfield, a suburb of Sydney. As it was a rented one my mother's passion for building additions to whatever house she lived in could not be indulged. However, her enthusiasm for changing and manipulating her surroundings manifested itself in moving the furniture. Her young husband never knew, when he returned home at night, whether the drawing room (they had drawing rooms in those days) would be upstairs or down. It was, for the most part, a harmless and inexpensive hobby, for she did most of the moving herself — even wardrobes. The piano, however, was beyond her ingenuity to shift, and she hired two men to carry it upstairs. This did prove expensive, as in addition to their services, plaster gouged out of the wall on their way up had also to be paid for.

In 1886 David, who was still at that time assistant geological surveyor in the Department of Mines, was instructed by his chief to begin an examination of the great northern coal field. This meant a prolonged stay in camp, so young Mrs. David decided to go with him, knowing how little consideration he gave to his own personal comfort when left to himself. She quickly adapted to camp life, cooked and washed for her husband, and filled in the long days with reading, sewing (she was an exquisite needlewoman) and botanizing.

During his daily absence from camp, Mrs. David discovered that considerable curiosity had been aroused in the district about her husband's activities. Coal in those days was as big an attraction for speculators as oil or minerals today, and soon a new task was added to her camp duties — that of fending off and getting rid of a series of male visitors, all hoping to extract information from the geologist's young wife. They probably thought this would be an easy matter. One man even tried to bribe her to tell him what her husband hoped to find and where. They soon learnt that this young woman, friendly and unsophisticated as she appeared, was more than a match for them. David himself, well aware of the local interest in his
work, managed to telegraph news of his discovery of what is now known as the Greta coal seam to the Department of Mines before prospective buyers were aware of it. The department immediately reserved an area of about 100 square miles in the direction of the dip of the seam. Very soon after, the government leased about 2,000 acres of this reserve. When I was collecting information for a biography of my father in 1937, it was estimated that this seam had yielded over 100 million dollars worth of coal. (The biography, Professor David, was published by Edward Arnold and Company, London, 1937).

The Davids' first child, Margaret Edgeworth, was born in Maitland, and spent the first months of her life under canvas with her parents, a candle box for her cradle. I followed my sister into the world seventeen months later.

While David and his wife were camped in the Maitland district they made friends with many of the residents who were interested in their own countryside, and one day a deputation of men called at the camp to ask him if he would give them a lecture on the geology of the district. He was very disinclined to do this, as he had never lectured, and doubted his ability to do it well. His wife, however, had the greatest faith in her husband's ability to do anything well, and persuaded him to undertake this new venture. On his return to camp each evening, they worked out the details of the lecture together, selecting what they considered sufficient material to last an hour. The lecture was to be illustrated with lantern slides. A lantern and an operator were hunted up with difficulty and the fateful night arrived. The hall at Maitland was packed, chiefly with men, and a large proportion of them miners. Mrs. David took her seat in the audience with an anxious heart, hoping that all would go well. The lecture began, and in a few minutes she sank back with a sigh of relief: it was going splendidly. David soon lost himself in the interest of his subject. His enthusiasm was imparted to the audience, and they listened with rapt attention. The allotted hour sped by, but still the lecture went on, and still the audience was held. Mrs. David, glancing at her watch, found to her horror that an hour and a half, and then two hours, had gone by. When he had lectured for two hours
and a quarter, David suddenly realized the time. He stopped, apologized humbly, and was greeted with roars of applause.

Of the early days in Maitland I have no recollection, but I remember a story my mother told us of the bravery of a friend of hers there. This friend, a doctor’s wife, was being driven out one day by a hired man in a buggy and pair. A skilled horsewoman, she was sitting next the driver with one of her younger children in her lap. Several others were in the rear part of the buggy. At the top of a long steep hill the horses suddenly took fright and bolted. The driver lost his head, threw away the reins which landed on the horses’ hindquarters, and jumped out, leaving the whole concern hurtling downhill to what he thought inevitable destruction.

Faced with this situation this small woman — she was not much over five feet — acted instantly. She put down her child, crawled over the dashboard, retrieved the reins, crawled back and pulled the horses to a standstill at the bottom of the hill.

Another Maitland story. While my father was away in the field once, my mother, because she was due to have a child, was living in a house in the town. One night the two maids she employed discovered a man trying to force a window on the ground floor. Having breathlessly informed Mrs. David of this fact, they fled panic-stricken to their own room and locked themselves in. Telephones in private houses were non-existent in those days, so a householder could not call the police. My mother, armed with an empty revolver, went out onto a balcony and challenged the burglar, telling him that if he didn’t go immediately she would shoot. He fled.

My brother, William Edgeworth, was born in Maitland.

My own earliest recollections are not of Maitland, but of Ashfield, where for a time our family lived in an old stone house at the bottom of Church Street called Merrivale, long since pulled down. Here my mother’s horse, Bunyip, learnt to trot reliably between the shafts of a buggy, and I can just remember sitting in the back of this with my sister, singing happily as we bowled out of the big untidy garden.

Our next home, a six-roomed brick bungalow called The Gunyah at the corner of Church and Alt Streets, was a per-
manent one, for my father bought it. The early years of our life there were the last of the nineteenth century. For its women, bustles were out, and boned corsets, ankle-length skirts, voluminous petticoats, leg-of-mutton sleeves, hard straw hats speared to the coiffure with ten-inch hatpins, were in.

Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee was a landmark for my sister and me, for we were taken by a friend of our parents to the city one night to see the celebrating illuminations. I remember how our pleasure had the edge taken off it by my brother’s being debarred from this treat at the last minute. He had been naughty, and this was his punishment. Victorian parents were strict; he was not yet old enough to be thrashed, so he paid for his sins in bitter disappointment. Though he was never as near to us as my sister and I were to one another, the bonds of our family union were strong, and the very thought of enjoying ourselves without our little brother savoured of treachery. After a lapse of nearly eighty years those jubilee lights are dim, but the memory of my brother’s disappointment is sharp and clear.

In 1891 my father applied for and was appointed to the chair of geology at Sydney University, and our family entered a new phase in its career.

Though as young children our everyday life was bounded by the small domestic scene, my sister and I were acutely aware of the current war, with the Boers. As a whole it was to us a vaguely worrying affair, constantly discussed by the grown-ups, but the siege of Mafeking mattered to us tremendously. I can still recall the delirious delight with which we received the news of its relief.

We did not know that my sister’s future husband, having managed to join a Tasmanian contingent at the age of eighteen, was fighting over there.
My father, being immersed in geology and university affairs, left all domestic arrangements to his capable wife. The first thing she did with the new home was to add two rooms to it — a bedroom for herself and husband, and one for the maids. At this time in history cooks and housemaids were considered a necessity in the homes of even medium-incomed people.

Though the Davids had settled down to a quiet domestic life, this was not without its dramatic moments, for there was one occasion on which my valiant mother actually fainted in an emergency. She happened to be alone in the house one night, except for us three children whom she had just put to bed. My brother, a plump little infant, was sitting up in his cot, entertaining himself by cutting pictures out of a book with a large pair of scissors which he had acquired by manipulating his cot over to a chest of drawers on top of which they had been left. My sister and I were in the next room, and hearing him cry out went to investigate. He had somehow managed to fall on the business end of the scissors, and there he was, like an ancient Roman spitted on his sword, the scissors embedded in his flesh. Followed by a dog-like little me, my sister, who never lost her head, even at the age of five, ran through the house to the drawing room where my mother was, and told her what had happened. She hurried to the scene, picked up my brother, and carried him in to the brightly lit drawing room. There she pulled out the scissors, and fainted. Faced with this situation, my sister knew exactly what to do. Down one block and up a cross-street from our house was an Infants’ Home, still functioning to this day though on a larger scale. The matron of this at the time was a Miss Taplin, a charming Englishwoman who was a great friend of my mother’s. My sister decided that it was “Tappy”, as we
called her, who must be fetched at once, so out into the night we ran, barefoot and clad only in our nighties. Hand in hand we hurried down our street and into the one where the Home was. Miss Taplin was in her sitting room. We burst in, and greeted her breathlessly with: “Tappy! Tappy! Come quickly! Billy’s stabbed himself with the scissors and Mummy’s dead on the floor!” Miss Taplin, appalled by this announcement, took charge, of course, and we all three ran back to The Gunyah. I don’t remember details of what followed, except that Miss Taplin found that my brother, thanks to his fatness, had received only a shallow flesh wound. His next one was to be more serious — shrapnel in World War I. One piece of this he carried with him to his dying day; it was in his lung, very near his heart, and surgeons in those days hadn’t learnt to juggle with hearts as they do now.

There was another less dramatic occasion at The Gunyah that my sister and I never forgot. In those Victorian days castor oil was the cure for all childish tummy troubles. My mother went a step further and decided to use it as a prevention as well. When we were invited to a party she used to issue this ultimatum: “You may go to the party, but you must have a dose of castor oil afterwards. No party, no castor oil.” We usually plumped for the party, hoping, I suppose, that by some miracle the dreaded dose would not be forthcoming. My sister and I decided one day to dispense with the miracle and hide the castor oil bottle instead. The drawing room window curtains were heavy brocade affairs that fell to the floor, and we chose one of these as a hiding place. Halfway across the drawing room Nemesis overtook us. Whoever was carrying the bottle dropped it, and the cork came out. The floor was carpeted in plain, reseda green felt, and across its surface there spread a large oily stain. My mother had to hide this with a rug for the rest of our life at The Gunyah. My sister and I were never spanked, but a stern lecture from a loved and revered parent was a severe punishment.

The presiding angel of our early childhood at The Gunyah was our Irish cook, Bridget. She was a charming, gentle person who had been trained in Ireland as a village schoolteacher, but had migrated to Australia in her early twenties, and was with us
for eight years before she married. She was not only an excellent cook, but she loved and understood children. I can still remember waking one night from a nightmare, and trotting into the kitchen to be comforted by "Bidgie". She was sitting by the kitchen stove — a hospitable old fuel one, of course — and instead of leading me straight back to bed as my mother would have done, she took me onto her comfortable lap and read me a story out of *The Red Fairy Book*. I can even remember the title of the story: "The Good Little Mouse".

Another pleasant memory of Bridget is the habit she had of supplying us with titbits when we were tucked up in bed for the night — bathed, and our teeth cleaned. The grown-ups dined at night, waited on at table by the housemaid — complete in black dress, white apron, and cap with flowing streamers. When the vegetable dishes were returned to the kitchen, and if there happened to be any roast potatoes left, Bridget would bring us some. We would hear her conspiratorial whisper at our bedside: “Are ye awake?” “Yes, Bidgie!” “Here’s a roast potato for you!” Eagerly we would raise the mosquito net, and receive in grateful hands the delicious, greasy, lukewarm offering. Dental hygiene was not so much in the news then — our teeth were never recleaned after this supper. Vitamins also were still unknown. Our nursery evening meal consisted of mugs of milk, well-boiled because of typhoid, and slices of white bread and jam — no butter. However, we survived and grew.

In 1895 when we all went to England to visit my father’s parents at St. Fagans in Wales, Bridget went with us as our nurse. My brother was four years old when we left for “the old country”, as most Australians called it, and was the only one of our family party who didn’t look forward to the trip. He advised my mother to take plenty of “rag” with her, because “they mightn’t have any rag in England” — for making clothes! He also announced gloomily, in a sudden silence as our cab approached the ship: “Mrs. Sharpe’s ship broke”. Mrs. Sharpe, who was housekeeper at Hurlstone College, had once been shipwrecked. My brother at this time was clad, and looked, like a plump little Lord Fauntleroy. He was topped by a mop of curly hair that any Beatle might envy.
Professor Edgeworth David at Timor Crag in northern New South Wales in 1895. Much of his geological work was in the field.
Left to right: Billy, Madge, and Molly David at the time of their visit to their grandparents at St. Fagans, Cardiff, Wales, in 1895.
The rectory at St. Fagans, the home of the Reverend William David. “The rectory was a large, imposing house, and the garden sloped in immaculate grass terraces from the verandah flanking the drawing room, dining room, and study windows, down to the gate leading into a lane across which was my grandfather’s small church.”
Billy, Dr. W. Edgeworth David, at the age of four. "My brother at this time was clad, and looked, like a plump little Lord Fauntleroy. He was topped by a mop of curly hair that any Beatle might envy."
We had a happy time at St. Fagans where our grandfather, the Reverend William David, was rector. The rectory itself in those days was beautifully kept and run. It was a large, imposing house, and the garden sloped in immaculate grass terraces from the verandah flanking the drawing room, dining room, and study windows, down to the gate leading into a lane across which was my grandfather's small church. We must have been considered rather wild little colonials, but nevertheless as grandchildren of the rector acceptable enough socially to play with the Castle children. I'm afraid we led them astray sometimes. I remember how we managed to shed their German governess, who had been detailed to "mind" us all one day. We lured her into the castle maze, and then crawled out under the hedges, leaving her stranded inside while we went off on our unlawful occasions.

Once when the Castle family was not in residence, my grandfather decided to take us out for a jaunt on a pond in the gardens. There was a raft there, and a pole to go with it, and before taking us three children on board he tested its carrying capacity by getting on to it himself. Yes, it bore his weight all right, so he told us to come aboard, not foreseeing the possibility that our added weight might turn the scale. We obediently stepped aboard, he poled off, and the raft proceeded to sink slowly in water about up to his chest, but well over our heads. My brother went under, all but his hat; my sister as usual kept her head, saw that one end of the raft had swung round and was touching the shore onto which she stepped. I followed her. Grandfather, standing on the bottom of the pond, rescued my brother.

Grandfather David was not popular with my sister and myself, not because of the raft incident, but because he wrung the necks of blackbirds caught thieving under the net spread over the strawberry bed. And what strawberries they were! Enormous and delicious, and what five o'clock teas my grandmother presided over on the rectory verandah! There were often buckwheat cakes and real maple syrup, for my grandmother came from Canada.

We had a nursery on the top floor of the rectory, but hardly
ever used it. Our bedrooms were on the middle floor, and we were bathed there in hip-baths, highly polished brass and copper cans supplying the hot water which was carried upstairs from the kitchen by the unfortunate housemaids. Bathrooms in private houses were not considered a necessity in Victorian England; it was only in the colonies that we had them as a matter of course.

The London of those days I remember chiefly for its smells – coal fires and the stuffy insides of the growler cabs. There were no petrol fumes, of course, but a myriad chimney pots supplied the pea-soup fogs.

When we returned to Sydney after this visit, my mother began planning additions to The Gunyah which when completed obliterated most of the small front garden. There was to be a large drawing room, a study and a square entrance-hall, all opening into one another by folding doors. When these rooms were built, my parents gave a housewarming for them in the form of a Dickens party. To this every guest was to come dressed as a Dickens character, and there was a prize for the person who guessed correctly the greatest number of characters. This competition was not without its hazards. One guest, Mr. Robinson we’ll call him, was a clergyman who had asked to be excused from dressing up, and came in his ordinary clerical garb. He was a lean, dour-looking man with a slightly red nose, and soon after his arrival my mother overheard a lively woman, who was a stranger to him, address him thus: “Ah! I know who you are – Mr. Stiggins!” to which he mildly replied “No, I’m Mr. Robinson.” The lady retired in confusion, but later learnt, to her relief, that he was not a reader of Dickens.

The supper at this party was also Dickensian. My mother, assisted by a friend, hunted through her entire set of Dickens novels, making a note of any food or drink mentioned, because it all had to appear on the supper table. The pigeon pie caused a little difficulty, but was finally and successfully achieved, and was as popular as the punch, a big bowl of which was tackled by all and sundry, including us children. Fortunately it had the effect of making us sleepy instead of uproarious, and we were sent to bed early in the evening.
But before these additions to The Gunyah began, another upheaval in our lives occurred. In 1897 our parents left us for three months — my father to lead an expedition to Funafuti in the Ellice Islands to prove or disprove Darwin’s theory of the subsidence of coral atolls, and my mother to accompany him and see to his welfare. How we missed and longed for her! Victorian fathers, however kindly, were august beings, never really in touch with their children as mothers were. Home without our mother was indeed a desolate place. During our parents’ absence it was presided over by a trustworthy but dour and narrow Scottish woman whom we all disliked. I remember one occasion when I was in disgrace with her because I had failed to learn the “duty towards my neighbour” section of the catechism. Rather than submit to this woman’s stern authority I retired to the topmost branches of a pepper tree in the front garden, and refused to come down at her command. She was obliged to summon Bridget to her aid. “Bidgie”, who could charm a bird off a bough with her soft Irish brogue, charmed the fledgling me, and I descended into her arms.

My mother, who was a born pioneer, thoroughly enjoyed her three months on the coral atoll of Funafuti. She wrote a book about it afterwards, which was published by John Murray, and before me now is a letter written by her in 1898 to a friend in London who was seeing to the publishing of this book, Funafuti. There obviously had been some difficulty, caused by Victorian prudery, over sections of the book describing native customs. To quote from my mother’s letter, written after receiving news of its acceptance by John Murray:

The good news quite astonished me — for, in spite of all your kindly encouragement the little belief I ever had in my book had oozed out at my finger-tips, and I was feeling rejected — but, I’m glad to say not dejected. Now of course I’m just uproariously happy — It is nice to be taken by such a good firm . . . The purifying process will be a trying one for you — I thought I had toned down those passages enough. Professor Scott is much amused because he cut out a heap of nice but naughty things. The worst of it is that in considering the delicacy of the spiritual and
moral constitution of the British Public, one is apt to lose
the vividly truthful picture of the island as it really is. A
little wholesome truth might shock 'em, but might it not
prove bracing? . . . If I could afford it, I would publish all
the indelicate facts — because they are full of teaching
which is needed . . .

My mother was always avant garde in her opinions. This
expedition to Funafuti was isolated on its coral atoll, depending
entirely, in those pre-wireless days, on occasional shipping for
news of the outside world. The arrival of a ship was always a
great occasion, and when a government steamer, the Clyde,
arrived one day it was particularly exciting as it had picked up
on its way thirteen shipwrecked Norwegian sailors who had
been marooned on an island for ten months. The following
incident which my mother described in her book throws light
on her enterprising character. Before the Clyde left, the
Funafuti natives held a sing-sing in its honour. They danced and
sang first, and then their sub-chief, Opataia, courteously asked
the white people to perform, as the Funafutians would very
much like to know how the people of other countries
entertained themselves. A student member of the expedition
obligingly sang “Little Brown Jug” with great gusto, and this
went down very well. Then the Norwegian sailors sang some
glees beautifully, and two of them solemnly danced a waltz.
Both performances fell very flat, and my mother decided that
something more spirited must be provided for the lively
Funafutians. To quote her own words: “I felt I ought not to
shirk my duty but should do something for the general
amusement, and I succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. I
induced the lively old captain of the ‘Clyde’ to dance a
Highland Schottische with me. I must have looked crazy, with a
native wreath all askew on my head and a flaming red muslin
dressing gown on, cutting such undignified capers, but it
brought the house down.”

My mother became very fond of the Funafuti people, and
they, in turn, loved and revered her. One of them, a charming
girl called Vitolia, who had adopted her as “mother”, wrote the
following farewell letter to her from a school in Samoa where
she was suffering the pangs of separation from home and family:

To Mrs. David the Lady.
My love to you! Alas my mother! The thought weeps when I think of you, together with the others, because of your kindness to me. Alas for my love! My heart is ful of love, but it is difficult because I cannot speak, but I thought I would try and send this small piece of paper to make known to you my love. . . . May you return with blessing to your home! . . . Alas, my parents! — love is difficult! This letter is hurriedly written. May Jehovah be with us when we are separated. Goodbye!

Vitolia. May you live!

We were fortunate indeed that she did live, for on the return voyage from Funafuti to Fiji my mother was very ill with pleurisy. However, she convalesced in Suva, tended by good friends, and was able to finish the voyage to Sydney.

How delighted we were to have her back again, and how we all sat gazing at her, basking in her presence and sharing in her happiness at being home! What a warmhearted, out-going person she was! And how quick to help lame dogs over stiles! And, incidentally, how we sometimes suffered from it! Several of these occasions stand out in my memory. One concerned our first piano lessons. It so happened that the daughters of a well-known public figure, Sir Henry Parkes, in Sydney were left, when their father died, with debts instead of money as a legacy. My mother, who had received hospitality from the family before her marriage, hearing that one of the daughters was trying to earn her living as a music teacher, immediately engaged her to instruct all three of us. My brother — very young at the time, and rather spoilt, owing to the fact that he had had pneumonia and the doctor had said that he mustn't be allowed to cry — was pronounced, after his first piano lesson, to be too young to learn. He had insisted on playing with his bare toes instead of fingers. The poor lady — I can still hear her asthmatic breathing and the creak of her corsets — had no idea how to teach, and we were quickly bored. She tried to rouse my interest in the piano by promising to bring me "a noo toon on
Toosday" — Tuesday was music lesson day. But one Toosday I decided to be missing. My sister and I had bicycles at that time on which we were quite skilled performers. Ladies' bicycles, incidentally, in those days had guards over their hind wheels to prevent voluminous skirts catching in them. Cycling for women was still considered rather avant garde, but my mother was never deterred by public opinion from adopting ideas that she thought sensible, or spurning those she considered were not. Corsets, for instance, were de rigueur when my sister and I were in our teens, but my mother refused to allow us to wear them. They were unhealthy, she said, and women, by tight lacing, had sometimes cut their livers in two! Our girl contemporaries were shocked at this lack in us of what was considered a decent and necessary piece of clothing.

But to return to those music lessons. About ten minutes before the luckless Miss Parkes was due to arrive I sallied forth on my bicycle to ride up and down the Parramatta Road — in those days a blue-metalled, rather pot-holey affair patronized by a thin trickle of horse traffic — till I thought enough time had elapsed for Miss Parkes to have left, her patience exhausted. My absence, however, had caused no flutter in the household, presumably because my better-behaved sister had dropped a hint of my whereabouts, and I was dashed, on my return, to find Miss Parkes, creaking corsets and all, still waiting patiently by the piano. I don't think these lessons continued for more than a year.

Mentioning the Parramatta Road of those days recalls another and a sharper memory. In our very early childhood my father used to take us for Sunday walks. On the far side of the Parramatta Road was an area of bushland, known as Ramsay's Bush, and this was the district's most countrified terrain in which to take a walk. Then, as now, unfenced bush was considered by the general public a dumping place for rubbish, and one Sunday during our walk through Ramsay's Bush we came suddenly upon a dead horse. Someone had made an unsuccessful attempt to burn the corpse. I can still remember the shock and horror of this sight before my father hastily led us away. That night it took me a long time to get to sleep. Both
parents tried in vain to reason with and soothe me, but I was convinced that that dreadful half-burnt corpse was just outside my bedroom window. Ramsay’s Bush is now the suburb of Haberfield.

If those music lessons were purgatory, my first experience of school was hell. A friend of my mother’s who had a charming but difficult husband — he was a great favourite with us children — was forced to earn a living somehow, and started a little “dame-school” in an adjacent suburb. My mother at once decided to help by sending all three of us to swell the classes, though it meant a train journey there and back. My sister, of course, was in charge of us. She was not only capable, but had a strong sense of justice, and I well remember her laying out the school bully, a boy older than herself in a brief but decisive battle.

All went well with us at this little school till I put my foot in it one day. Our teacher, during a lesson, made a statement — I forget what — that I knew to be wrong, and I tactlessly piped up and corrected her: “But Daddy says, etc., etc.” There was a ghastly silence in the classroom. I was reprimanded coldly, and from that moment became a target for the teacher’s sarcasm and ridicule. Being a shy and sensitive child, I suffered agonies, and though my sister was worried about the situation, it never occurred to either of us to confide in our parents. Week after week went by, and my persecution continued till one day our Uncle Arthur, Archdeacon David, came down from Brisbane for a visit. He happened to be present one morning when my mother was sending us off to catch our train to school. He was astonished at my behaviour. Weeping bitterly I clung to the foot of a brass bedstead while my hat was put on, and my satchel slung over my shoulder, and when I had to be wrenched away and reprimanded, he intervened, and told my mother that something must be drastically wrong for the child to behave like that. My mother questioned us, and my sister explained. She was then entrusted with a note to be given to our teacher right at the end of the day — on no account before. How my mother worded the announcement that her children were leaving the school immediately, I don’t know, but it
caused only a passing coolness between her friend and herself. At the close of the school day the note was duly handed in, and we left the school for ever that very afternoon, and oh! the glorious feeling of being free! Incidentally, there was a sequel to this episode. About sixteen years later this same teacher, who was a good and usually kind person, apologized to me for her cruelty. It had been on her conscience all those years!

Another of my mother's kindnesses was to the son of an acquaintance who was starting his career as a dentist. I was sent along as a small child to help boost the practice, and he extracted one of my second teeth in mistake for a first one — fortunately very much to the side of my mouth.

Somewhere about the time of that Funafuti expedition, our parents took in a boarder, a colleague of my fathers', a professor on the Arts side of the University. He was a large, shy, heavily bearded Englishman, recently arrived from "the old country", and my parents housed him while he looked about for an establishment of his own. We three children had never met a beard at close quarters before, and at breakfast (the only meal we shared with the grown-ups) were fascinated and repelled by it. To this day I am strongly prejudiced against all beards, and I think it is owing to the memory of that particular one. P. G. Wodehouse has a piece in one of his stories about a beard whose owner successfully steered spaghetti or something through the jungle to his mouth. Our bearded professor was not such a skilled pilot, and we used to watch, fascinated, while he ate.

There was an old man with a beard
Who breakfasted just as we feared;
Bits of toast and of cereal
Egg and other material
Have all lodged themselves in his beard.

As a matter of fact it was really porridge (cereal had not been invented) that was the chief offender, but nothing seemed to rhyme with it, so I had to make do with cereal. I think it is not only the lack of cleanliness — the idea that they are harbingers of dirt — that puts one off beards, but the fact that they often
hide a person’s character. Eyes have been called the windows of the soul, but mouths, I think, are more revealing, and beards act as venetian blinds to them, masking a weak or peevish or a cruel one.

My mother, who up to that brief dame-school period had taught us herself, now decided that my sister and I should not go to any school, and she engaged a governess for us. Miss Wilson had a pleasant voice with a slight Scottish accent, and grounded us well in mathematics, French and Latin grammar, history, and geography. A love and knowledge of English literature was inculcated in us by my father who read aloud to us in the evening whenever he could spare the time. We were introduced at an early age to Ivanhoe (my father wisely omitting any long descriptions of scenery) and to Conan Doyle’s The White Company, and other tales of knightly derring-do. My sister, who learnt to read at a very early age, devoured Micah Clarke when she was six. Our childish games were often concerned with mediaeval knights and friars, bows and arrows, spears and battle-axes. As saintly hermits we fasted (between meals) on dry bread and water. The backyard of The Gunyah didn’t lend itself to jousting, nor did my sister and I ever contemplate fighting one another. In our imagination we were always shoulder to shoulder against a common enemy. I think my father chose those historical novels not only because he liked them himself, but because of the principles they upheld – integrity, courage, and compassion. Years later we were introduced by a friend of the family to Uncle Remus, and I remember my father’s obvious though unspoken disapproval of these tales, the hero of which invariably triumphed not by valour but by cunning. Perhaps my father thought that children might be led by them to look upon smart dealings as something to be admired. We children revelled in them, because they were funny. Oddly enough, the grown-ups, including my father, thought the Alice in Wonderland books funny. Personally I found “The Walrus and the Carpenter”, for instance, revolting. I believe I even shed tears over the fate of the oysters. To me the walrus and the carpenter were the baddies, and the simple-minded, trusting little oysters the goodies. What was funny
about their death? An early example, I suppose, of “sick”
humour.

My brother, at the age of eight and a half, was sent to Sydney
Grammar School. He came home from his first day there
somewhat bruised and battered, for when the other older boys
discovered that he didn’t conform to Australian standard
speech, but had an “English accent”, he was promptly knocked
down a long flight of stone steps. Thereafter he wisely became
bilingual, speaking Australian at school, and English at home.

Miss Wilson was a great success. We all liked and respected
her, and thanks to her sound teaching, my sister and I both
succeeded in matriculating at the age of fifteen. But that is
leaping ahead.

Somewhere about the time of her appointment to our
schoolroom, my parents bought a property at Woodford in the
Blue Mountains. It consisted of twenty-six acres of wild
bushland, chiefly gully, with a weatherboard cottage on the
upper flat part. This was to be our holiday home, an escape
from the moist heat of the Sydney summer to crisp mountain
air.
This cottage my parents named Tyn-y-coed, which I believe is Welsh for “hut in the bush” or something equivalent. The building itself was a typical outback dwelling — two gabled rooms in front, two lean-tos at the back, and a passage down the middle. Very unimaginative. It was not long before my mother set to work on this country residence. She managed to find a reliable bush carpenter, and under her direction he began bursting out the cottage in all directions, adding a room here and a verandah there, whenever she had saved enough money for the purpose. On cutting down some scrub it was discovered that the cottage had been built with its back to the only view possible, which was a distant one of the Kurrajong Mountains. So, naturally, my mother had the new front of the house built to face the view.

To begin with the cottage was equipped with only one 400 gallon tank as its sole water supply. In one drought-stricken summer we were buying water at sixpence a bucket from a man who owned a well. After that my mother began adding 1,000 gallon tanks to the house, so that eventually we had an adequate water supply.

About a mile from our cottage down a rough bush track was a large, picturesque water hole known as The Pool. It was about ten feet deep at one end, had a sandy bottom, a waterfall above it surrounded by ferns, and was well populated with crayfish, or yabbies. We learnt to swim in this pool.

I think our holidays at Woodford, as very young children, were an important stage in our lives, because we lived close to the earth there. When I say “earth” I don’t mean ploughed fields and hedges, but the primitive, untouched earth. It was poor country but we came to know intimately whatever flowers,
Tyn-y-coed, our "hut in the bush" at Woodford, before Mrs. David set to work on it. "The building itself was a typical outback dwelling—two gabled rooms in front, two lean-tos at the back, and a passage down the middle."
Tyn-y-coed increased in size like the trees surrounding it because of Mrs. David's insatiable urge to build extensions.
trees, and shrubs grew there, and the small life that inhabited it—little rough lizards, for instance, some of which we tamed and kept for a while in tins. They would sit quietly in our hands, or run up our arms. There were dignified beetles, known to us as “Lord Blacks”, and under overhanging sandstone rocks ant lions which dug minute pits in the sandy soil for the unwary ant to slither down into waiting jaws. I’m afraid we sometimes pushed a little black ant over the edge of a pit, because it was exciting to see how the ant lion catapulted sand up the sides to knock its prey down to the apex of the inverted cone.

We had enemies in the bush too, snakes and bulldog ants. Though there were plenty of the former about—tiger snakes, black snakes, and death-adders—we seldom came across them. When Tyn-y-coed became our permanent home, as it eventually did, we kept fowls, and on one occasion I heard them uttering the awed sounds that hens make as a warning. I left the front verandah—a large, very wide affair that had sprouted from what used to be the rear of the original cottage—to investigate, and saw the hens standing in a circle, beaks pointing down at something in their midst. It was a death-adder, so I hailed my mother who was dicing in the garden close by, and she, being armed with a spade, soon finished it off. It was the only death-adder we ever saw at Woodford. I once shot a black snake there, but this was when I was grown up and promoted to a .22 rifle.

When we were quite small we were allowed to own tomahawks, and became reasonably good axemen. We did sometimes damage ourselves with these weapons, but never seriously, and they served as an apprenticeship to the axe, a tool we could all use with skill when we grew up. To this day I get a thrill watching skilled axemen at agricultural shows, competing in various tree-felling events.

Bulldog ants are ferocious creatures, dark purple in colour and about an inch long. They are plucky little things, and will confront mountainous human beings, challenging them to battle. They stand, back bent at the waist, head raised and jaws open, turning to face their enemy as he moves. If a small enemy approaches, they will seize it in these powerful jaws, and then
bend round their abdomen in which is located their sting, or pair of stylets. These are then stabbed into the enemy, and believe me it is a painful experience. This weapon, unlike the bee's sting, can be retracted for further use. Their nests, built of earth, are mounds about a foot high, with a rather poor attempt at camouflage in the shape of leaves, sticks, and pebbles scattered over them. We discovered that ants from the same nest would not attack one another, so when we arranged our game of gladiators in an arena, we had to get ants from different mounds. The arena was built of damp sand, with walls leaning slightly inward to prevent the warriors scaling them. There were two entrances to it, and these were closed by gates made of small pieces of perforated zinc cut from a discarded meat-safe. Collecting the warriors was a tricky business, because we had bare feet. The technique was to approach a nest armed with a thin stick about a foot long. There was usually a sentry ant stationed at the entrance to the nest. We would prod him with the stick, and he would immediately run up it to attack the hand holding it. By changing the stick quickly from hand to hand we would carry the warrior safely to the arena, where he would be shaken off into a glass jar. Then a sentry from another nest would be collected. At an imaginary fanfare of trumpets the two arena gates would be opened, the ants pushed through and the gates reclosed. At first the warriors would explore their enclosure, looking for a way of escape, but sooner or later they would meet, and then the battle began. They would clinch and manoeuvre to sting one another, and sometimes they would fight to the death. What bloodthirsty little brutes we were! We used these ants in other ways. They served as lions in a miniature zoo, and one hot day we found that our bulldog ant lion, being composed of chitinous material, had been baked quite brittle by the sun in his wire cage. Bulldog ant jam, which I thought would look like blackcurrant, was literally a wash-out, as the poor insects melted into clear liquid.

Over these gruesome experiments my sister and I never had the least twinge of guilt — in fact we never thought about it from the ants' point of view at all. I suppose it didn't occur to us that they could feel.
While we were still young children, and before the new kitchen had been built at Tyn-y-coed, the old one was presided over for a time by a hired help who was a rather slatternly woman with a baby. It was impossible to get good, well-trained help to live in such an out-of-the-way country place. The stove in this old kitchen was what was known as a "colonial" oven. An open fire burnt both on top of the oven and underneath it, and neither was protected by bars of any sort. The fuel, of course, was wood. One day when my mother was absent in town, our hired help had retired with her baby to her bedroom for an afternoon nap, leaving the kitchen fire burning. To save stoking she had put one end of a long piece of wood on the upper fire, its other end resting on the wood-box at the side of the stove. The fire slowly consumed this piece of wood right down to the wood-box which, naturally, burnt too and set alight the wooden wall against which it stood. The woman, hearing an unusually loud crackling sound, emerged from her bedroom, saw the conflagration, seized her baby, and fled shrieking from the house. We three children heard her, and came to investigate. My sister immediately took charge—she was about thirteen at the time—and organized us into a bucket-bearing chain. From a tank close to the kitchen we passed buckets to one another, and hurled water over the kitchen wall. By this time, though, the ceiling was alight, so my sister climbed into the roof through a manhole in the sitting room ceiling. I think she managed this by improvising a step ladder with a table and a chair on top of it. My brother and I handed buckets of water up to her, and she crawled along the rafters and poured water over the burning ceiling. The fire was somehow extinguished, though the kitchen was considerably damaged. Later, when the fire insurance people came to inspect it, they were so impressed by our feat that they presented us children with ten pounds as a reward—quite a handsome sum in those days. Of course, if there had been a high wind blowing at the time of this fire nothing could have saved the house. We were lucky.

Not very long after the purchase of this holiday home, a friend who lived in Fiji asked our parents if they would take a
small Fijian princess to be educated with us. Her father was anxious for her to have the advantage of a European education. Our parents consented, the child was sent to Sydney by steamer, and my mother met her here at the wharf. Elenoa Mila Vuniwanqua Lala (I'm not sure of the spelling of the two middle names) was a pretty child of eleven years old, and carried herself with the poise and dignity that seem to be part of a South Sea Islander's heritage.

Having left the ship, my mother took her shopping. The child had never been in a big city before, and the traffic must have been an alarming experience, but not by the blink of an eyelash did she relax her calm dignity. I think the old square-engined, choo-chooing steam trams of my very early childhood had by that time been superseded by electric ones, though their old cars remained the same for some time. These were divided into a series of compartments set at right angles to the length of the car, and each compartment had a door at either end. The tram conductor, or ticket collector, walked his beat precariously on the outside of the tram, his feet on a running board and vertical hand-bars interspersed at intervals providing a hand-hold as he travelled along the near side of the moving car, trusting to balance as he punched tickets and handed out change. He seemed miraculously to avoid being scraped off the running board by packs of vehicles herded between footpath and tramway. Transport workers put up with a lot in those days.

But to return to Elenoa and her arrival in Sydney. The only time that her tense self-control gave way for one brief moment was in a lift, when what she thought was solid ground beneath her suddenly shot upwards. Her only reaction to this was to put out a hand and grasp my mother's.

Elenoa had very little English when she first came to us, but was lightning quick to learn. We all loved her, and she fitted into our household at once, and became part of the family. I suppose she must have been homesick sometimes, but she had a keen sense of humour and was a jolly companion. Her father used to send her presents which were sometimes embarrassing. A large sack of unhusked coconuts was not a great problem, as my mother had brought back from Funafuti a husking-stick.
which was thrust into the ground in The Gunyah’s backyard. The outer husks could be split on this, but I’m afraid a good many of the coconuts went mouldy eventually.

A more problematic gift was a large, live turtle. My father had to take delivery of this from the ship in which it arrived. It was, of course, not possible in The Gunyah’s small backyard to accommodate, slaughter, and butcher a large turtle. He solved this problem by transporting the turtle, in a hansom cab, to a restaurant in the city competent to turn it into soup and steaks. Some, I believe, was reserved for Elenoa. I wonder if the present-day equivalent of a cabby would receive a large live turtle in his taxi? In the boot, perhaps, and depending on his personality.

We were all thrilled, during the summer holidays at Woodford, by Elenoa’s skill as a swimmer in our mountain pool. We used to picnic on the banks of this, and the pièce de résistance of our lunch was always crayfish boiled in a billy, and eaten with bread and butter. Elenoa seemed to be just as comfortable under water as above it, and was an expert fisherwoman. No line baited with raw meat for her! She swam about under water, and pounced quickly on her prey. She would emerge with one crayfish in her teeth and another in her hand. I can well recall her beaming smile as she shook the water from her fuzzy dark hair.

We once tried cooking tadpoles, but only the tails of these were edible — the rest being entrails — and it took a lot of tadpoles to make a mouthful, so we gave that up.

The only time that I remember seeing Elenoa really angry was when we were all dressed for a party. We loved parties, and fortunately before Elenoa came to stay with us my mother had decided that we had outgrown the castor oil treatment, so our pleasure was unalloyed. On this occasion my sister and I were in white muslin with pale blue sashes, and wore thin gold necklets with turquoise pendants. My mother had dressed Elenoa in some richly coloured material, finished off with a red coral necklace, and she looked magnificent, but was furious at not being dressed exactly as we were. She wrenched off the necklace and threw it on the floor. My mother somehow
managed to pacify her; the necklace was resumed and so was Elenoa's good temper.

Another memory of Elenoa was an occasion on which we were all taken as a great treat to a matinee of the Maskelyne and Devant conjuring show. Our party, including Elenoa, enjoyed it immensely until the trick of cutting in half a bespangled lady. Elenoa watched this performance with mounting horror, and at the climax rose up in her seat announcing with dignity: "That lady die. I go now!" We hastily pushed her down, assuring her in loud whispers that it was only a trick, but she was not convinced till the spangled lady reappeared, all in one piece, smiling and bowing to the audience's applause. Strange ideas of humour these Europeans have!

When she had been with us for over a year, she returned to Fiji for a visit to her parents, and we never saw her again. While there, she developed pneumonia and feeling hot because of her high temperature, went swimming. There was, of course, no penicillin in those days. The news of her death came as a shock and a grief to us, for we looked upon her as our sister.

Not very long after we lost Elenoa, we came to live permanently at Woodford, governess and all. I think The Gunyah was let to Miss Wilson's family with whom my father boarded during the week. Woodford was about fifty-four miles from Sydney, and the western railway at that time was a single line, trains passing one another at sidings. The station at Woodford was a rough wooden platform with a small shelter-shed perched in its middle, and a stalwart young girl acted as stationmistress. There were passenger trains three times a day, to and from the city. I have a vivid recollection of a funeral service held at this station one hot summer's day. A neighbour of ours, whose family lived at Woodford House, a large stone, convict-built place that was a boardinghouse then, died of typhoid fever. The coffin was carried down to the station where an elderly clergyman was to read the funeral service — there was no church at Woodford at the time. However, when the old man arrived at the station, he discovered that he had come without his spectacles, and couldn't read the prayer book. The train that was to carry the coffin to Sydney was due in ten minutes, and
*Left to right:* Madge, Miss Stockfelt, Arthur (brother of Edgeworth David), Mrs. Edgeworth David, Molly, Bridget Devereux, and Billy, by the Pool at Woodford in the Blue Mountains, about 1896.
Molly David in Sydney, about 1900.
consternation reigned till my mother stepped into the breach, and taking the prayer book from the trembling and agitated old man, read the service for him. She was always a tower of strength in a crisis.

And while on the subject of church services, it was during our childhood at Tyn-y-coed that my sister and I were confirmed. It is orthodox for children to be prepared for this by a clergyman, but my mother obtained special permission to instruct us herself. She held very strong anti-hell opinions, and was afraid we might be introduced to the devil and church doctrine relating to him. For this reason we were never allowed to attend Sunday school either.

Our mail at Woodford was sorted by the keeper of a small general store which was also the local post office, and once a day we would walk down to this to collect our letters.

When I was about twelve, a dream of my life was realized. Our parents bought a couple of ponies for us to ride. They were mischievous and adorable — a bay with black points called Monty, and a smaller one, a chestnut called Bobby. Monty was an ingenious person; if he was tied to a fence by a halter he would undo the knot of this with his teeth. There was a stable built — I’m sure my mother was delighted at the need to get a little more building done — with two stalls and room for a village cart, the latter acquired soon after the ponies. There was a 400-gallon tank attached to the stables, and this had a “key” tap with a spanner that could be removed when required, but was not till one day Monty helped himself to a drink. He pulled or pushed the key spanner with his mobile top lip till it was in the “on” position, and the water flowed. I arrived on the scene in time to see him pawing a hole under the tap with his hoof — presumably to hollow out a drinking trough. Fortunately the tank wasn’t completely drained, and after this episode the key spanner, when not in use, was kept above the door of one of the stalls.

My sister and I had one saddle between us, so we both learnt to ride bareback. My mother’s sidesaddle, treasured from Hurlstone College days, was available, but was too large for the ponies, and anyhow we preferred to ride astride.
There was only one road at Woodford in those days, and this was the main western one, known then as the Bathurst Road. Most of it followed the old original route taken by the early explorers, and all the little townships were dotted along it and the railway line that ran alongside it.

One day when my sister and I were out riding about a mile from home, and were about to emerge from a bush track onto the Bathurst Road, we heard the sound of raucous male voices singing. We approached cautiously, and peering through the scrub, saw a cart drawn by a thin, underfed horse. One wheel was off the road in a shallow ditch, and the horse was too weak to pull the cart out of this. There were two men in it, and one was beating the horse with a length of barbed wire, singing in time to the blows. Horrified, we turned our ponies and galloped back home to relate the dreadful episode. It so happened that shortly after we left, a mounted trooper on patrol came across this cart and its occupants, but they had seen him coming in time to stop beating the horse and throw away the length of barbed wire. He stopped, and seeing the condition of the horse, questioned the men. I don’t know what explanation of its wounds they gave, but the trooper was not satisfied. He questioned people along the road, which in those days was a lonely one. Eventually he heard that my sister and I had actually witnessed the beating of the horse. The men were arrested, and we were escorted by my mother to Katoomba police station to give evidence before the magistrate. Only my sister’s was needed, fortunately, as she was her usual clear-headed self, courtroom or no courtroom, whereas I was half paralyzed with fright at the whole proceedings. On her evidence, and that of a silent witness — the horse — the two men were convicted and punished. My sister was about fourteen at the time.

When the ponies had to be reshod, I used to take them down the winding road eight miles to the nearest smithy, which was at Springwood, riding Monty, and leading Bobby by a halter. I loved watching the blacksmith at work, and was not even repelled by the smell of singeing hoof. There was a blacksmith’s boy, too, whom I thought the epitome of manly beauty as he...
stood working the bellows in the fierce glare of the forge.

For some reason I was always the one to see to the ponies' welfare. I remember on one occasion it was necessary to administer a drench to Monty, who had a tapeworm. I managed this affair by putting a halter on him, throwing the lead of this over a rafter in his stall and pulling it till his head was in a raised position, thus enabling the drench to trickle down his throat by means of gravity, after which his head was lowered. He must have been cooperative, because it seemed to be quite a simple business.

There were various alarums and excursions connected with the ponies. When my mother happened to be in town one day I thought it would be fun to walk the ponies through the house, from the kitchen down a long narrow passage to the sitting room, and out onto the front verandah. Monty was of slender build and managed it all right, brushing the walls on either side as he obediently followed me through, but Bobby was much fatter, and halfway down the passage he stuck — I think in what had once been a doorway and was narrower than the rest. It took me a long time, exercising considerable ingenuity, to back him out into the kitchen. On another occasion Monty got loose from his bush paddock where the stables were, and found his way to the feed shed, the door of which opened inwards. He pushed this open and was busy at a chaff sack when I discovered him. I uttered a wrathful yell, he panicked and backed, pulling the door to with him, jamming his head as it tried to shut. He only pulled the harder, and went down on his knees in the effort to free himself. Fortunately the bush carpenter happened to be at hand — there was usually something to be added to the place in the way of an out-house or a verandah — and he freed Monty by hoisting him up by the hindquarters and pushing him forward till the door flew open and released him.

The village cart was very useful. It was a boxlike two-wheeled vehicle with a fairly high-slung chassis, and a sliding seat. It held two people comfortably, and we used to drive four miles further west up the road to the nearest township to shop. Both ponies went quite well in harness. One wild winter's evening just
as it was getting dark, Miss Wilson and my sister were returning from this township (Lawson), when they stopped not far from the turn off to Tyn-y-coed, which was across a wide, grassy clearing. Miss Wilson had gone into a small general store, and my sister was waiting in the cart — Monty’s responsibility that day — in a place where the Bathurst Road and the single line ran very close together. Darkness had fallen, and presently my sister heard a goods train approaching, puffing noisily up a steep incline. She knew it would soon emerge close to her from a cutting — the firebox was open, and a magnificent glare from it could be seen above the walls of the cutting. She knew Monty’s opinion of trains in the daytime, but at night . . . ! She dismounted from the cart, and went to his head to soothe him. The iron horse, breathing fire and panting noisily, emerged from the cutting, Monty threw off my sister’s restraining hands, and bolted. He was too frightened to notice the home turnoff, but galloped on down the road, pursued by the empty, clattering cart, which no doubt urged him to keep going, like a tin can tied to a dog’s tail. Fortunately the road was empty, and he managed to take the many bends in it successfully, till a few miles further on he left it for a sweep of grassland known as Bull’s Camp, with a quarry in it. He missed the top of the quarry by a few feet, entered the bush, and was halted by a wheel catching on a stump. This held him prisoner till he was run to earth the next morning by a mounted trooper, and returned to us miraculously undamaged — the cart also in one piece.

One day I had been sent to Lawson to buy vegetables, accompanied by a young girl who was our hired help at the time, and Bobby was in the shafts of our village cart. On our return from this excursion we were bowling merrily down a long hill just outside the town when, to my consternation, I saw a large sheet of newspaper ahead of us lying in the middle of the road. Knowing his shying capacity I tried to slow Bobby, but he had a mouth of iron. Arrived at the paper, he swerved violently, overturning both himself and the cart. Thanks to the sliding seat which slid right out of its grooves, the girl and I were thrown clear. We landed in a sandy patch among sandstone rocks, accompanied by the seat and a shower of pumpkins and
potatoes. Bobby righted himself and the cart, and continued on his homeward way, but was captured about a hundred yards further on by one of the men in a fettlers’ camp. The railway line at this time was being duplicated, and there were fettlers’ camps, complete with wives and children, at intervals along the road. We collected our scattered vegetables, and drove sedately home.

When we first acquired Monty, and before Bobby was bought, my mother heard that the people who now owned her old riding horse, Bunyip, wanted to get rid of him; he was too old for work of any sort. She sent for him to come to Tyn-y-coed for what remained of his life. He was to share the bush paddock with Monty, and this he did for a time. He was a great pet with us children; we used to take him for walks, and he led a quiet, happy life till it was disrupted by violence. I came round the corner of the house one morning at the exact moment when Monty lashed out at him with a vicious hind hoof. Bunyip uttered a dreadful scream, and fell to the ground with a broken leg. A man was engaged to shoot and bury him, and while this was taking place my mother took us all for a long walk, far enough away to be out of earshot of the gun.

This was the second tragedy among our pets. The first was when we were very small children at The Gunyah. At that time our only pet was a beloved cat called Tabby. His tail was broken one day by a dog, and needed amputating. In those days veterinary surgeons were not to be found every two miles or so, and my father put Tabby in a basket and took him to the university. At the Medical School there a Dr. Charles Martin (later Sir Charles Martin of the Lister Institute), who was a friend of my father’s, kindly undertook to amputate the tail. A small dose of chloroform was administered — perhaps not quite small enough. Whatever the cause, Tabby never regained consciousness, and my father had to return home with an empty basket to face a row of eager little cat lovers anxious to welcome back their darling Tabby.

Riding astride in those early days was still considered rather “unwomanly”. My mother, when she accompanied my father on a field excursion to Kosciusko, rode astride in a very seemly
divided skirt, and this was considered quite dashing. There were only bush tracks on Kosciusko at that time, and except for bullock drays, a saddle horse was the only means of transport.

One day when I was riding down the road at Woodford, a navvy working on the railway line who was evidently imbued with Victorian ideas about women’s behaviour, called out something to me about why didn’t I ride sidesaddle like a decent girl. Never having been spoken to like that before by a rough stranger, my morale was shattered. I had not my mother’s nor my sister’s courage. The next time I went out on Monty I unearthed Bunyip’s big sidesaddle, and put it on him. He had a habit, when being saddled, of taking a deep breath, holding it till the girth was tightened, and then letting it go, which meant, of course, that the girth was then quite slack. I usually thwarted his trick by giving him a sudden slap which made him catch his breath, and then I would tighten the girth quickly before he could repeat his trick. However, in this case, slap or no slap, the girth on the sidesaddle was still not tight enough. I rode gingerly down the road as far as the general store, with Miss Wilson following in the village cart, as we had shopping to do. At the store where we stopped, I dismounted to try to tighten the girth. As I stepped to the ground the big sidesaddle slid part of the way with me. I was standing by Monty, about to push it back into place, when he upped with a hind hoof and caught me smack in the chest with it. I fell to the ground unconscious. I don’t think I was actually out for more than a few seconds, but the unpleasant part about the affair was that when I came to I was quite blind. Miss Wilson and various bystanders – probably among them the navvy who was responsible for the accident – rallied round. I was hoisted into the village cart and driven home, still seeing nothing but a red haze till I was nearly there. I think my heart had had a considerable jar, and I was suffering from shock. My mother didn’t think the accident called for a doctor, and in any case the nearest one was eight miles away, and his only transport a horse and sulky. Apparently no bones were broken, and no skin either, so the treatment was bed till the following day. For years afterwards I could never sleep on my left side, and for several weeks after, I was troubled at night.
by a sensation of falling down a big black shaft dotted with sparks of light, just as I was drifting off to sleep. I was not allowed to go out riding for some time after this, and Monty waxed fat and indolent. I don’t think he had meant to kick me, but was only trying to rid himself of the bulky sidesaddle.

Looking back on the Woodford days of my teens, I realize how very much our lives were dominated by my mother. Seething with vitality that had somehow to find an outlet, she was always trying something new, in religion, in diet, or in physical culture. Easily the most worrying of these to my sister and myself was her involvement in various religious sects. All were tried and found wanting — Christadelphians, Methodists, Seventh Day Adventists, Unitarians, Quakers, Baptists. I remember that it was with difficulty we persuaded her not to be rebaptized by complete immersion, which we felt would be not only unnecessary but undignified. Children are very sensitive about their parents’ behaviour.

My mother had for many years suffered from migraine, and while we were at Woodford was persuaded (probably by one of her Seventh Day Adventist friends) to try vegetarianism as a remedy. The result of this was that we all had to become vegetarians for one year. My sister and I were told that we might return to carnivorous habits at the end of this period, if we wished. My mother’s migraine disappeared, and she remained a vegetarian for many years afterwards, but the rest of us returned to a normal diet. It was during this vegetarian year that my mother, who always made our bread at Tyn-y-coed, decided that it should be of the unleavened variety, and whole meal at that. Our digestions were young enough and tough enough to cope with this, though it was pretty heavy going. Fortunately after a while she returned to the normal loaf raised with yeast. There are still bread makers in our family. I always make mine, and one of my nieces, Anne, makes hers. Indeed, she has a son who likes it so much that he too has learnt to make it, and does so when his mother happens to be away. A great-niece is another of the family who makes excellent bread. Most of us dislike the elastic, doughy, tasteless stuff produced commercially and popular with the average consumer.
But I must go back in time. My mother’s physical culture craze was much more acceptable to us than the diet one, and we enthusiastically wielded the heavy iron, spring-grip dumbbells that she bought, and pulled conscientiously at the tough elastic chest-expander that was screwed into the wall. Accompanying these physical culture activities there developed a fresh-air craze. My mother had all the bedroom windows removed, and I remember one indignant weekend guest (a university professor) protesting about this. It happened to be winter time, with a cold wind blowing. My mother laughingly accused him of being a Sybarite, but I believe my father replaced the window for him.

Outside the house were other activities. My mother was an enthusiastic gardener. Just as she planned extensions to the house, so did the area of cultivation outside it increase. She was chiefly interested in the utilitarian side of gardening, and not only produced most of our vegetables, but had a large orchard planned, drained scientifically with agricultural drainpipes, and planted with a variety of fruit trees. Besides apples, pears, and peaches there was a greengage, a prune plum, a persimmon, a hedge of filbert nuts, and one of Kentish cherries. They all seemed to flourish.

At one time she invested in a cow. It was called Penelope, and of course she learnt to milk it. We had, during Penelope’s stay with us, a marvellous “daily” who revelled in work. I remember her objecting to the small size of the wash one Monday, and whipping quilts off the beds to make it look like a “real wash”. She also milked Penelope much more efficiently than my mother, when the latter had to be absent in town. Certainly an unusual daily, even for those days.

To this day, bushfires are a hazard that Blue Mountains dwellers live with. These mountains are not really mountains at all, but a big plateau riddled with deep valleys and shallower gullies. These valleys and gullies act as funnels when a strong wind blows, and if a bushfire starts, God help the mountain people! We had our share of bad times, but Tyn-y-coed was lucky enough to survive till the 1930s. We were no longer living there then, and it was let to a man who was helping a neighbour
fight to save his home, when the wind veered and Tyn-y-coed, undefended, went up in flames, leaving nothing but the usual residue of brick chimneys and hearths.

Outside our front gate was a wide hill-top of treeless land, the grass on it very short, and when threatened by a bad fire one year when my sister and I were in our teens, we had to carry what valuables we could out of the house and onto the comparative safety of this bare hill-top.

"Don't try to save anything big!" commanded my mother, "There's no time!" My sister, having rushed all the small stuff she could think of — books, clothing etc. — onto this sanctuary, seized a couple of chairs, and was hurrying up to the hill-top with them when she met my mother, who greeted her indignantly with: "I told you there's no time to save the big things!", and snatching the chairs from her carried them back to the house! When we later told this story against her, my mother refused to believe it. She must have been much more strung-up at the time than she realized. A bushfire exploding through treetops before a high westerly is an extremely unpleasant sight and sound.

Though most of our friends were university people, I remember one couple who were not. They spent a weekend with us at Tyn-y-coed. The husband, who was a big, bluff country man, was not only an interesting raconteur of incidents in his outback life, but was also a skilled hypnotist. The only one of his yarns I remember was about a boundary rider. In those far-off days it was a lonely job on a big property, and he told us of a man called Joe whose mind had become a little unhinged through living for months at a time without human contact. The owner of the property rode into Joe's camp one day, and seeing half a sheep's carcase hanging on a fence, inquired what it was doing there. Joe explained that when he killed a sheep for meat, the crows in the neighbourhood would come and sit on the fence, and glare at him, calling a long-drawn-out request for "Ha-a-alves, Joe! Ha-a-alves, Joe!" till he couldn't stand it any longer, and had to give them what they asked.

At the time of these people's visit, we had a very nice, rather
shy young girl as "lady-help", who was a willing subject for hypnotism, and I remember a rather peculiar posthypnotic suggestion that our friend gave her. Just before he woke her from a "sleep", he said "when you wake you won't remember a word of what I've told you, but when I rub my hands together, you will go over to that umbrella that is standing in the corner, and put it up."

Well, she came to from her sleep, and picked up her sewing — we were all sitting round the fire talking, knitting or sewing. About five minutes later our hypnotist friend walked over to the fire, and rubbed his hands together. "Cold night, isn't it?" he said. Our young lady-help who had been hypnotized put down her sewing, looking puzzled. Then she walked over to the umbrella, picked it up and looked about her hesitatingly. Over one of the doors in the room was a shelf from which curtains hung. She went over to this, and threw the umbrella up onto it. She had obviously translated "putting up" not as the hypnotist intended — he had meant her to open it. His words, but not his meaning, had penetrated her mind.

My sister was by this time growing into a charming and attractive girl, very feminine and much admired by the few young men of our acquaintance in the district. She and I sat for what was then known as the matriculation examination, and passed. At about seventeen my sister began her Arts course at Sydney University, and so did I at fifteen. I think this was a mistake — to allow me to accompany my sister — but I hated being separated from her, and I suppose I coaxed my parents into allowing me to start my Arts course at the same time.
As Woodford was so far from Sydney, my mother rented two rooms for us in the house of a friend, close to the university, but for the most part we were to look after ourselves. I’m afraid she attributed to us more sense than we possessed. We had one meal a day, I think, with the owners of the house, but ate mostly out of tins, their contents washed down with cocoa heated on a spirit lamp. My sister took her university work seriously, but I didn’t. As winter approached I became a Rugby fan, and attended football matches with more enthusiasm than lectures. One cold, wet winter’s day I spent an afternoon at the oval watching a match, my shoes sodden with rain. On returning to our lodging I didn’t bother to change them, but sat trying to study, my head hot, and my feet icy. The next day I was down with pneumonia. There were no antibiotics, of course, at that time. My mother was sent for, and a doctor — a female one, as my mother had great sympathy for and confidence in those courageous pioneer women who were receiving rough treatment at the hands of their male colleagues. This doctor managed to pull me through a very serious illness. When I was considered strong enough to travel, I was escorted to Woodford under the wing of a trained nurse, and there convalesced. I was a trying convalescent, peevish, selfish and rude to those in authority, so my parents decided that I needed disciplining.

As children we had run more or less wild at our Woodford home. My sister had naturally good manners, founded, as good manners are, on consideration for other people. I had none. When I was a child, up to the age of fourteen, if visitors called at Tyn-y-coed — a rare occurrence, certainly — I would bolt down the gully rather than face them. Apparently my capable mother felt incompetent to deal with my post pneumonic behaviour,
and I was sent to boarding school for a year to be disciplined.

The school chosen had the reputation of being a finishing one for the social elite, and rumour had it that the pupils were taught only such things as getting in and out of carriages gracefully. This school was the old original Kambala, a large, bungalow type of house situated on the top of Bellevue Hill, and had been the home of a well-known Sydney family, the Lambs. The heads of the school were two remarkable women — Miss Gurney, an Englishwoman, and Mademoiselle Soubeiran, a French one. As my parents were personal friends of both, they were not deterred by rumours concerning the snobbish conduct of the school. I am sure there has never been another like it, before or since, and this, of course, was entirely owing to the personality of these outstanding women. They had poise and dignity, coupled with complete lack of selfconsciousness, and their strict discipline was tempered always by common sense.

Miss Gurney taught only music, Mademoiselle her own language. I was privileged to learn from both. Under Miss Gurney’s tuition piano lessons became a fascinating revelation of what music could mean, even to an ungifted person like myself. Mademoiselle’s French lessons were equally absorbing. She was an excellent teacher, and managed to hammer my accent into something that sounded almost like a French one. Unfortunately I lost it a few months after leaving school. That year, thanks to her, I won the only prize I have ever received in my life — that of the Alliance Francaise.

Excellent though their teaching was, it is not by that one chiefly remembers them, but by their characters — their personality. The tales about teaching pupils how to get in and out of carriages gracefully were, of course, poppycock. Our transport at the school consisted of trams and horse-drawn buses — the combustion engine was only just beginning to seep into transport. A special bus conveyed us to the local church on Sundays, and trams took us to concerts at the Town Hall. At meals we waited on one another at table, and were taught not to despise menial work. Mademoiselle herself set us an example over this. She not only presided over the kitchen, but sometimes cooked in it, one or two of the older girls being
privileged to fetch and carry for her. She would make enormous and delicious omelettes, for instance, which were cut into sections or servings in the dining room. I'm sure, as regards food, no boarding school has ever been treated as lavishly as we were. For the evening meal we always had a savoury dish of some sort — *chou-fleur au gratin*, perhaps — huge cauliflowers clad in a delicious cheese sauce, or a macaroni cheese whose like I have never come across since. Sunday dinner was a wonderful meal, the tables gleaming with spotless napery, silver, and glass, and decorated down their middles with large jugs of lemon squash, ice clinking in them.

Mademoiselle was the housekeeper, the head of the domestic side of the school, and always carried a large bunch of keys tied with a cherry-coloured ribbon. Sometimes she would mislay this, and someone would be told off to find it. We always felt it a privilege to wait on these two remarkable women. I feel I ought to apologize for using this word "privilege" so often, but I can't think of a substitute. Honour is rather too strong a term.

Mademoiselle used to have a French salad with her midday meal, and the head girl was taught how to prepare it. It was considered a privilege to *fatiguer la salade* for Mademoiselle. Another of the head girl's privileges was to help Mademoiselle — if she needed help — to dress for parties. I was sent to her bedroom one evening with a message, and found her holding on the foot of her bed while the head girl was lacing her up tightly enough to fit in to her evening dress. Mademoiselle, completely unselﬁsh, turned her head as I entered, and remarked, with a grimace as the laces tightened uncomfortably: "Il faut souffrir pour être belle!"

Miss Gurney also had the faculty of making us feel it a privilege to wait on her. I can remember leaping forward to help her on with her opera coat when she was about to escort some of us to a Town Hall concert — no command was necessary; one just knew it was the thing to do.

Sunday at Kambala was visitors' day, and there were often a number of people there, friends of Mademoiselle or Miss Gurney, who had no relatives among the girls. One or two of the older ones among us would be told off to help in the
drawing room on these occasions. We were briefed thus: "You are to carry round tea and cakes, and see that no one is neglected. If anyone is looking lonely, go and speak to them. It doesn't matter whether you have been introduced to them or not. You are not to think of yourselves, but of them. Do you understand?" Indeed we did. We felt it to be a responsibility as well as a privilege to be there. I remember once, in the crowded drawing room, noticing a young man who looked shy and lonely. Supported by another girl, I went and spoke to him. He was Spanish, and had very little English, but we managed to converse somehow in French. It had taken a considerable effort to overcome our shyness, but he was so grateful we were well rewarded.

Once a year Kambala gave a dance. The young men invited were carefully chosen, and it was quite a social event. The big tiled entrance hall was lit by a magnificent chandelier, and several days before the dance this had its annual cleaning. One of the gardeners, mounted on a ladder, would carefully dismantle the glittering contraption, and several of the girls, seated round a table, would wash the various glass pendants in hot soapy water, and others would dry them. This job, being a pleasant break from school routine, was welcomed by the girls allotted to the task. The dance supper, of course, was magnificent, and the following morning discipline was relaxed; we were allowed to rise late, and wander into the dining room where delicious leftovers — fruit salads, trifles, oyster patties and so on — coldly furnished forth our first meal of the day. They were warmly received, of course, by hardy young digestions.

Miss Gurney was a strict disciplinarian. In church on Sundays the girls were not allowed to sag or lounge. I remember hearing her singing her instructions to a slouching girl during a hymn: "Judith, will you stand up straight!" sung to "Rock of Ages Cleft for Me"! An ingenious way to convey an order without interrupting the continuity of sound.

Every morning we had prayers in the dining room before breakfast, usually conducted by Miss Gurney. There was one girl who was apt to faint on these occasions, and Miss Gurney
kept an eagle eye on her, and when she noticed her beginning to
turn pale, the collect for the day or whatever it happened to be
would be interrupted by a stern command: “Maud! You are not
to faint!”, and Maud, pulling herself together, would obey.

We had, of course, besides Miss Gurney and Mademoiselle,
other teachers, but the usual rat race to obtain high examina­
tion marks was not the first object of the school. However, the
girls did get a good grounding in English, history, mathematics,
and French.

I found the discipline at Kambala irksome after our free­
roving life at Woodford; not to be allowed to sit on the grass to
watch a tennis match, for instance, without spreading a rug first
to insulate one from the earth; submitting one’s hair to be
inspected by the maths mistress whom I disliked, while she
decided whether or no all the shampoo had been properly
rinsed off. Whatever we did for Mademoiselle or Miss Gurney in
some mysterious way became a privilege, but this applied only
to them.

While at Kambala I was visited one Sunday afternoon by
some elderly family friends who arrived in a strange vehicle
called a motor car, presided over by a chauffeur, and they
obtained permission to take me for a run in it. It was my first
experience of riding in a car, and I found it rather alarming.
Motoring in Sydney was in its infancy at that time. This car was
a queer contraption — the chauffeur sitting up in front with no
horses before him gave him a very cutoff appearance. The
tonneau, as it was then called, had one door at its rear, and the
seats were parallel to the length of the car, not across it as they
are now, so that the passengers sat facing one another. Going
downhill, with no horses in front to act as a brake, seemed to
me a perilous proceeding. Little did I guess then the part that
the combustion engine was to play in my life — in all our lives! I
wonder now how long it will rule us — this metal monster that
infests our roads, adding to the general din its own peculiar
groans, moans, pistol shots, and shrieks like mandrakes torn out
of the earth? This little bit of home on wheels! This instrument
of death!

46
This part is called drifting because between 1909 and 1928 I was merely bobbing about in the wake of my distinguished parents. The lack of purpose in those years is reflected in these pages. The incidents recorded are just little islands sticking up out of a darkening sea of memories.
After the salutary year at Kambala, I was allowed to return to the university. In the early 1900s this was a small, compact place. There were the original beautiful sandstone buildings – main facade with the clocktower in the middle, the Great Hall at one end, and the Fisher Library at the other, and separate from these the Medical School, also in mellow stone, and all looking as traditionally English as possible. There was a women’s common room at one side of the quad, a wooden shanty flanked by a narrow verandah. The women’s tutor had a room in this building. Her role was more that of a chaperone, I think, than anything else. There was also a kitchenette with a sink and a gas ring in it off a larger room that could be used for meetings. The only meeting I ever attended there was a discussion on the character of the Virgin Mary, arranged by the Women Students’ Christian Union, and in which I took no part, not feeling competent to express an opinion on the subject.

The engineering, chemistry, physics, and geology departments were housed in small, ugly, brick buildings. Science in those days was still frowned upon as a poor relation, barely acknowledged by scholars of the period, and certainly despised by the university authorities. And that reminds me of a story my father told us about the late Professor Griffith Taylor, one of Sydney’s most distinguished graduates. Being a progressive person, he fought for some years, assisted by my father, to establish a chair of geography at Sydney University. This at that time was strenuously opposed by the Senate, but eventually achieved. Later, Griffith Taylor was offered and accepted a similar chair in a United States university. Before leaving he was officially farewelled at the Sydney one, and presented with a gold watch. When he rose to reply to speeches, he thanked the
givers, picked up the watch, and looking at the back of it, saw the university motto engraved thereon. Commenting on this, and for the benefit of those present with whom he had battled in the cause of science, he translated it aloud thus: "Sidere mens eadem mutato — Though in a different hemisphere, we shall still think exactly as did our fathers, and our grandfathers, and our great-great-grandfathers before us."

The authorities were not amused by this dig at their conservatism.

On the other side of the quadrangle from the women's common room was the men's, also a wooden shanty, and it was here that the traditional battles between engineering and medical students took place, usually in the lunch hour. How the antipathy between meds and engineers at our university first arose must by now be forgotten, but the fights occurred regularly year after year, and were greatly appreciated as an entertainment by the women students, who watched proceedings from their common room verandah. A squad of medical students in dirty white dissecting coats would march purposefully over from the Medical School. News of their approach would somehow be flashed ahead of them, and those engineering students who were not already lunching in the common room would come hurrying out of their fastness, clad in blue dungarees, to join their colleagues.

My sister, then in her third year Arts, and I always barracked for the engineers, for most of our men friends were doing a course in civil or mining engineering. Though outnumbered, the engineers usually managed to rout the medical invaders, much to our satisfaction.

In those days when students were fewer, they were allowed into the Great Hall on Commemoration Day, which was also the occasion for the conferring of degrees. The students' traditional procession through the streets of Sydney took place before this, and by the time that they arrived at the Great Hall they were in high spirits and difficult to control. The chancellor of those early university days, Sir Normand MacLaurin, was a peppery Scotsman who, though a braw fine admeenistrator, nae doot, had not the gift of oratory, and students during his Com-
Madge gained her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1907.
Mrs. Edgeworth David in 1910.
memoration Day speeches became uproarious. The poor old fellow would gesture angrily at them for silence, but in vain. A man needed to be not only a good public speaker but a strong personality to control undergraduates in holiday mood. I remember seeing this miraculously done in the Great Hall once. The speaker was a visiting professor, Starr-Jordan of Leland Stanford University, California. When he first rose to address his audience, pandemonium had been reigning for some time. He stood, a fine figure of a man, like a rock, while waves of noise washed over him. His immobility puzzled the students, and the noise abated for a moment, and in that moment Starr-Jordan began his speech. The first word the mob caught was "elephant", and this, unexpected in a professorial address, caused a sudden silence. That was all that President Starr-Jordan needed. What he had to say was so wittily and forcefully said that the students were held spellbound to the end of his speech, when they gave him tremendous applause. In sensing authority they are rather like horses, who know the moment a rider mounts whether they can successfully play up with him. Students know it as soon as a speaker mounts the rostrum. On the other hand they are quick to hero-worship.

In those early 1900s of my university days, the bewilderment of the young at the state of world affairs had not begun. It was after World War I and during the depression that life became insecure for many who had never known insecurity before. It was in the 1920s at a conferring of degrees ceremony in the Great Hall that our then state governor, Sir Phillip Game, made a speech that I have never forgotten. Addressing the graduates who were about to sally forth into the world, he spoke of the troubled and uncertain times in which they lived, and said: "But no matter what the conditions, you still have to guide you the sun, the moon and the stars, by which I mean your heads, your hearts, and your ideals."

I believe that the majority of students today, in this muddled and bewildered world, are still guided by the stars, though clouds will sometimes scud across them.

In a speech in recent years Pope Paul made a peculiar statement. He said: "After all, man is a rational being." How
rational? Is there a nation that does not spend the greatest part of its revenue on developing bigger, surer, and more revolting ways of destroying its fellow men? The sophisticated nations setting an example to the unsophisticated? Rational? A woman scientist in America was recently awarded a medal for discovering a sure way to destroy rice crops, while others are helping the rice-eating communities of the world to increase its production.

If a women's organization is formed to work for peace, it is instantly labelled subversive by our government. If students rise up to protest against war, they are called traitors, or at best, nuts.

Looking back down the vista of my eighty-odd years, I see the "rational being" as a fear-ridden savage, thrusting his way through the jungle, a club in his hand. Whether the jungle happens to be tree-clad hills or a city of steel and concrete, matters little; the fear and the club are there.

Some of these protesting students may one day become canting politicians, the majority will probably fall into line behind the swinging club, but a few, a still protesting few, will continue to follow their own particular star. I think there are two such ideals fundamental to life — love of one's fellow men, and zeal in the search for truth. Love and truth are, incidentally, Gandhi's definition of God. The word "visionary", according to the dictionary, means "one given to indulging in fanciful theories". Has the faculty of seeing visions lost face through the speeches of self-justifying or cynical politicians? Are students to be sneered at for being visionaries? How fanciful is the dream of peace on earth and goodwill towards men? Someone once gave us an eleventh commandment — to love one another; in the politicians' view a "fanciful" idea to indulge? I suppose it is unkind and unfair to speak disparagingly of politicians, but seeing them so constantly on television, and hearing the hackneyed old phrases and forced enthusiasm being pumped out, makes one feel bored and depressed. Perhaps one should think of them as Bishop Bienvenu did of the spider in his garden: "pauvre bête, ce n'est pas sa faute". Perhaps it is not the politician's fault. They are obliged to speak in public so often, it must be difficult for them to be genuinely enthusiastic
to order. My mother once told me of a clergyman who spoke to her of “the mechanical part of the service, such as prayers”. He was Anglican, but his remark smacked of Tibetan prayer wheels. I suppose that constant repetition of words, unless one is a great actor, inevitably sounds mechanical.

What were we talking of? Oh yes, students. My sister and I thoroughly enjoyed the social life of the university. Coming as we did from a rather lonely and secluded one in our mountain home, we revelled in the entertainment that came our way — such as the college and Sports Union dances, and, of course, the University Dramatic Society.

My mother had rented a small semi-detached house for us, very close to the university, and sometimes a hired help cooked for us here, and sometimes we fended for ourselves.

The annual dances at St. Paul’s and St. Andrew’s Colleges were highlights of the year. The Sports Union Ball, always held at the Paddington Town Hall, was another. The St. Andrew’s dance was famous for its magnificent suppers, provided by the capable housekeeper there, who was an excellent cook.

In those days there were always programmes for the dances, and the college men, having access to these some days before the dance, would book their favourite partners in advance. The current dances of my youth, such as two-steps and waltzes, required skill, coordination, and a certain amount of athleticism. I can still remember the glorious feeling of swooping down a crowded ballroom with a good partner. One sensed his every movement beforehand, and needed no guiding. One had complete faith in his ability to avoid collisions. There was none of the modern jiggling, just smooth movement to rhythm, a most satisfactory form of exercise.

The University Dramatic Society, then in its infancy, was very much “amateur theatricals”. My sister and I were usually given young-girl, minor parts in the plays. She was Maria once in The School for Scandal. My only part that I remember was that of a young girl in (I think) a Pinero play. At one stage in this I had been given some flowers by my lover, and (I forget why) had to say pathetically: “Like these flowers, they are fading at my feet!” (awful sloppy stuff), and at this point I was supposed
to let the flowers drift slowly through my fingers to the floor. This scene had never been rehearsed with the essential property, and on the night of the play the stage manager or whoever was responsible had provided me with a charming tight Victorian bouquet tied up with ribbon. The fatal moment arrived — "Like these flowers, they are fading at my feet!" I dropped the bouquet, and it fell with a thud, stalks uppermost — a marvellous example of the unwanted laugh! These plays were performed in the old Palace Theatre, now gone for ever, white marble staircase and all. It was a small but charming little theatre.

In those early 1900s Sydney was a small, cosy city. On Saturday mornings there was a kind of social meeting place in the block bounded by King and Market Streets, the section of Pitt Street in between them its lively centre. Young people as well as the oldies met for coffee in the refreshment room of the Civil Services Stores there, or at the soft drinks counter of Washington Soul’s close by. There was also a movie in that Pitt Street centre. It consisted of an “auditorium” — a long, narrow one shaped and furnished like a suburban railway carriage, and I remember the first film I saw there was shot from the front of a train travelling through Siberia. To me it was a thrilling experience! I have wondered since if that could have been Sydney’s first picture theatre.

In 1907 towards the end of my Arts course, the Shackleton expedition, bound for Antarctica, its chief object to bag the South Pole for England, arrived in Sydney. My father met Shackleton, and was invited by him to accompany the expedition as scientific adviser, just for those weeks that would be spent in unloading stores from the Nimrod, the expedition’s ship. He was to return to Sydney in her before the ice pack froze over. He joyfully accepted the invitation. To quote his own words: “For my part, I look upon Lieutenant Shackleton’s invitation to join the expedition as one of the greatest compliments I have ever received in my life.”

1908 was a trying year for my mother. There was no wireless in those days. When the Nimrod returned from Antarctica, it was without my father, and with the news that he had been
persuaded by Shackleton to remain with the expedition in charge of its scientific work. As there was no means of communication between the Antarctic continent and the rest of the world, except by ship, he had applied by letter to the university authorities for a year's leave of absence without being able to receive their reply. My mother was not worried about the possibility that he might lose his professorship, but by the thought of him living and working in those dangerous regions at his age — fifty, — far too old for such an expedition. His brother, Archdeacon David, wrote to my mother to reassure her: "I felt in my bones somehow that he would not be content to put his nose into the place for a week or two and not stay. Well, it is just like him, after stewing in Funafuti, to be frost-bitten in the Antarctic. Fortunately he is hard, and always in a kind of training. However, whilst Edgeworth has always had a romantic faculty for getting himself into tight places, he has a perfect genius for getting himself out of them."

There was one such tight place that he got himself into during his sojourn in Antarctica, that could hardly be described as romantic, but was so characteristic of him that I shall quote Sir Douglas Mawson's account of it. It happened during their journey to the South Magnetic Pole. They were camped, and Mawson was inside the tent, changing photographic plates, when my father, who had gone out with his sketchbook, suddenly went through the snow lid of a crevasse. He only saved himself from going right down by throwing his arms out and staying himself on the lid on either side, but it was so rotten that he didn't dare to make a move to get out. This is Mawson's account of the episode:

I was busy changing photographic plates in the only place where it could be done — inside the sleeping bag . . . Soon after I had done up the bag, having got safely inside, I heard a voice from outside — a gentle voice, calling "Mawson, Mawson".

"Hullo!" said I.

"Oh, you're in the bag changing plates, are you?"

"Yes, professor."

There was silence for some time. Then I heard the
Professor calling in a louder tone:

“Mawson!”

I answered again. Well, the Professor heard by the sound I was still in the bag so he said:

“Oh, still changing plates, are you?”

“Yes.”

More silence for some time. After a minute, in a rather loud and anxious tone:

“Mawson!”

I thought there was something up, but could not tell what he was after. I was getting tired of it and called out:

“Hullo. What is it? What can I do?”

“Well, Mawson, I am in a rather dangerous position. I am really hanging on by my fingers to the edge of a crevasse, and I don’t think I can hold on much longer. I shall have to trouble you to come out and assist me.”

I came out rather quicker than I can say. There was the Professor, just his head showing, and hanging on to the edge of a dangerous crevasse.

Shackleton had realized that my father, apart from his scientific ability, would be an asset socially on an isolated expedition, especially one that had to face the long darkness of a polar winter. In his book *High Latitude*, Captain J. K. Davis wrote of my father:

He was one of those fine characters met only once or twice in a life-time. His lean, deeply lined face with its high forehead and bright, kindly eyes might have been that of a poet rather than a man of science, and his physique, though he was not a large man, was still that of an athlete . . . None of us will ever forget Professor T. W. E. David or “the Prof” as we called him, and after all these years the memory of his strength and humility, his well-stored mind, his courage and his old-world courtesy always remain with me. The most thoughtless among us felt a compelling urge to do their best when they were in his presence. He had that rare gift of ennobling all he touched.

During the long darkness of that winter one member of the expedition temporarily broke down under the strain, and
attacked another with a carving knife. Shackleton thought a change of scene would benefit X — (the attacker), and sent for my father, explaining that all X — needed was to get right away from the hut for a while. His suggestion was that my father should take him for a little camping trip — just the two of them. It would do X — all the good in the world. Of course my father agreed, and off the two of them went. Shackleton was right — the change of scene cured X — of his temporary indisposition. My mother was not amused by this anecdote.

Our home, at this time, was still Woodford, and we commuted daily from there to the metropolis. My mother would visit the latter occasionally, and my brother, then beginning his medical course, would meet her when his work permitted, at Central railway station. Like most young men of his age and time, he was inclined to be sensitive about appearing conspicuous in any way — the limelit cult of the hippie was still well below the horizon. One morning when he met my mother at Central station, as the train slowed to a standstill she handed her luggage to him through the carriage window. The poor fellow received in one hand a Primus stove (unwrapped), and in the other an equally naked top hat. My mother, herself impervious to public opinion, was surprised at his reluctance to carry these through the city in a crowded tram.

One of our guests at Tyn-y-coed during that year of 1908 was A. E. Macintosh, then second mate of the *Nimrod*. During the unloading of stores from his ship at the Antarctic base, he had been struck in the eye by a cargo hook which came adrift from the sling and swung across the deck. His eye was so badly damaged that the expedition's surgeon had to remove it. He was a good-looking, cheerful young man, and when he came to stay with us for a few days he was wearing a glass eye that looked quite like a real one, but which he found rather uncomfortable. He had a disconcerting habit of whipping it out of its socket, and putting it in his pocket. One of my recollections of him is his prompt action when he and my sister and I were out for a walk one day, accompanied by our shaggy little mongrel dog. It was struck by a passing car, and Macintosh brusquely ordered my sister and me to go on ahead while he dealt with the
situation, which meant finishing off the dog, who was dying in agony, with a large stone.

We all admired Macintosh for the courageous and undefeated way in which he took not only the loss of his eye, but his disappointment at not being able to join the expedition as had been intended. He was a great admirer of Shackleton’s. Eight years later he died while on a depot-laying journey during the second Shackleton Antarctic expedition. He was drowned while crossing the sea ice, on the Cape Royds side of the continent.

I have often wondered how I managed to acquire a Bachelor of Arts degree. It was certainly by the skin of my teeth, for I rarely took notes in lectures, and sometimes ignored the books we were supposed to read and study. The standard of knowledge required must have been much lower than it is today.

In my first year I made a mistake about the time allotted for an English examination paper. I thought it was two hours, but it was a one-hour one, and I was only halfway through it when, to my horror, “Ten minutes more!” was called. As soon as possible I hurried to our women’s tutor, and told her my predicament. Through her offices an oral was granted me by one of the English lecturers. I had never been faced with an oral before — nor have I since — and was paralyzed with fright. The first question I was asked was: “How would you sum up the character of the Poor Parsoun in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales?”

I just sat there, stricken dumb.

The lecturer kindly prompted, “And gladly . . . ?”

“Oh! And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach!”

The examiner beamed kindly upon me. Which reminds me of another oral. In my brother-in-law’s last year of his Edinburgh medical course, he was being examined by an eminent professor. He knew his work, and the examiner knew he knew it, but he hesitated for a considerable time, racking his brains over one question. While he struggled with his memory, the examiner doodled on the blotting-pad before him, and presently pushed it sideways from him. My brother-in-law, attracted by the movement, glanced at the pad and saw the answer to his
question “doodled” there. I wonder how often this sort of thing happens?

When confronted with the English examination paper at the end of my third year, I read it through and realized that I could answer practically none of the questions. Despairingly I wrote what little I could, knew it was hopeless, and then was seized with a fit of bravado. All right, I said to myself, I might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb. One question was, “Discuss Ruskin as an aesthetic critic.” Never having read a word of Ruskin, I just wrote down my mother’s account of the embroidered waistcoat incident. I can’t remember all the awful things I did with that paper, but I do remember that one question I couldn’t answer was something about Tennyson’s “Maud”. I had read this, but didn’t know how to discuss whatever it was that was asked for, so merely put down that I knew a family who owned a cow called Maud because it would come into the garden — which was true. Having got all this childish facetiousness off my chest, I gave in my paper, and went home to Woodford. The train we commuted in from there to the metropolis was called The Fish, because the train’s crew all had fishes’ names — or so legend has it. It used to leave Woodford at about seven in the morning, and return us there at approximately seven at night.

I returned to Tyn-y-coed that evening feeling smug and pleased with myself, to relate what I considered my amusing and cavalier treatment of the English paper. My mother and sister, instead of being amused as I had expected, listened in a shocked silence. Then I was told that I would probably be had up before the Professorial Board for impudence, and that I must, on the following day, go straight to the English lecturer and apologize. I argued in vain; they were adamant, so the following day I returned to the university, and with a thudding heart, knocked on the English lecturer’s door. He listened to my apology, and then told me that he had corrected my paper, and that I had passed — in fact there were two students with marks below mine who were also passes. Before I had recovered from the shock and relief of this news, he added a remark about my examination papers in general so kindly that I was forced to
leave his room hurriedly to battle with a sudden rush of tears. Instead of my feeling humiliated at having to apologize, he had made me feel humble, ashamed — and happy!

During the long silence of that year, people all over Australia who knew him were wondering how the "old Prof" was faring, surrounded as he was by dangerous and inhospitable conditions. At least, they thought, he would be stationed at the base. When it was discovered that he had, with two companions, located the South Magnetic Pole, not to mention achieving the ascent of Mount Erebus, a furore of enthusiasm was sparked off not only among the students but the general public also. Our family had not realized, before his return from Antarctica, how popular my father had become during his university teaching days.

One of his earliest duties on his arrival in Sydney was to call on the chancellor of the university. As Captain Evans of the Nimrod said, "He was uneasy about the cordiality of his welcome at the hands of the University Senate because by this time he had been absent from his professorial duties for sixteen months without leave from that august body."

His apologies were graciously received, and his conduct forgiven. Later in the day he was given a reception in the Great Hall by the university staff and students, and there "he received one of the heartiest as it was also the noisiest welcomes home . . . that ever fell to the lot of mortal man. He was given rather more than a taste of the lung-power of the undergraduates, whose shouts might almost have been heard in the region of the Magnetic Pole."

For this occasion one of the students had hastily slapped up a song to the tune of one of their Commemoration Day ones, and as soon as the "old Prof" had been officially welcomed by the chairman of the Professorial Board, and rose to reply, the organ pealed forth and the students sang their song with deafening enthusiasm:

Good old Nimrod David, mighty hunter 'fore the Lord!  
He has sledged in triumph to his goal.  
His coat is full of specimens, his boots are hardly thawed,  
But he's left the old brown hat upon the Pole!
The last lines of the chorus, even more deafening than the verses, were as follows:

Undergrads, waiting gladly here, give a hearty cheer,
    tell him never fear
Were he away until the judgement day,
We'd not forget him!

After this my father was obliged to wait for nearly five minutes before the cheering ceased and he was able to reply. When he had finished, the students cheered and cheered again, and then as the company dispersed he held a sort of informal levee, during which his hand was wrung by hundreds of enthusiastic young friends.

His next welcome was a civic reception held in the Town Hall. This also was patronized by students who rolled up in hundreds and took possession of one of the galleries before the hall was packed to overflowing.

The speeches of welcome began, and most of the speakers were subjected to a certain amount of ribald commentary from the students' gallery. One of these officials happened to be a little weak in his H's, and unfortunately had to refer to a Mr. Hogue, a Mr. Hamlet, a Mr. Hughes, and a Mr. Hedley. The students restrained themselves till the fourth H was dropped, and then there were loud cries of "'ear! 'ear!" from the southern gallery.

When the "old Prof" rose to reply to the welcoming speeches, such a storm of cheering burst forth from the crowded hall that it seemed as though the whole building shook. It was several minutes before the noise subsided. In the hush that followed, his clarion voice that could be heard in the farthest corner of the hall (no microphones then!) rang out, and every word he uttered was listened to with respectful attention. His speech was interspersed, as his speeches usually were, with amusing anecdotes. The end of it demonstrated his extraordinary power over an audience, even one that included hundreds of unruly students. He spoke of the gramophone music in the hut at Cape Royds, mentioning that a record called "Waltz Me Around Again, Willy!" had been a very popular one.
When the laughter that greeted this had subsided, he continued: "But the most sustaining and encouraging of all was a rendering of the old hymn: 'Lead, Kindly Light'.” He quoted the first verse of this, while the whole audience listened in respectful stillness, applauding when he finished.

Students! So quick to hero-worship, to resent injustice, eager to do their bit in the world, shedding the bonds of school discipline, tweaking the parental apron strings, exuberant and gloriously young! Are we to “run over the bastards”? Break them, or give them a break?
The time between the return of Shackleton’s 1907–9 expedition and World War I is a bit muddled in my mind — not events themselves, but the exact order in which they came. The early stages of it, I know, were punctuated by more Antarctic expeditions. As members of my father’s family, we all met the leaders of these Polar expeditions — Shackleton, Scott and Amundsen. For me, the introduction to the first two meant a hasty how-do-you-do, and that was all, but I still retain sharp impressions of both. Shackleton appeared to me as an attractive, magnetic personality with a hint of recklessness about him; Scott as a tense, serious-minded and rather worried man. Amundsen was quite different. He and my father were lunching together one day at the Australia Hotel, and I, as I was then my father’s secretary, lunched with them, so that I saw more of this particular explorer than of the others. I thought him a warmhearted, kindly, unselfconscious person.

My mother, of course, briefly met all these leaders, but was also privileged to meet another collection of valiant men, the crew of the *Nimrod*. Shackleton, members of his expedition and officers of the *Nimrod* had been given a civic reception at the Town Hall on their arrival from New Zealand, but the *Nimrod*’s crew, though they came in for a certain amount of reflected glory when showing visitors over their ship, had not been particularly noticed by the general public. My father had many friends and admirers among them, and he, in turn, held them in grateful remembrance. So he gave them all an outing. It was a personally conducted tour, and after a visit to the university and various pubs — the crew were a thirsty lot — the pièce de résistance of the tour was a trip to the Blue Mountains. Two compartments in the train had been reserved for the party,
and at Woodford it was joined by my mother. After the train had left the station and was travelling at a good speed, one of the crew climbed out of the window of his compartment and in at that of the adjoining one (a feat for which a stunt man in a movie would be highly paid), in order, as he explained, to pay his respects to the Professor’s wife.

We young people used to enjoy listening to tales of “the frozen south”, especially those that were not considered suitable for the press. These were retailed to us by members of the expedition who were amused at seeing themselves constantly alluded to in print as “intrepid explorers”. One little anecdote sticks in my mind. It involved a Primus stove, a portable cooking apparatus used by Antarctic explorers of that period. Incidentally, it was also used by country people here in Australia before electricity penetrated to country towns. Its fuel was kerosene gas, generated by heating small pipes above the fuel tank. This was done by filling a small saucer-like container below the pipes, with methylated spirit, and setting it alight. By the time the spirit was burnt out the pipes were hot, and the gas could be pumped up. The result was (or should be) a clear blue flame accompanied by an irritating but reassuring hissing noise.

Well, of course, explorers in the Antarctic carried fuel for this vital apparatus, and on a sledging trip, far from the home base, fuel was precious. On the occasion mentioned above, there were three young men from headquarters out on an exploring expedition, and friction arose between two of them over the use of their Primus stove. Any water required for cooking or drinking purposes consisted of snow which had to be melted, and the Primus, of course, was used for this purpose. One of the men insisted on melting snow for another purpose — that of teeth-cleaning; another considered this a needless and ridiculous waste of fuel, and said so. The altercation that followed ended in the two refusing to speak to one another — very embarrassing for the third member of their party. This state of affairs persisted till one night they camped on frozen sea ice attached to the shore. During the night the sea ice broke up, and in the morning they found themselves drifting out to sea on a floe.
Left to right: Unknown friend, Madge (Mrs. W. K. McIntyre), Professor Edgeworth David, Molly David, Bill McIntyre (Madge's husband), and another unknown friend, at the entrance to one of the mine shafts at Waratah, Tasmania, in 1910.
Professor Edgeworth David in 1910, with Ambrose, the sledge-dog lineally descendant from the Siberian wolf. After the return of the Shackleton Antarctic expedition, Professor David was presented with Ambrose as a token of appreciation for his services. Coming from germ-free Antarctica, the dog died of distemper not long after arriving in Australia.
Killer whales, accustomed to bumping seals (their natural prey) off floes, decided to bump off (in both senses) this trio of animals, and began the bumping process. Fortunately a current in the bay carried their floe round back to the shore where it touched long enough to enable the men to leap to safety on firm land. Thanks to this brush with death, the two estranged men forgot their quarrel, and all hands were on speaking terms again. Strange how trivial domestic matters can divide grown people!

Soon after the return of the Shackleton expedition my father was presented with one of its sledge dogs. Lineally, I believe, this dog, Ambrose, like his fellows, was descended from Siberian wolves. He was certainly the most charming and good-natured wolf that one could possibly imagine. Little Red Ridinghood’s grandmother would have fallen for him in more ways than one. We all loved him. He was very handsome – fluffy and cream-coloured, with intelligent brown eyes. Taking him for walks was a strenuous business, as he pulled at his leash with the same vigour that he applied to his sledge harness. When we took him up the mountains to our Woodford home, we tethered him under a tree the first night, but he had never come across trees before, and couldn’t sleep for the rustling of their leaves. After that we allowed him to sleep where he chose. He commandeered a sofa on the front verandah, and to make a really cosy bed collected half a dozen cushions from the sitting room, and arranged them in a neat heap on his sofa. There he slept really comfortably. He was so happy and pleased with himself about this arrangement that we hadn’t the heart to disturb him. Besides, he had carried the cushions very carefully, and nothing was damaged. Ambrose, alas! died of distemper not long after he came to live with us. Coming from the germ-free Antarctic, he was an easy prey to microbes.

But to return to other expeditions and what my father described as “the over-crowding of the South Pole” in 1911. At that date, of course, there was still a British Empire, and though expeditions from other nations had at times visited the Antarctic continent, we, the British, looked upon the South Geographic Pole as our particular property, and the general
public was inclined to resent the entry of other nations into the race for it. The disappointment that we Australians felt when the news of Amundsen’s success burst upon the world was aggravated by the tragic end of Scott’s expedition. My father was anxious for our nation to appear, at least, good losers. As he said: “in the absence of any accepted code on the ethics of Pole-jumping, it may be fairly stated that after Amundsen’s cablegram to Captain Scott, the South Pole might have been considered anybody’s Pole – either the Norwegians’, or the Japanese or the Germans’ or the British, for expeditions representing all these people had by this time entered the field as competitors.” He wrote an eloquent letter to the press, begging them to rouse the public to give Amundsen a hearty welcome when he arrived in Sydney after his victorious dash to the Pole, and used his influence to bring this about. Between Amundsen and himself there sprang up a firm friendship.

Years later, towards the end of World War I, when my father was at G.H.Q. in France, he and Amundsen met again. The latter had come there on some official mission. Here the famous explorer held quite a reception when various officers were presented to him. As each introduction was made, he said politely but a little perfunctorily “How do you do?” till “Major David” was presented to him. My father’s back was to the light, and Amundsen was about to say “How do you do?” and pass on to the next man, when he stopped, seized my father by the shoulders and swung him round to the light, exclaiming joyfully: “But this is not a major at all! It is my old friend Professor David!”, and led him away to talk Antarctica.

In 1909 my sister, who had been engaged for several years to a mining engineer, William Keeverall McIntyre, a son of Mr. Justice McIntyre of Hobart, Tasmania, married and went to live in a little mining town on the west coast of Tasmania. The conditions there were primitive, and in those days women did not as a matter of course go to hospitals to have their babies. Her first baby was born in their small weatherboard cottage. The doctor who attended her was elderly and conditions, in spite of all that my mother could do – she had gone there from Sydney for the event – were not absolutely antiseptic. My sister
developed puerperal fever, and nearly died. It was only through the efforts of her husband and my mother that she pulled through. She and her baby went back to Sydney to recuperate, and my parents decided that life in outback mining towns was not desirable, and suggested that they finance their son-in-law through his medical course in Edinburgh, and it was arranged that in 1911 he was to start his studies there.

At the end of 1910 my father went to England on business connected with the scientific results of the Shackleton expedition, and I accompanied him.

During this visit we stayed with friends at Oxford, where he lectured on Antarctica, and the honorary degree of Doctor of Science was conferred on him. I have before me now a letter of his written to my mother in January 1911, describing his doings. The Reverend Dr. W. A. Spooner (of "Spoonerism" fame) was at that time warden of New College, my father's old college. He had been a tutor there in my father's student days, and they held one another in mutual esteem. To quote from the letter:

We had tea with the Spooners in their lovely old house at 5 p.m. and then went on to New College chapel. The service was most beautiful. Molly was entranced. Spooner emitted a Spoonerism when pronouncing the benediction, but it is too blasphemous to repeat.

As a matter of fact it was the transposition not of initial letters, but of whole words: "Jesus Christ and His only Son our Lord".

The Spooners' house was over the gate of New College. It was panelled in oak, and there were many steps up and down in it. His wife and an attractive red-headed daughter were there, presiding over the tea. Recently I came across a letter of Dr. Spooner's written to my father in 1882, when the latter was about to leave England for Australia. Spooner wrote:

I have always had an interest in new lands, and some time ago bought some land in New Zealand as a way of giving practical expression to my interest. If, as I expect is possible, in a few years I am bought out by my tenant I shall send the money for you to invest for me in New
South Wales, for I think it is a country that has a great future before it.

Spooner, far from being the absentminded academic that most of us imagine him, was an excellent man of business. He retired in 1924 from his wardenship of New College at the age of eighty.

We all of us have uttered a Spoonerism at some time in our lives, but not many, I imagine, have equalled the ones attributed to him. Two examples are quoted in the Concise Oxford Dictionary: “Has just received a blushing crow”, and “For real enjoyment give me a well-boiled icicle”. Another favourite: “You all of you know what it is to have a half-warmed fish within you.”

I think my best effort was inquiring of my dentist (between drilling sessions) “when you were in London last year, did you notice much damn bombage?” Being elderly it took me a couple of seconds to realize what I had said.

It was during this visit to England that my father was summoned to Buckingham Palace for an audience with the King, George the Fifth. Not having had such an experience before, he wished to understand the procedure, and particularly how such an interview should terminate, so he asked the equerry under whose wing he was being shepherded if he would be told when the King wished to end the audience. The equerry said that the King would give him a hint. After about twenty minutes of chat – more about Australia than Antarctica – the King said: “And when do you think of returning to Australia?” My father was correct in interpreting this as his dismissal. Nowadays I understand (from watching television) that the reigning monarch just presses a button when an audience is over, to summon the visitor’s escort – a much more sensible idea.

My father returned to Sydney at the end of the long vacation, but I remained in England to meet my sister, her husband and baby daughter, Peggy, who were due to arrive in London on their way to Edinburgh, where he was to begin his medical course. My sister was still terribly run down after her
severe illness, and now our roles of leader and led were, for a time, reversed. I was forced to stand on my own feet to help her. At the time of her arrival I was staying in London at a boardinghouse in Shepherd’s Bush kept by a delightful family—a widow and her two just-grown-up daughters. As young couples the world over know, it is difficult to find accommodation anywhere when they are accompanied by a baby. I had to find a place for just one night for my sister and her family, and, as tactfully as I could, inquired of my landlady if it would be possible for them to be put up there. The reply was prompt: “A baby? Oh, how lovely! We haven’t had a baby in the house for years!”

“But is there a room vacant?” I enquired.

“Now, let me think. I’ll see how it can be arranged.”

The situation was explained to the other boarders, and one, a Dutch business man, insisted on finding temporary accommodation elsewhere, and giving up his room to me so that my larger one might be vacant for my trio of relatives. The landlady and her daughters not only welcomed them, but volunteered to do baby-sitting for that evening, so that we adults could go to a play.

In Edinburgh we all stayed for two nights at a hotel where my brother-in-law affronted the Scots by playing the piano on a Sunday. He was reported immediately to the management who sternly requested him to stop the outrage. It was our first introduction to the Scottish Sabbath of those days.

It fell to me, while my brother-in-law was busy making arrangements with the university, to find a flat for the family, which I very soon did, in Marchmont Street. It was well furnished, and so cheap that we all felt that there must be a catch in it somewhere, but there wasn’t. Living in Edinburgh was very cheap in those days. Fresh herrings, for instance, were threepence a pair! Judging by the old Scottish riddle “If a herring and half cost a penny-halfpenny, what would two herrings cost?” they must at one time have been even cheaper.

My sister and her husband soon settled in to their new life. She was busy not only with her baby and the housekeeping, but in the evenings coached her husband in Latin. He had
matriculated in Hobart where it was not a compulsory subject, so that when he completed his engineering course at Sydney University he was not allowed a degree, and for medicine, of course, it was essential to have matriculated in Latin. My sister’s tutoring was successful, and it was a great relief to them both when he passed.

While in Edinburgh they made a number of friends who were the kindest, warmest-hearted and most generous people one could find anywhere in the world.

After my sister and her husband were well settled in Edinburgh, I decided that I should like to see Canada, and wrote to some relatives of my father’s there, who kindly invited me to stay with them. An aunt of his was married to the Archbishop of Ottawa, and to Ottawa I went, via St. John, as it was winter and the St. Lawrence was iced over. The ship I crossed the Atlantic in arrived in St. John decorated from stem to stern with snow and ice.

Canada was a regular fairyland to me — white and sparkling, new and exciting — the trains ringing bells at the level crossings instead of tooting as our Australian ones do; snowploughs clearing the line ahead of us. Inside the sleeping cars there seemed to me a peculiar arrangement — men and women shared the same long carriage. In the bunk above mine was a man who occasionally peered down at me through the curtains that provided a shred of privacy. However, as it was the custom of the country to be all mixed up like this, I tried not to be embarrassed.

My cousins were kindness itself, and made my visit a very happy one. There was an open-air skating rink at Ottawa (I was never anything but a novice on skates) which was far more satisfactory than the enclosed, artificial one in Sydney.

During my stay in Ottawa there was a garden party held at Government House, and I was invited along with my cousins. The guests arrived with skating boots over their arms, and having bobbed our curtsey or made our bow (according to sex) to His Excellency, those of us who wished to skate proceeded to don our gear. There was a biggish rink close to the house for skilled performers, but for beginners like myself, further out in
the garden was the “Duffers’ Pond”, a delightful little frozen-over one set among fir trees. I have never enjoyed a Government House garden party half as much before or since.

Canada’s winter in those days was a time of white silence, broken only by the tinkle of sleigh bells, for the motor car was only beginning to invade the earth. The cabs were sleighs, their drivers fortified against the weather by fur coats and picturesque coonskin caps. The inside of the cab was provided with a fur rug for the fare’s knees.

My cousin took me to a dance one night, and returning from this at one in the morning, I watched, from our sleigh cab, the northern lights shimmering across the sky. The air was very dry, and full of static electricity. I remember I used to turn off the metal electric light switch in my bedroom with a rubber sponge-bag between it and my hand. Little boys amused themselves by sliding across carpets and touching one another — or preferably a grown-up — to give them a shock and make them jump.

Talking of electricity, the commercial variety was widely used in Canada long before it penetrated to England and Australia. I remember watching the Archbishop being vacuum cleaned by one of his daughters before he went to a meeting, a much more efficient way of cleaning black cloth than with a clothes brush.

One of my cousins was married and lived in Hamilton, Ontario, and while visiting there I was taken to see Niagara Falls. We walked across the bridge from Canada into the United States, the only time I have ever set foot in that country. I remember that we had to go through a customs’ office to get there. I had nothing to declare but surprise that it should be necessary. I think, in those days, we were nearer to the States as relatives than we are today. Conan Doyle once said, through the mouth of Sherlock Holmes: “It is always a joy to me to meet an American . . . for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in fargone years will not prevent our children from some day being citizens of the same world-wide country.” A pipe-dream, alas!

Incidentally, I can still remember the Sherlock Holmes stories
when they first appeared in the Strand Magazine. They were illustrated, and the artist's portrayal of Holmes is still, to my mind, the correct one. The actor who played Holmes in one television series that I watched was too plump in the face to be convincing.

But to return to Canada. It snowed heavily just before I left Ottawa, and the train taking us from there to the port of St. John was delayed while the snowploughs were busy clearing the line ahead of us. We arrived at St. John behind schedule, but the ship had kindly waited for us. However, it was tooting impatiently as we emerged from the station. There was quite a distance between this and the wharf, and passengers, stimulated by the hooter, ran across the intervening space. I remember being impressed by the sprinting power of two nuns who picked up their skirts and hared along with the best of us.

It was somewhere between 1911 and 1914 that I went touring (merely as a passenger) with a theatrical company playing dramatizations of Dickens' novels in the "third" towns of England. I had a great friend, Una, a Sydney girl, who was bent on a stage career. She and her younger sister had been left a few hundred pounds each by a relative, and instead of putting this in the bank, Una used her portion of it to take herself and her sister, Rosalind, to England. Una studied for a year at Benson's Academy of Dramatic Art, and then took whatever acting job she could get, for by that time her few hundred pounds were exhausted, and till Rosalind came of age her share of the legacy was not available. Both girls were courageous and enterprising, for they did not have the sophisticated background of their modern counterparts.

Una joined this third-rate theatrical touring company, and it was with her that I travelled with it for a few days. I was young enough to think it great fun touring the third towns of England with a very mixed bag of theatrical people. At night we would put up at dreadful third-rate theatrical "digs". Two or three of the company were educated youngsters with a good family background, but most of them were tough old troupers - particularly the manager who eventually vamoosed with the company's takings, leaving its unfortunate members stranded in
an unattractive town called Macclesfield, with not enough money to pay what they owed their landladies. I was not with them at this time. Una sent my sister in Edinburgh an urgent wire asking for a loan, which, of course, was despatched immediately together with an offer of accommodation in the Marchmont Street flat. What happened to the old troupers if they had no friend to come to their rescue, I shudder to think.

While I was touring with them, the company gave an afternoon and an evening performance at Leamington. I went to the matinee which was patronized by an audience of about four people. It happened to be *Oliver Twist* that day, and by way of entertaining themselves one of the company had challenged another to bring into the play's dialogue any phrase she chose to suggest — a common pastime among the educated members of the cast. This time the phrase suggested was "with cat-like tread". The young man challenged happened to be Bill Sykes in the play. I think he said that he came home late at night with cat-like tread — I forget why, but it took some leading up to, and it was entertaining to hear the way the old trouper to whom he was speaking, and who knew nothing of the challenge, dealt with this unexpected piece of dialogue. He never turned a hair, but just gagged along with Sykes till the script returned to normal. This young actor, the juvenile lead in the company, was striking to look at, and was usually followed in the third towns by a handful of small ragged boys as he walked from the station to his digs. All his clothes were a bit offbeat, and he had a mop of longish hair — very pre-Beatle — and the only footwear he could afford was sandals. He was writing an Italian tragedy at the time, and usually carried the manuscript loose under his arm, having no briefcase. Once when we were battling against a wind as we approached the station, a gust snatched his tragedy from him. He struck an attitude, clutching his hair as the sheets of manuscript floated away, exclaiming: "Oh, god of battles! There goes my heart's blood!" Which, of course, impressed his retinue of small boys who were doubtless hoping for an exhibition of some sort.

At one time during her life in England, Una did a locum tenens for Bernard Shaw's secretary. It was only for a few
weeks, but during that time she developed such an admiration for her employer that she became imbued with all his ideas – including the one about vaccination. When, some years later, she married and went with her husband, who was in the diplomatic service, to a southern European country, she refused to be vaccinated before going. A few weeks after she arrived there she developed smallpox and died.

Her sister Rosalind also married. Her husband was a young Cambridge graduate, whom she met at the Tilly Institute in Berlin, where they were both studying German. He entered the air force, and afterwards, in World War II, rose to the rank of airfield marshal. Ros, then Lady Tedder, died in an aircrash in Egypt.

My life during all this time was a frivolous and irresponsible one for the most part, but I enjoyed it and my friends. I used to stay sometimes with friends of ours, the Streets, at Liverynga, Elizabeth Bay, in a beautifully run household – a contrast to our rather Bohemian, unconventional one at Woodford. My visits to this immaculate home were a great treat. One of the highlights of them was going to the theatre, not only because I loved plays, but because of the journey there and back in a hansom cab. This vehicle was a special one, I think, always reserved for my host and hostess. They would step in and seat themselves first, I would follow and take my place between them on a little seat that slid out from under the main one. The horse that drew us seemed to me as handsome as the cab. I can still hear the clop-clop of its hoofs, and the gentle rattle of harness. The wheels were rubber tyred, and the whole vehicle the height of luxury. The young men of the family travelled to the theatre by public transport.

For some time after I graduated in Arts, I worked as my father’s secretary. It was somewhat of a sinecure of a job, as he very seldom had time for dictating letters, and as for keeping track of his various books, pamphlets, lecture notes and so on – that was a hazardous proceeding! I have a vivid recollection of the stern reprimand I received for “tidying up” his papers once. Apparently he knew the exact position of certain important
papers that I had gathered into orderly fashion, and now he
couldn't find them. "They were there — under those lantern
slides on top of those proceedings of the Royal Society on the
corner of the desk. Where have you put them?" After that I
never attempted to interfere with what looked like chaos on his
desk.

My father, like my mother, was ahead of his time in his
attitude to women workers. He recognized ability when he
came across it in his department, and decided to appoint a
woman, outstanding in her work, as a demonstrator in the
Geology Department. This was a very unusual thing to do in
those days at the university. Knowing the chancellor's dislike of
women workers — or innovations of any sort — in his
recommendation of her appointment he gave no Christian
names, only initials. It was not till the appointment was ratified
by the Senate that the chancellor discovered that one of the
Monstrous Regiment of Women had been granted a job in a
university department, and he was furious.

After the retirement of this chancellor, a very different one
succeeded him — Sir William Cullen. Both he and his wife were
able and charming people. They and my parents were personal
friends, and we all shared a love of animals, as well as of the
native Australian bush. The Cullens had a house at Mosman
with a wild bush garden, criss-crossed with paths. Garden parties
there were enjoyable occasions, attended not only by guests,
but by the Cullen's pets — cats and a white cockatoo of
uncertain age and sex who was very much part of the
household.

The Cullens also had a house at Leura in the Blue Mountains,
and I remember my father telling of an occasion when he had
been staying there, and was returning to Sydney with Sir
William in his car. The car was driven by a chauffeur, and Sir
William and my father shared the back seat of it with the
cockatoo who was partly muffled in rugs between them. As the
car sped across the plains the cockatoo suddenly poked up its
head and announced "Cocky want a drink!", and kept
interrupting the humans' conversation with the same observa-
tion, till Sir William turned to him and said, kindly but firmly:
"I'm sorry, Cocky dear, but it's Sunday, and all the pubs are shut", and then resumed his conversation with my father.

My next visit to England was with my parents in the long vacation of 1913-14. My brother-in-law was by this time nearing the end of his medical course, and he and my sister and their two children — their first son, Archie, was born in Edinburgh a few years after their arrival there — had moved to a much nicer flat in Thirlestane Road, which boasted a view over the Pentland Hills.

When not with my sister, I spent a good deal of my time visiting friends with my mother, and of course staying with my aunt in Llandaff, in the midst of a regular colony of relations.

I loved being in England, but there were two aspects of life there to which I could not adjust. One was snobbishness. This characteristic of the English middle classes was deplored by my father, and anathema to my mother. My father's people were not all snobbish, but most were, particularly my grandmother, who despised her husband's ancestry because it had consisted of Welsh yeoman farmers. In one way and another I suppose we are all tainted with snobbery. There can be a snobbery of the intellect, as well as of income and social position. Man is prone to enjoy feeling superior to his fellows. Perhaps it is a subconscious desire to assert himself as an individual. We are social creatures, and the opinion of our fellowmen must count with us, unless we are very unusual people. That is the best I can do in extenuation of snobbery.

I think the most virulent form of English snobbery flourished (I use the past tense optimistically) in the upper middle classes — doctors, lawyers, regular army and navy. One of my most unpleasant recollections of this nasty trait, and which still revolts me when I think of it, was an incident in a train, a special train, on the way from London to Portsmouth. I had been invited by a friend of mine, a young naval officer, to a Spithead review. He was a fine young man whom I met when his ship was in Sydney. He had a brother who was an officer in the Territorials, and he himself was an engineer-lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Neither of these sterling, patriotic, hard-working,
capable young men was acceptable to the "upper crust" of the English army and navy. In the latter, navigation officers were O.K. but engineer officers, no! They were looked upon, I imagine, as rather superior stokers or greasers, but definitely not wardroom — halfway between petty officer and gunnery one, perhaps.

Well, to get back to that first class compartment on the special train carrying guests to the Spithead review. I was travelling in it with my host's aunt, chaperons being de rigueur in the early 1900s. She was justly proud of her nephews, and looking forward to being with her naval one on his ship — I think it was the *Neptune* — during the great review.

In our compartment were some regular army officers — I don't remember of what breed, regiment or whatever it's called — complete with their women-folk, all chattering and laughing together. They were airing their wit at the expense of the Territorial Army, which they obviously considered a jumped-up concern trying to ape its betters, and, of course, completely incompetent. A great joke to them was the idea of a Territorial officer tripping over his own sword; they all laughed heartily at the thought of it.

My chaperon listened to the sneers and derision with a set face. One of the women, supposing her to be a social equal because she was travelling first class in the special train, made some affable remark to her, and was answered politely but frigidly. There is no need for me to comment on what the despised Territorials did for England in World War I. Later, in that same world war, my engineer officer friend went down with his ship (I think it was the *Monmouth*) during a battle somewhere in the Atlantic.

I believe the navy’s attitude to engineer officers has changed with the passing years. I hope so.

The other blemish on English life — or so I considered it — was the men’s attitude towards women. I had been accustomed all my life to being treated as an equal by my men friends. As I mentioned, we had various relations living in Llandaff, and often dined with them. The men, when they joined the women in the drawing room after dinner, would cluster round the fire
talking sport or politics, and occasionally throwing a kindly word to their women-folk who were cut off from both fire and conversation. As in German and Arab communities, so in England women were definitely second-class citizens. I am speaking, of course, of bygone years.

I think it was during this visit to England that I was taken by an uncle (my father's youngest brother) to spend a week in Paris as a great treat. It was his "There, there, little woman!" Victorian attitude to women that spoilt the trip for both of us. We stayed at the Louvre Hotel, a handy spot for sightseeing, and the week seemed a very long one. My uncle believed that because I was of the female gender I must be enthralled by shop windows. When he exclaimed "Hats! Hats! Hats!" to me as though I were a dog ("Rats! Rats! Rats!") and expected me to dart across the road to a milliner's window, I felt ashamed for him, and embarrassed for myself, because I couldn't even pretend to live up to his ideal of what a young girl should be. I used to sneak out of our hotel to the real Louvre by myself, and spent a good deal of time there becoming acquainted with Venus de Milo, Mona Lisa, a winged Victory and other favourites restful to the eye and reassuring to the mind.

My uncle took me to lunch one day at a then famous restaurant called Voisin's in the Rue St. Honoré. I remember we had Soles Marguery with a delicious sauce involving shrimps and mussels, and he was horrified at the bill. He also very kindly took me to the opera — Faust on this occasion. The opera house seemed enormous, and I remember being intrigued by the way the men in the stalls during intervals stood up and examined the distant dress circle through opera glasses, presumably looking for acquaintances whom they couldn't spot with the naked eye — or perhaps just observing the women in their décolleté dresses.

We also went to the Folies Bergères one night, and I think my uncle felt a bit guilty at taking me, especially when "La femme au poil mobile" appeared on the stage. This was a rather dull turn by a woman clad in nothing but a fig leaf of black lace. She could waggle her tummy muscles in a remarkable way — a belly dancer? My uncle, during this item, kept muttering "Disgusting!"
Disgusting!

The highlight of this Paris visit was for me an unexpected meeting with a family of Australians. They happened to be staying at the Louvre, too, and there were excited greetings when we suddenly confronted one another in the hotel lift. With my uncle’s permission, these friends swept me off for a trip to Versailles. I don’t think I had realized before what a gulf there was between Englishmen of those Edwardian days and my own Australian countrymen. That was a relaxed and happy day. I think my uncle was as relieved as I when our Paris week ended.

Somewhere during this time, I went for a Lunn’s tour with three other Australian women who happened to be staying at the same London boardinghouse as my mother and myself. The tour was through the north of Italy. In those days tourists travelled by train. It was at a railway station in Switzerland (Basle, I think) that I came across really good coffee for the first time in my life — aromatic, delicious stuff. We did everything that the tour had promised. We walked up the leaning tower of Pisa; I remember hurrying when on the underside of it, I suppose feeling subconsciously that it would be preferable to be on the upper one should the whole structure suddenly collapse.

We went to Florence, Venice, Verona, and Milan, and we tramped for miles through enormous cathedrals on conducted tours. We arrived in Venice on a drizzling wet afternoon, and travelled from the station to our pension in a gondola with our umbrellas up — not at all romantic!

This pension seemed to be full of old ladies sitting on plush-covered chairs in the drawing room, knitting in a desultory fashion. One of my Australian co-tourists thought this was lovely — “just like home”. She was not so pleased with the Grand Canal, however, and compared it unfavourably with the Parramatta river back home in Sydney.

After we had been conducted all one morning through picture-galleries in Florence, and another cathedral was threatened for the afternoon, one of my Australian companions
and I went on strike. We sneaked away by ourselves, had coffee in a little restaurant, and took a tram to Fiesole. It was only then that we began to “feel” the country’s daily life, and forget for a little while that we were tourists. I have a vague recollection that in Verona we were shown Juliet’s balcony — or was it her tomb? Fair enough! Tourists to England may visit the home of Sherlock Holmes in Baker Street. Both “historic” spots are a tribute to their creators.

It was during this visit to England that I went with my parents to hear Rudyard Kipling lecture at the Royal Geographical Society on “The Psychology of Travel”. Shackleton, among others, was on the platform, and when Kipling had been speaking of the scents and smells familiar to travellers and explorers he suggested that for Antarctic men the smell that he believed would recall to them most vividly their life in the frozen south would be that of the seal oil used in cooking. He turned inquiringly to Shackleton as he spoke, and received a confirmatory nod and smile.

And that reminds me of an anecdote about Shackleton and a lecture he once gave in Germany at which the Kaiser was present. When it was over, the great Wilhelm graciously commanded that Shackleton be presented to him. This was done, and during the chat that followed, the Kaiser inquired: “Did you shoot many polar bears while in Antarctica?” Shackleton replied that there were no polar bears in the Antarctic. Displeased at having his ignorance exposed, the Kaiser snapped: “Why not?” I suppose if Shackleton had been less honest and more worldly-wise, he would merely have answered “unfortunately no” and left it at that.

It was on this visit to England that I went for a hike through the Trossachs with a Scottish friend. We spent the first night at the country home of some relatives of hers, and in the morning, of course, we had porridge for breakfast, but it was no ordinary porridge — the oats had been grown on the estate, and were freshly ground. From childhood onwards I have always loathed porridge, but these — porridge seems to be plural in Scotland — were different. It/they was/were delicious, especially when eaten with home-produced cream, and (I have to confess) sugar.
We walked through the Trossachs, and stayed the night at a hotel there, a grand place whose minions looked askance at our luggage — haversacks. We deposited these in the room we had booked, and taking a billy can and the makings of a picnic meal, we hired a boat and rowed out to Ellen’s Isle. I don’t know if we were the only people ever to have boiled a billy there, but that is what we did. It took some ingenuity and a good deal of dry bracken to get our fire going, but the billy boiled all right, and we had our tea in comfort, as the smoke of our fire kept the midges at bay. Lovely, quiet rural Scotland! And south of it, placid, comfortable England! And across the Channel, in the midst of all its wonderful cathedrals and works of art, the outward trappings of so-called civilization, trouble brewing!
In March 1914, before term began, my parents and I returned to Sydney. There was a meeting there of A.N.Z.A.A.S. (the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science) attended by various scientists from overseas, including one from Germany. Into the middle of this friendly gathering the declaration of war dropped like a bomb. Our young men eagerly enlisted in defence of "the mother country". Battalion after battalion left Sydney for the other side of the world. Incidentally, the only time in my life that I have ever fainted was when my mother and I were waiting to watch one of these battalions march past on its way to the troopship. We had been standing with many other civilians lining the city streets for some time, certainly, but it must have been the psychological effect of the band and the marching men, for when the battalion first swung into view I had no premonition whatsoever of faintness. Then I suddenly found myself sitting beside my mother in a hansom cab, and a strange man was handing in my shoes to her. They were court ones, and had fallen off when I was lifted into the cab. I felt dreadfully humiliated, and I had missed seeing my friends march past. Most of them I was never to see again.

My father, an ardent patriot, was, of course, too old to enlist, being fifty-seven. My brother, who had just completed his medical course, made his way to England as M.O. on a troopship, and later became attached to the 6th Cameron Highlanders in France. My brother-in-law when fully qualified was an M.O. with the Imperial Forces in Salonika.

My father, however, thought up a way of being useful to the army and getting to the front himself. To quote a Sydney newspaper of the time:
The Minister for Defence, Mr. Pearce, announced today that the Imperial Authorities had gratefully accepted the offer of the Commonwealth Government to raise and equip for service at the front a special corps of geologists and miners. Immediate steps are to be taken to recruit men for the unit... In announcing the formation of the corps the Minister said that some little time ago General Birdwood referred in one of his despatches to the highly successful work accomplished by the miners attached to the Australian Expeditionary Forces. Following upon the remarks of General Birdwood, representations were made to the Defence Authorities by Professor David of the Chair of Geology at the Sydney University, in regard to a definite utilization for war purposes, of the mining resources of Australia.

As soon as it was decided to raise this corps, my father offered his services as geologist on its staff. The colonel to whom he made the offer was a personal friend who gazed at him speechless for a few seconds, and then exclaimed: “You dog! You cunning old dog! So that’s why you were so anxious to have this battalion formed!”

And so my father went off to France to play his part in World War I. We, who were left at home, so many thousands of miles away from the centre of things, did what we could. My mother and I became enthusiastic Red Cross workers. By 1916 wounded men were being sent home from Europe to convalesce in their own country, and accommodation for them became a difficulty. My mother instantly perceived that our Woodford home, being a big, rambling place with wide verandahs, would make an ideal convalescent home for about a dozen men. She offered it to the Red Cross for this purpose for the duration of the war, or for as long as it would be needed. The offer was accepted, and she then felt justified in indulging once more in her favourite hobby – building. This time it was a three-roomed fibro cottage for herself and me, built close to Tyn-y-coed.

My mother, as I have mentioned before, was an excellent public speaker, and all her life was in great demand to address women’s meetings of various sorts. She was practical and methodical, and invaluable on committees as chairwoman.
As the war progressed, the mothers of young recruits were becoming more and more disturbed by the fact that their sons were being led astray, or at any rate shouted constantly to drinks when off duty and in the city at night. It was largely owing to my mother's efforts that the six o'clock closing of public houses became law. She not only spoke at meetings all over the country advocating this, but with others headed a procession of several thousand women who marched through the streets of Sydney to present their petition at Parliament House. My mother was always ready to do battle for a cause she believed to be just, no matter how unpopular or how hopeless it might be.

We heard from friends at the Red Cross head office in Sydney that Tyn-y-coed as a convalescent home was a success, and was popular with the soldiers. It was too small to be institutional, had no rules, and the cooking was excellent. The whole place was run by voluntary workers. However, it had one great drawback — no transport. We had long since given up our ponies and trap, and there was only one vehicle to be hired in the village, and this was not always available for bringing soldiers and their kit to and from the station. At first we pinned our hopes for transport to a wealthy local resident who had recently acquired a limousine, but when he was sounded as to whether he would lend it sometimes for our use, we found that his chauffeur had been given orders that no soldiers were ever to be allowed in it. The soldiers, incidentally, were rank and file, not officers. This dog-in-the-manger person, as we considered him, regarded our military convalescents as not only rough and tough but ungodly, for he protested to my mother about their lack of Sunday observance; they played games — ping-pong, for instance! Tut! Tut! — instead of going to church. When she asked what he expected them to do on Sunday afternoons, he said they should go for walks and think of their Maker.

The long and the short of it was that my mother became so indignant that she decided to provide transport for the men out of her own pocket. She would buy a car, and I would drive it. All my life my mother had arranged things for me like this. I remember when I was about seven years old she had decided
that I was to take up stamp collecting as a hobby, but I just
couldn't be interested in it, so that lapsed. When I was about
thirteen she decided it would be nice for me to keep bees. I was
terrified of them. We never had more than two hives, and a kind
friend collected the honey for us, so that fell through, of
course.

And now I was to go to a driving school, and learn not only
how to drive a car, but how its inside worked. My mother's
feelings were contagious, and fired by her indignation and
determination, I willingly took up the challenge, cowardly and
unenterprising though I was. I went to a driving school in
Sydney, studied the combustion engine, and teetered timidly
about the metropolis in a ramshackle car accompanied by an
instructor. There were trams everywhere, and the Philip-
Elizabeth – Hunter Street corner was a tricky S bend with
double tramlines in it. My instructor advised me to observe
reflections in the shop windows there which gave one warning
of approaching trams before they rounded the bend. I was too
terrified to notice anything but the road in front of me.

The police test was a simple one, and directly I had passed it
and been issued with a licence, my mother bought a car. It was
a four-cylinder Dodge tourer. Sedans at that time were
considered luxury cars. A man from the agents who sold it
drove me in our brand-new car up to Woodford. He deposited it
in the garage – yes, of course my mother had had a garage built
at our new cottage – and returned to Sydney. I was left with
this dreadful monster on my hands, an unknown quantity
despite my newly acquired knowledge of how its inside worked.
It stood there, big and black and shiny, laughing up its sleeve
valves, no doubt (author's licence – it hadn't that variety), and
I was terrified of it.

My mother was delighted with her planning – the car would
be used not only for carrying soldiers and their luggage to and
from the station, but would take them for trips to see the
beauty spots in the mountains. She hadn't the remotest idea of
her daughter's feelings about it.

The next morning I was expected to demonstrate my prowess
at the wheel. It was the first time I had been behind this
particular one. With a thudding heart I opened the garage doors and proceeded to back the car out onto the road. The ground between the garage and the double gates was slightly uphill, and canted slightly sideways. However, I got going and backed rapidly up the slope, not realizing that one half of the double gates had blown shut — the half I wasn’t looking at, of course. There was a momentary jar, a crack and behold! the half gate trampled under wheel! My morale was still further shattered by this incident, but pride upheld me. I loathed and feared the wretched vehicle, and any psychologist could have told me that I was completely unfitted to drive anything. Perhaps it was not only pride that came to my rescue, but the grounding my sister and I had had in literature, and its influence on our lives. Apart from historical novels packed with deeds of derring-do, our reading had been The Boys’ Own Paper, Chums, Jules Verne, and so on; we had always despised girls’ storybooks and magazines. And so, I suppose, masculine ideals of bravery had been superimposed on my naturally timid, feminine disposition.

The soldiers blithely accepted me as a responsible driver, and all went well with our outings till one cold morning the car wouldn’t start. Only one of the men knew all about cars — or said he did. As the self-starter wasn’t coping, he volunteered to crank. There was a crank handle in the tool kit, and in the front of the car a small plate covering the hole for its use. He unscrewed this, cranked up, replaced the plate, and off we went. The next day he obligingly cranked again, and then said: “You might as well put this little thing in the tool kit — it’s only a finish to the car, anyway, and it’ll save time when I have to crank.” Painfully aware of his superior knowledge — after all, he was a man and I was only a woman — and my lack of it, I obeyed.

We then proceeded on our way, the car full of trusting convalescents. Halfway back from Springwood, whither we had gone, the engine began to boil. I stopped, opened the bonnet, and found that the fan, though still belted, was stationary — it appeared to be caught somehow on the radiator gills. We travelled home cautiously, the engine still boiling, and I put the wretched car away in the garage. On my mother’s advice I sent
out an S.O.S. to a friend who worked in a car agency in Sydney, and he kindly drove up to Woodford as soon as he was able. He took one look at the car and another at me.

"Do you know what you have done?" he inquired sternly. "That little plate that you say is only a ‘finish’ to the car is vital. The engine is bolted to the chassis in three places — two at the rear and one in front. You have unbolted the front one, causing the engine to drop at least an inch — hence the fan trying to cut through the radiator. You are very lucky not to have wrecked the whole engine."

He was a muscular fellow, and hoisted the engine up into place, screwed on the “finishing plate”, and said: "You remember this — everything on a car is put there for a purpose.” This, of course, was before the car became a status symbol, and luxurious vulgarities were added.

Gradually I came to regard this first car with less aversion (I called it Cuthbert) and was beginning to develop almost a timid affection for it when my mother received a cable from the Defence Authorities telling her that her husband had been severally injured in France. Details of the accident were not possible in a cable, but we learnt later that while he was being lowered on a bucket down a hundred-foot dry well (it was important for tunnelling reasons) to examine the strata, when he was about twenty feet from the top the windlass collapsed, and he was dropped the remaining eighty feet to the bottom of the well. All we knew at the time was that he was in hospital with internal injuries. My mother decided that we must both go to England at once to be with him.

Having convinced the authorities that she had her husband’s permission to leave the country, and that her income tax was paid, she booked a passage for herself and me on the Niagara, bound for Vancouver. A friend of ours, Isabel, who also wished to go to England, came with us. We were to travel across Canada and then get a ship at Halifax for the Atlantic crossing.

The United States, much to our indignation, was still neutral at this time, and though it was safe to travel on American ships, my fervently patriotic mother would have none of them. No! Submarines or no submarines, we would cross the Atlantic on a
British ship, and to hell with America!

During the voyage from Sydney to Vancouver we made friends with one of the ship's officers who heartily agreed with my mother's sentiments. The night before we arrived at Vancouver, a steward knocked at my cabin door, and presented me with a large envelope. I opened it and found it contained a piece of bunting and a short note. It was from this ship's officer, saying that he was enclosing a mascot for our Atlantic crossing — a piece of an old merchant ensign, under which we should feel "proud and safe to sail". Another fervent patriot! There was enough of the bunting to be divided into three, and we each took a piece.

It was winter in Canada, and crossing the Rockies was a glorious experience. Once more I found myself on the east coast, and about to take ship for England, but this time the port was Halifax. We had hardly arrived there when the British government issued a new regulation. Owing to the submarine danger, now extreme, no women were to be allowed on British ships crossing the Atlantic.

Women who had been fellow travellers with us switched at once to American ships, but not my mother! She would battle with the authorities till we obtained permission to sail on a British one.

However, money was our problem. We had enough for our travelling expenses, but the rest was in a bank in London, so till we had permission to cross, we must earn some. Our friend, Isabel, and I scanned the "situations vacant" advertisements in the Halifax newspapers. Only one of these seemed suitable, and that was for a cook and a chauffeur in a doctor's household. Isabel could cook, and I could drive a car, so we went to the address given, and were interviewed by the doctor's wife, a charming person. She was quite ready to employ Isabel as a cook — we had told her our dilemma — but said that Halifax was not yet ready for women chauffeurs, and if she were to engage me as such her husband would lose not only his practice but his reputation. She was very apologetic and sympathetic, and we were very pleased to have met her.

In Halifax we had what is known in business circles as a
"contact". She was a relation of a Sydney friend, and she advised us to go to New Glasgow where several munition factories were operating, and work would be more easily obtainable. So to New Glasgow we went, armed with introductions to several residents there.

The people in this little Nova Scotian town were hospitable and friendly. We rented part of a house there, and had many invitations to their homes. However, we were bent on earning, and Isabel and I soon obtained work in a munition factory. The work was on eighteen-pounder shells. Isabel was allotted a machine cutting open ends, and I was given one doing rough turning.

One of the first things we did when we received our pay envelopes was to send flowers to the doctor's wife in Halifax from "The cook and chauffeur". The letter of thanks she wrote in reply I treasured for many years afterwards.

Isabel and I fell upon our munition work with enthusiasm, and soon became friendly with our fellow workers. The only thing about them we found difficult to adjust to was their chewing habits. Many of the girls chewed gum, and most of the men tobacco. On night shift, when we women had our supper in the rest room allotted to us, the girls would remove the gum from their mouths and slap it onto the under side of a wooden table there till they had finished their supper, and were ready to return to work. Then they peeled the gum off its anchorage and replaced it in their mouths. We learned that there were social standards in gum chewing. A person might chew — that was socially acceptable — but "crack" gum? No! A discriminating girl would not go out with a boy who "cracked" his gum. This meant pulling it out like a piece of elastic, and then letting it snap back into the mouth — not done in the best chewing circles!

The people we met socially in New Glasgow were certainly not gum chewers. They prided themselves on being very English. We were intrigued by the women's "At Home" days. They all had visiting cards, and a great deal of calling went on. They knew one another's at-home days, because the dates of these were printed on their visiting cards, but if a woman
happened to be busy or indisposed, and didn’t want to receive callers, on the due date all she had to do was hang a dainty little basket on the knocker of her front door. Into this any caller would deposit her card, and so the conventions were observed.

Another thing that interested us was the attitude of our landlady, one of the social elite, towards her hired help, or cleaner. The latter was a large, good-natured Negro woman. These two had been to school together, and addressed one another by their Christian names, but both recognized the status of employer and employee.

My mother was the housekeeper of our party. She shopped, cooked and washed for the three of us. It was still winter, and the washing froze stiff on the line. It was a queer experience unpegging these rigid garments, and carrying them indoors. All the houses had basements where the central-heating stove was situated, as well as the garden’s rose bushes. These were dug up before the ground froze at the beginning of winter, and replanted in spring as soon as the soil was sufficiently thawed.

We liked our life and the people in New Glasgow, but were anxious to get to England, and felt frustrated. After we had worked for some time at our shell factory, it was suddenly closed. Government inspectors found that faulty shells were being passed by the manager. He was supposed to be Danish, but was now suspected of being a German saboteur. Rumour had it that he had been arrested. At any rate he disappeared, and we were out of a job till a strike occurred at another, larger factory. Women had never been employed there on machines, but the management decided to try them out now in the hope of breaking the strike. Isabel and I, amongst others, applied for and obtained work there.

On the morning when we arrived there to begin our jobs, we had to pass through lines of booing strikers drawn up by the factory gates. It was the first time in my life that I had been booed, and found it depressing.

At the factory I was posted to a magnificent “turret” machine which swung round on a pivot, bringing various tools into operation on the shells (4.5s this time) for undercutting and making squiggly lines for the driving bands and so on. An
Molly at the age of twenty-seven.
Molly (behind girl in dark dress) sitting on empty shell cases with some of the girls on her shift at the munitions factory in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, 1917. Women had never before been employed on the machines of a munitions factory, until a strike by the men.
efficient young man (a scab, of course) introduced me to it.

We women manned the machines for a week before the strikers went back to work. I loved my turret machine, and hated having to give it up. Isabel and I were given shell-inspecting jobs by the management, and found it dull work. There was a lot of hanging about, a little pushing about (of trolley-loads of 4.5s) and sometimes the routine was broken by a visit from government shell-inspectors. These men all seemed to be inveterate tobacco chewers, and while they were inspecting shells Isabel and I were expected to accompany them. We became quite adept at leaping out of the way when they spat. Chewing tobacco may be healthier than smoking it, but it is definitely not as socially acceptable.

Winter faded, spring arrived, then early summer, and we were still held up in New Glasgow. Rose bushes were planted out, and the lilacs, mauve and white, began flowering beside the porches of Nova Scotian houses. When the roads became passable I had a little driving practice in a large, cumbersome American car belonging to new acquaintances. One day when I was out in this with its owners, it suddenly stalled after bumping along rough country roads, and we found ourselves marooned a good way from home. I earned an undeserved reputation as a mechanic on this occasion by diagnosing the trouble — a broken wire which I was able to mend with a fringe-net hairpin. We rubbed the enamel off this on a stone before using it.

As the summer advanced, in some roundabout way through one of our New Glasgow friends, a politician was prodded into obtaining special permission for us to cross the Atlantic. Delighted to be on the move once more, we packed our bags, bade farewell to all our kind friends in New Glasgow, and took train to Montreal. Once there, we booked passages on a Bristol-bound British ship. It proved to be one of the pleasantest voyages I have ever experienced. This was largely owing to the captain, who took us under his wing. It was lovely weather to be at sea, clear and smooth.

The captain marked out our deck games for us, and entertained us with anecdotes about his wartime adventures. He
had been torpedoed in one ship, been in a collision in fog in another, and had rescued survivors of submarine attacks adrift in their lifeboats. Incidentally, he also shared our dislike of gum chewing. I remember he told us of a Montreal post office employee who was chewing gum as he checked over a telegram the captain was sending to London. “London Ontario?” inquired the gum chewer nonchalantly. This seemed to the captain to be the last straw. “No!” he snapped, “London the whole bloody world!”

The stewardess on the ship was a lecturer in classics at an English university — she had signed on for the job of stewardess in order to get back to her own country. The stewards, who were real ones, were very kind to her, and did most of her work for her.

We had a gun in the stern of our ship, and one of our entertainments during the voyage was watching the gunners practice-shooting at a cask thrown overboard as a target.

The night before we entered the submarine zone, the captain invited the three of us to his cabin for coffee and a chat. He asked us then to be sure to sleep with our life jackets on the floor beside our bunks, and never to undress — no baths, of course!

The night before we were due in Bristol was an uneventful one, but early the next morning, soon after daylight, we suddenly heard shouts on the deck above us, and then the sound of swiftly running feet. We just had time to register this as trouble brewing, when the chief steward arrived, panting, at our cabin door. “Will you please take your life jackets and go to the saloon square at once! Captain’s orders”, he announced.

There were two other women passengers on the other side of the ship — we hardly ever saw them because they stayed in their cabin for most of the voyage — and my mother volunteered to alert these, while I went to Isabel’s cabin to tell her. I found her stripped to the waist, having a semi-bath. I was irritated at this, because I felt obliged to wait while she dressed, and visualized myself trapped in the narrow passageway outside her cabin while the ship sank.

However, we all arrived pretty promptly at the saloon square,
and were told that a submarine had been sighted. At the end of about twenty minutes, during which we felt more excited than apprehensive, the chief steward informed us that we might now return to our cabins if we wished. The danger, for us, was past, but not for another ship in our vicinity. Later in the day our wireless operator picked up its S.O.S. We heard of this while we were strolling on deck as we came up the Bristol Channel.

Having docked, we tipped our stewardess for fun (she gave the money to the Red Cross), said goodbye and went ashore. It was lovely to be in England again. The captain invited us three to his home in Bristol to meet his wife, and have a cup of tea and a farewell chat before we took train to London.

By this time my father had recovered from his injuries, and was back in France at his job at G.H.Q., so we all three set about doing our bit, too. My mother found a post as matron of a hostel for girls doing some sort of war work, in Kirkcudbright. Incidentally, the hostel, a converted private home, was called Belmont, and when my mother first saw the name on the gate, she said to the Scotswoman accompanying her: “Belmont! ‘In Belmont is a lady richly left.'” Her companion replied: “No, indeed – she’s a puir widow.”

I don’t remember what Isabel did, but I think she found work in a munition factory. I enlisted in the W.A.A.C.s – Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps. These were enrolled in London at a big hotel commandeered for the purpose, and here I became introduced to army discipline which I loathed. I was barked at by a woman sergeant when I was first being interviewed: “Stand to attention when you speak to a superior officer!” she snapped.

We, the recruits, were drilled and went for route marches in Hyde Park. As a car driver I was posted, with others, to Plumstead on the outskirts of Woolwich Arsenal. We slept in a hostel, and every morning were called for by a bird cage lorry which conveyed us to the Arsenal. There we breakfasted in a big shed before reporting to our unit, a fleet of Ford vans. These, having the old epicyclic gear, were new to me. However, they were easy to drive – when their clutches weren’t slipping. There were ten or twelve of us women drivers, and we were presided
over by a lively little he-sergeant who, in civil life, “travelled” in ladies’ underwear.

Every morning the Detail would be posted up in the A.S.C. office. Having perused this, each woman started up her allotted van, and set to work. Our jobs were many and varied – all fetching and carrying, of course – sometimes within the Arsenal itself, and sometimes in the city, and our loads could be anything from periscopes to people. It was quite interesting, and I liked the work, though I hated the Plumstead hostel.

At the A.S.C. garage there were skirmishes between us and the male lorry-drivers, because they were always pinching our only watering can for filling radiators. However, our little sergeant had it painted in camouflage so that it was easily identifiable.

We had air raids, of course. As Punch put it:

Though overhead the Gothis buzz,
Stands London where it did? It does.

But of course the raids were mild affairs compared with those of World War II. And now this “rational being”, Homo sapiens, has devised more effective ways of destroying his fellows in World War III, when it comes.

One of the highlights of my stay at the Plumstead hostel was when I was invited to lunch at the home in Woolwich of Colonel Edmonds, one of my father’s friends at G.H.Q. He had a dry sense of humour and a rather biting tongue, and his comments on current affairs, particularly army ones, were most entertaining. Afterwards, when he was a general, and knighted, he had the unenviable task of compiling an official history of the war.

When I had leave, I would go up to London to visit my actress friend, Una. She was staying with friends – a very charming family, one of whom was Bernard Shaw’s secretary – in a flat in Adelphi. Sir James Barrie had a flat in the same building, and they sometimes shared the basement with him during air raids.

I was with Una and her friends for dinner one night, when the “maroons” went off. These were air raid warnings. Una’s
friends consisted of a mother, known to her family as “The Lamb”, and two daughters. The Lamb was rather deaf and didn’t hear the maroons, so one of her daughters announced in her ear: “Lamb! Huns!” The Lamb sighed resignedly, put away her embroidery, and we all descended to the basement till the raid was over. One bomb fell very close to Charing Cross that night, very close to where we were.

After a few weeks at Plumstead, I was put in charge of our small fleet of Ford vans. This was a worrying job that I didn’t like at all. The little sergeant and I were responsible for keeping the vans on the road, and they always seemed to be suffering from slipping clutches, or some other ailment.

Every morning the day’s instructions for our fleet of vans was posted on a board in the garage, and was known as the Detail. One morning the sergeant and I committed a dreadful crime — from a military point of view; we altered the Detail without reference to our commanding officer. A van detailed to go through London we discovered was not behaving well, so we switched it to Arsenal work, and sent out a more reliable one to cope with the city traffic. Our crime was discovered, and we were had up before the A.S.C. officer. I remember the sergeant’s cap had to be removed while he was being roared up. I was allowed to retain my hat (the W.A.A.C.s had hats, not caps) and was treated to a milder reprimand. It was never explained to us in what way we had imperilled the safety of the Empire. The vans, though switched, had done the allotted jobs efficiently. However, ours not to reason why, I suppose.

After some time at Plumstead, I applied for a transfer to the Women’s Legion, another army organization employing women drivers. The application was granted, I was fitted out with a new uniform, and posted to Manchester. The Women’s Legion I think, though am not sure, consisted entirely of women drivers attached to the A.S.C. It had a much smarter uniform than the W.A.A.C.s’, but this entailed a good deal of polishing — brass buttons, cap badge, and so on.

After some weeks in Manchester I managed to get transferred to Edinburgh. This was heaven, because I was billeted with my sister in Thirlestane Road, and though the garage to which I was
attached was on the far side of Princes Street that was only a very minor disadvantage compared with being once more with my family.

Our jobs in Edinburgh were as varied as they had been in Plumstead. Sometimes we drove Ford vans, sometimes staff cars. The job I liked best was taking rations to anti-aircraft gun stations along the Firth. It was summertime, and the country was glorious. I remember singing happily as I drove along.

Once when I was returning from Queensferry, I was hailed by an R.A.F. officer who had missed his train to Edinburgh and was thumbing a lift. We were not allowed to carry passengers, other than A.S.C., the penalty for this being the loss of a week’s pay. However, having explained this to him, I decided to take the risk. He was a very attractive young man. He scrambled aboard, and off we went. Presently we sighted a staff car full of brass-hats which might possibly be A.S.C. ones, approaching. My passenger took off his cap and covered the wings on his chest with it as the car approached. However, it turned out to be a naval staff car, on discovering which my passenger exclaimed “All’s well! It’s replete with admirals!”, and replaced the cap on his head. I remember this little incident because it was exhilarating to be in the company of a frivolous young man. I did miss my happy-go-lucky Australian friends.

Sometimes we had munition jobs, such as driving factory inspectors about. We always felt it a come-down to have civilians in our cars – very unreasonable, but there it was! However, civilians were preferable to the loads of smelly fats and bones we sometimes had to pick up at the back doors of hotels. This cargo had to be taken to factories, because glycerine was valuable in making explosives. I used to drive as fast as possible on these occasions, hoping to out-distance the smell.

Once I had to drive a British prisoner up to Edinburgh Castle, and I hated this job. I don’t know what crime he had committed (altered the Detail, perhaps?), but he was under escort, and I kept my eyes away from him the whole time, feeling embarrassed and sad.

A really pleasant task was meeting returned prisoners of war
at Leith docks, after the armistice was signed, and taking them
to trains or wherever they were to go. There were happy
reunions with friends or families of the Scottish ones. I had one
interesting passenger to pick up there on one occasion. He was
an ex P.O.W. English officer who was to take the night express
from Edinburgh to London. His ship had docked in the
afternoon, and as he had several hours to spare before the train
left, he wanted to have a bath. He seemed to think it would be
quite simple to hire a room-with-bath-attached at a hotel. His
problem was complicated by an enormous despatch bag, heavily
sealed, with which he had been entrusted and told not to let out
of his sight. I drove him round to practically every hotel in
Edinburgh, but without success. As usual in wartime, they were
all full to overflowing. Then I suddenly had an inspiration. My
sister had some very dear friends with a comfortable home in
Palmerston Road. They were hospitable, patriotic Scots, and
had a commodious bathroom capable of holding at least one
officer complete with despatch bag. I telephoned them and
explained my predicament. The reply was prompt: “Bring him
here, of course!”

I then told the officer what I had done. He seemed a bit
dubious about the arrangement, though I assured him that these
people were not enemy agents, but the salt of the earth. By this
time he was getting rather tired and hungry, and longing for his
bath, I suppose. At any rate, it ended in my depositing him and
his despatch bag at my friend’s house, after which I thankfully
went home to dinner at my sister’s flat. Later I returned to
Palmerston Road to see how things were going, and found the
superconscientious officer, having had his bath, dining happily
with his Scottish hosts, the despatch bag by his chair. I forget
how we got him to his train, but eventually he was safely
deposited there, despatch bag and all. He wrote our hospitable
friends a very nice letter of thanks afterwards from one of the
stately homes of England.

The A.S.C. officer in charge of our unit was very scathing
about this young man and his despatch bag. “Why couldn’t he
bung the blasted thing in the cloakroom at the station?” he
demanded.
My brother, during this time, had been severely wounded, and was convalescing in Devonshire. He had already been mentioned twice in despatches, and was awarded the Military Cross. My father was now a lieutenant colonel with a D.S.O. after his name, and America had decided to enter the lists.

There were many Australian soldiers on leave in London, and while I was with the W.A.A.C.s in Plumstead, I was sometimes lucky enough to come across friends among them. I remember going out to dinner and a show one night with an old dancing partner. His leave was up the next day, and he was in a thoughtful mood. He told me that through seeing so many men die in France, he had somehow come to know — that was the word he used — that people didn’t die when they were killed. He couldn’t explain why he had this conviction, but it was there. He went back to France the next day, and was killed about a week later.

But to return to Edinburgh. The Germans were beginning to crack, and soon Armistice Day arrived. As a genteel employee in a post office near Thirlestane Road said to my sister on the great day: “Did ye hear the news? Hospitalities will cease at noon!”

The war — that one — was over. England went mad, delirious with joy. The historic scenes of dancing and singing in Trafalgar Square took place. In Edinburgh the rejoicing was quieter. At my sister’s flat that night we could hear the navy in the Forth tooting its sirens, and see the flashing beams of searchlights swinging madly, triumphantly, across the sky.

Heartfelt relief manifests itself in different ways. I knelt in the dark beside my bed, and cried and cried.
Having been honourably discharged from the army, I returned with my parents to Sydney. The Gunyah had been sold, and Woodford was considered to be too far away from Sydney for my father's work, so my parents — or rather my mother — began hunting for a house in the suburbs. My father always left domestic matters such as house hunting to his wife; for him it came under the heading of women's work. Of course when my mother finally settled on a suitable place, he was called in to give his opinion before financial arrangements came to a head.

The upper north shore suburbs, being about six hundred feet above sea level, and in their extreme northerly parts not as fashionable as the expensive harbour-side residential area, became my mother's hunting ground. What is known among snobs as "a good address" never entered the head of either of my parents.

While my mother was house hunting, we lived in various temporary places. The last of these was one of a large block of flats in the city, overlooking Sydney's Hyde Park, and here we had a mild adventure. I woke one night to hear unusual sounds — voices raised in urgency, and an occasional shout. I opened the door of our flat and looked down the long corridor that skirted a central well on each floor. I saw firemen in brass helmets battling with hoses, and through a haze of smoke a motley collection of people dressed anyhow, and carrying belongings to the lifts. One man had several pictures under his arm, another carried a bird cage, and one woman waiting for the lift had a suitcase in either hand and three hats on her head, piled one on top of the other.

I retreated to my parents' room, and roused them with some difficulty.
Molly in her first car, a four cylinder Dodge tourer. She learnt not only how to drive it but also how it worked.
Sir Edgeworth and Lady David in the bush at their Hornsby home in 1921.
"I think there's a fire", I explained apologetically.

"In our building?" inquired my mother sleepily. I said I thought it was, so they got up and dressed, and my father went to investigate. Yes, there was a fire in our building, and the firemen thought that perhaps we should get out. We each took some small thing with us, my mother and I our purses, and my father picked up one of the bags he took to the university every day. On this occasion the one he took contained, not his papers as he thought, but a pair of old boots destined for the boot mender.

In the park we found a bench, seated on which we had a comfortable view of proceedings. There is always something inspiriting in a fire — not so much the glow of the flames as the clanging engines complete with uniformed firemen hurtling into conflict with destruction. As my father philosophically remarked, recalling the horrors of the recent war, how fortunate we were to be sitting there quietly, while men battled nobly to help, not harm us. The fire was quickly brought under control. It had started in a building behind ours, and had leapt the narrow lane between, burning two or three of the flats. I remember my mother took in a woman, whose flat had been badly burnt, for what was left of the night.

Eventually it was in Hornsby, about fifteen miles from the centre of Sydney, that my mother discovered a small weather-board cottage perched on the slope of a few acres of bushland. At the bottom of the slope was a little creek, spanned by two bridges, one for car traffic, and a smaller one for foot passengers. Access to the road was over these. It was a picturesque place, and cheap enough for the purse of a university professor not many years from retirement on a pension. The cottage was small and hideous, and my heart sank when I was introduced to my new home. At that time we had no friends in the district either. My mother thought the situation a charming one for elderly people to spend their declining years in, and I ruefully agreed that for such a purpose it was ideal.

Of course it was not long before my mother started building operations. Under her instructions a carpenter-builder began the
usual bursting out of the house in all directions. A dining room was added and a sitting room (drawing rooms were out and living rooms not yet in), a study for my father, a new kitchen, a laundry, another bedroom and various verandahs. Water and electric light was already laid on, but there was no sewerage, and no night-cart service. After about a year of burying night soil ourselves — men were not always available for this job — my mother had a septic tank installed.

Somewhere about this time I took part in a procession, and on recent Anzac Days I have been remembering it and wondering if it could have been the very first Anzac Day march past. All I know is that various private car owners were asked if they would volunteer to drive disabled convalescent soldiers in the procession. I was one driver who volunteered, and I picked up my passengers at a hospital somewhere in Randwick, I think. It was the last occasion on which I wore my Women’s Legion uniform, its brass buttons and A.S.C. cap badge well polished for the occasion. My car at that time was, of course, an open touring one — very suitable for a procession, as the wounded men could both see and be seen.

The years between the end of World War I and the early 1920s, till my sister sent her two eldest children to live with us and go to schools here, were not very happy ones for me, as my life seemed rather pointless. I lived at home and was the family chauffeur. I drove my father to the station every day, and my mother, who was a keen State Commissioner of Girl Guides, as well as an active member of various other commendable organizations, kept her chauffeur busy.

As the daughter of my parents’ house, I had other duties besides that of chauffeur, one of them being preparing and pouring tea for them and their visitors. Though I came to dislike this job, it sometimes had its compensations, for some of the visitors were very interesting people. Amateur scientists needing help were in the habit of applying to my father. One interesting visitor was a charming Aboriginal man who believed he had discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and had written to my father about it. My father asked him to come to our Hornsby home, and persuaded his colleague, Professor Von
Wüler, physics professor at the university, to meet him there and discuss the matter. They strolled about our rough bush garden while Professor Von Wüler tactfully explained the inventor's error to him.

Another visitor was Hubert Wilkins (later Sir Hubert), a distinguished polar explorer. He had come to get my father's help about some project, and happened to be left alone in the sitting room for a few minutes with a very small niece of mine, Anne McIntyre, who was staying with us. I entered the room with the tea trolley in time to rescue him from Anne who was chanting "Noisy pillow fights with visitors", and beating him over the head with a cushion. He was too shy and too unaccustomed to small children to retaliate by seizing a cushion himself and joining battle, which was what Anne had hoped for.

Our cars varied in make. After Cuthbert, the next one was Ethelred, because in his early life he was not always ready to go. He, also, was a four-cylinder Dodge. They were, on the whole, very reliable cars. We had three of them as the years went by, and I came to know them so well that I cleaned their cylinder heads and ground their valves myself.

After World War I my sister, her husband and their two children, Peggy and Archie, left Scotland and went to live in Launceston, Tasmania, where my brother-in-law became partner to a leading doctor.

The highlight of every year for me was the time I spent with my sister and her family in Tasmania. For about three months of each summer I stayed with them, and used to take the current Dodge car with me. This was quite a proceeding in those early 1920s — no roll-on-roll-off then! — and for me a worrying one. I would drive the car down on to the wharf where it was deprived of all its petrol. This had to be siphoned out. Sometimes I was able to get a man from a garage to do it, and sometimes a friend. I worried about the car in rough weather at sea, because there was no insurance against shipwreck — that was considered an act of God. Presumably if this occurred, one just bowed to His decree, and reverently refrained from attempting to recoup one's loss. However, if the car was dropped from its sling when being swung out onto the wharf
that was an act of man, and could be challenged. Business, in those days, at any rate, was difficult to understand.

In the 1920s, owing to the scarcity of service stations, there was a do-it-yourself trend among motorists, and we carried little vulcanizing outfits for mending punctures in inner tubes, and "sleeves" to protect gashes in outer covers. I always disliked battling with tyre-levers, though.

One summer when touring up the east coast of Tasmania, my Dodge’s cylinder-head gasket sprung a leak. I stopped at a little village where there happened to be a service station run by an intelligent young mechanic who hadn’t the correct spare, but cut a temporary gasket out of some stuff called adamite. He said this might possibly last the 600-mile journey from Melbourne to Sydney — I was going to drive home up the Prince’s Highway — but advised me to get a proper Dodge gasket in Melbourne, in case the adamite one gave out. This I did. I had my mother, an eleven-year-old niece (Peggy), and a woman friend as passengers, and we had a very pleasant trip, taking it slowly and spending several nights on the way. I remember a piece of bushland near Orbost in Victoria that was simply stiff with bell-birds. I happened to have a splitting headache at the time, and couldn’t appreciate their shrill chiming as much as the others did.

At Narooma we bought some marvellous oysters — local, of course — and in the Bega dairying district we picked masses of gorgeous mushrooms which we fried for our picnic lunch.

We were well into New South Wales when the temporary cylinder-head gasket gave out. I limped on three cylinders into the nearest village, and pulled up alongside the local school-house where there was a tank for refilling the radiator. It was holiday time, so I didn’t have an audience while I removed the engine-top and put on the new gasket. It only meant letting the water out of the radiator, disconnecting the carburettor, and unscrewing a few nuts. I was used to doing this at home, so it didn’t worry me. I think that was the biggest roadside repair I ever had to do, though I once had to organize and superintend a more vital one. This was in Tasmania. I was driving my sister and her newest baby one day along the winding road that
follows the Tamar river, when some navvies working by the side of it yelled at us as we passed, pointing at the front of our car. I pulled up and got out to see what was wrong, and found that the tie bar of the steering had broken in two. One of the men came hurrying up to help. There was a deserted cottage close by, with a backyard full of junk. Hunting among this I found a suitable iron rod — a piece of an old iron bedstead — armed with this the roadman and I crawled under the car. I directed while he constructed a splint for the broken bar. We had wire to bind it on with.

When my brother-in-law heard of this incident, he drove to the place where the men were working to thank them for having saved us from a nasty accident. He tried to reward them, but they flatly refused to take any money. This was standard behaviour on the part of self-respecting Australian workmen. Though we are gradually changing, as regards tipping, to English and American habits, by and large the custom is not yet generally accepted. Even now, at this time of writing, I have recently met taxi drivers, for instance, whom one wouldn’t dare to tip. Tipping is, of course, a product of snobbery — an outward symbol of class distinction, though in the United States I believe it is just a racket.

It is a long time to have been driving, since 1917, and I have seen many changes in our roads. I remember when we first returned to Sydney after World War I I took delivery of a new Dodge, and drove my father in it up to Woodford. It was dusk when we started along the Great Western Highway. This was still known as the Bathurst Road then, and its surface reminded my father of the shelled roads in France. There it would have been repaired, he said, before staff cars were expected to use it. It was dusty and full of potholes. Night fell as we travelled across the plains, and somewhere between Paramatta and Penrith we met a herd of cattle being driven Sydneywards. They were horned and looked enormous, their eyes gleaming like torches in the headlights through a haze of dust. I stopped, and let the sea of cattle surge past the little island of our car.

The road from Hornsby to Milson’s Point, where cars embarked for the metropolis on a ferry, was called Peats’ Ferry
Road (Peats’ Ferry plied across the Hawkesbury River) and was full of potholes. Driving northward from Sydney on a Sunday afternoon, when there was more traffic than usual, was like driving through a fog, but the fog was reddish dust. One had to travel slowly then because of poor visibility. Peats’ Ferry Road (now grandiloquently renamed Pacific Highway) was narrow — only wide enough for two lanes of traffic, one going north and the other south. Driving in to the theatre one night from Hornsby I once had a brush with another car. A stream of traffic was coming up from Sydney, and near Killara, on a bend in the road, I was suddenly confronted head-on by a car that was overtaking the line ahead of him. Fortunately there was a side road on my left, and we both shot up it, brushing one another lightly as we came to a halt. The driver of the other car leapt out and began apologizing profusely. “It’s entirely my fault”, he said, “I got impatient being behind that line of traffic, and just risked meeting anything on the corner! If there’s any damage to your car...” There was only a very slight dint, and a soft answer turneth away wrath. We both proceeded on our respective ways.

During the early 1930s I had one car, a Standard, that might have been called an unlucky one — one with a hoodoo on it. I bought it because it looked so attractive in the picture advertising it. It was a tourer with hood and side curtains — sedans were still not common, and were also much more expensive. We had this car for a few years, and things kept happening to it. Once, when I was driving (alone fortunately) down a hill on the main road between Wahroonga and Waitara, a hind wheel came off. The speed at which the car was travelling gave it momentum enough to steer to the side of the road before bumping to a halt. But I saw the wheel, which didn’t stop when the car did, bowling merrily along ahead of me. It was found later in a blackberry bush a few hundred feet further on. Having parked the car, I walked back to a bus stop, as I had to have transport to a service station. In the bus a local resident who didn’t know me, but recognized our car, exclaimed as we passed it: “Ullo! Ullo! There’s Lady David laid up!” My father had recently been knighted.
Another time an English cousin was driving my parents down from Woodford in this car, when the steering wheel suddenly came off in his hands. He managed to jam it on again before anything drastic happened, and held it pressed into position for the rest of the journey.

One day when I was driving over the mile-long harbour bridge which had replaced the old Milson’s Point Ferry, there was a stiff gale blowing, and while I was in the centre of the bridge, the canvas part of this car’s hood suddenly peeled off like a banana skin, and hung over the back of the car, leaving the bare bones of the framework still in position. When I paid my toll the man who took it informed me unnecessarily: “Yer hood’s off!” I replied coldly that I was aware of that fact, and drove on, trying to look dignified. Having passed through the toll I pulled in to the side of the road where an affable policeman rolled up the hood for me — it was still attached to the rear of the car — and put it neatly on the back seat.

“You aren’t the first one to lose a hood on the bridge today”, he informed me comfortably as we let down the framework. I might mention here that I have a soft spot for policemen, whom I have always found kind, helpful and prompt to answer calls.

It was in this same “unlucky” car that I had the only incident in my driving career involving a pedestrian. It happened on Pacific Highway, a few miles south of Hornsby. My mother and I were returning home one afternoon when a child of about eight ran out into the road from in front of a stationary bus on our left. Fortunately I was not travelling fast, and braked so effectively that instead of hitting her, I pushed her over. Nevertheless she was under the car when it stopped. Before I could get out of my seat she emerged, very dusty and slightly tearful, and I was confronted by an indignant woman who turned out to be the child’s aunt, responsible for seeing her safely home. This was before schoolchildren were briefed in “looking both ways” and so on.

There was a doctor’s house close by, and my mother insisted on taking both the child and her aunt in, while the former was examined for possible injuries. She had none, and we drove her
and the aunt to the child’s home. The mother was in her garden, and I went to tell what had happened. By this time my self-control was wearing thin, and tears were near the surface. The mother was perfectly sweet – she clasped both my hands comfortably, and we just stood there, holding hands and blinking back our tears.

The doctor, at my mother’s request, called to see the child the following day in case of delayed shock. When reporting afterwards he told us the only treatment he had given her was a lecture on darting across main roads in front of buses.

Though I drove my mother to and from her various meetings, I rarely attended any of them myself, but used to sit in the car, reading, knitting, doing crossword puzzles in the daytime, or just brooding if it happened to be night. I had the company of other chauffeurs occasionally when I happened to drive my parents to functions at Government House, but even so it seemed a long wait.

Occasionally I had to go in to a meeting to let my mother know that her car was ready to take her home. On one such occasion, when she had been asked to speak at a Purity League (for the promotion of equal standards of morality for men and women), I was met at the door of the Masonic Hall or School of Arts, or whatever the place was, by an earnest woman who peered up into my face, and greeted me with “You believe in the White Life for Two, don’t you?”

Fortunately at that moment my mother appeared and I was spared having to answer.

It was somewhere about the late twenties that I went to stay with friends, a doctor and his wife, at a country town, Coonabarabran. It was then a small typical one-street town, sporting a hotel, a butcher’s shop, a chemist’s and so on. On the windowsill of the butcher’s shop was a large bell – the sort with which stationmasters used to ring out trains. In this case it was for the use of customers. The butcher, during slack trading hours, was in the habit of retiring to the pub for company, but a few swings of the bell would summon him back to the shop.

This doctor friend was a keen golfer. The only course there at that time was a rough bush one – no grass anywhere, just sandy
ground made as level as possible for the "greens". My friend was playing there one day when a patient, driving a well-worn car, ran him down (figuratively) at one of the greens. This patient wanted a prescription renewed immediately. Neither he nor the doctor could find paper, pen or pencil between them, but the patient overcame their problem by handing the doctor a penknife and asking him to scratch the prescription on the wing of his car. This he did, and the man drove back to town and parked his car outside the chemist's shop. The chemist came out, read the prescription, the man got his medicine and everyone was happy.

There was a river at Coonabarabran — the Castlereagh, I think — not very wide but formidable when in flood. The doctor's wife told me of one such occasion when her husband was summoned to an urgent obstetrical case on the other side of the river. This was in winter time and at midnight. The bridge was under water, logs and debris of all sorts swirling down-river, and on the far bank was the agitated husband of the woman in labour, waiting with a car. The doctor, an athletic man, decided to swim across. He put a hypodermic and some tablets into a waterproof bag, walked up-river for a short distance, calculating how far the flood waters would be likely to carry him down-stream before he landed on the other side. Then, stripped enough for swimming, and holding the bag in his teeth, he plunged in and swam across, clambering ashore at the desired spot, to be welcomed with relief by the anxious husband. This incident became news in the local papers, and the doctor was acclaimed a hero. One little town in another state awarded him the freedom of its "city"!

While on the subject of Coonabarabran, this doctor told me recently of how they arranged their water supply there. When they first settled in the town their only supply was in tanks depending on rain to fill them, so on someone's advice the doctor called in a dowser to investigate the possibility of sinking a well. The water diviner came and discovered water, giving the approximate depth at which it could be tapped in their back-yard.

The doctor's wife, like many other people, was very sceptical
about the whole business. The dowser asked the doctor if he'd like to try his hand at water-divining, so, willing to test the thing with an open mind, he walked over the place chosen for the site of the well, but nothing happened — the twig, or whatever indicator was used, gave no reaction. The doctor obviously was not "gifted". He then suggested that his wife should have a go at it.

"Certainly not!" she replied. "It's a lot of rubbish!"

He eventually persuaded her to try her hand at it. She took the twig and walked over the controversial spot. As soon as she arrived there the twig turned strongly downwards, so strongly that she had to wrench it back, and she was furious.

The well was sunk and water found at the exact spot, and at the specified depth — or within a few feet of it.

A young doctor friend of mine has this dowser gift. Through his large garden there runs a sewer, deep underground and well grassed over. Any friends who wish to test their skill with the two wires he uses as divining rods are told to walk across the garden, holding the rods horizontally and lightly in their hands. I must admit that I was one of the sceptics till I tried my hand at it. I knew the sewer ran somewhere under and through the garden, but had no idea where. However, the wires had. I don't think I have ever felt anything more uncanny. Quite of their own volition they turned strongly in my hands from a horizontal to a vertical position as we crossed the invisible sewer.

Another instance of water-divining was at my brother's home at Buderim in Queensland. He was advised by friends there to employ a dowser, as he wanted a permanent water supply. This man found water below his garden, using a rod. A well was sunk, a pump installed, and my brother's tanks kept filled. Country people seldom question a water-diviner's powers, they are so accustomed to finding that they work. Why some people have this "gift" and others not, and what the "gift" itself is, nobody seems to know. Perhaps a throw-back to some long-lost instinct?

In 1924 my father had retired officially from the chair of geology at Sydney University, and in 1926 went to England on
business connected with the book he was writing on the geology of Australia. While there, he had a fainting or giddy turn, and on hearing of this my mother decided that she and I must go to London to look after him.

We booked our passages on a cargo steamer that had accommodation for twelve passengers. It was cheaper than the mail steamers, but pursued a rather devious course from Sydney to Antwerp. Having crossed the Bight it proceeded up the northwest coast of Australia to Wyndham on the Cambridge Gulf — why Cambridge, I wonder? Here we tied up to a jetty, and remained for several days, taking on a cargo of meat. There was a large meat works in Wyndham, and the town consisted mostly of one street, with a few shops, including a Chinese tailor's, a school and a small hospital.

Though it was the “good” season, as opposed to the “wet”, which was bad, it was 29°C in our cabin, night and day. The tides in the Cambridge Gulf are terrific. At high tide our cabin ports were well above the wharf, at low we looked out through the piles below it onto muddy water. There were crocodiles in this, and we were taken one day to see one that had been caught in a trap. They were attracted to it by the smell of blood from the meatworks, though the trap had been baited as well.

Visitors to Wyndham seemed to be welcome. My mother and I called on the matron of the little hospital, and the schoolmistress. The hospital was a small cottage with accommodation for about half a dozen beds. The schoolmistress regaled us with glasses of delicious cold milk from her refrigerator. This proved to be goats’ milk, the first I had ever tasted, and was what goats’ milk should be — not rank and nauseating as it is in European countries.

While in Wyndham we were taken one day for a drive by the owner of a large tract of cattle country in the north, Mr. Durack. There was no road outside the town, and his driver took the car through grass bonnet-high, past small lagoons where wild birds were disporting themselves, and across an almost dry river bed. This had to be negotiated with chains, because the banks were steep and sandy. The driver took it with a rush. The object of the drive was to visit a courteous
Chinaman who lived in a spotlessly-kept shack near a “lagoon”. He owned a flock of about a hundred goats, but this time we were given not milk but slices of watermelon as refreshment.

One night we went to a picture show. This was an open-air one, not a “drive-in” but a “walk-in”, as it was only a short way from the town and our ship. The show was provided for the meat works’ staff and employees. It was pleasant and novel to sit at a picture show in deck chairs under an open sky.

The other ports of call on our voyage were Capetown and Teneriffe — the latter a brief one to take on fuel, I think. We were advised not to go ashore there because of political unrest.

My father met the ship at Antwerp, and we ferried across to Harwich. England again — beautifully groomed, trim and hedged, and so lovely that as our train hurried up to London I had to blink back tears of emotion! Strange how beauty of sight or sound or thought has this effect on people! Understandable if it is linked with tragedy. Perhaps love of country inevitably is, and yet my own rugged one, with its hard blue skies and faded-tapestry bush, does not move me in this way. Perhaps because my love for it lies too deep for tears.

My mother had a friend in England who “bought houses as other women buy hats”, as one of her sisters put it, and in one of these we rented rooms. There was a communal dining room on the ground floor, but we had a sort of kitchenette in our apartment, and could cook for ourselves if we wished.

This friend of my mother’s had a family tree with its roots deep in the days of Boadicea, and she used to joke about the “jumped-up knights” of William the Conqueror with whom her people inter-married. Though untitled and far from wealthy, members of this family had a bowing acquaintance with royalty. The one who made that remark about her sister buying houses as other women buy hats, was a very striking personality. She was a member of parliament, and lived in a charming little Queen Anne house in Westminster. My mother and I had lunch with her there one day. Her domestic staff consisted of one faithful maidservant. The kitchen was immediately below the dining room, and when our hostess was ready for a second course, or for coffee, she merely stamped on
the floor. "That's not temper", she explained airily, "the bell to the kitchen's broken."

One night, after a dinner party at the house of another friend, also in Westminster, my mother and I had a small adventure. When we were leaving, a taxi called for us, and our friends waited at the door to wave us goodbye. We took our seats in the taxi, and the driver then proceeded to investigate the amount of petrol in his tank. This was situated under the driver's seat. He lifted off the cushion, unscrewed the cap of the tank, and struck a match to look into it. The result, as was to be expected (except, apparently, by the driver), was an instant burst of flame which seemed to envelop the whole cab. My mother and I, tucking our skirts about us, stepped out over the flames.

At that moment there appeared, strolling along the pavement, what might have been Bertie Wooster himself, in evening dress with a theatre hat perched on the back of his head. Stepping past the taxi driver who was just standing there, dazed, he snatched the cab's extinguisher from its socket, and in a few seconds put out the whole blaze. He then replaced the extinguisher in its socket and went on his way. I don't think he spoke a word, not even to the driver. The whole incident was quickly over, and our friends procured another taxi for us – one with a more intelligent driver, we hoped.

While we were in England, my father, who was working on his book The Geology of Australia, wished to consult a world authority on fossil botany, Dr Marie Stopes. Dr. Stopes, a doctor of philosophy (not of medicine, as many people believed), on receiving my father's letter, kindly invited him, my mother and myself to spend the weekend at her home in the country, and thither we went.

Dr. Stopes and her husband Mr. Roe at that time had an infant son, and to keep him company had adopted another little boy. They also had a Chow dog that seemed to rule the household, for Dr. Stopes told us that if it took a dislike to a servant, that servant would be dismissed. Incidentally, it took a dislike to me. While it was eating its dinner in the dining room, it growled at me, and Dr. Stopes said it was because I was
watching it eat — a familiarity resented by a royal dog of China.

She and her husband seemed to be devoted to one another. We all went for a walk on the Sunday, and I remember him saying to her as he helped her over a stile: “Have you a kiss for me in passing, dear?” She gave him one, and went on talking.

As a mere appendage of my parents I rarely took part in the conversation of my elders and betters, but was an interested listener. Dr. Stopes was a most dynamic personality and a forthright talker. Discussing her child with another guest, an elderly doctor, we were told where the baby was conceived and where born.

Another memory is her account of how she was inspired to confront a bevy of bishops with her ideas on birth control.

In spite of the Chow’s opinion, she was kind and sympathetic to me, because during the visit I had a sort of heart attack. This, as was discovered years later, was due to poisoning from an infected tooth. Dr. Stopes gave my mother various practical suggestions as to treatment and diet. My mother received the suggestions in the spirit in which they were meant.

Dr. Stopes and my father had quite a session over their fossil botany, of course. Some years later I came to know an Englishwoman who had been a fellow student of Dr. Stopes in her university days, and she told me that they had camped together on a botanical excursion once, and mentioned that Dr. Stopes had an inborn inability to sleep unless she was lying north to south — or east to west, I’m not sure which. My friend, who was sharing a tent with her was convinced that the inability was not imaginary, as she watched Dr. Stopes get up, and turn her stretcher in the desired direction, after which she slept peacefully.

An unusual, a redoubtable personality, but, I should imagine, a difficult one to live with.

It was during this visit to England that I went, with my father and mother, to stay with an uncle in Switzerland — the same uncle who had treated me to that Paris trip. He had retired from his profession just before World War I, and had bought a villa on the shore of the lake of Geneva, at a village called Nyon. The villa was staffed by a cook and a housemaid, both
French-Swiss, and a German-Swiss gardener. It had a beautiful view across the lake to distant Mont Blanc, and the garden sloped in grass terraces down to the water’s edge. Here was my uncle’s boat shed, and a bathing enclosure where I had an occasional swim — the water being quite a comfortable temperature in spite of distant snow-capped peaks, for it was summer time in Europe.

My uncle belonged to a club in Geneva, and here we all went to a luncheon one day at which the famous explorer, Fridjof Nansen, was guest of honour. He was a man of magnificent physique, and if he had lived in mediaeval times probably would have championed in the lists the minority countries, about which he was so concerned. As things were then, he could only battle for them with words in the League of Nations. We felt proud and privileged to shake hands with him.

My uncle owned a very large, obsolete make of German touring car, and I was allowed to drive this, after the village gendarme had taken me for a driving test in it. The hand brake and gear lever of this elderly vehicle were in a “gate” on the outside of the car. I took my mother for drives along the road that skirted the lake, and one day the self-starter of the old bus gave up the ghost. I managed to get to a service station close by, but when I had to explain what was wrong, I found that the Victor Hugo type of French I had learnt at Kambala was inadequate. However, by pointing at the self-starter, and announcing “Ça ne marche pas — il est tout à fait mort” I got the idea across to the mechanic.

My uncle was a marvellous host, and we had a most enjoyable time with him. He took us to see Chillon Castle, and to watch an international tennis tournament at Territet, beyond Lausanne. We dined on a lake steamer that night when homeward-bound to our village. These lake steamers carried excellent restaurants, or my uncle, who was fussy about his food and wine, would never have patronized them. Everything in Switzerland was spotlessly clean — even to the street lavatories, as my mother and I discovered in Lausanne. One descended a few steps, to be confronted by an office presided over by a female attendant who gave us our correct change, and
waved us to the women’s section of the immaculate place.

One day my uncle hired a car, and we all drove into France to visit Mont Blanc in tourist style. As soon as we crossed the border the Swiss cleanliness disappeared. This was very noticeable. Having arrived at our destination, we ascended by a little mountain railway to a station on the lower slopes of the great mountain. Unfortunately my memories of the view, glacier and all, are completely obliterated by a clear-cut mental picture of the station lavatory, at which my mother and I took one look, and retreated, horrified. How infinitely preferable was our view of the great mountain as seen from my uncle’s villa — clothed in the magic of distance, a snow-capped vision, aloof and unsullied!

On one of our visits to a village near Lausanne, we noticed, in an ancient castle open to tourists, some queer, long-handled implements leaning against a big, open fireplace. These, we discovered, were “bricelet” irons — the ancient equivalent of the modern waffle irons, and the business end of these was stamped with a coat of arms, as they had been the property of a Duke of Savoy. Bricelets are wafers made of a batter of egg, cream, flour and sugar. They are crisp and delicious to eat with ice cream or stewed fruit. The modern bricelet iron that Jeanne, my uncle’s cook, used held two bricelets at once, and was short-handled for use on a gas stove.

I was seized with a desire to possess one of the ancient, long-handled variety intended for open fires, and told Yvonne, the housemaid, that I wished to buy one. She obligingly put an advertisement in the local paper, with the result that two irons were brought to my uncle’s house. We bought both of them, and, to Yvonne’s disgust, without haggling. We lost face in her eyes over this, and deprived the peasant families who sold them of a great deal of entertainment.

I still have my bricelet iron, but it is seldom used now, as the butter blobbed onto the hot iron to lubricate it before the dab of batter is placed in position is inclined to ooze out onto the electric stove — a messy business. So there the iron is now, leaning disconsolately against the wall behind my laundry door. The bricelets cooked in it are decorated, not with a coat of
arms, but a simple geometric pattern and the figures 1817, presumably a date.

Some months after this visit to Nyon, my uncle died. He was a bachelor, and left his estate to his brothers and sister – all but his lake-side home, and that went to the one great love of his life.

I still find it difficult to associate romance with that grey-headed, bespectacled elderly uncle – but there it was!

After this visit to England I returned alone to Australia, leaving my energetic mother keeping house for my father in a flat in Hampstead.
PART 3

ANCHORAGE
Some time before we took this trip to England, my sister had sent her eldest daughter and son, Peggy and Archie, to live with us at Hornsby, and go to schools close by as day scholars. While we were in England they were obliged, much to their dismay, to become boarders at these schools, and were relieved, on my return, to be once more free of institutional life. Archie, for instance, was able to resume his habit of doing homework at the top of a pine tree in the garden. Some months later my parents returned from England, and we settled down to our normal routine.

These were the years of the great depression, and a worrying time for everybody. People like my father, who had jobs, suffered in sympathy with those who had not. All his life he had been a source of income to hard-luck storytellers, and the depression was a gala time for confidence men. I remember one case in particular. A man came one day to our Hornsby home to ask my father for money. His poor old mother was dying in Melbourne, he said, and he hadn’t enough money for the train fare to get to her. He produced a bible, which he said he always carried (and I’m sure that, at any rate, was true, for it must have been a useful property for his acts) containing his mother’s photograph as proof of his sincerity!

My father was a bit suspicious, so told the man he would not give him the money for his fare then and there, but would meet him that night at Central Railway Station a little before the Melbourne express left, and would give him his ticket then, and see him off.

At the appointed time my father met the man at the ticket office, bought the ticket, and having seen him onto the platform and into the train left. In those days, when the city’s
population was smaller than it is now, not only the lost property office men knew my father by sight — he constantly left his umbrella in trains — but also the men in the ticket offices.

On this particular night my father had hardly arrived back at his Hornsby home when the telephone rang. It was the man at the ticket office who had sold him the single ticket to Melbourne, and seen him hand it to the confidence man. He told my father that the man had returned not long after the train left, asking for a refund on the ticket. The railway man took the ticket, and instead of refunding the money told the man off, and then rang my father.

“And if you’d call here when you’re passing tomorrow, Professor,” he said, “we’ll refund you your money.”

So that was the end of that episode. On another day, a young man came to our Hornsby home, asking for work. He had been tramping the countryside for weeks, he said, trying to get a job. He would do anything — chop wood, garden — anything. My mother gave him some food, and my father told him that he was sorry, but there was no work. The man thanked them and left, and as he walked away there was something so dejected about his whole appearance, that after a quick consultation with my mother my father called him back, and told him that though they couldn’t promise him work, there was a shed out at the back in which he could sleep, if he didn’t mind the discomfort. He jumped at this offer, and made the old shed his home for some time. He managed to get an odd day’s work every now and then, and both my parents and I gave him odd jobs, too. He knew nothing about gardening, but worked at it like a beaver. Later, as conditions improved, he was able to get regular work up-country, and left us. Some of the big pine trees now growing in my land were planted by him as little seedlings.

About six or seven years later, when my father died, my mother was touched to receive a letter of sympathy from this man. As my father used to say, it was better to be taken in by a fraud than to pass by a deserving case.

I think it was my mother’s idea that I should have a house of my own. At any rate, I remember her holding forth on the
subject of the right of every woman to have one, whether she
were married or not.

At our Hornsby home the rather awkward entrance to the
land, at an acute angle, down a steep slope and across the creek
bridge, had been replaced by another which gave on to a
different road. My parents had bought several blocks of land in
order to achieve this and have a straight, level driveway to the
house, and now they presented me with one of these blocks on
the slope above them, and gave me a thousand pounds towards
building a house on it. This money represented a considerable
portion of my uncle’s legacy to my father, and was a most
generous gift.

Filled with enthusiasm, I began drawing plans of what was to
be my very own home. I had always longed to live in a
two-storeyed house, so now my dream was to come true. My
mother engaged an architect, whom she chose because he was
the son of a friend, and I put the plan I had drawn before him.
He obligingly stuck to this after making some necessary
amendments. The stairs, for instance, as I had drawn them, were
peculiar because I didn’t know exactly where they would
emerge on the upper floor, and I had forgotten to include a
storeroom of any sort, but he sorted all this out. There were
verandahs fore and aft of the living room, and a wide balcony
upstairs as well as three bedrooms. The house faced north and
south and the architect made the exterior pseudo-Spanish in
style.

I wanted the living room, which opened through double
doors of glass onto both north and south verandahs, to be
thirty-two feet by sixteen, but he cut this down to twenty-eight
by fourteen, thereby saving a considerable amount of money.

One of the stipulations I made was that I must have good
smooth floors for polishing. At Woodford and our Hornsby
home, the floors were rather rough and splintery, and before
the days of electric floor polishers, had been unpleasant to rub
by hand. The architect was cooperative; the living room was
floored with narrow boards of Tasmanian blackwood, and the
bedrooms with “Tasmanian oak”, all sanded and polished.

The living room had a magnificent open fireplace, wide
enough to take two-foot logs. We moved in during the winter of 1928, and I kept going upstairs in order to come down again and look across the narrow hall, through the wide-open door of the living room, to the glorious log fire, its dancing flames reflected in the polished boards. Later I was to find that Tasmanian blackwood is a pièce de résistance in a termite’s menu, and periodically a few boards had to be replaced — always with cypress pine, which they dislike. My cleaner, when down on her knees putting on the polish, would hear the termites munching, and report “Them white ants is at it again!”

By the time I moved into my new home my eldest nephew, Archie, was beginning his medical course, and his sister, Peggy, nearly through her Arts course, both at Sydney University, then the only university in the state.

Archie was keen on chemistry experiments which he carried on in an old shed out at the back of my parents’ house. One day when he was down there pounding away on some concoction with pestle and mortar, Peggy and I were sitting on the northerly verandah of our new home, reading and basking in the sun, when suddenly there darted into my mind for the fraction of a second an extraordinary feeling that I was going blind. I stopped reading for a moment, and told myself I was being a nervy idiot. A short time later we saw, down through the area of bush that separated us from the other house, a car shooting housewards along the drive at a great pace, and about five minutes after this my mother appeared, coming up the steep little path between the two houses to tell us that Archie had burnt his hand, and would we please pack an overnight bag for him as the doctor was driving him straight away to hospital. The substance that he had been pounding in the mortar had suddenly flashed. His eyebrows were singed and his right hand badly burnt, but his spectacles had saved his eyes. He later told me that when the stuff flashed his spectacles were instantly coated with it so that he couldn’t see a thing, and his first thought was “I’m blinded!” It was this, I am sure, that had been telepathed to me at the moment when it happened.

We had great fun in our new home, in spite of the fact that it was depression time, the early 1930s. And speaking of the
depression reminds me of two incidents that concerned my mother, the first of which amused her. She had a tremendous admiration for the Salvation Army and its work, and every year gave them a cheque, for which they always called personally. Now, our family was, like every other, affected financially by the depression, and one year my mother was forced to reduce her charitable subscriptions. When the Salvation Army officer called for his cheque, he found it was half the usual amount. At the end of his visit he asked my mother if she would like him to say a prayer. She, being completely unselfconscious about such matters, assented. He went down on his knees, and prayed that “the purse strings of the wealthy might be loosened”.

The second incident, being concerned with Inland Revenue, was not really funny, but illustrated my mother’s courage and determination. In 1932 when Mr. Lang, then premier of New South Wales, decreed that income taxes were to be paid in cash only, my mother was not only indignant, but belligerent. She sent her cheque as usual to the Taxation Department. “And if they demand a fine – let them! I shall not pay it; I shall go to prison instead.” And we all knew that she meant exactly what she said.

My father and various friends who heard her make this statement were worried, but could not shake her determination. In due course she received a note from the Taxation Department, returning her cheque, and informing her that she must pay in cash or else . . . She took not the faintest notice of this threat.

Time passed, and before any further movement was made against her, Sir Philip Game, governor of our state, dismissed its premier, and a new government was formed. Not long after this my mother received a note from Inland Revenue informing her that she hadn’t paid her income tax, and unless etc., etc. She wrote a dignified letter back, telling them they were mistaken; she had paid her tax, and the department had insulted her by returning her perfectly good cheque which she now enclosed to prove her point. The result was that she received an apology from the department, and the original cheque, slightly dog-eared from its travels, was accepted.
Well, to get back to our life in the new home. We, the young people and I, certainly made our own amusements, and these usually took the form of theatricals — I think that would be the right term. Our efforts in this line were as much of an entertainment to the actors during rehearsals, as to the audience on the night of the show. My nephew, Archie, was the mainstay of every performance, as he was responsible for all scenery, lighting and stage effects. One of his most ingenious efforts was a machine made from an old clock which produced on a backdrop clouds drifting across the sky. This was for a one-act play called *The Mask*. The clouds were painted on a piece of paper that revolved round the clock when it was wound, and were greatly magnified when they appeared on the backdrop. I could never understand how he worked that one out.

We usually chose one-act, offbeat plays, such as Lord Dunsany’s. One year we did *Mr. Sliggen’s Hour*, in which the devil suddenly had to vanish “as best he may” according to the stage directions. This, of course, was a challenge to Archie, and he worked out an effective scheme. He borrowed a transformer from the Medical School, and ran a wire concealed by rugs across the floor of the stage with an ash tray of flash powder interrupting its path. The ash tray was hidden by the footlights. At the correct cue the flash powder was touched off, causing the entire audience to blink, and in that instant the devil stepped back neatly behind the black hangings before which he had been standing. This trick, I understand, is commonly used on the stage for disappearing tricks, but Archie had thought it out for himself.

The stage, raised about a foot from the floor, was about ten feet deep by fourteen wide. Between it and the audience was the width of the fireplace. The audience consisted of about twenty to thirty people, mostly families of the players.

The glass double doors at the back of the stage were easily lifted off their hinges, making a wide entrance, or archway if desired, opening on to a twelve-foot wide verandah, which was utilized for backdrops, or an extension of the stage itself.

At the end of the plays we had supper, of course. I was not only producer and prompter, but cook and caterer. The very
thought of the work involved staggers me now. About half of
the forty-odd people comprising audience and players would
crowd into our small kitchen at supper-time, all anxious to help,
but making it difficult to get to the oven where savouries and
Parkerhouse rolls were heating. The latter I had first come
across in Nova Scotia, and years later an American friend,
visiting Australia with her geologist husband, had presented me
with a copy of The Boston Cookery Book — the U.S. equivalent
of Mrs. Beeton — and in this were many bread recipes, both
plain and fancy, and that for Parkerhouse rolls was one of them.
They are a delicious bread, containing milk and butter, and
when heated, split and buttered and filled with minced veal or
chicken coagulated by a chive-flavoured, stiff white sauce, were
always the pièce de résistance of the supper. Parkerhouse rolls
are still a tradition in our family; my niece and a great-niece
make them for special occasions. Most amateur cooks baulk at
yeast recipes, which they wrongly think to be difficult.

The first time we provided a supper at one of our play
evenings we had a problem with the coffee — or rather with the
milk that went with it, for at least a gallon of this had to be
heated, and it seemed to take ages, holding up the supper
arrangements, so Archie devised a method whereby it could be
put on to heat during the last of the one-act plays. Milk, as we
all know, has a notorious habit of boiling over unless watched
by an eagle eye. He arranged a float to be placed on the milk
with a tall wire attached to it perpendicularly. When the milk
began to rise in the silent, inexorable manner peculiar to its evil
genius, the cork float and its overhead wire rose with it, the
latter well above the milk making contact with a bell, giving us
warning with a light “ping”. Thanks to this Heath Robinson
arrangement, guests were not kept waiting for their coffee.

The plays well over, it was lovely to relax among chatting
guests, and hear their comments. The most frequent and
genuine one was: “The scenery was simply wonderful!”
Criticism of the acting was so tactfully vague that I don’t
remember any of it.

One of the short plays we did was Dunsany’s Gods of the
Mountain. The author had been rather lavish in his ideas,
making the gods seven. We reduced them to three, which fitted
our stage better, and made less work for the wardrobe-mistress
— me. Dunsany, with a complete disregard for the difficulties
involved, decreed that they were carved out of green jade. To
get this effect as nearly as possible I made long straight robes of
unbleached calico, dyed green and stiffly starched. Our gods
had green masks, the eyeholes of which were covered by green
gauze through which they could see enough to steer by. Shoes,
stockings, gloves and headgear were also green, of course. It
meant a lot of work for a very brief appearance, as they only
came in right at the end of the play to point accusing fingers at
the sinful beggars who were fraudulently impersonating them.
Incidentally, these beggars were supposed to be having a whale
of a time being plied by the gullible villagers with sacrificial
meats. I had carefully prepared a dish of sliced cold lamb to be
eaten by the false gods, and this was waiting for its cue behind
the scenes when it was discovered by our cat Webster, who, in
turn, was discovered by Archie. Someone was told off to rush
to the kitchen and prepare a second offering, in time for its
appearance on stage.

The scenery for this play was particularly good, and the
backdrop excellent. There was a palm tree (cut out of plywood)
seen through a wide, oriental archway, and an expanse of sky,
blue and sunny till the end of the play, when it slowly
darkened. Archie had constructed a dimmer out of a drainpipe
filled with the correct solution, and a piece of brass curtain rod
which was slowly raised out of it by a careful stagehand. When
darkened the sky was seen to be sprinkled with twinkling stars
— holes in the backdrop. These were invisible with a bright light
on it, and appeared only when this was out, and a light behind
it. Indeed, considering our limitations, the scenery was wonder­
ful!

We gave a dance once in our new home, and once contrived a
treasure hunt, but these, compared to acting, were dull
entertainment, so we stuck to the latter. Happy days, those, in
spite of the depression, and it is a pleasure to remember them.

Though most of my social life revolved round my home,
occasionally I sallied forth into outer zones, as an appendage of
my parents. I remember one occasion when we were invited to a
garden party at the university to meet the representatives of
various English publishing firms who were here for some
conference, I think. There were speeches in the Great Hall
during the afternoon, and one was made by a young journalist
whose frivolous articles in *Punch* had delighted us. His name
was A. P. Herbert. I remember that when he rose to speak he
pretended to be nervous, confronted, as he was, by a mass of
intellectuals in their imposing hall, and said: “I feel like the man
who dreamt that he was addressing the House of Lords, and
woke to find that he was”. I don’t suppose this was the first
time this joke was told but it went down well with the
audience.

During the afternoon, one of the English publishers, puzzled
and slightly peevish, said to me: “Why is everybody here
making such a fuss of Herbert? He’s only a journalist!”
Peggy, having graduated in Arts, had returned to her home in Tasmania, and Archie had almost completed his medical course, when my father died. This was in 1934. He had for some time been suffering from arthritis, but insisted on going in to the university nearly every day, for a room at the Geology Department there had been reserved for him to work in. I always drove him to the station, but otherwise he fended for himself. He was able to walk with the aid of a stick, and by carrying his books and papers in a haversack slung across his shoulder, both his hands were freed for his stick and a handrail, whenever one of the latter was available.

I remember his account of an incident before the haversack days, when he was still using an attaché case. This burst open one morning while he was on an escalator, mounting up from a railway station. Some of the papers that were cast forth — important notes on his geological work — disappeared into subterraneous regions, carried under by the relentlessly-moving escalator. I don’t remember what occurred, if anything, between their exit and the appearance of what he described as a grease-smeared genie who emerged suddenly from a trap-door in the floor, and handed him back his papers. My father was a gifted raconteur, as all his friends knew, and made a good story out of this incident.

One day, after he had gone into town, my mother came up to my house later in the morning, and said she wanted me to drive her to the station, because she had to go to town at once. She told me afterwards that she had had an urgent feeling that she must go, though the business she meant to attend to was not necessary — and so she went.

When she left the train at Wynyard station, she was met at
the exit by one of the staff from the university Geology Depart­
ment who told her that my father had collapsed there in his room, and had been taken to Prince Alfred Hospital. This man had telephoned her home to tell her, but she had already left for the city, so he hurried to Wynyard, and was there in time to catch her as she left the station.

My father, when getting out of the tram in which he had travelled from Wynyard to the university, had fallen when the tram started before he was safely on the ground. He picked himself up with the help of bystanders, including (we hope) the tram conductor, for conductors were usually kind to elderly people. Whether it was through the shock of this fall, or whether he had already contracted the illness, I don’t know, but after he collapsed and was taken to hospital he was found to be suffering from “senile” pneumonia. In those days there was no penicillin, and pneumonia was usually a death sentence to the aged.

My father was not told what his illness was, but to my mother he said, touching his chest, “there is something sinister here!”, and he asked that my sister should be sent for. My mother and my nephew were in constant attendance at his bedside. My sister came from Launceston, but just too late to see her father before he died. They had always been very near to one another, being much alike in character as well as feature.

Both she and my mother stayed in my house for the next few days. My sister told me afterwards that on the night she arrived, she was going over memories of her father as she lay awake, and thinking how afraid she would be if she were suddenly to see him now, as she had seen him so often before, coming up the steep little path from his house to mine. The thought had hardly entered her head before a wave of conviction swept over her that he was near, and all fear left her.

My sister, and my mother, and Archie and I attended the state funeral that the government decreed should be his. My brother was in practice in London. He had married an English girl after World War I, and had settled there.

St. Andrew’s Cathedral was packed for the service. It was a great emotional strain for all of us, too great for tears. The
opening words of the Dean’s address were:

We are assembled to pay a last tribute of respect to a fine scholar, a great scientist, a gifted teacher, a distinguished explorer, an ardent patriot, a warm-hearted philanthropist, a gracious friend, and a humble-minded Christian gentleman.

It was that last phrase that I found most shattering. My nephew said afterwards that to him the most emotional part of the service was the moment when six of my father’s old Tunnelling Company’s officers, who were the pallbearers, stepped forward and lifted the coffin to their shoulders. It was the set sadness on their faces that moved him.

The tunnellers had wanted to give him a military funeral, and towards the end of the journey from St. Andrew’s Cathedral to the crematorium chapel north of the city, they had their wish. The coffin was transferred to a gun carriage drawn by some spirited horses evidently not very well conditioned to brass bands. However, their riders had them under control, and my fears for the dignity of the occasion were groundless. Chopin’s passionately tragic funeral march, and the traditional muffled drums, accompanied us for the last half mile. After a brief service at the chapel, everyone stood to attention while the military outside fired a salute. After the third volley, the Last Post, the Reveille, and the long strain for his family was over.

Life for my mother and myself changed. To begin with, I took a job.

Not long before my father died, I was asked by the then head of Barker College if I would teach at the school. He was anxious to improve the boys’ speech, and as I had a neutral pronunciation, offensive to neither Australian nor English ears, asked me to see what could be done. I had never taught anyone anything before, but lightheartedly agreed to try my hand at this problem. For a year or so I took classes at the college, and really had a most enjoyable time there, but without making the faintest impression on the boys’ speech. They could speak in class, just as I wished them to, but the instant class was over — back to Strine!
Part of my job was to produce plays at the school. We started the new assembly hall off on its dramatic career with the old school favourite Ambrose Applejohn’s Adventure. Once more the ingenuity of my nephew Archie McIntryre was put to use with the scenery in this. The stern ports of the pirate ship opened out onto a lovely blue sea, which heaved up and down — a boy at either end of it moving it slowly and rhythmically. It gave the effect of the ship rocking gently, and made some of the audience (so I was told after the performance) feel squeamish.

The skull-and-crossbones, flying from a staff outside the ports, fluttered in a breeze caused by an offstage electric fan. And, of course, for the earlier scene in Ambrose’s home, there was a wind machine for the storm.

Working with these boys I became aware, at first subconsciously, of the tremendous potential for good in them — a readiness to appreciate all that is fine and worthwhile — if given a chance. I am speaking of the older boys on the verge of manhood; the younger ones were just the usual carefree embryonic little devils.

I have not had much contact with girls on the verge of womanhood, but they, being second-class citizens right from scratch, have not had the freedom to develop as part of the outside world, and so are inhibited and narrowed. They are still so brainwashed as to the role of women that, I believe, the prime object of the average girl is still the fairy tale one of marrying and living happily ever after. The ever after consisting of cooking and washing for the man, and rearing his children. The average man still considers this the only ultimate role for women in his life — to be, as the church decrees, subservient to him. He has a horror (comparable to that of the woman’s of becoming an old maid) of not being able to “wear the pants”. He has been brainwashed, too, and believes that if he can’t boss his wife there must be something wrong with his masculinity. There is still not much thought, or at any rate reality, of partnership in marriage.

A woman is not conditioned to the idea of taking part in public life, apart from her vote, or taught her potential. I believe there are now isolated cases in schools of pupils of both
sexes being taught awareness of the part they can and should play in the community’s life — what Nader calls citizenship.

But the majority of both sexes are still brainwashed from infancy onwards. Just as little boys are given toy guns to play with, so are little girls presented with dolls and toy prams, each indicative of the parts they are to play later — aggression and violence for the man, childbearing and domesticity for the woman. And how the churches approve!

At Barker College I once produced a play for the small boys. It was called Oliver’s Island, and in it were pirates, dusky maidens and a tree that produced bull’s-eyes as fruit. The word “dusky” was new to these children, but they all knew “dusty”, so that’s what they called the maidens. When I told my mother this, she said: “Dusty maidens? Been on the shelf a long time, I suppose?”

Various jobs were allotted to the small boys. One, as stage manager, was in charge of the bull’s-eyes, and took his job seriously. He was a day boy, and carried the sweets home after rehearsals for safekeeping — a necessary precaution — and informed me that he kept them in the fridge there. He was a trustworthy child, for the number of bull’s-eyes remained constant throughout rehearsals. On the night of the performance, of course, nobody inquired what became of them after curtain fall.

After my father’s death my mother tried living at her old home with a lady-help who had been with us for some years, and of whom we were all very fond. During this time it was suggested that my mother should write a biography of my father, and this she struggled to do. But, according to some publishers, for anyone so near a man as his wife, such an effort usually proves unsatisfactory. It was so in this case. The Sydney publisher to whom she showed the first few chapters she had written was not satisfied. My mother, so accustomed to succeed in whatever she undertook, was naturally upset.

I took the manuscript to a friend of my father’s to read and criticize. He agreed with the publisher, and then suggested that I should write the biography myself. This, to me, was a staggering thought, but my mother, who had washed her hands of the

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whole affair, agreed that I should make the attempt, so, after consultation with Archie, and advice from him — he was very methodical in his own work — I set about a difficult but fascinating task.

Fortunately my father had kept various letters, some dating back to the time when he left England in 1882 to take up his post in New South Wales as assistant government geologist. Any that had touched his heart — farewell ones from his family, from a former teacher, and so on — he had kept. There was a tremendous amount of other material to be read and sorted, but after a year’s work the biography was finished.

My sister and Archie and I decided that, under the circumstances, it would be best to get it published in England, if possible, rather than in Australia, and my mother agreed to this. I was to take the manuscript myself to London. By sacrificing some capital, funds were raised for my fare, and for the last time in my life, in 1937, I found myself sailing for England.

We had a friend in London who was connected with the selling of books, and who knew various publishers, and he advised me as to whom to approach. He gave me the names of three eminent publishers, first on the list being Edward Arnold and Company, because they were to publish the Geology of Australia, on which my father had been working when he died, and which was being revised and completed by Dr. W. R. Browne.

This London friend and my brother met my ship at Tilbury at breakfast time, at which time it had berthed, and later that same morning an appointment was made for me with one of the heads of Edward Arnold. He was very kind, and promised that his reader would be as quick as possible with the manuscript. My worry was money, of which I certainly had not enough for a long stay in England.

A few nights later, when my brother had deposited me at my lodgings after a small party, I found on a table in the dimly lit hall a letter for me from the publishers. I grabbed it and raced up the three flights of stairs to my room at the top of the house, and with my heart thudding more from agitation than the ascent, tore it open. The biography was accepted, and all
terms stated — or rather suggested — which to me amounted to the same thing. I toyed with the idea of cabling the good news to the family at home, but a sudden feeling that it was too good to be true came over me, and I wrote airmail letters instead. I suppose I felt that somehow I was placating the gods by doing this. However, it certainly was true.

I had to stay in England long enough to read the proofs, but it was good to be carefree and able to enjoy the various small parties to which I was invited. At one of these, in Chelsea, I met a fascinating woman, Dame Rachel Crowdy, who was reputed (so my bookselling friend said, who had worked with her on committees in London) to receive a proposal of marriage every day. She was an able member of various international concerns, and had the title of Dame. At the party I told her what I had heard about the proposals, and asked if it were true. She smiled a Mona Lisa smile, and said serenely: “If it were, I can’t imagine what the attraction could be, unless the lure of the unattainable.”

Charm is a difficult thing to analyze. This woman, though good-looking, was not what is generally accepted as beautiful. Brains and beauty for some reason are considered incompatible — probably a masculine idea — but brains and charm were certainly a powerful combination in this attractive woman.

About six months after my father’s death my mother came to live with me, and her own house was let. Before she came she decreed that she must have a workroom of her own, in which to indulge her hobbies of spinning, weaving, bookbinding and pottery making, so for the last time in her life she started building operations. A capable carpenter built, about seventy feet to the rear of my house, a building which contained a room twenty-four feet by twelve, with a chimney and open hearth for log fires in it, a small kitchenette, and at one side a garage for my car. Later she added an annexe to the kitchenette.

My mother, though now in her eighties, still made all the jam for our household, and also the whole meal bread. I remember coming in to her workroom one day — she called it The Growlery — to find her stirring marmalade with one hand, and holding a volume of Shakespeare in the other. She had just
finished reading a novel that white-washed the character of Richard the third, and explained that she was looking up Shakespeare's version of him to compare the two.

In 1939 I went to Launceston, in Tasmania, to have my appendix out and be near my sister at the same time. I was recovering from the operation in a private hospital when I suddenly found my bed one evening surrounded by a bevy of tearful nurses. World War II had just been declared, and they were bewailing the awful news.

Back again in my Hornsby home, I set about doing what little I could for our country. Japan being our enemy in this particular war, our part in it was likely to be waged in tropical Pacific (!) regions, so the army decreed that camouflage nets for the protection of our men in jungle warfare were necessary. Various organizations started making nets with great enthusiasm, and I netted with the Hornsby Women War Workers. These nets, I believe, were later scrapped, as it was found that a natural covering of branches for gun emplacements, etc. was more effective. However, at the time it pleased us to imagine that we were being useful.

There was also an organization known as the National Emergency Service, and in this I was a car driver. Being of a naturally timid disposition, I refused to drive anything but my own car (to be used for walking cases of air raid casualties), while other more courageous women would leap confidently into the driver's seat of large, strange lorries, and hurtle forth to practice raids without blenching.

Sydney had no air raids during this war, but we had one alert when a Japanese submarine entered the harbour. On this occasion, after the siren sounded, I managed to be dressed and out in my car in an incredibly short space of time. Our headquarters, or rallying point, was some four or five miles further south down the line, and I found that my chief difficulty in getting there was caused by zealous air raid wardens who, at imminent danger to themselves — our cars were allowed very little light — kept rushing out into the road to hold me up and demand my credentials. By the time I was halfway to headquarters the all-clear went, but I proceeded on my way
nevertheless to report.

There was little that we, out here, could do during that war, and listening to the shattering news on the radio was the worst of our wartime worries — France and Belgium going down, then the Dunkirk business, and Churchill's announcement that we had suffered a major military disaster. I remember that the Russians were simply staggered to think that such a piece of information, such an unpleasant truth, should have been told a people by its prime minister. They remarked that he must have had great confidence in his countrymen to do so.

After Dunkirk the battle of Britain, D day, and finally that blot on the history of the world and our so-called civilization — Hiroshima.

Looking back on those days, and comparing them with the present world situation, one is inclined to believe that the surest way for a nation to achieve material prosperity is to suffer defeat in a large-scale war. Vide West Germany and Japan.

The drought that had afflicted Australia during these war years had broken before "peace" was declared. Thunderstorms always bring out cowardice in me, but on that particular occasion when I heard a sudden roll of thunder, tears of relief trickled down my cheeks, and oh! the glorious scent of rain on the baked earth!

Talking of cowardice, it was during this war that I first flew in a plane. I had the chance of visiting my sister in Tasmania, and the best way to get there at the time was to fly to Melbourne, and then go by steamer across Bass Strait to Launceston. I was reading H. G. Wells' History of the World at the takeoff, and I kept my eyes firmly fixed on a page of this till we were in the air. I read assiduously all the way to Canberra, where we came down to jettison a politician — Billy Hughes, as it happened. It was then that I discovered that I was still reading the same page that I had begun as we were leaving Sydney, and hadn't understood a word of it. We arrived in Melbourne during a heat wave, which meant a rough trip for the last hundred miles. I was much too scared to feel airsick.

Having arrived in Melbourne, a friend who was travelling with me and I found ourselves stranded there for a night, as our
ferry-steamer was packed with soldiers going to a convalescent home in Tasmania, and not a berth to be had.

We tried to get accommodation in Melbourne, but every hotel was booked out. We tried the Y.W.C.A., and even the Salvation Army hostels — but no! We were faced with a night in the open. Then I remembered a Melbourne colleague of my father’s, and rang him. He consulted his wife, and then said he was sorry but they could only put up one of us, so that was that. If any of our family had been asked for a bed by stranded friends, we should certainly have managed somehow, knowing that a sofa or a mattress on the floor would be preferable to a bench in the park.

I was just contemplating asking the police for clean cell accommodation when I remembered a Sydney friend who had come to live in Melbourne a few years before. I found her home number in the telephone book and rang. The reply was prompt. Of course she could put us up! Take such and such a train, and she’d meet us at the station. So there we were, one bed inside the house, and one on a verandah, and all was well. How smooth life would be if all people were as kind to their fellows!

And that reminds me that my niece Anne was once stranded in a similar way, but in England at Stratford-on-Avon. She had managed, with difficulty and the night before she was due to sail for Australia, to get a seat for a play she particularly wanted to see, and rashly trusting to luck for accommodation she arrived in Stratford just in time for the performance.

After the show she began hunting for a place to sleep. No luck. She asked to be allowed to sit up for the rest of the night in a chair in the hall of one hotel. They said no, and suggested she contact the police who always had a few places up their sleeve for such emergencies. The police were sorry, but for once there were none of these reservations left. However, a sergeant who was just going off duty said she could be put up at his own home. He rang his wife and drove Anne there. They supplied her with bed and breakfast, and refused any recompense. I wonder if our Australian police would be as kind and as helpful as that!

At the end of the war my brother returned to Australia in
time for my mother's ninetieth birthday party. There now began for me a quiet domestic life, housekeeping for my mother.
11 My Sister

In the *Australian Encyclopaedia* there is a brief account of my sister’s contribution to the welfare of her countrymen, but, as is usual in such pocket accounts, not a word of the woman herself or the feelings towards her of her fellows — which is what really matters in a person’s life.

By the time her children were in their late teens, her husband had become a distinguished and popular obstetrician, and a very busy man. My sister, with time on her hands, and an able and active mind, came gradually to take part in various activities outside the domestic scene. As well as keeping open house for visitors — incidentally she was an excellent cook — she became state commissioner for girl guides in Tasmania, producer for the Launceston Repertory Society, started a successful youth club, was an active member of various groups interested in education, and was in demand everywhere as a speaker.

Her enthusiasm and selfless concern for her fellow citizens won their respect and affection, which culminated in a deputation of men, who had worked with her on committees, asking her to stand for parliament. They undertook to do the necessary campaigning. She reluctantly consented to stand as an independent. By tradition she and her family before had been Liberals. The Liberal candidate who was opposing her in this election was confident of his own success — besides, no woman had ever been elected to the Legislative Council of Tasmania.

When the election results were broadcast, I happened to be at a cocktail party at my brother’s home. Someone switched on the radio, and we heard a voice announcing: “In Tasmania history has just been made — a woman has been elected to the Legislative Council! Mrs. Margaret McIntyre, an Independent, by a majority of...” I forget the number, which was
considerable, but I do remember the thrill of delight and pride in my sister.

Though she was on the Liberal side of the House, the only time in her brief parliamentary career that she had to vote on a motion she crossed the floor, as did another independent, to vote with Labor against the Liberals who were trying to push through an unconstitutional piece of skulduggery.

My sister was liked by the Labor Party, one member of which said of her that she was “liberal in the true sense of the word”.

In September 1948, she went as a delegate to a conference of the National Council of Women in Brisbane, Queensland. She travelled there by train, but was to fly back. Her husband, who was on holiday, and I saw her off at Sydney’s Central railway station. She was waving and smiling goodbye from her carriage window as the train drew out.

At the close of the Brisbane conference, the plane in which she was to return was due to arrive in Sydney at about seven at night. I drove in from Hornsby to meet her, accompanied by my brother-in-law. The night set in wet and stormy, and we drove the fifteen miles to town through lashing rain. Both wind and wet had stopped by the time we arrived at the airways city terminal, in those days a small building at the corner of Clarence and Margaret Streets. I parked the car, we went in to the office, and having inquired about the time my sister’s plane was due, sat down to wait. Time dragged on, and whenever we asked about the plane’s arrival we were fobbed off with “any time now”, or words to that effect.

After about an hour’s wait, there thrust through the entrance doors a small group of men, one of whom was the managing director of the airways company. He happened to be a Tasmanian who recognized my brother-in-law.

“Dr. McIntyre, isn’t it?” he said. “You’re meeting someone? Your wife?” He put a hand on my brother-in-law’s shoulder. “We have to face it – the plane’s overdue.”

They went off together into an inner office, and I heard the manager say as they left that he had lost his wife in an accident a few years before. I was left alone in the outer office. Later we drove home.
It was about a day and a half before the plane was found. During that brief flurry of wind and rain on the night it was due, it had crashed into a mountainside near Tamworth and burnt out. There were no survivors.

It is difficult to express in writing the feeling of love and trust evoked in her fellows by my sister, but one letter of sympathy that I received on her death stands out in my memory. It was from a former servant of hers who had married and gone to live in the country. This letter was a cry from the heart. "How could God do this to her?" it began. Later she spoke of their occasional meetings in Launceston: "When she stopped to speak to me I felt I was treading on air . . . "

A few months before that aircrash, my sister had a letter from a friend in Edinburgh with whom she had shared the trying years of World War I. This friend wrote to say that she was dying of cancer, and had not long to live. She ended the letter with "I know you will not forget me, for you are in my very bones".

Everyone, of course, adjusts in time to the loss of someone who matters to them more than anyone else in the world, and it was not till about twelve years later when I was walking along a passage in my house, not thinking of anything in particular, that there suddenly swept over me, for a brief flash, the memory of how I used to feel when my sister was alive, and I realized then that, since her death, I have never for one moment been really happy.
Being now anchored at home, with my mother to tend, life inevitably narrowed down to the house and two acres of land in which it stood, and as the years went by, house and parent not being enough to occupy a person's time and interest, a kind of backyard farm gradually developed on my unkempt land.

It was in 1947 that I began keeping sheep and goats. It came about through our local milk supply, backed up by a growth of blackberry and honeysuckle beginning to invade my property.

My mother at this time was about ninety-two, and though musculearly not strong, was very alert mentally. She no longer came downstairs, but could still travel, under her own steam, down the passage from her bedroom to the northern balcony where she retired for the day to a bed in a sheltered corner. From this she could look out onto tree-tops and the open sky. She could still knit, and made small things to be sold on stalls in aid of this and that, and she enjoyed reading what she called a "pretty love story". This, of course, to her generation meant one with no mention of sex in it. She had many visitors, and kept her interest in what was going on in the outside world.

About 1947 milk in suburban areas was not organized as it is now to come in sealed bottles, but was supplied by a local dairy. Householders put out cans overnight, and in the morning the milk cart, bearing a tank with a tap in it, travelled slowly down each street, the horse obligingly stopping and starting when ordered, and the milkman would dish out the required amount of milk into each can. This milk, in our district at any rate, seemed to be getting thinner and bluer as time went on. I can't remember which of us (but probably my mother) suddenly thought it would be a good idea to have our own milk supply. After all, we had two acres of land, so why not a cow?
We consulted a farmer friend who suggested that a cow would produce rather too much milk for a household of two, but why not a goat instead? A goat? Oh no! Oh — well, no harm to investigate the possibility.

What did we know about goats? As much as the average person, which was nothing — or less than nothing because inaccurate. I looked up “goat” in my 1934 edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary. It said:

Goat Hardy, lively wanton strong-smelling usually horned and bearded ruminant quadruped. (Sheep and goats — the good and the bad: see Matt: 25: 32, 33)

Out of curiosity I turned to the dictionary’s definition of sheep. It said:

Sheep Kinds of wild or domesticated timid gregarious woolly sometimes horned ruminant mammal. (Sheep and goats — the good and the bad: see Matt: 25: 32, 33)

Why the compilers of that dictionary harp so insistently on the wickedness of goats, I don’t know — unless their gardens had once been raided by these “wanton” ruminants. Goats are not grazers, but browsers, and shrubs and trees are their natural diet, rose bushes being high on the menu.

How goats acquired their ugly reputation in biblical times I don’t know, unless it was that in the Middle East they were black — black and glossy (“Thy hair is like a flock of goats”, Song of Solomon 4:1.) and black traditionally is the colour of evil. At least their skins were useful, making tents, water containers, etc. And talking of tents in the Middle East calls to mind a story told me by an acquaintance who was a liaison officer there during World War I. He was camping in a bell tent when one morning he was woken at dawn by mysterious thumps and slitherings on his canvas roof. Hurrying outside, ready to vent his wrath on some impudent practical joker, he was confronted by a character straight out of the Bible — a bearded old man in flowing robes, obviously upset by the behaviour of the flock of goats he was tending. The kids were
taking runs at the tent, leaping on to it, and tobogganing down its sides, thoroughly enjoying this heaven-sent slippery-dip that had sprouted in the wilderness. Their attendant, anxious not to antagonise the English officer, was wringing his hands, crying: "Alas! Alas! they know not what they do!"

Somehow the goats were persuaded to leave their attractive plaything, and proceed on their way.

To return to the local goats. We heard of a woman who kept a herd of pedigree Saanen goats only a few blocks from us. I took a can and went to visit her. The first step, of course, would be to taste the milk and see if we could tolerate it. This flock consisted of seven or eight goats who were milling about in a small yard about the size of my living room, but they had a number of sheds to shelter in. Their owner was about to do the milking when I arrived, and I watched proceedings. She washed the goat’s udder, and all was methodical and hygienic. I bought a pint of milk and went home. When I removed the lid of the can, a strong smell of capric acid assailed my nostrils. Gingerly I tasted the milk. It was revolting, nauseating! My mother tasted it, but not being quite so fussy about flavours, and having made up her mind anyway that we were going to keep a goat, said yes, it was rather strong, but we could use it for cooking.

So we bought a goat — or rather we bought a four-month-old kid. She was the result of a mating between a scrub goat and a pedigree Saanen buck, and we called her Belinda. Not knowing one thing about goats and their psychology, I drove her home and put her in a nice little shed prepared as her night quarters. She, bereft suddenly of both mother and twin sister, cried bitterly all night, and most of the next day. The goat is a social animal, attached to its family, and though physically toughened through centuries of maltreatment by man (a case of the survival of the fittest) it remains at heart, loving and sensitive.

Soon after the acquisition of Belinda, a friend kindly presented us with a pair of young wethers whom we called Mop and Mow. They were wild flock sheep, but like any animal were soon tamed through the usual channel, the stomach.

Our fences at that time not being goat-proof, both Belinda and the sheep had to be tethered. Two large strong wethers
were more than I cared to manage, so Mop was given away to a
friend, and Mow and Belinda were the only prisoners of peg and
chain that I had to be moving constantly. At night they were
allowed to run free in the small home paddock. In the morning
when I wanted to tether them out to graze, I had only to rattle
Mow’s chain and he would come running for me to fasten it to
his collar, for he knew it meant that he would go to better
pasture elsewhere. He was the most intelligent sheep I have ever
owned. I used to give him chaff and crushed oats sometimes in a
large tin dish, and he developed a parlour trick with this. When
he thought it was time for me to put something into it for him,
he would bang on it with a forehoof as a hint — or possibly a
command. In fact it was his dinner gong. He used to look very
self-conscious and coy when sounding it, and I am sure rather
fancied himself as a performer, for he was always ready to do
his act for visitors.

He and Belinda were tethered by longish chains to iron pegs
hammered into the ground, and here I must speak of Mr.
Marchant, the Hornsby blacksmith who made the pegs for me.
He was one of the old school, and it was a privilege to watch
him handling iron. Horse-shoes he made himself, of course — no
off-the-peg stuff for him — and I sometimes hung about when
he was shoeing a horse to watch the whole process, from the
selection of a straight piece of iron from his store, right through
to the stamping of nail holes and the upturning of that little
flange on the shoe’s front. When I first bought a scythe, the
local ironmonger Mr Payne (also an outstanding personality)
advised me to take it to the blacksmith who would set it to the
correct angle for my height. I took it to Mr. Marchant, who not
only did the required heating and bending, but when this was
done demonstrated the art of mowing on a patch of clover
outside the forge.

“You don’t need to swing a scythe”, he explained, “or you’ll
go cutting your leg off.” And he gently and skilfully shaved the
clover.

It took some time, of course, for me to acquire a reasonable
skill, and also to realize that constant sharpening with the
scythe stone is necessary. Incidentally, for anyone wishing to
reduce a waistline, mowing a crop can be highly recommended.

I suppose the salesmen and women in supermarkets and big stores are just as human as those old-time, independent tradesmen, but there is not the same link now between customer and salesman. Bruce Payne, the ironmonger, for instance, seemed a personal friend to many of us. He gave us sound advice when we were in doubt over a purchase, and I remember one occasion when he took time off to give me a practical demonstration of how to fasten a length of hose piping to a tap with a neat little gadget I had bought. He could see that I was puzzled by it, so led me to the back regions of the shop to demonstrate how to attach it to the tap, and made me do it also, under his supervision. He was not only helpful, but seemed to have in stock everything his customers required. I can remember only one item as an exception to this. One day I needed soft soap to soften a leather thong. “Soft soap?” he said, “No, Miss David, we don’t keep it — you must go to Canberra for that!”

In Hornsby there is the crater of an extinct volcano, known locally as The Valley, and a number of homes are perched on the rim of this. In summer weather bushfires would sometimes roar up from The Valley threatening these, and the local shopkeepers would then turn out to lend a hand with the firefighting.

But to get back to pastoral matters. Belinda, when old enough, was taken to visit a goat stud, with a view to mating. However, the view, as it turned out, was not hers, so as the need for a home milk supply was becoming urgent I went to a large goat-farm some seven miles away, and bought an in-kid doe called Paula. The owner of this farm and his wife were unusual people. They had bought some acres of bushland after winning a lottery, and started their enterprise because they’d heard that goats’ milk was in demand for children suffering from asthma and infantile eczema. Goats multiplying as they are apt to, the business became too much to carry, and eventually, after selling out, they migrated with their children to India, and when I last heard of them were living somewhere in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Paula was all that a goat should be — intelligent, gentle,
affectionate, and kidded without trouble. I had always heard that milking is a difficult skill to acquire, but did not find it so. I was advised to begin with the stripping movement, as Paula had very small teats. Later, the conventional milking method came naturally. It was a great thrill to find that I had milked successfully at the first try. I carried the can to the kitchen, and strained the milk into a jug. Then, very gingerly, I tasted it. And tasted it again. It was delicious! Sweeter than cows’, but delicious! Could there be something wrong with the goat? I rang her former owner, and explained that the milk didn’t taste goaty, and was that normal? He was inclined to be indignant. “Of course it’s normal! A well-fed, healthy goat, not running with the buck, should always give good milk!” And this is so; the milk, sweeter than cows’, has more body to it, and in colour is “deadly white”, as one friend of mine tactlessly described it, but is otherwise indistinguishable from it. Visitors to my home who don’t know that goats’ milk is used in the household often exclaim: “What delicious tea!” “Would you like another cup?” I ask. “Yes, please! What brand is it?” I tell them, and add: “But I think it’s the goats’ milk that gives it such a good flavour”, and am amused at the look of mingled astonishment and horror on the visitor’s face.

There is, of course, always a possibility that for some reason or another the capric acid flavour will crop up in the milk — if the goat is out of sorts, perhaps. A nephew of mine who drank goats’ milk here with pleasure once happened to be hiking in Switzerland, and at a village where he stopped to rest, was offered a glass of goats’ milk. He accepted cheerfully, but was disillusioned when he tasted it. Why the milk of European goats should be so unpleasant I don’t know, but from all accounts it certainly is. Climate cannot be responsible, for well-kept herds in England produce good, untainted milk. However, a wise goatkeeper, if he is selling milk, will always taste the produce regularly, in case the “goaty” flavour should suddenly turn up. The prejudice against the milk is as strong as capric acid itself, and dies hard.

And here I must speak of other prejudices against the goat — smell, over-sexiness, butting and stupidity. The ignorant, or perhaps I should say the uninformed, believe that all goats smell
— vide the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*’s definition. My present copy (1964 edition) omits “smell” from the definition. Let me stress here that *it is only the male* (or buck, as goatkeepers call him) that provides this suffocating, unpleasant odour. The female, or doe, when she returns to her home after mating, will reek of billy goat for a time unless washed, but when not living with her mate is as sweet as a kitten to cuddle.

Another myth extant about goats is that the male is more or less a sex maniac. The truth is that where his women are concerned he is a perfect gentleman. If a doe is brought to him by some inexperienced goatkeeper mistakenly believing her to be in season, he politely refuses to approach her. It is the doe’s wishes that are to be respected. (Religious sects advocating “natural” methods of contraception please note.) The satyr of mythology is an insult to the male goat.

And now let me explode a third myth — the goat is not stupid. As a matter of fact it ranks with dogs in intelligence, according to some authorities, and indeed I have found this so. Before citing my own experience of their intelligence, let me describe two examples that I have witnessed on television. One was a film of a performing goat in a small Indian circus. This animal, amongst other tricks, walked a tightrope, and was the highlight of the show. Wild goats on free range can climb trees, provided, of course, that the branches begin reasonably low down on the trunk. Once up in the tree they can balance on fairly thin branches while eating the leaves. I have seen a photograph of goats browsing up a tree in Madagascar. The phrase “out on a limb” holds no terrors for them.

The other instance on television was a film shot in Australia of two Saanen goats trained as sheep dogs. On this newsreel they were trucking sheep. The latter had to mount a ramp into the truck, and according to their habit would not enter a confined space until a leader took the initiative. This was provided by the goats. One of them would hurry up the ramp, the sheep would stream after it, and once on the move kept going, whereupon the goat would return down the ramp, squeezing past the up-going flock, and wait below till her services were required again.

Goats will act as foster-mothers to lambs. A friend told me
once of goats on a property near Lightning Ridge who were used in this way. During the day they browsed on free range, but about four in the afternoon they would return to the homestead, and each go to its allotted lamb to feed it. I, personally, have never met a goat without strong maternal instincts. Old Paula would answer the cry of any infant in distress, including a human one, and when one of her daughters produced a buck kid that had to be destroyed, she followed the man who was taking it away, and though it was not uttering, she bleated anxiously, looking first at me and then at the man, as much as to say: “Do you see what he’s doing? Are you going to allow this?” She mourned for some time after it disappeared. The kid’s mother, having its twin sister to tend, was not upset.

And talking of maternal instincts, one of my sheep, a ewe called Delia, seemed to be devoid of them. I was present when she had her lamb (Charles, of course), and for some time after he arrived she didn’t seem to know what to do with him. A goat, the instant her slimy offspring flops into the world, begins to lick it clean and dry, at the same time crooning to it softly and comfortably.

Delia used to park Charles, when he was very young, in one of the goathouses while she and rest of the stock, goats and sheep, went grazing away off in the furthermost parts of their domain. Charles usually slept till they returned, but one day he woke suddenly, found himself apparently alone in the world, and cried miserably. I heard him, and hurried out to find him standing at the door of the goat house, whence all but he had fled (that was his line of thought, I imagine) baaing disconsolately. Delia, who was out of sight, heard him and answered from afar. What she said I don’t know, but imagine: “Come on down, silly! I’m here, and if you think I’m traipsing all the way back to the goat house, you can think again!” At any rate she didn’t go to him, so I decided that I’d herd him down to her, as he obviously hadn’t the courage to follow a disembodied voice on his own. I managed to shoo him out of the night paddock, but he doubled back to the goat house, presumably because Mum had told him to stay there, and for some time we kept repeating this performance.

Down at the far end of the first paddock old Paula and one
of her teenage daughters were grazing, and out of the tail of their eye evidently watching my ineffectual efforts. After about ten minutes of fruitless rushing about, I sat down on a log for a breather, while Charles continued his miserable baaing. Paula then took over. She and her daughter cantered up the field, and between them they herded the agitated lamb down the first paddock through a gateway, and round a corner into the lower paddock where Delia was grazing unconcerned. As soon as Charles sighted his mother he rushed joyfully to her, and Paula and her daughter returned to their original browsing place. Oh well, they had eight legs between them, and I had only two. I sometimes find it hard to convince friends of the truth of this occurrence, but the incredulous are always those with no experience of the goat's capabilities. I must confess that at the time I was so astonished and impressed by this incident that tears of emotion filled my eyes.

But to return to the other prejudice against goats, that of butting. For generations this idea has provided subjects for the comics — a horned billy propelling some luckless person from the rear. At agricultural shows one can still hear mothers warning their children as they pause before a goat pen: “Watch out it don’t butt yer!”

Goats do butt, of course, just as sheep do, in self-defence or in play, but does reared with kindness treat their owners with respect. Even a he-goat, or buck, does not butt a human that he knows and trusts. For some years I used to take my goats, when they wished to mate, to a place some miles north of Hornsby, where a husband and wife kept a goat stud. It was the wife who was most involved in this enterprise. They had quite a large property, and in those days most of it was untouched bush, and provided free range for the young bucks. When not on this they had a large paddock in which to live. They were never tethered, were provided with weatherproof houses, and in cold weather rugged. I remember arriving one day with a goat to be mated, when a buck called Vanquisher was brought out of his paddock for the purpose. He was rugged up against the weather, and as he approached the doe his owner suddenly decided to remove the rug.

“Wait a minute, Vannie”, she said placidly, “while I take
your rug off." He stopped and waited (a severe test of docility), obedient though a little impatient, while she lifted each foreleg to slip his rug off.

She once had a buck whom she hadn’t reared herself, but had bought from another goatkeeper, and she admitted that she couldn’t trust it. When she escorted the flock to its browsing in the bush, she took the precaution of carrying a bucket of water with her, which, when thrown in the face of this occasionally belligerent fellow, effectively damped his aggressive masculine ego. Goats, incidentally, hate getting wet.

Most stud bucks are kept either in a very small yard, or on a chain, and this makes them irritable and dangerous.

Sheep, though not as dumb as people think, are certainly inferior in intelligence to goats. For instance, sheep not reared as pets will not necessarily recognize their owner if she appears in a dress or apron they have never seen before. Goats, after a brief shock, will accept it when they hear a familiar voice, but not the average sheep. I remember an amusing incident when I was going out to dinner with friends, and was wearing a long black evening dress. Just before I left I suddenly remembered that I hadn’t let the sheep into the night paddock. Usually all I had to do was to open the gate of this, and the sheep, already queued up and waiting, would push past me into the paddock. On this occasion when I opened the gate for them, they took one horrified look at me, and stopped dead in their tracks. I spoke to them, exhorting them not to be idiots, but there they stuck. Apparently sight was more important to them than sound. I then stepped back a few paces from the gate, and after a short pause the leading sheep, who happened to be Delia, got up her courage. She dashed through the gateway, took a spectacular leap over a drinking trough just inside, and was followed instantly by her two fellows, each repeating the flying leap exactly. It was a ludicrous performance.

In defence of the sheep’s intelligence, though, I have recently bought a pair of sheep that have been reared as pets by an old lady who shut them into her laundry every night. These two, a big wether, Samson, and a ewe, Delilah, trust anyone who is kind to them, provided she has a feminine voice.

Hand-reared lambs will carry their affection for their foster-
mothers right through to adult sheephood. I was once given a sheep called Joseph, who had been brought up with a family of children. As a lamb he shared their games, and even watched television with them on occasions, but when he grew up and became too large for their small suburban garden, he was a problem. He bleated when left alone, to the annoyance of neighbours, and finally a new home had to be found for him. On the shearer's recommendation he was given to me.

When the children and their mother, having deposited him in the safety paddock here, left in their station wagon, Joseph, bleating wildly, raced after it as far as the fence would permit, and remained for hours in the corner from which he had last seen his family, crying bitterly. I stayed with him for some time, trying to comfort him, but to no avail. He proved to be a worrying pet, for when he was shorn he developed an allergy, and the vet had to give him an anti-histamine injection. Then he picked up a tick which affected him to the point of weakening his hind legs. However, an injection of anti-tick serum cured this.

Poor Joseph! He was convinced, I am sure, that he was a human and not a sheep. He refused to run with Delia and her fellows, but wandered round the paddock fences by himself, looking for children to play with. My mother's old workroom quarters, which had been turned into a snug little flat, was occupied by a city-bred tenant not accustomed to sheep, and several times Joseph invaded her premises. On these occasions I would be hailed: "Miss David! Miss David! Joseph's in my flat and I can't get him out!"

Fortunately Joseph was accustomed to being led, and was easily removed, but he never ceased to try to associate only with humans till his dying day, which, as it happened, was not far off. I always thought him a rather tragic figure, and so he proved to be. But that belongs to another chapter.

It is lovely to own, tend and enjoy the usefulness, comradeship and affection of animals, but one must be prepared to battle with the unexpected and unhappy situations that arise occasionally wherever they are kept. This is the tougher side of farming.
Molly with Twiggy (the horned goat) and Twiggy’s kid, Evonne, at her Hornsby home in 1974. “I have often tried to analyze the goat’s charm, but it is not only elusive, it is complex.”
I bear the sins of sinful men that have no sins of my own;
They drive me forth to heaven's wrath, unpastured and alone.
Rudyard Kipling

Animals, like humans, fall sick, damage themselves, and, of course, die. Goats, like dogs and horses, scream when in pain, sometimes even when frightened. Belinda, for instance, fell over a low embankment once when I had tethered her wrongly – the peg being on the highest point of land instead of the lowest – and she couldn’t get up. She called for help, a peculiar nerve-racking cry which brought me hurrying to the scene. She hated having her hoofs trimmed, and would cry out before the shears touched her. Incidentally, her pal Mow, when he first heard her, threatened to attack me, so after that I shut Belinda and myself into a goat house whenever I clipped her hoofs. Goats require hoof-trims about once a month unless living on very rocky ground. I usually choose a wet day for this job, when hoof-horn is softer and more easily snipped with the foot-rot shears.

Both sheep and goats may eat what is poisonous, though they seldom do. However, their trust in humans is such that they will accept from them what is poisonous, if offered, so a likely source of poisoning is a well-meaning neighbour. As zoo authorities know only too well, ignorant human beings can be potential killers. I arrived at the far end of my land one day, just in time to snatch a rhubarb leaf from one of my goats, to the astonishment of a kindly neighbour who thought she was doing the animals a kindness in feeding it to them. She had a
sheaf of these poisonous leaves in her hand, and was dealing them out over the fence, one by one.

Other deadly poisons are oleander, yew and cypress. Camphor-laurel is suspect, though I have had both goats and sheep who ate it regularly without any apparent ill effect.

Sheep do not scream when in pain. A groan or moan is all they utter. When my sheep Joseph died in the small hours one morning of what I took to be entero-toxaemia, but which I later suspected might have been from oleander leaves fed to him by a well-meaning neighbour, though he must have been in agony he could only groan. Fortunately he did not suffer for long – he died in about one hour after I heard his first groans and found him lying on his side, scouring badly. I gave him a dose of a powerful narcotic, but it had no apparent effect. A veterinary surgeon will not turn out between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m. for a mere pet sheep, and even if he did Joseph would have been dead before he arrived.

Talking of vets, I did ring one once in the small hours, and thereby hangs a tale. This was before I had a safety paddock in which to fold the animals at night. The goats I used to shut in the home paddock where their sheds are, as it is close to my house, but the sheep roamed where they wished at night. All fences were then post and wire, with the addition of pig-wire at the base.

My sheep at this time were Mow, the old wether, Delia, and a young black wether called Sammy. What woke me I can’t remember, but one morning before daylight, something did, and putting on dressing gown and gum boots, I took a torch and went out to the home paddock. The goats were all there in good order, but obviously strung up about something. Delia was at the upper gate asking, with short anxious little bleats, to be let in. Sammy was with her. I opened the gate and let them in, expecting them to be followed by Mow, but there was no sign of him. I explored the upper paddocks, the torch’s beam probing dark corners but revealing nothing. In mounting anxiety I travelled further on to the lower and most distant part of the two acres. This time as I swung the torch in an exploring arc, there appeared two eyes glowing in the dark.
"Is that you, Mow?" I called.
The eyes responded, coming jerkily up the slope towards me. It was Mow, and having reached me, he lay down at my feet. Obviously there was something badly wrong.

"My poor old boy, what is it?" I went over him, and found blood on his fleece, but no visible wound. I hated to leave him, but ran back to the house to ring the vet, who refused to come till it was daylight.

I hurried back to where I had left Mow, but he was not there. I discovered him up near the gate of the goats' night paddock. He was standing up, and now I could see that one of his hind legs had been ripped up and the bone laid bare.

When the vet came he shook his head over the wound. It couldn't be stitched, because there was practically no skin left on the leg. He was an old sheep, and the wound would suppurate. It would be best to — had I a gun? I fetched my .22 rifle and a choice of long and short cartridges.

And this brings me to the physically toughest part of farming, as well as one of the most emotionally trying — burial. Till in my late seventies I buried whatever animal died on the property. On this occasion two neighbours, young married women, hopped over our shared fence and insisted on finishing Mow's grave for me. On two other occasions a vet — in both cases a young one just beginning his career — has buried a goat for me, but during my twenty odd years of goat and sheep keeping I have buried, without any help, a number of both. At first I used to dig an oblong grave, but being of a naturally lazy disposition, I decided that this was a waste of energy, and invented one that was a mould, roughly the shape of the animal that was to lie in it, which not only saved a good deal of digging but helped decomposition as the body lay so snugly in the earth that received it. "Earth to earth." I have never ceased to be grateful for this miracle — nature's ability to transmute the cast-off shells once inhabited by life into something clean and beneficial to the earth. Of their bones is calcium made — those are trees that were their flesh!

Before burial the gut of a large animal should be pierced to allow the escape of gases. One's heart must be hardened to do
this to the body of an animal one has loved, but the job must be done as sensible pre-burial routine.

Now that I am in my eighties, though I can, and still do, swing a mattock, when an animal dies my vet takes away the body, and I must admit it is a great relief to wash one’s hands of burial.

After Mow’s death I decided that the goats’ night paddock must be made a safety one for both them and the sheep, so I had a dog-proof fence erected round it. This is of chain-wire, seven feet high and topped by an overhand of three strands of barbed wire. There are two chain-wire gates – or rather, doors – in it, one close to the house and the other on the far, upper side, opening on to the paddocks.

Soon after this safety fence was up, a neighbour’s pet lamb was killed one night. She had shut it for safety, she thought, in an old fowl house, but when the dogs made it frantic with terror, it had burst through the wire netting front of the shed. She told me she had seen a footprint of the killer in a patch of soft earth, and said it was so large that she thought it must be that of some animal bigger than a dog.

In chatting to a man serving in a shop selling pets’ meat, I heard that quite a number of sheep kept as lawn mowers in our suburban district had been killed, obviously by dogs. The police were constantly being called early in the morning by distracted sheep-owners who had woken to find their animals dead or dying of their wounds. The number killed eventually ran into double figures. The dogs who were responsible for these deaths killed not for food, but from a sudden reversion to natural instincts, stifled and repressed for generations. Having once given way to a lust for killing, such a dog becomes an addit.

I decided to set a trap for the killers. Each night I shut the goats into their sheds, and put the remaining sheep into a pen in that part of the safety paddock furthest from the gate next to the house. To the top of this gate, or door, I attached a cord which led from it to the window of an upper room in my house overlooking the paddock. From this upper room I could shut the gate instantly by pulling the cord. Each night I left the gate ajar, hoping that the killer dogs would return and enter the trap.
I had set for them, and each night I sat at that window, waiting in the dark, from midnight till three in the morning. I knew that there were two dogs concerned, because one night before the safety fence was up I saw one of them and heard the other. The one I saw was creeping past the back verandah of my house, and fled when I shone my torch on it, but not before I had seen it was a half-bred brown kelpie. At the same time, in the scrub close to the house, I heard a rustling which meant that it had a companion who preferred to remain anonymous.

Well, the dogs did come one night, but to the upper door of the safety paddock. One of them sprang at this over and over again, trying to burst it open. Sound alone told me what it was trying to do, as it was too dark in that corner to see, but the white heads of the agitated goats, looking out over the halfdoors of their sheds, were dimly visible. My hopes were high that the killers would circumnavigate the safety fence and find the gate ajar near my window, but they gave up for that night.

The sheep-killing continued, and the police went round the district inspecting peoples’ dogs in the forlorn hope, I suppose, that some owner would admit that his pet had been caught with blood and wool on its muzzle.

My nightly vigil lasted for a couple of months, and I was heartily tired of it. Then, one Sunday morning, when I had let the sheep out of the safety paddock soon after daylight, and had just gone back to bed, I was thunderstruck to hear that kelpie barking quite close to the upper gate. I leapt out of bed, hurried downstairs, and was just about to go to the sheep when I remembered I hadn’t yet seen the kelpie’s partner in crime. Now was my chance. I left the sheep, trusting to the theory that a barking dog is not a killer, and sneaked along the side of the garage to the lower and most distant part of the two acres, and there he was — the arch-murderer, silently waiting, coal-black and enormous — the Hound of the Baskervilles incarnate! I have never seen such a huge dog. I think he must have been a cross between a Great Dane and an Alsation.

I rang the police and told them I’d seen the killer dog, and described it. They said they’d send out a patrol. A patrol? Ha! Ha!
Having brooded over the situation for some time, especially during the night watch which I still kept, I suddenly had an idea which should have entered my head as soon as I had seen that black monster. Dog owners notice other people's dogs, and this one was distinctly noticeable. I knew a man who lived nearby and owned a boxer, so rang him. Had he ever seen a big black dog that went about with a small brown kelpie, and if so, who was the owner? Oh yes, he had; the big dog belonged to Mr. X. in East Street, and the kelpie to Mr. Y. They lived next door to one another. The dogs were pals. I thanked him, and rang the police.

Well, that was the end of the Hound of the Baskervilles; the police interviewed its owner, and he had the dog destroyed. I don't know what happened to the kelpie who was the brains of that partnership.

I once had a goat called Sally Horner. She was horned because I had tried unsuccessfully to disbuds her with a caustic stick when she was a week old. Goatkeepers have various methods of ensuring that horns don't grow, the most popular being the stick of caustic. Hair round the embryo horn is trimmed, and vaseline applied to the area about the spot to be burnt, before the caustic is applied. It means a few seconds of burning agony for the kid, who, of course, screams. After that it doesn't seem to suffer, but it is a method I can't endure.

Other goatkeepers let the horns grow a few inches, and then clip them off. My present vet, who has tended my animals for some years now, performs the disbudding in his surgery, humanely, under an anaesthetic. An electric cauterizer is used, I believe. The kid is returned to its home when out of the anaesthetic.

Sally only once got into trouble with her horns. One day I heard her making a peculiar moaning cry, so I hurried out to the paddock to investigate. I found her in a goat house that was divided into two stalls by a partition of mixed pig-wire and wire netting, and one of her horns was so tightly wedged in this that I couldn't move it one fraction of an inch, so I hurried back to the house for the wire-cutters. Sally stood perfectly still while I severed several strands of wire, and when she was freed, instead...
of hurrying away immediately, she raised her head and cast me an enigmatic look out of her uncanny, horizontally pupilled eyes, and then licked my hand. If she had spoken her thanks it couldn’t have been clearer.

The only other goat not disbudded is Twiggy, who is still here. She and her mother were mated with a British Alpine buck, and Twiggy’s first kid, Sheba, was a charming little black and white one, true to her father’s type. When she was about four months old I put a collar on her. All my goats wear collars, because they are easier to manage so. Sheba’s was a temporary one, a little on the tight side, but I intended to buy her a larger one as soon as possible. That afternoon I happened to go into the goat paddock for some reason, and found to my horror Twiggy and her kid locked together, a horn wedged inside Sheba’s collar. The collar was too tightly strained to undo. I hurried back to the house for a knife, feeling a little faint. I severed the collar, Twiggy lifted her head, and little Sheba fell to the ground, limp and lifeless. Her mother, in trying to free her horn, had made a tourniquet of the collar, and Sheba had been throttled.

One of my earliest troubles was the loss of old Paula, who died after giving birth to twins, one of whom also died. The other I foolishly left with the dying mother to comfort her, and in the hope that the kid might get a drink of colostrum from her. They both spent the night out in the open, Paula being too weak to walk. I covered her as well as I could to keep her warm, but in the morning she was dead. I think she was really too old to be having children by that time.

I was a very inexperienced goatkeeper then, and had never reared a kid by hand before, and now I had to learn. Little Pauline, not having had her colostrum, was a target for infection, and almost at once developed pneumonia. The vet cured that with antibiotics, and though she was not a very lively little thing, she took her bottles well, and never complained. For a day or two she slept on cushions on the living room hearth, and I kept the fire going for her.

When she was about a fortnight old, a friend who was inspecting her noticed something peculiar about her eyes, and
called my attention to it. There was a film beginning to form over them, and to my horror I discovered that she was going blind. The vet prescribed eyedrops of an antibiotic to be applied several times a day, but couldn’t guarantee a cure. However, he said that dogs could be cured with the same treatment, and why not a goat?

Pauline, though blind, remained the same docile and uncomplaining little thing that she always had been, but another trouble was in store for her; she lost the use of her legs. I kept her in a big cardboard carton, and at intervals each day took her out to lie in sunshine on the grass. It was an emotionally trying time for me, chiefly because of the patient way in which she accepted her fate; she obviously had complete trust in me, the only mother she had ever known. Every morning and several times during the day I would test her sight by waving a hand across her eyes. The film that clouded them disappeared, but still she could not see. Then one morning as I waved my hand across her face, she turned her head and followed the movement with her eyes — sight was returning! I hugged her and shed tears of joy. In a few more days the eyedrops had completed their work. Then came the task of teaching her, first to stand, and then to walk. This took patience; she kept toppling over, but after a few days began to take wobbly steps of her own accord. She was obviously thrilled with this new accomplishment, for she kept on practising it. In a few more weeks she was a normal kid. She still slept in her big carton, and till she was really strong I used to carry her up to my room in it every night. If I happened to switch on the bedhead light to check the time during the night, I would see two big ears begin to rise up out of the box.

“Down, Pauline! Down!” I would say, and the ears would subside obediently.

When she was really strong she used to accompany me upstairs under her own steam, her little hoofs clattering on the wooden treads. She used to go out with me in the car, and sometimes accompanied me into shops. I remember my chemist weighed her once in the baby-scales on his counter.

Well, she grew into a very handsome doe, and was mated. At
her first kidding she had twins, and at her second triplets. These were all does, and I called them Faith, Hope and Charity. At her third kidding she had quads.

Hope and Faith were sold to a Queensland goatery, and later their purchaser asked for Pauline and Charity. The latter was the largest goat I have ever owned. After some heart-searchings, I allowed them to go. Pauline was entered in shows, and eventually became champion of Queensland. I was happy in the belief that she would end her days in this goat stud where she was receiving care and affection, but unfortunately her owner sold the whole flock, and Pauline went with them to a dairy in this state where she died in some epidemic. I don’t think I have ever quite forgiven myself for parting with her.

Violent death by accident is one thing, but in farming there is another variety — a planned killing by the farmer himself. The victims — ducks, geese and fowls — all eventually come under the executioner’s axe. Poor birds! Birds? Definitely! I wonder how many bird lovers eat them in the form of poultry?

For many years I used to kill one or two roosters every weekend for our Sunday dinner. I shall never forget the first one to die under my axe, or the weeks that preceded it while I tried to screw my courage to the sticking place. All my life I have been a coward, and so, though I told myself that it would be impossible to keep going hat-in-hand to some long-suffering neighbour to beg him to do the deed for me, I kept rationalizing to myself why I couldn’t kill that rooster till the following week or the next and so on. Finally I came to grips with myself. My heart thudding uncomfortably in my craven chest, I made the preparations. These may sound complicated, but when completed the execution takes only a second. The routine was — first, have all necessaries in readiness. These consisted of a wooden box, large enough to cover a rooster, a piece of string tied to a fence at one end and with a slipknot at the other, a three-by-four bar of hardwood (the execution block), a sharp axe, a rhubarb leaf, a straight eye and resolution. Then catch your bird, tie his legs together, lie him down with his neck across the block, insert his head in the slipknot, put the box over him, leaving head and neck out, place a rhubarb leaf across
his eyes — this because I found that the sight of the descending axe caused the victim to flinch — and then one swift blow, a foot on the box to keep it in position during the ghastly kicking business that goes on inside. The box, an idea of my sister’s, prevents the headless corpse from careering about the countryside as it is apt to. Of course, the most sensible way of killing a bird is to wring its neck, but this requires not only skill but strength, if it is a large bird. I tried this method — once.

As I said, all my life I have been a coward, and my fears include thunderstorms, air travel, drunken men and machines. Of these fears the only one I have been able to overcome is that of machines, and this is really only a partial victory. Each time I have had to control a combustion engine, my heart sinks. Beginning with a car, continuing with lawn mowers and cultivators, it has been a continual battle. At the back of this fear is another — a fear of incompetence, that I shan’t be able to start the wretched thing or keep it going. However, I have come to know the little adjustments to feed, etc. that small temperamental machines consider their due. I still shudder, though, when the motor mower jars over a stone.

The first cultivator I owned had various tools that could be fitted in place of the rotary blades, and when it was a new toy I once fitted some cutters to it as I wanted to mow down a high growth of weeds in an old fowlyard. At one stage in this operation I failed to turn the wretched thing in time, and it triumphantly mowed through a wire netting fence. After that I replaced the rotor blades, and never experimented with others.

My present cultivator is a reasonably satisfactory one. Covered by a tarpaulin it sits out, rain or shine, in the open, and obligingly starts after a couple of pulls — or possibly four or five if it hasn’t been used for several months.

Perhaps I shouldn’t class machines under the heading of “tougher side of farming”. I think spades and forks which entail heavy lifting deserve the term more. Most people would add the mattock to this list of heavies, but it is a much maligned implement — I think because of its misuse. Women particularly make the mistake of using it as a hoe, whereas it is really a lever. True, it has to be swung, but once it bites the earth, a mere
touch suffices to loosen a clod.

In my youth, when there were "lower classes" (the Victorian and Edwardian equivalent of our modern "underprivileged" or "lower income groups"), the navvy working on road maintenance with pick and shovel was often sneered at by the "upper classes" (white collar, high income groups) for the "slow" way in which he worked. This was even given a derisive name "the government stroke". Anyone who has used a mattock or pick regularly knows that he must work slowly and steadily — yes, even resting every now and then — or it would be physically impossible to keep going.

No, power tillers are not, should not be, on the tough side of farming. The burial of animals as large as sheep and goats and the slaughtering of poultry definitely head the list for the backyard farmer.

But all his unexpected worries are not tragic. Take Belinda, for instance, a small goat with rather short legs and a large udder. For one thing she was irritatingly choosy about husbands. I did at last find a buck whom she fancied, and when she kidded she proved to be a two-quart milker, which was quite a feat for her size. But, as the School of Veterinary Science would genteely phrase it, she had not a "well-attached vessel", which, being translated, means a neat udder. In fact it was a pendulous one. The combination of this and short legs not only made milking difficult, but posed a problem of teats almost brushing the earth as she walked. The answer, of course, was a bra. This I constructed out of unbleached calico. It was kept in place by strips of the same material tied over her hindquarters. It looked funny, but protected her from abrasions.

On another occasion I had a kid called Lucy who suddenly refused to eat. She wasn't scouring, and had no other symptoms but loss of appetite and energy. I didn't know then that this condition can be sometimes caused by worm infestation, and I began to wonder if she had swallowed some foreign body. I examined the stall in which she fed, and found some loose screws in the woodwork, and one actually in her feed bucket. Though cows often swallow nails and odd bits of metal, it is
rare for a Saanen goat to do so, but I was afraid that Lucy might be an exception. I happened to tell my worry to a friend who was a doctor's receptionist, and she mentioned it to a technician of our local X-ray specialist. The result was that I was told to bring the kid to his surgery at a specified time. I drove Lucy there and she was, with difficulty, made to lie on a couch under the X-ray apparatus.

After the shots had been taken, and I wanted to settle the bill, the doctor refused to take any payment, and during our chat that followed told me that throughout his long practice he had X-rayed a number of curious objects, one of them being a Christmas pudding. This was brought to him by a woman who had made two, one for a family of children, and one for herself. The children's one contained the conventional sixpences, thimble, etc., and the other nothing. When they were cooked she couldn't remember which was which, and was worried because she didn't want the children to have a disappointing pudding without the usual treasure trove. How the doctor came to hear of it I don't know, but he X-rayed one of the puddings for her — it didn't matter which, of course.

I have a very happy recollection of the kindness and courtesy of this doctor and of his assistant who manipulated the X-ray machine, and afterwards solemnly took down Lucy's name and age for the records. The trouble proved to be not screws but worm infestation.
Is there such a person as the Ancient Mariner described — one who loves all things both great and small? I very much doubt it; we are apt to have our favourites and our bêtes noires. I remember attending a Foyles’ luncheon once at a fashionable hotel in London, at which the author Axel Munthe was guest speaker. He drew tears from his audience when he said: “God so loved the birds that he gave his angels wings.” This same man, though, could be amused by a monkey plucking the fur off a kitten. Being a bird lover, I presume he was also a cat hater.

Another author, who wrote charmingly about his pet otters, rejoiced when some goats who trespassed on his property died from eating rhubarb there. I can understand an enthusiastic gardener who loves his flowers hating goats, and, of course, vegetable growers and orchardists abhor them. As David Mackenzie says in his book *Goat Husbandry*: “The face of agricultural advance was turned against the goat, and the goat chivvied the heels of advancing agriculture with its infuriating impudence and eternal disdain. To the undying credit of its nuisance value, an atavistic hatred of goat still lingers in the mind of England’s farmers.”

The goat has built up this nuisance value through superior intelligence, for there are not many fences that are goat-proof. These hardy, lively, “wanton” quadrupeds will creep under the wire of an electric fence, or merely ignore a brief shock, and
will lean heavily against wire netting till it bulges, then rest their forelegs on it till their hoofs cut through the bulge, and so on ad lib. The latches of gates must also be goat-proof if fruit trees and other delicacies are to be made safe from caprine gourmets.

A few years ago I came across an example of what David Mackenzie calls the goat’s “infuriating impudence and eternal disdain”. In the middle of a fairly busy suburban road not far from my home, I was staggered one day to see a goat lying, basking on the warm tarmac, and cudding placidly while cars swerved past it on either side. Fearing that she might get run over or knocked by a passing car, or cause an accident, I begged some cabbage leaves from a nearby shop, and lured the goat into a side street. A friend there tethered the animal in her garden while I first of all made inquiries as to the goat’s owners at local shops, but nobody knew anything about it. So then I rang the police.

“A boat in the middle of the road?” said they.

“No, no! A goat!”

They said they’d come and pick it up, which they did, and observed it doubtfully.

“We have no facilities for goats at the station”, said one.

“Miss David has goats”, piped up my friend.

The police immediately suggested that I should keep it in my paddock till the owners rang them, which they were certain to do, and they would then give them my address. So, pursued by the police car containing the goat, I drove home. The owner, much to my relief, arrived the next morning in a rather smart car, and collected the truant. He opened the car door, and the goat leapt in and perched on the back seat, as though to the manner born, and was driven home.

I think it is because of the comics and their butting billies that the hatred of goats is combined with derision. One has only to mention the word “goat” to any unenlightened person (98 per cent of the population) to elicit a grin. Goats? Ha! Ha! They smell! They butt! You silly goat! That gets my goat! Don’t act the giddy goat! Ah well! let us leave them to their derisive laughter, and turn to the enlightened who really know their goat.
I have often tried to analyze the goat’s charm, but it is not only elusive; it is complex. The average goatkeeper will become as maudlin over his or her charges as any dog lover over his. I remember reading in our goat magazine (yes, there is a modest periodical put out by the Goat Breeders’ Society) a man’s brief account of a much-loved goat who had just died. He ended his tribute to her with the following quotation:

And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

A goat returns the affection bestowed on it, but not abjectly in the canine way, for she has the independence of a cat, and the dignity of a horse. She can also display the confident poise of a camel without its superciliousness. I remember a friend of mine, when first confronted by a goat’s affable but appraising stare, exclaiming involuntarily: “Oh, where are her lorgnettes?”

Looking back on a long line of these remarkable animals, I realize that their charm begins about five minutes after they are born. Unlike the young of dogs, cats and birds, the kid enters its world with all faculties functioning. It is fascinating to watch it come to grips with life. As soon as its mother has licked it dry, it begins to struggle to its feet. After a few tumbles, it staggeringly stands, and battles with equilibrium while it hunts for the milk supply. A few exploratory thrusts at its mother’s hind leg lead on to the udder and eventually to the source of nourishment. Having taken a good pull at this, its legs strengthen perceptibly, and it begins to stagger about, noting and exploring its surroundings with a dawning joie-de-vivre. At play it is the most delightful of all young animals to watch. The young lamb may bound as to the tabor’s sound till the cows come home, but compared to a kid it is a clumsy, tail-flapping clown.

In my goats’ safety paddock is the stump of an old pine tree, about eighteen inches in diameter, and two feet high. Kids delight in this, leaping on to it, ears and short tail erect, then taking off with a spectacular leap, executing in mid-air exaggerated twists that any male ballet dancer might envy. These twists are performed also at ground level by kids when a
few hours old, and are alluded to by some goatkeepers as "back-hops". The word entrechat, I am told is all that is left of the original capriola intrecciata ("Intertwined caper"), and caper itself, of course, is Latin for goat. Apart from these ballet performances, the skipping gallop of a young goat is beautiful to see.

When kids or goatlings indulge in mock battle, it is with grace. A sheep attacks his enemy in one plane, like a battering ram, but a goat rises up on its hind legs, neck arched and head cocked to one side, and descends on its opponent head to head in a graceful arc. The grace can be accompanied by dangerous strength when exerted by a full-grown pair of fighting bucks. One goatkeeper I knew declared that bucks fighting in earnest could crack a Brazil nut between their colliding heads — a figure of speech, I imagine, for how could he prove it?

From kidhood onwards I think the goat's outstanding characteristic is camaraderie. She treats her owner as an equal. During my twenty or so years of goatkeeping I have been accepted as a playmate by generations of kids, and have played chasings and hide-and-seek with them round goat houses in the home paddock. Now that I am in my eighties I am finding this a bit of a strain. One of my goats, Sophie, when a very young kid was particularly energetic, and used to hurl herself into my arms over and over again, landing in the region of my waistline, and I was expected to catch her before she fell to the ground. This was great fun till she grew larger than a large fox terrier. After that this game had to be discouraged.

On the subject of camaraderie, there was one occasion on which I found the goats' propensity to join me in whatever I happened to be doing both frustrating and amusing. I had just read a book called Run for Your Life, advocating the healthful exercise of jogging, and being fired with enthusiasm for the idea, decided to run a mile a day for the good of my health. Through the upper goat paddock down to the lower one and back seemed to be the obvious route for it, so one morning I started off at a gentle lope. Immediately I was joined by the whole flock — three sheep and four goats — all keen to run too. Grand! But the goats would insist on running close to me, and
kept bumping into and nearly knocking me over. Much to their disappointment I gave up that route and ran the mile indoors.

This acceptance of one as part of the flock carries on into adult goathood. There is something deep-seated, almost uncanny, in this bond between goat and trusted human. The dog-human bond is stronger, but differs in quality, for the dog needs and relies on his master’s presence and affection, and is glad to obey his orders. A goat takes orders willingly from no human unless it pleases her. Fortunately, like all domesticated animals she approves of routine, particularly routine as to feeding hours, and this helps one to discipline her.

Goats like variety in food — fresh woods and pastures new, woods being particularly acceptable, for goats are not naturally grazers but browsers, and as far as trees and shrubs are concerned *Excelsior* is their motto. The higher the twig the cleaner and more desirable it is. The modern dairy-goat is a fastidious eater. Any food that has been mouthed or even sniffed by another animal will be spurned by her.

Apart from their grace, their camaraderie, their intelligence, and their affection, there is the goat’s engaging maternal behaviour — the gentle crooning to its new-born kid, the instant response to a cry of distress, even that of a human baby. And why not? Did not a goat, according to Roman mythology, act as foster-mother to Jupiter himself?

To end this recital of her virtues, I must mention one particular goat who played an honourable part in our Australian history. She belonged to no less a person than Sir Joseph Banks. The late Lord Russell Brain in *Some Reflections on Genius* recounts how when Dr. Samuel Johnson was told by Sir Joseph of the latter’s goat that had twice circumnavigated the world with him, and was now turned out to grass, Johnson composed in her honour a Latin verse to be inscribed on her collar. Boswell later translated the inscription into English:

> In fame scarce second to the nurse of Jove,  
> This goat, who twice the world had traversed round,  
> Deserving both her master’s care and love,  
> Ease and perpetual pasture now has found.
I am indeed grateful to Dr. Johnson for the admiration and compassion he displayed in this tribute to one member of a long-suffering, courageous and intelligent breed of animals. Let us hope that they will not always be despised and rejected of men.
Man moves into new country, cuts down its trees and plasters the earth with concrete. He destroys or usurps the home of its original inhabitants, and long suburban tentacles reach out from his cities, and gather in more and more of the native bush. In commendable retaliation, the little people whose rightful terrain it is exploit this situation to the best of their ability. The possums, for instance, both bushy and ringtailed, make their home in the roof of the usurper’s suburban house. Here, till dislodged by some irate human, the female possum rears her young in a refuge much more weatherproof than the hollow trunk of a tree. She thumps noisily about on his roof in the dead of night, sometimes descending a chimney and scattering soot over his upholstery and window curtains. In the garden she eats the fruit of his labours. In the small hours she will occasionally invade even his bed.

We had one such possum, a little ringtail whom we called Cornelia. Whether she was the escaped pet of some family who had tamed her we never knew, but she began by visiting my parents not long before my father died. He was working late one night when she climbed onto his table, and then onto his shoulder. This became a regular habit. Later, after getting to know her well, I decided it was her way of demanding food. One night she burrowed up his shirt sleeve, and became so firmly stuck there that he had to cut his sleeve open to release her.

After my father’s death she deserted my parents’ home and moved into mine. My nephew, Archie, still at that time a medical student, was living here, and slept on the balcony. Cornelia used to retire for the day (being a nocturnal animal) into either his bed or mine, burrowing down between the sheets
to the foot. At dusk she would suddenly appear wherever we happened to be in the house — usually in the kitchen — and then she would run up Archie’s leg and perch on his shoulder. She had a passion for cake, not just because it was sweet. One day we had run out of it, and when, at dusk, she arrived in the kitchen for her titbit, and I offered her a piece of bread and brown sugar instead, she seized it in her dainty little forepaws, sniffed it, and hurled it to the floor. I then tried her with a piece of bread and jam, but this was similarly spurned.

When she arrived at my bedside in the small hours and found no cake on the chair by my pillow, she retired to the foot-board of the bed, perched there, and banged on it with her tail. I interpreted this as a display of temper. Thereafter, if I hadn’t had time to make a cake, I would hurry to the shops and buy one. Cornelia was a regular bully. In wet weather, when retiring in the small hours, she would perch on the chair by my bed and give herself a good shake, scattering raindrops over my face. Then, still very damp, she would creep past my shrinking form to her cosy nest at my feet where she eventually dried off.

Not long after she commandeered my house we discovered that she had twins in her pouch. They were sweet little russet brown miniatures of herself, and when they became too big for the pouch she used to leave them in the foot of my bed while she went foraging at night. Getting into bed became a tricky business for me — the twins were right down at the foot of it, and as my feet descended cautiously, they would sometimes be nipped, being regarded, no doubt, as trespassers on ringtaill territory. In fact, the twins were becoming a problem.

At this period of my life I was accustomed to spending the summer with my sister in Tasmania, and then our house had to be closed. We explained this apologetically to Cornelia, and on our last night before leaving for Tasmania, Archie and I unearthed the twins from my bed and put them on their mother’s back, where, obedient to instinct, they clamped themselves securely. We had never done this to her before (except one day when we photographed them) and she perched on the foot-board of my bed looking miserable, as though she understood what was happening. After a short hesitation she
went out into the night, and we never saw her or her children again. She would, of course, have been able to park them in the balcony beds, and this she may have done, but as we were absent for three months we never knew. Perhaps she considered the children old enough by then to make the surrounding bush their home.

There are still many trees about my home and my parents' old one. The combined four acres are a small sanctuary for birds — butcher-birds, minahs, magpies, currawongs, kookaburras and peewees, to say nothing of sparrows, bulbuls and silver-eyes who regularly move in on the usurper's fruit crops. I have even heard whip-birds one season, and the koel visits us every year with its urgent and monotonous cries.

When my father was alive, an enterprising thrush used to tap on his study window, demanding cheese, which, of course, it duly received.

Peewees perhaps are the most friendly of all our native birds, though kookaburras run them a close second. I was once presented with a minah whose wing had been broken by a dog. A schoolgirl friend had rescued it, and her mother put it in a small cage and brought it to me to look after. When it arrived I didn't know what kind it was, so I bought a small book about birds to find out. Having diagnosed it as a minah, and learnt that its food was nectar and insects, I was able to look after it properly. It drank honey diluted with water from a teaspoon, and I rummaged the garden for leafhoppers and grubs. It was a sensible little bird, always ready to eat or drink what was offered. I consulted my vet about it, but he said he couldn't mend the wing, and that if it hadn't adjusted to the injury at the end of three weeks it had better be destroyed. At the end of three weeks I put the cage on the northern, cat-free balcony, opened its door and left the bird to its own devices. At intervals I went upstairs to note its progress. At first, after leaving the cage it had perched on the rung of a chair, later on the bar of a clotheshorse, and in an hour or two it had disappeared. As the broken wing was still hanging down when I released him — I called him Simon — I presumed he had done a glide from the balcony rail into a neighbouring tree. A partial flap of the wing
may have been possible. At any rate, I saw him the next day
high up in a tree outside the kitchen door. Being worried about
his food I fetched a cup of his honey drink and a teaspoon, and
was wondering how I could get the nectar up to him, when he
solved the problem by coming down to me, branch by branch,
and sipped his drink gratefully out of the proffered teaspoon.
The next day he was gone, and I never saw him again.

A few years ago a succession of tame peewees adopted me as
a friend and food-producer. They built their nest in a large gum
tree just outside the far gate of the goats' safety paddock, and
came to my house for cheese at intervals through the day. The
male peewee has a black shirt-front right up to his chin, but the
female has a white dickey. The first peewee to invade my home
was a male who would fly fearlessly into my living room and
perch on my lap or the table, eyeing me expectantly. If cheese
was not immediately forthcoming he would demand it in a
voice so piercing that it was painful to the eardrum.

Storms, and larger birds such as magpies and kookaburras,
will sometimes wreck a peewee's nest, though the parent
peewees will gang up on these larger aggressors and drive them
away.

Once, after a heavy storm, I found a pair of peewees trying to
persuade a nestling — apparently the only survivor of their
brood (they usually have two) — to roost in a tree with them.
Though fully feathered it hadn't reached the flying stage, and
could only ascend a small bush by hopping up, twig by twig.
Night fell, the parents retired to a neighbouring tree, and the
wind and rain began again. Being worried about the nestling, I
decided to bring it indoors. I took a torch and went out into the
paddock where I had last seen it. It was still sitting there on its
small bush, drenched and miserable. As I plucked it from its
perch it uttered shrieks of terror which were answered by its
parents from a nearby tree, but owing to the dark they were
unable to come to its rescue. Indoors I dried it and put it in a
cardboard box for the night. In the morning I tried to feed it
with insects, but it refused them, so, as the rain had stopped
and the sun was out, I decided to replace it on the bush where
its parents had parked it. As I emerged from the back verandah,
carrying the baby in its box, one of its parents sighted me — and my cat who was accompanying us. The parent peewee routed the cat by diving at it, and then escorted me, flying alongside, while I carried its offspring out to the paddock and replaced it on its bush. This youngster survived, and was soon airborne. I often saw it afterwards, flying from tree to tree with its parents.

The last peewees to befriend me were a husband and wife, either of whom would glide gracefully down from their high tree, across the goat paddock, swoop effortlessly up and over the top of the safety fence, and touch down on my outstretched hand. The hand, holding cheese crumbs, was then emptied and whatever bird was on duty carried the food back to the excited nestlings. The parent birds would also follow me when I was digging, either with a spade or the cultivator, and grab any grub that was turned up. Once I was staggered to see a peewee parent wrestling with a centipede about three inches long. It required some juggling to get the ungainly thing securely beaked, but the peewee finally achieved this by crossing the ends in its beak, making a loop of the rest. I wondered how the nestlings would receive this offering.

Tragedy, unfortunately, was in store for this family. I found the mother bird one day dead in my fowlyard, not far from her tree. The father bird did his best to feed the nestlings on his own, but not for long. Some enemy, probably a kookaburra, knocked the nest and its little occupants out of the tall tree. They were still alive when I found them, and I tried to rear them, but in vain.

After this second blow the peewee husband left, and since then, though many of his kin are about, none have befriended me as he and his wife did. There is something both touching and comforting about the trust that wild things have in humans. Trust and kindliness being the great bonds between all life in the scheme of things, how can we reconcile it with destruction? And yet, destroy we must or the earth would be so overrun with living things that all life would die for lack of space and food. And how inconsistent we are about these living things! We love and cherish our pet dogs and cats and our horses. Some of us love our pet lambs and calves and rabbits, and yet we eat
their fellows when they appear on the table as savoury food.

But to return to the exploiters – from the airborne to the earthbound. There is a short, stocky lizard called the blue tongue, about twelve or fifteen inches long and about two inches wide, that is usually a welcome visitor to the garden, for he eats insects. However, he also can become an exploiter. Usurping man imports into his territory hens that lay eggs in boxes to augment his food supply. The blue tongue also likes hen eggs which he breaks and eats. Twice I have caught one in flagrante delicto, egg yolk dripping from his jaws onto the broken shell. I don’t think I could force myself to kill one now, but I despatched both these marauders.

If a creature becomes an egg addict, and killing it is impossible, one either has to give up keeping hens, race out every time a hen cackles to collect the egg, or let events take their course. My yard was raided once for a time by a canine egg addict. I never sighted him, but on wet days his paw marks were visible on the cement floor of the hen house. The yard was enclosed by a six-foot fence which he apparently scaled with ease. Once he went so far as to push a broody hen off her clutch of extremely passé eggs, and eat them.

Another exploiter is the bush rat which burrows under the cement floors of hen houses, or the straw-covered ones of goat sheds. These places make convenient overheads for her nursery. One night, some years ago, I was woken by the cry of a hen in trouble – a despairing, long-drawn-out cry. I leapt out of bed and raced up to the yard, about fifty yards away. I shone my torch inside the henhouse. All but one of its occupants were sitting serenely on their perches, but out of the tail of my eye I saw the flick of a little grey shadow that disappeared in a split second. I directed the beam to the floor of the house, and there a hen was lying. I picked her up gently and saw that there was a little blood on her white feathers near her comb. I put her back on the perch with the others, and she sat there, apparently unhurt. The next morning when I fed them she wouldn’t eat, just moped about, and she died before nightfall. Guessing that a rat had attacked her, I put a popular (with rats) poison down various holes under the floor of the hen house, and the next
morning was confronted by a horrid but satisfactory result – one mother rat, and six plump little ratlings, all corpses. They had come out to die in the open. The mother rat, her young still at the suckling stage, had been doing her best to nourish them through feeding herself on the hen’s blood.

I don’t think that the much-maligned snake is an exploiter. Some species will defend their territory or themselves from aggressive humans, but the snakes round our Hornsby homes were self-effacing. As children we had been brought up on the biblical idea that man must bruise the serpent’s head or the serpent will bruise his heel. In other words it was instilled into us that if we came across a snake it was our duty to kill it. My father, the kindest of men to most living things, made an exception of snakes. I remember one occasion on which he joined battle with a courageous tiger snake. It was in Tasmania one summer when I was driving my parents from Hobart to Launceston. Somewhere in the midlands we sighted a tiger snake by the roadside. My father, believing it his duty to kill it, told me to stop. The snake, seeing danger approaching, retired into an adjacent paddock. My father, armed with his short-handled geological hammer, the only weapon available climbed over the fence and joined battle with the snake which had halted to confront him. He hurled his hammer at it, but missed. The snake was now justly incensed, and made a pass at him. My father then picked up a stone, and by throwing this a bit wide of the mark, lured the snake away from his hammer which he was then able to retrieve. During these manoeuvres my mother, from her grandstand post on the fence, was hopping up and down, calling out: “Don’t be a fool, Tweddie! Leave the wretched thing alone! Tweddie!”

After about three shots the hammer landed square on its target. My father stood there, looking sorrowfully at the shattered snake, and said: “I’m afraid the poor thing’s dead.”

I have killed only black snakes, one at Woodford, and two or three at Hornsby. One of these last few was cornered by my two cats on the stone-flagged front verandah. I found them sitting staring at it while it panicked to and fro, bumping against the french windows of my living room. There was no stick
handy, and though I had a rifle I couldn’t risk firing onto the stone flagging because of possible ricochets, so I ran to the garage for an axe. When I arrived back at the verandah one cat had left, and so, apparently, had the snake. However, Biscuit, a beige-coloured Manx, was still there, gazing fixedly at a small heap of billet wood in a corner of the verandah. Following his suggestion, I raked the blocks of wood apart with the head of the axe, and there was the unfortunate snake coiled up. This meant that when I struck it, the axe broke its back in several places at once. It seemed beastly to kill it, but I suppose it might have bitten someone some time. The black snakes are not aggressive, and try to be as self-effacing as possible.

I have once met a green tree-snake here, in my garden. It was progressing, not horizontally as most snakes do, but in a series of vertical loops in the manner of pictured sea serpents. It bounded skittishly into the asparagus bed, which was in full leaf, and miraculously disappeared, for though I poked and raked through the whole forest of fern, there was no sign of it. Anyhow, it was not a poisonous variety.

Between the earthbound and the airborne are the spiders. They are not exactly lovable creatures, but one can’t help admiring their skills. There are here some garden ones, about a couple of inches from toe to toe, that manage somehow to span with a strong supporting rope a thirty-foot gap between tree and tree — usually across the driveway — and in the centre weave an exquisite web. These skilled artisans sleep by day in a house made of a leaf, curled to cylinder shape, but before retiring they attend to the web’s catch. I watched one, early the other morning, packaging a bee and a moth. She wrapped each in a neat web parcel, and then bound the two together before retiring to her leaf apartment. This lady maintained her web over the drive for some weeks. She had swung it high enough to miss passing cars, and people who were taller than cars used to duck under it as they went by. At sunrise, after a still night, it was strung with diamonds of the first water and shot with rainbows.

There is one spider who sometimes exploits usurping man, using his house as a home. This is a large one called by some the
hairy huntsman, but by most a tarantula. Tarantula is a misnomer, for these poor spiders are quite harmless, and do a good work eating flies and mosquitoes. When living in the bush they hide by day in crevices, usually under loose bark on tree trunks. Their colour varies from an all-over fawn to grey, or grey spotted with a darker shade of the same. My father when called upon to remove one of them from the wall of a room occupied by some member of the family allergic to spiders, used a humane system. Armed with a tumbler and a stiff sheet of notepaper, he approached the spider, cupped the glass over it, slid the paper between spider and wall, carried his captive outside and tossed it into the garden.

The “tarantula” doesn’t hang webs anywhere, but roams free about a house. Recently one appeared in my bathroom where it remained for about ten days. As there was practically nothing there in the way of food for it I was afraid it might starve, so I collected dead flies, and put them on the windowsill for it. In the morning these offerings had gone — perhaps only a wing or the leg of a fly left. During the day the spider took up different positions, usually high up on the wall where it remained motionless till nightfall. There was no reason why it should not have escaped by means of the open door, down a passage and out onto the balcony. One day it chose to roost a little above my eye-level on the wall, and twice as I passed it, it waved a couple of legs at me. I have seen them attack a potential enemy by gathering all eight legs up under them and catapulting themselves at him from a wall, but this one was merely waving. I wondered if it was threatening me, or merely asking for more flies, but all I could be certain of was that it was aware of me.

My eldest niece, Peggy, used to remove tarantulas from the house using both hands to pick them off the wall, and carrying them gingerly out of doors, a toe in each hand. They can nip if frightened, but it is a harmless defence.

Of course all spiders are not as pleasant as the hairy huntsman. We have two kinds that are dangerous. The first is the funnel-web, or Atrax robustus. The Latin name describes it well, for it is black and strong — in fact it is armour-plated in parts with a beetle-hard covering. Incidentally, the male of this
unpleasant being is three to five times more deadly than the female. Its fangs are delicately-made scimitars, and to use them effectively the spider has to rear up, bend back at the waistline and clamp down on its victim at the correct angle. Being curved, these fangs are not easily wrenched out when they have struck home.

My house, at one period, was constantly visited at night by prowling males of this species, during the autumn months particularly. I remember one Atrax, a very lively male, who demonstrated the robustus part of his makeup. I happened, out of the tail of my eye, to see him making for the kitchen over the polished floor of the living room. He paused for a moment, and I clapped a tumbler over him. It was one of thin glass, and believe it or not that spider managed to shift it — just the fraction of an inch. He was one of those I captured for the research centre. Another caught for the same purpose I found in a china mixing-bowl in a kitchen cupboard. They were apt to turn up anywhere. There was one that dropped off a pantry shelf into a flour bin the lid of which had been left off overnight. He had managed to struggle out of the flour onto the sifter in the middle of the bin, and there I found him in the morning, all white and floury, but ready to do battle with all comers. I killed that one.

A neighbour of mine was told by a research person that the Atrax robustus does not climb, but it does. It can climb up rough-cast walls — clumsily, I grant you — but they occasionally scaled the outside of my house to the upper storey, and dropped in through the windows. I actually saw one entering one night. It fell from the top of my bedroom window onto the floor with a light plop. I despatched it with the heel of a shoe. One morning when stripping my bed, I shook out the eiderdown and an Atrax dropped from it to the floor. The thought that this creature had probably been wandering over the bed for a good part of the night gave me quite a turn, and I killed it instantly.

A cure for the funnel-web's venom has not yet been developed, but scientists are still working on it.

After a couple of Rouen ducks were let loose in my garden to
clean up slugs and snails, we have had very few funnel-webs in the house, the reason, I imagine, being that the ducks cleaned out their food supply. The female *Atrax* is partly black and usually has a fawn-coloured rear section, and is a different shape from the male. I dug one up in the garden once. She had her young in an egg bag, and when I put her and it into a jar of methylated spirit it was pathetic to see her trying to save the bag and keep it out of the spirit.

The other potentially deadly spider, more common than the *Atrax*, is the red-back. It is much smaller than the funnel-web, and sports its red danger signal on a black background. People have died from the bite of both these arachnids. The red-back hangs its web anywhere near the ground — in old tins and boxes, and under the wooden seats of earth closets in the country.

One moonlight night, before my house was built and I was still living with my parents, I raced out into the garden to drive away a horse that was trespassing there. I hadn't stopped to put on shoes, but merely bath slippers. Having successfully routed the horse, I returned to my room, and was about to take off my slippers when I felt something biting my foot. It was not a sharp, painful bite, but an unpleasant, insidious one — a dull flowing-in of poison. I took off my slipper, and shook a red-back out of it. Having been told, or read somewhere, that people often panicked unnecessarily about the bite of these spiders, I decided to ignore it. The next day it was rather irritable, but not too bad. I went to the theatre that night to see *Outward Bound*, and practically forgot the foot. However, the next morning it was very swollen, and I couldn’t put a shoe on, so rang our doctor. He painted it with something and in a few days it was back to normal — in spite of the fact that one friend when she heard of the incident informed me that I would lose my foot!

Besides these unpleasant spiders there is another arachnid, an eight-footed minute creature that carries death to the smaller domestic animals — dogs, cats and sometimes even fowls, and this is the bush tick. I once heard a fowl breathing loudly and stertorously, captured her and discovered a tick anchored at the
corner of her mouth. I pulled it out — the female tick punctures its victim with a sharp proboscis, and sucks up blood till its body is enormously distended. I removed this tick, and the hen recovered at once. Not so with dogs and cats. They have to be rushed to the nearest vet to receive an anti-tick injection, or their number may be up. Dogs are particularly susceptible to the tick’s paralyzing poison.

Apropos of ticks, I remember Sir Ian Clunies-Ross as a young man working at the School of Veterinary Science at Sydney University. By accident he happened to drop a small glass tube containing a number of live ticks that were being studied. He took a forceps, and with it delicately picked up and replaced the ticks in their tube, saying “That one’s a lady — that’s a gent — another lady”, and so on. The gents, incidentally, are not provided with a proboscis like the female’s, and do not attack animals.

There are other earthbound creatures more attractive than spiders, and which can inspire tolerance, if not liking. Take the bombardier beetle, for instance. He is a small black and orange one, and he protects himself from potential enemies by emitting little puffs of blueish smoke, accompanied by a tiny click. The first time I came across one of these I was so fascinated by his performance that I kept prodding him till he ran out of smoke.

The commonest of all exploiters are the slugs and snails. How did this great army, that like Napoleon’s marches on its stomach, manage to exist before man provided him with a garden? In mine there is a fine collection of both, but the slugs are particularly handsome. There are three varieties that are not only large — three to four inches long — but two of these are decorated, one with leopard-like spots, and the other with fine scarlet markings. The third variety, though plain, is the one who invades the usurper’s house and drinks the cats’ milk. This slug can be found in the small hours leaning over the saucer of milk, sipping daintily at it. When the kitchen light is switched on it will begin to withdraw, slowly and with dignity, and manage to disappear in an incredibly short space of time, and without being trodden on.

I knew long ago a little boy who was fond of snails, and took
several to bed with him one night. His mother, when tucking him up, discovered and removed them, her small son protesting meanwhile: “But Mummy, the darling little snails were just getting nice and cosy!” His mother explained that they didn’t appreciate being warm and cosy, and might even die from such treatment — a case of anthropomorphizing? What a word!

Collecting snails is a distasteful task, but every now and then I pick a canful from the vegetable garden and throw them to the hens. Some hens are expert at breaking the shells, others gawp at them puzzled. I remember hearing a niece of mine exclaiming: “Oh, well shelled!” as she watched an expert hen crack the housing of an extra large snail.

The little young snails are dainty creatures, carrying their translucent housing with grace and dignity, and one can’t help admiring them. Oh yes, I throw them to the hens!

Before leaving the indigenous exploiters I must say a few words about household pets — dogs and cats, the most exacting of all. Dogs have not played such a large part in my life as the “harmless, necessary cat”, though our family has owned a number, and loved one of them — Ambrose, the Antarctic sledge-dog.

All dogs are not clever and faithful as dog lovers like to believe. My family has owned two that had to be destroyed for attacking small children, and we once had a fox terrier, a stray whom we adopted, that hadn’t a brain in its head. But we had, apart from Ambrose, an attractive Irish terrier called Terence, of whom we were all very fond. He loved riding in the car, and when it was not convenient to take him with me, it was difficult to elude him and drive off before he discovered I had gone. Often I would just be flattering myself that I had diddled him, when, glancing in the rear-vision mirror, I would see his small determined figure galloping furiously after me. In those days the roads were not sealed, so he would appear and disappear in a cloud of dust that was also following the car. Of course I would have to stop and pick him up, and then, pale with dust and delirious with joy, he would leap all over the car before finally settling down to pant and beam happily on the passing landscape.
Dogs that are not disciplined can be a public nuisance. There have been two in my street who were in the habit of rushing out of their own territory to attack innocent passersby on the footpath. One woman I know was badly bitten by such a dog, right through an overcoat and the clothes under it, leaving a black and red bruise, the size of a cricket ball, on her thigh; the skin in the centre of it was broken so her doctor gave her an anti-tetanus injection. No one seems to bother about such occurrences — the dog owners will, of course, defend their pets regardless of the truth. The dog, to them, is always a faithful Gelert, and that’s that.

Cats, like dogs, vary in intelligence and capacity for affection. I have, with reason, a preference for black and white cats — that is, black cats with white paws and shirt-front, and perhaps a little white on their faces. I have owned three of these, Webster, Poley and Merlin, and they were all intelligent and affectionate. Webster was a water-loving cat, though unlike one that I came across at St. Helens in Tasmania that fished for flounder in shallow water on the beach, he didn’t wade in it, but liked to dabble his paw in the fascinating stuff, right up to the elbow. Of these three black-and-whites, Merlin was the most demonstrative. I had rescued him when he was half-grown from the produce store with which I deal. He had been dumped there. Dumping cats at the produce store was a common practice, the dumpers salving their consciences with the idea that their discarded pets would get a living off the rats and mice among the feed sacks. I have counted as many as fourteen cats in the yard there, when it was my custom to bring milk to these foundlings several times a week. I noticed Merlin particularly because he preferred being stroked to joining the mob round the milk dish. I picked him up, popped him in the back of my car, and drove home. Whether he wished to show how grateful he was for this adoption, I don’t know, but the manner in which he displayed his affection was quite uncanny. He would sit on my lap, gazing up into my face, and when I said to him: “Do you love me, Merlin?” he would throw his arms round my neck, and dash his cheek against mine. He would carry on like this quite unselfconsciously even in the presence of visitors.
Another cat that was very near my heart was Biscuit, the beige-coloured Manx that helped me kill a snake once. He was a crack rabbiter, and before he was two years old caught fourteen little ones. I was able to keep tally on his catch, because he always brought them into the house. Unfortunately he would sometimes dump them alive on the verandah, and then I had to finish them off. Occasionally he would eat one, or part of one. Beginning at the head, he would engulf it, fur and all, as far as the waist, when he didn't seem to have room for the remainder. I watched this extraordinary feat once, and so did an elderly black cat called Parker, who at that time was sharing my home. Parker watched this engorging process, and made no attempt to interfere till Biccy abandoned his prey. Then Parker stepped forward, examined the rear half of the rabbit, licked it over, gave it a couple of expert crunches, and got it down whole—a boa-constrictor couldn't have done better. Cats must have extremely powerful gastric juices.

At present there are two cats ruling my household, an elderly dumb blond (beige-coloured and with a low I.Q.) called Caramel. He is good-natured, mildly affectionate, and not very companionable. In his youth, before some of his teeth had to be extracted, he was very beautiful, being half Persian.

The other cat is a volatile black and white youngster called Cisco (after The Kid) who conceals an iron will in a velvet paw. He is affectionate, intelligent and seething with energy. The television screen puzzles him, as he is unable to capture, or even feel, a swarm of bees or a white moth that have appeared on it in films. Occasionally he strolls over to it and slaps the larger-than-life face of some nattering politician, but for the most part he is resigned to the sight and sound of it. He has definite ideas about early rising, and at 4.30 a.m. I am woken by loud purring, and feel that velvet paw on my face.

"Fie! Fie! You slug-a-bed!" is its message. "Breakfast time!"

Cisco has developed into a big game hunter, having graduated from mice to full-grown rats.

Perhaps these cats should not be classed as exploiters. After all, they are good mousers, and earn their keep—or part of it, anyway. No—bullies perhaps, but not exploiters.
Added to the wildlife and domestic exploiters are the front door ones that all suburban housewives have to contend with — the pedlars.

These pedlars, usually known as door-to-door salesmen, might be divided into two classes — the sectarian and the commercial. Between these two, and balanced somewhat precariously, being neither one nor the other — or rather considering himself partly one and mostly the other — is the man who peddles graves, six feet of earth in a lawn cemetery. I answered the door bell to one of these one morning, and had some difficulty at first in understanding what product he wished to sell. His sales talk meandered ambiguously through parks and gardens, and I thought at first that he wanted me to donate a piece of land to the local shire council. However, suddenly I grasped his purpose and exclaimed: “Oh, I see! You’re selling graves!” He drew in his breath sharply as though I had struck him, and clucked deprecatingly — I had shocked his genteel sense of the delicacy of the matter and upset his sales talk. When he had recovered from hearing a spade (the sexton’s?) called a spade, he said he would come back later and tell me the necessary details. He left, and when he had gone I thought to myself “the idea of peddling graves at the householder’s door jars on me”.

I thought about it still more, and decided that it revolted me, so I telephoned a cremation company, and clinched the matter with them. They would send me the necessary documents to sign — no sales talk, sanctimonious or otherwise.

When the grave-pedlar returned later I told him: “Sorry — I’ve arranged to be cremated. Good-day!”

And that was that.

Of the religion-peddling organizations I know of only two. One is a widely-known, much-resented, tough one that I shall call The Hot Line to Heaven, because it considers itself to be in close touch with the Almighty, and it alone knows what His plans are.

In the past these pedlars were not only as persistent as the proverbial vacuum-cleaner salesman who jams his foot in the door, but bullying as well. After various complaints to the
authorities had been made by householders, the Hot Line changed its tactics. Instead of a truculent man they now employ touching family groups — one man, one woman and two children, or two women and one child, and often just an attractive young girl. I did once gossip a little with one of these last. We talked, however, not of the Hot Line to Heaven, but of her, and I learnt that she voluntarily gave up one night a week to class training for this door-to-door salesmanship, though she worked for her living in a shop, selling worldly goods during the day.

The other door-peddling sect is that of the Mormons, or Latter-day Saints. Its emissaries are pleasant young Americans who hunt in couples. If allowed to enter one’s home they are apt to offer up a prayer.

The first time a pair of these young men knocked at my door it was not at the front one, but at french windows opening into my living room. It so happened that the previous night I had gone out, armed with my .22 rifle to investigate a noise in the fowlyard. On my return I had put the rifle down on the back of a sofa near these french windows, and forgot it.

Having answered the L.D. Saints’ knock, I was surprised at the speed with which I got rid of them, but, on reflection, it occurred to me that the sight of a rifle in an elderly woman’s living room had suggested to the young men that I must be some sort of dangerous nut, and had better be avoided.

Every year a pair of these evangelists visits my home, and we talk, not of religion which is dismissed straightaway by me, as I know the substance of their creed, but of them — what they intend to do later for a living, and so on. One pair was fascinated by the spinning wheel — a more appropriate sight than a rifle in an old woman’s house — so I spin a little to show them how it worked.

Incidentally, the spinning wheel seems to exert a peculiar fascination for men, no matter what their job. I have spun briefly to oblige electricians, painters, real estate agents, council men, fencers, the lot. I remember one man who kept exclaiming as the wheel turned and the fleece paid out its thread: “Good God! Good God!” which seemed to me a rather extravagant
commentary on so simple a process.

Handskills can still fascinate even the modern technician. I remember being told of two cases, one by a neighbour who was foreman in a big bakery when some overseas visitors were being shown round the premises. One employee, an elderly man who was skilled in the use of the peel, was at work at the ovens. The peel, a flat tray on the end of a long handle, is loaded with scones, rolls and so on ready to be cooked, and is then thrust into the oven. Skill in its use consists of the manipulator’s ability to withdraw the peel leaving its contents in their exact array on the floor of the oven. This proceeding so fascinated the visitors that they were with difficulty moved on to inspect the more modern equipment of the bakery.

An engineering friend told me of a similar occurrence, but this time in a car factory. A group of visiting dignitaries who were being shown the conveyor belt operations were fascinated by the hand-skill of a man with a big rubber mallet who struck doors into place with it as the cars moved past.

But to get back to our pedlars. There was one who called here regularly, armed with a tray of wares, just like a mediaeval one, except that his box of tricks was not slung by a strap from his shoulder: he just had to remove it from his car and carry it up to the house. I think it is the sight of goats and sheep in the home paddock that helps me to defeat — deflect — salesmen. The first time that this particular one came, having seen the animals who hailed him as he passed their paddock, he informed me that he had a goat he wanted to sell, but had no idea what price to put on her: could I suggest one? He described the goat, and I told him what I thought it should be worth. The next time he called he informed me that he had sold the goat, and for the price I had named. Thereafter he became cooperative, and never tried to force his wares on me. On one occasion he arrived to find me trying to drive goats out of the orchard into which they had broken. He put down his box of samples, and hurried to help. Another time he came when I was beginning to put a new blade into my bushman’s saw, and very kindly finished the job for me.

My two acres, any part of which I refuse to sell, must be a
thorn in the flesh of real estate agents, but even they can be
deflected from salesmanship by the animals. One of them had a
go once at trimming a goat’s hoof with the foot-rot shears, and
their visits often end in my listening to accounts of their own
animals. Not long ago one turned up a second time, not for sales
talk but carrying a tortoise he had found in the middle of the
road. He was afraid it would be run over, and might he leave it
in my garden? He put it down gently under a large sage bush,
and said:

“There! I’ve done my good deed for the day!” and departed,
chuckling.

Pedlars! Of far more interest than the stuff they sell!
Dating from childhood days in the Blue Mountains, our family has always kept poultry. My mother, with her penchant for change, didn’t stick to one variety of fowl, as I do now. The only two breeds that I can remember at Woodford were Silver Wyandotts and Brown Leghorns. The Wyandottts, though decorative to look at — large birds speckled all over in black and white, and with offbeat combs — were dull characters compared to the Leghorns. These were small, neat, energetic birds, good layers, and clad in pleasing autumn tints. The head of the flock was a little rooster we called Brownie. He was a definite personality — tame, we could pick him up and cuddle him, and a model husband to his hens. He invented the idea of fathers being present at the birth of their offspring, for he would sometimes sit alongside a laying-box, cooing encouragingly to the hen within while she battled with parturition.

As a ten-year-old I ran a newspaper for some time called “The Weekly Farmyard”, all contributions to it being supposedly by the fowls, and from their point of view, of course. It was illustrated, too. I was sole contributor, editor and artist.

My sister, who had ambitions when a teenager to become a doctor, was able to try her skill as a surgeon on the fowls. A half-grown hen had its leg broken once — whether it got in the way of a stone somebody was throwing, or something fell on it, I don’t remember, but my sister put the leg in a splint, and the bone set well. I think there was a slight lumpiness in the region of the break, but not much. She also operated on crop-bound hens, and it was my duty to hold the patient for her. Carefully avoiding veins, she cut through both outer and inner skins of the crop, removed the compacted mass of smelly food, and
sewed up the skins again with an ordinary needle and thread. One of the few cases she had was an unusual one — that of a hen whose crop was almost empty, but who was moping and not eating. Suspecting digestive trouble, the young surgeon opened the crop, and found that a piece of newspaper was blocking the entrance to it. She removed this foreign body, sewed up the crop skins, and the hen made an instant recovery.

I have twice operated on a crop-bound hen at my home here in Hornsby, but having no one to hold it for me, I had to use an operating table. This was a piece of board to which I strapped the hen with strips of soft cloth. The patient took an interest in proceedings, judging by the way her head would constantly be lifted to take a look at her slit anatomy. This was more unnerving to the surgeon than to the patient. It is really a very simple operation, though making sure that both inner and outer skin are not sewn together at any point is a bit tricky, as they are slippery.

When my house was built I didn’t run my own poultry for some years, but when World War II began in 1939, I started off with a few hens. Backyard farmers were encouraged to be food producers. I have not needed to buy an egg since the beginning of World War II. The homegrown variety is so much more palatable than the anaemic, flavourless one of commerce.

The modern hen of commerce is perhaps the most cruelly treated of all food-producing livestock. She is hatched in an incubator, reared on wire netting in an air-conditioned brooder, and when old enough to lay is isolated in a “battery” — a small wire cage so arranged that when the hen lays, the egg which Nature has taught her to guard to the best of her ability rolls down a slope and disappears from her ken. She has no dust bath, no luxurious sunbaking, no scratching exercise: she just exists. The poultry farmer maintains that she is perfectly healthy and happy. As it is not feasible to take a poll on this question, his statement must remain forever unproven, but it is a fact that the yolks of the eggs she lays are as colourless as her life.

Of course, hens whose lives are bounded by batteries are also sheltered from danger, but being reared artificially does not
wreck their instinct to survive. I remember one batch of half-grown pullets I bought from a local hen factory. When I arrived to collect them, the man in charge informed me that he had been cooling them off for me. By this he meant removing them from their air-conditioned shed into a normal temperature. He was also quite worried because I was going to put them in a yard without a wire netting floor. “They’re not used to earth”, he said. “They’ll probably pick up some disease if you put them on earth.”

Well, several of the dozen I bought did die, but the rest survived, and lived quite happily in a large yard, sleeping at night on low perches in the open-fronted house with a raised, cement floor. After one of them had been attacked by a rat, as told in a previous chapter, these artifically raised hens decided that low perches were no good to them. They abandoned their house, and for night quarters chose a tall magnolia tree. Here, every night, come rain, frost or gale, they perched among the branches — some as high as fourteen feet from the ground. There were, at that time, about a dozen hens, all white crossbreds, and at dusk they looked like large magnolia flowers seen dimly through the glossy leaves.

Some of these hens lived to be very old, as I no longer have the resolution to kill them for the table, and in the mornings one or two of these tree perchers would take a long time, accompanied by hysterical cackling, to make up their minds to parachute earthwards. At bed time they retired upwards, branch by branch, but in the morning it seemed to be de rigueur to ignore steps, and plunge to the ground. A hen once broke a leg doing this, and as the break was very close to her foot, it was impossible to put the ankle in a splint. I ignored my conscience which told me I should kill the poor bird at once, and so she was left to battle alone with her affliction. This she did very competently, resting the leg as much as possible, using the other leg and her wings for motive power. In a few weeks the broken ankle had set; in a few months it was hard to distinguish this hen from the others — one had to look carefully to note the lumpy place above her foot. The mend was ungainly, but the leg completely serviceable.
Another instance of the hen’s instinct to survive. One day I was woken at dawn by a commotion in the fowlyard. Tumbling out of bed, and without stopping to get my rifle, I raced out to find two dogs at work on the hens. The killers fled at sight of me, and I stood there, surveying the wreckage of my flock. One hen was dead and two dying. A few others were walking about, dazed, but about four were missing. Could the dogs have eaten them? No, of course not; they usually kill just for the pleasure of it, and leave their victims strewn about the yard.

Some hours later, having breakfasted, and buried the casualties, I went into the yard to count the hens again. There were still four missing. They couldn’t have flown over the fence, because the yard was an old tennis court with high wire netting all round it, except in one place where the dogs had entered, and there was no sign of them anywhere outside the yard. I then began a systematic search of the yard. There was a good deal of “Paddy’s lucerne”, and big clumps of coarse buffalo grass in it, and I began to inspect these carefully. One by one I unearthed the missing hens. Obedient to instinct, they had taken cover, and “frozen” in their hideouts while the massacre took place. What impressed me about their performance was that they had remained “frozen” for so many hours. When at last I found them I had practically to push them out into the open.

While on the subject of self-reliant poultry, I must tell you about a bank manager friend of ours, and his first post. This was to a country bank in the early nineteen hundreds. The bank building was an old converted house in which the manager and his family lived — the bank premises in front on the ground floor, kitchen at the rear. Behind the house was a creek overgrown with blackberry, and in this he discovered a large flock of fowls whose forebears had evidently been deserted by a previous tenant of the place, and who were now living off the land. Numerous clutches of eggs could be glimpsed through the dense growth, and the new bank manager decided to cash in on the situation. To force a path through the blackberry, he laid down planks wide enough to walk on, and carried on a search and destroy campaign, removing all eggs from the jungle, so that
when the hens laid again in the empty nests, he would know the eggs were fresh. He then made a deal with his grocer, swapping eggs for groceries. He also introduced well-bred roosters to the flock to improve the stock, and turned his attention to the surplus male members of it. By sprinkling corn at a reasonable distance from the house he lured the fowls out into the open, and then from the cover of the back verandah was able to pick off suitable table birds with his rifle. Not exactly pioneering days, but far enough removed from the present spoon-fed times to prod a man into original thinking.

When we first came to Hornsby, and before the spate of building had begun, there were quite a number of snakes in the district, the most numerous being small brown ones about twelve to eighteen inches long. These are not poisonous, and were sometimes brought indoors by the cats, and deposited at my feet as trophies of the chase. One day, on glancing casually at the fowlyard, I saw a hen being pursued by the rest of her fellows. She had something in her beak, and I went out to investigate. It was one of these small brown snakes, evidently regarded by the hens as an outsize worm. The lucky one who had picked it up did her best to evade her pursuers. At one stage she had to drop her catch in order to get a better grip of it. As she did so, I saw it strike at her. Then she seized it, and gulped it down as though it were macaroni — a remarkable feat. Later in the day when I fed the hens their evening grain, this one seemed a bit dazed, and ate sitting down. Whether the snake (I could see the marks of its fangs on her face) had a small amount of venom, or whether the weight of it in her crop had caused the loss of leg power, I don’t know. I picked her up and felt her crop; the snake was coiled up in it like a large spring. In an hour or so she had completely recovered, and was racing about with her fellows.

When I first began my own poultry yard, I started off with a breed known as Australorps, a black variety rather lighter in weight than their black Orpington forebears. At that time I had an ambition to raise my own chickens, so there was always a rooster in the yard. The Australorp roosters were very handsome birds, and occasionally belligerent ones. I remember one
that used to attack me while I was dishing out the morning mash into its trough, and had to be threatened with a yard broom. Altogether he was a nasty piece of work; he used to coo ingratiatingly to the hens when they were in mating mood, but in the off-season when they were moulting and looked hideous he would peck them away from the food trough and gorge himself with all the titbits.

The Light Sussex fowls I kept at one time were handsome birds, but replacements of them were not easy to come by, and they were not such good layers as the crossbreds. The roosters were enormous — I had one that weighed eight pounds when dressed for the table — and goodnatured. About the time that this breed occupied my poultry run, I became interested in electric fencing, and I put a group of big cockerels in a paddock bordered by one low wire. The birds roamed about their new domain while I watched, and soon they began scratching close to the fence. Presently one stooped to peck at something below it, and when he raised his head his comb came in contact with the charged wire. He uttered a squawk and sprang back, horrified. Thereafter I didn’t need to watch their wanderings — they soon developed a respect for that single wire, and not one strayed from the area it circled.

I had very little success with sitting hens and their clutches of eggs, so ended by buying day-old chicks and putting them under a broody. This required a certain amount of technique. It was done at night, of course, and at first I used to try to arrange the chickens snugly under their potential mother’s person, but I found she resented this, so I learnt to place them alongside her in the box, and let them find their own way in to the warmth of her feathers. Most broody hens will accept these foundlings, but sometimes one will refuse them indignantly as soon as she becomes aware of the imposition, and then, warned by agonized squeaks from the chickens as they are beaked out of the box, one has to remove them and rear them by hand. I had one hen, Gertie, with such strong maternal instincts that she would accept day-old chicks even when she was not broody; all I had to do was to place the chickens at nightfall in a snug box, lift Gertie off the perch on which she was roosting, place her
carefully in the box, and put a bag over it to exclude light. By breakfast time the next morning she would be clucking comfortably to the chickens, and never failed to rear them successfully.

Poor little creatures! How the motherless ones miss the sense of security that a parent gives! I remember one batch that I was forced to rear by hand. I put their coop close to a sunny back verandah, and here they would chatter and scratch quite happily as long as someone was in sight, but as soon as I left them they would all stand upright, wailing in concert—a miserable sound. I persuaded my mother to take her knitting and sit by them on the verandah, while I attended to the household chores. The chickens relaxed immediately, and began their contented chirrupings as they scratched and fed.

At one stage of my farming career I decided to experiment with geese. Using a hollow in a sandstone outcrop as a base, I made a cement pond about four feet in diameter, filled it with water, and then went to a nearby farm to purchase a breeding pair. They were placed in a sack, their heads protruding, and I drove home from the farm to the accompaniment of an ominous hissing behind my back. They proved to be a devoted and intelligent pair of birds. The goose laid a clutch of eggs in a distant part of their paddock, and sat on them. Every day when she came off the clutch to feed, she made her way to the pond by a devious route, stopping every now and then to make a pretence of eating a bit of grass, at the same time keeping a wary eye on me. She was convinced, I believe, that she had diddled the human as to the whereabouts of her nest. At the end of her sitting time the eggs hatched, and I was privileged to see her lead the goslings—five or six of them—from the bottom of the paddock up to the pond. On the brink of this she paused, and launched her brood. One after one the dainty little creatures took to the water, and swam gaily to and fro under the proud eyes of their parents.

As these youngsters grew up, they had to be killed for the table. The first to go was a very large bird. I weak-mindedly asked a neighbour to kill it for me, which he did. After that, whenever one was wanted for the table, I pulled myself
together, and killed it — in self-defence. It practically amounted to that. It was a beastly business, though swift, and reminded me horribly of "The Battle of Lake Regillus":

And out the red blood spouted,
In a wide arch and tall.

The adorable fluffy young of goose, duck and hen that so delight our eyes, we later transmute to dressed poultry, and eat with pleasure. Custom blinds us to the realization that these are birds slaughtered for our use.

Those of our animals we regard as pets fare better than the farming stock. In fact, they are treated, when ailing, just like humans. Their teeth are cleaned or extracted when necessary. If they get flu they are given shots of penicillin and courses of sulpha drugs. For minor, as well as major, operations they are given anaesthetics.

Did I say that they are treated just like humans? I was wrong; they are treated far better. If a dog, for instance, turns vicious and roams abroad killing other animals it is humanely destroyed. Not so humans! They are treated to hideous death and torture — napalm and bombs rained on the innocent as well as the guilty. Their land, nature’s food supply, is devastated by people who are rewarded at research centres with medals for inventing effective ways of destroying both it and human life. Such is the hate and fear of one section of humanity for another that they have gone so far as to invent a means of destroying all life on earth — cutting off one’s nose to spite one’s face. Homo sapiens? Homo sap!

And what has all this to do with the animals I have been writing about? We and they — our little dogs and cats, our horses, our goats, birds and lizards, earthworms and spiders — are all caught up in the great Scheme of Things — swept along in a mysterious flood, our only lifeline love, compassion and a zeal to know.
Molly at the tomato house she built to keep tomato blight off the plants, Hornsby, 1942. It was made of cut saplings, hessian, and gauze.
Molly drawing out the thread, Hornsby, 1974. "Between 1948 and the present I have spun and knitted a considerable number of garments. My winter dressing gown, made of Sammy, a black wether, is trimmed with Delia, a white ewe."
As children we were introduced to *The Swiss Family Robinson*, a fascinating desert-island story. The family consisted of a father, mother and their children who were wrecked on a very accommodating desert island which, as far as I can remember, grew tropical fruit in unexpected places — pineapples on trees, for instance.

Through their own ingenuity, plus salvage from their stranded wreck, this family managed to lead a fascinating and rewarding life. I seemed to remember that the author cheated a little by allowing them to find a second wreck on the far side of the island to provide them with some essentials lacking in the first one, but it is a very long time since I have read the book.

Be that as it may, I think it was that story that roused in me a longing to do things from the beginning — a primitive desire to produce the necessities of life with my two bare hands. Or was it just a throwback to my father's Welsh farming forebears? This desire was dormant in my younger and more frivolous years, but during and after World War II, when circumstances forced me into a quiet domestic life revolving round my mother, it welled up in me again. The goats were to supply us with milk, the sheep with clothing, the hens with eggs and meat, the garden with vegetables and fruit. And all this came to pass, though like the Swiss Family Robinson we were reinforced by help from outside, not from a wreck, but from the surrounding civilization — or are these words synonymous?

There are times of pessimism when some of us feel that we are all heading for disaster, largely because life is now too complicated. Too many things are necessary to the affluent way of life, and permeating it all is one particular thing called money. The craving for this hangs over the world like a foul
miasma, polluting the air, obscuring sun and stars. All our energies seem to be centred on money — money for houses, money for clothes, for speed-boats. Money! Money for supermarkets, home units, carparks! Money for space travel, money for bombs, money for hospitals, money for germ warfare, money for the starving, money for crop destruction. Higher wages! Bigger profits! Reduce our taxes! Spend more on us — the taxpayers! Give us this day as much as the Jones's have — more, if possible! How will it all end? In one big bang as, according to some scientists, it began?

Ah well, having blown off steam about that, let us return to earth, and to my two-acre little island washed by the seas of suburbia. The Swiss Family Robinson had no money on their island, but to have none on mine would be pure fantasy. Everything can't be done from scratch nowadays. Here, water and electricity, for instance, are laid on; we pay for it and other necessities, and are grateful.

The modern dairy-goat will not present us with three or four quarts of milk per day on a diet of grass and rubbish. She needs crushed oats, lucerne-chaff and hay, bran and mineral licks, and these money must buy. But extracting milk from the goat is done, literally, with one's two bare hands. To achieve this skill was a great thrill. Though sometimes it can be a tiresome and exacting chore, as when I broke my arm once and could milk with one hand only, it is still a satisfactory one. Not many of my goats have needed to be tethered during the process; they are content to continue eating their oats, bran and lucerne-chaff while I fold a sack, place it on the ground, seat myself on it, wash the udder and begin. Like running water in quiet places, the milk seems to talk. After the initial sharp ping-ping on the bottom of the empty can, the sound deepens to a current-affairs rhythm. A milkmaid should sing to the rhythm of her milking. I tried this once, but the goat uttered such a protesting baa that I gave it up, and let my mind take over. During the Vietnam war, for instance, the milk seemed to say "Vung Tau! Vung Tau!" or "Phnom Penh! Phnom Penh", and when astronauts were blasting off to the moon, "Countdown! Countdown!"

Milking at dawn has its magic moments, as when the sun,
slanting through trees, touches the froth on a full can, transmuting it to sparkling gold.

Dairy animals are good for solitary people, because of the discipline they impose. Most pets can wait for their breakfast, however indignantly, while their owner indulges in an extra hour or two in bed on a cold winter’s morning, but not the milker. Routine, so cherished by the domesticated animal, must be observed in a dairy.

But what happens when the farmer falls ill? In my case, I have a marvellous friend in a fellow goatkeeper who lives not far away, and though an extremely busy woman with husband, children, an aged parent, goats and dogs to attend, she rallies to a neighbour’s need. The good Samaritan can’t hold a candle to her.

Over the years of my goatkeeping I have periodically sold milk to various people whose delicate babies needed it — those with infantile eczema, for instance — and in some cases the result was a spectacular, instantaneous cure. One infant, after his very first bottle of goats’ milk, slept peacefully for the first time in months, and his rash disappeared overnight. Another baby, convalescing after a virulent attack of pneumonia, was unable to keep his bottles of cows’ milk down, and someone (just possibly a doctor) suggested that goats’ milk be tried. The baby was given a bottle of this, had no difficulty in digesting it, and never looked back. I have had only one case in which the milk did not effect a cure, and that was a subject eventually found to be unable to digest milk of any sort.

It may not be generally known, but a good dairy-goat produces, at its milking peak, from three to four quarts a day. It will also continue to give three to four pints for years without being re-mated.

In the field of agriculture I have had varying results. At one time it was my ambition to bake a loaf of bread made from wheat grown on my own land. I sowed a plot with wheat from the hens’ feed bin. It grew and flourished, and was eventually mown and stooked by an old odd-job man who sometimes worked for me. To thresh it, on his advice I placed the ears in a chaff sack which I then thumped with a stick. Winnowing was
more difficult. To make a draught I tried the reverse end of a vacuum cleaner, without success, and ended by waiting for a light breeze, and dropping handfuls of grain from a height into a container. This, though slow, was successful. I eventually ground this wheat, and made a loaf from the resultant flour. It was quite edible, though more solid than one made from commercially milled wholemeal, but the flavour was very good.

Milking apart, the most satisfactory skill I have managed to acquire is that of spinning. My wheel was bought in 1916, one of a batch made by a leading department store in Sydney, and is an exact copy of the old English model. I had to teach myself how to use it, and having no raw fleece at that time, I began with machine-carded wool, and developed, unwittingly, what I have since been told is the Hebridean method of spinning — pulling the wood out almost to arm’s length with the right hand, and guiding the strand into the flier with the left. Whatever the method is called it seems to be different from that taught by the C.W.A., in which the wool is paid into the flier with both hands close to it.

During World War II I first began spinning the unwashed, greasy fleece. This was bought from someone in Hornsby who kept a sheep as a lawn mower. At the end of the war I had my own animals, and was self-supporting as far as the raw material was concerned. Mow was a big wether, and one year his fleece weighed seventeen pounds.

My shearer, who has been shearing my sheep for over twenty years, arrives in his truck to the back of which is clamped his petrol-driven machine. For some years he had good dogs to help him escort the sheep from the sheds in which I had corralled them for him, to the stone-flagged area outside the garage where his truck was parked. One ewe, Griselda, was a perfect pest to catch, and refused to be lured into a shed, no matter how attractive the bait, so the dog came in handy to help the shearer corner her in the safety paddock. When his good dog died, he made do, so far as Griselda was concerned, with a shepherd’s crook — a modern aluminium version about which he was slightly selfconscious — I nearly said “sheepish”.

I shall always remember Griselda, because throughout the
years of my goat and sheep farming she was the only sheep who revolted against the dominant goat. Certainly this happened in her old age, and may have been caused by senility, but suddenly one day she began a fight with Sophie, the leading goat. How it happened I am not sure, but she managed to change the pecking order, and had all the stock, goats and sheep alike, afraid of her. I watched her exercising her new power; she would confront an animal whom she wished to intimidate with her mouth open and her tongue protruding, and for some reason this caused her opponent to utter a short protest and turn tail. Whether she had persuaded them that she had rabies and was dangerous, I don’t know, but as she was interfering with the goats’ rest, she had to go.

The shearer charges me so much a head for the sheep shorn. I used to take what wool I wanted for spinning, and he would buy the rest. After deducting the shearing fees, my wool cheque usually worked out at about $2.60. For some years now, since the decline of wool prices, he has not bought the wool. Nevertheless, the sheep pay because I never have to buy wool for knitting.

Between 1948 and the present 1970s I have spun and knitted a considerable number of garments. My winter dressing gown, made of Sammy, a black wether, is trimmed with Delia, a white ewe. I have a knitted dress made from Sammy when he was older, and this is a pale grey, contrasting with his earlier dressing gown wool which is dark brown. A black sheep’s fleece seems to bleach with age.

Shawls for the first babies of a niece and a niece-in-law have been spun and knitted, and one of these has just been passed on, in good condition, to a great-niece for her first baby. There have been various bed jackets — one of them still in existence after twenty-six years of hard wear; handspun wool seems to last miraculously if correctly washed and guarded from moth. And once I actually achieved a sizeable hook rug for a niece’s house. Besides being long-lived, the handspun wool is twice as warm as that mangled and flattened by machinery. The look and feel of a newly-shorn fleece still gives me exquisite pleasure. I am, in more senses than one, a spinster.
Another satisfactory handcraft, domestic alchemy, or whatever you like to call it is that of soap making. For over thirty years I have made the kitchen soap for my household, and it is a rewarding though heavy task. This skill is not without its hazards. During the second boiling, when the fat has been added to the lye, the mixture rises at boiling point with the inexorability of milk. The heavy bucket then has to be shifted instantly from the fire to a prearranged hob, where it continues to bubble menacingly. Incidentally, home-made soap is much kinder to the hands than the factory-made, for the natural glycerine in the fat has not been removed.

All our jam and preserved fruit are supplied by the property. We have grapefruit, Seville oranges and cumquats for marmalade, navel and Valencia oranges for eating. There is a fig tree, producing large quantities of small green figs with pink insides — excellent either for eating raw or for jam. A blood plum tree for jam, Isabella grapes and guavas for jelly. Strawberries are easily grown, and though they haven't the flavour here that they have in cold climates, they are a useful between-seasons fruit. As goats are usually kidding about strawberry time there is plenty of cream available — a satisfactory arrangement of nature.

The whole garden looks unkempt compared to those in the adjoining fashionable suburbs, but there always seems to be something in it to pick for cooking or to eat raw.

During various strikes and restrictions affecting our electricity power I have had recourse to the most primitive of all cooking heat — burning wood. That old handyman who sometimes worked for me once built me a mud oven. He had lived most of his life in the country, and had made an oven there for his wife out of a termites earth nest, adapted for the purpose. Not having any such nests on my property — the local termites preferring old tree stumps or the flooring-boards of my house — he found suitable earth of a yellowish colour, and out of this, with the help of some chunks of sandstone rock, he made an oven a few feet high with a rounded top. The floor of the oven had to be smooth, so he made it of bricks. The threshold was the blade of an old saw, and the door a section of
sheet iron with a wooden handle screwed to it. The whole structure was topped at its rear by a neat little chimney made of an agricultural drainpipe. All this material, with the exception of the bricks, was scrounged from off the property.

The old man then gave me my instructions. To heat the oven long pieces of wood were required, and when these were burnt up and the resultant ash raked out, my instructor said "Now you put your 'and in the oven, and if you can 'old it there while you count eleven — and mind you count it quick — then its right for bread." I can't be sure of the exact number at this moment of time; it may have been seven, not eleven, but I always remembered to "count it quick".

The first time I tried to heat the oven, I just couldn't get the fire to burn, so when the old fellow came to work, I told him my problem. He said he'd consult his wife who was an authority on the subject, and this he did.

"She says you've got to 'eat the chimney first", he informed me. "You build a little fire of small sticks under it — right at the back of the oven — first, and when the chimney's 'ot you put in the big wood. It'll draw then."

It did. I used this oven at intervals for several years before the goats took to jumping on and off it, causing its eventual downfall. It cooked bread beautifully, and as there was plenty of room in it, a creamed rice-pudding and a gingerbread, or baked apples could all be done simultaneously with the loaf. The earth walls of the oven, after a period, became impregnated with appetizing scents. When it began to heat, a delicious aroma of baking bread or apples or whatever had been cooked on a previous occasion would rise from it. I was sorry when the goats destroyed it, but its rounded top, about three feet from the ground, was a tempting target for their sharp little hoofs. My success with this oven may have been partly due to the fact that in my teens I had served an apprenticeship to the fuel stove, for at that time wood, kerosene and candles were all we had at Woodford for cooking and lighting.

All these skills — milking, spinning, soap making and the baking of bread — are traditionally women's work, and I never have qualms about undertaking any of them, but such activities
as mixing cement, splitting wood with sledgehammer and wedges, and using machinery and a scythe are another matter. Having been born in the reign of Queen Victoria, and reared in Edwardian days, I am imbued with masculine ideas about the role of women, and in spite of my mother's avant garde opinions, always feel sheepish, apologetic and a little guilty when indulging in "men's work", and consequently a great deal of pleasure in it is destroyed.

When I remove the tarpaulin from my little cultivator and prepare to start it up, it is as though a bevy of late Victorian and Edwardian male ghosts are hovering about me as I wind the strap in its groove, and subconsciously their brainwashing seeps into my mind: "It won't start." "You'll have to ring the garage." "You won't be able to start it." "You'll have to get a man to cope."

I give the strap a good pull, and nothing happens.
"Ha! Ha! I told you!"

I pull the strap a second time, and still nothing happens.
"You see, you can't do it!"

 Feverishly I pull again, and nothing happens. I know there's something wrong. The feed probably needs adjusting — it's a cold morning. That little jigger under that thing — which way do I turn it? For a richer mixture? Anti-clockwise? You fool, of course! Not too much — careful! I pull the strap again, and off she goes! All those ghostly masculine sneers slip away from my mind. I let in the clutch and ploughing proceeds merrily. But a few days later when I approach the machine, the same feeling of incompetence sweeps over me. Too old now to be rid of it forever.

There is an old tag, probably never quoted now by sage oldies to the female young: "A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither good to God nor men." This is really a rhyming version of "Woman's place is in the home", or "Let the cobbler stick to his last" — whistling being, in early times, a male prerogative, and certainly an unwomanly accomplishment. Incidentally, that idea about crowing hens is false. I have owned several bachelor hens who took to crowing, and laid just as regularly as their more conventional sisters.
“Woman’s place is in the home.” Ah yes! For home read “house”, for once upon a time only two fields of work out-of-doors were open to a woman — the milking shed and the hen house. Cooking, washing, ironing, feeding babies and young children, sweeping, dusting, polishing, supplying meals for the men folk and washing up after them — oven and sink and laundry bounded her horizon.

“It would never do to educate the lower classes!” How often, during my childhood, have I heard women repeat this statement, not realizing that they themselves were included in that category. However, this dangerous educational process is now taking place; the lower classes, if they wish it, may be educated. “It would never do” implies “there will be trouble”. And there is; the human male should have kept the human female indoors.

Another old tag: “A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be!” I don’t think many dog owners would agree with this statement, nor would the average present-day husband. The law still, to a great extent, allows citizens privacy in their homes, and neighbours say: “Never interfere between husband and wife”, so when a man beats his wife she, through lack of muscular strength, cannot protect herself, and receives the black eye and bruises that she tries the next day to hide from the neighbours. Very occasionally a wife retaliates, but only when circumstances permit. I remember hearing of an Irish charwoman who, when had up before a magistrate for assaulting her drunken husband, exclaimed indignantly: “Sure, I only gave him a couple of licks with a broomstick!” The “licks” were being repaired at the casualty ward of a hospital.

From earliest boyhood men are taught to despise “the weaker sex”. Schoolboys still sneer at what are considered “sissy” traits in other boys, such as being cowardly or inept at games, disliking violence, being prone to tears. The very word “girl” is derogatory.

But not only schoolboys are taught to despise women; the church does its best to belittle them, beginning right from scratch with the garden of Eden story. “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat”; in
other words “The woman tempted me and I fell”. Ignoring the fact that Adam, in this betrayal, was guilty of splitting on his pal (to my mind a more distasteful sin than disobedience, though not specifically mentioned in the Commandments), the masculine compilers of the Bible lay the downfall of man at woman’s door. She ate of the forbidden tree of knowledge. I imagine that when our primitive ancestors first became aware of the difference between good and evil, then they ceased to be animals and became human. This being so, Eve certainly has a lot to answer for.

Added to all this, the church decrees that reproduction, though arranged by the Almighty as an essential part of life on earth, is evil. A child is “born in sin”, and has to be “purified” by the church, and Eve’s punishment must be meted out to her — “And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

“Wilt thou obey him and serve him?”

How I admire and envy the courageous young women of today! They seem ready to step into any job that takes their fancy, and as a matter of course, whether it belongs to men or not. And no words can express my gratitude to that handful of just, intelligent men who regard women not as “the opposite sex”, but as people.
Although my mother was not able to take an active part in my farming work of these early years, she was always ready with advice. It was not till the summer of 1951 that she left us.

Judging by what one hears or reads, most people when nearing death are either unconscious or wandering in their minds, but an exceptional few are aware of their approaching end, and speak of it. My sister had a friend whose father was one such person. He was a moderately successful business man, in character simple, straight-forward and tolerant. There was nothing particularly remarkable about him except, perhaps, his kindliness. A mutual friend once said of him: “If you were to knock at his door at three o’clock in the morning to tell him you were lonely, he would say ‘Come away in!’ , and sit you down at his fireside as though it were the most natural thing in the world to do.”

His daughter, an only child, was very near to him, and when he came to die she was at his bedside. It was during this time that he obviously had been granted a glimpse of what life means — the Scheme of Things, for want of better words — and he said to her: “It is all far finer and grander than I can possibly explain!”

A day or two before Christmas in 1951 my mother suddenly began to lose her hold on life. She was ninety-five, still in possession of all her faculties, but physically failing. My brother was summoned, and he and I took turns in watching at her bedside.

That first day wore on, and at midnight I went to bed, though not to sleep. At about 3 a.m. my brother came into my room to say that “Mootie” (our pet name for my mother) wanted me. We went in to her, and sat one on each side of her
bed. Her expression was happy.

"This is a good thing", she said. "It brings us all together again."

And looking straight in front of her, she spoke the pet name she had always used to my father (Tweddie), but had not uttered since the day of his death. Then she spoke my sister's name. Obviously, for her, they were present. Then, still with a light of happiness in her eyes, she said slowly and wonderingly: "I think I know now!" A pause, and then: "How happy I'll be when he comes!"

My brother, a doctor and an atheist, said to me afterwards: "She was in full possession of all her faculties at that time." Nor was she suffering from oxygen lack. The difficult breathing did not begin till next day. Before it began she suddenly became physically aware that the last enemy was at hand, and told me with fear in her eyes that she was dying. Our very nice young doctor, who had a tremendous admiration for her, seeing that she was distressed put her under sedation.

My brother-in-law flew up from Tasmania, and was with us at her bedside when she died on Christmas Day. He had always loved and admired her. With her passing strength and stability seemed to leave my home.

All through her life my mother had been trying, through the study of different religious sects, to get a glimpse of the meaning of life, and I like to believe that those words "I think I know now!" meant that her wish had been granted.

Sir Francis Bacon wrote: "I do not believe that any man fears to be dead, but only the stroke of death." I think he is wrong; it is natural to fear "that bourne from which no traveller returns", because we don't really know what happens to us - our personality, spirit, soul - when the body dies; whether it continues or fades into nothingness. Everyone instinctively craves to be recognized as an individual, and at the same time to belong to someone or something. My sister had a theory that after death we lose our identity, and are caught up in some other dimension in one great Being. She maintained that we are always happiest when we have completely forgotten ourselves.

It seems to be impossible to know the purpose of life on
earth, but very possible to believe that there is one.

My father, in the last speech he ever made in the Great Hall of the University of Sydney, said: "One thing I will stand to, and that is that all who earnestly pursue truth will find glory and loveliness in this universe, and in human hearts — a glory and loveliness that manifest the beneficient working of an Unseen Power."

A few days after my sister died I wrote to the woman who had been her hostess in Brisbane during that meeting of the National Council of Women, asking her to write and give me a minute account of my sister's time there. I felt that this would be, in some small way, an extension of the time we had lived together.

The answer to my request was exactly what I had hoped — a detailed account, but so understanding, kindly, and breathing in every line her own admiration for my sister and distress at her death, that a wave of gratitude swept over me, and for an instant I knew that reality is just this — a great kindliness that binds all life together, and like the peace of God, passes understanding.